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Original ink sketch of Arunachala by Sri Ramana Maharshi, from Kunju Swami's notebook

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clarify the paths available to seekers
in the conditions of our modern world.**

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Divine Names of Arunachala

25. ॐ ध्वजधृके नमः

om dhvajadhṛke namaḥ

Prostration to Him bearing the banner.

Lord Siva cast as Arunachala, the triumphant warrior bearing the banner of battle, is an arresting and powerful image that Ramana Maharshi playfully evokes in verse 24 of *Akṣaramaṇamālai*, his immortal hymn to the Holy Mountain in 108 verses. Playfully because the verse is spoken by Ramana in the guise of an innocent bride complaining to her lover that if her ego is destroyed, how can she ever hope to lead a worldly life? “*You have raised the flag vowing the death of the ego in your devotees. How then can I survive after wedding you, O Arunachala?*”¹ If seekers coming to Ramana for support in their spiritual growth are cruelly consumed, what favour is that? It’s a great irony that complete surrender stands as the only sure path to true enlightenment!

For some, Ramana Maharshi himself is Skanda, Commander-in-Chief of the celestial forces. Nowhere is he more brilliantly portrayed in that role than in Ganapati Muni’s *Forty Verses in Adoration of Sri Ramana*. Eight divinely inspired verses came pouring out after Muni saw a sparkling light touch the forehead of Maharshi six times in the Pachaiamman Temple in Tiruvannamalai. They begin with *yānāyātra na kekinām kulapatiḥ* in verse 13. In verse 22 we are served the true meaning of Bhagavan’s incarnation on Earth. “*He is resplendent, having arrived at the eternal status of Light which chases away the darkness inside and outside. He strikes at the root of ignorance of those who bow down to him. Even when he perceives this universe, he is beyond it, on its other shore, shining. Salutations to such a One, to Sri Ramana, the Master of the worlds and the slayer of grief.*”² What a blessing! What a breathless reassurance that all is well!

— BKC

¹ Translated by Professor K. Swaminathan.

² Translated by S. Sankaranarayanan.

EDITORIAL

In Praise of Boredom

We are all familiar with those outwardly endless periods when nothing is happening. If we can recollect those stretches of time during adolescence, we would probably vividly remember seemingly interminable periods when we were neither child any more nor yet adult. Annoyingly nothing seemed to be happening. Things were occurring to us over which we had no control and we were impatient to get on with leading our lives as we thought we wanted, but actually we had no real idea of what was involved. Chaffing at parental guidance we longed to conquer the world, be stars in our own drama. There was no limit to our impossible dreams in the midst of our inertia coupled with impatience, in fact our boredom.

A similar experience occurs to us when we step onto the spiritual path. It is not so much a question of acquiring a new outlook, as of letting go of our preconceptions. This is brought home forcefully when we sit, say in the Old Hall at the Ashram. We struggle to calm our thoughts and emotions as they rise unintentionally in an uncontrollable parade. This, we think, is not what we want. We want to dive into the Self; we want to be self-realised; we want the satisfaction of being wise; we want to be rich; we want to be admired for sitting here so peacefully. There is no end to our wants. And this boredom we heroically endure is of no use. Nothing is happening!

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And then another thought process starts: are we doing this right? Everyone around us is sitting peacefully, not saying a word. Are we doing it correctly, is there something we did not understand? How miserable I am that I cannot do meditation which everyone says is necessary. It is a waste of time and effort. This is quite foolish and I shall never get anywhere. Let me get up and walk out of this useless place. But something keeps us grounded. Something keeps us persevering in face of a lack of progress. There is no excitement, just a subtle perspiration and rigid limbs that want to wriggle out of the forced immobility. Boredom is the entrance way to infinite possibility.

At a certain moment we let go. We give up and accept that nothing is happening. It is then that a mysterious alchemy occurs beyond the grasp of our normal micro-monitoring mind. Not knowing how, we have crossed into a no man's land where we are neither here nor there. We are in a dimension of potential that feels weightless and agreeable. We are not exactly happy but in the delicate shock of it, we can recognise that we are at peace. How long it lasts we cannot say. It may seem like an age, it may seem like a second. Whatever the time frame it is irrevocable. We cannot forget that taste of nothingness... or perhaps it is infinity.

Naturally we want more.

But no, that is not what happens next. As we come out of the positive vacancy, our mind begins to race again. It fills up with ideas, new and old. A door is opened and deep-rooted sharp memories and hurts grab our attention. Who are we and where are we going? We try to make sense of this shift in our perception. The earth is slowly sliding under our feet and opens up a space where there is nothing to hold on to. We recoil in a panic and quickly grab our familiar thoughts for reassurance. But it is too late as the startling memory is there like an unwanted sharp stone in our shoe that inconveniently prods us and won't go away no matter how much we may try to divert our attention.

Whether we are aware of it or not we have taken a significant step. The values in our habitual world are called into question. We all are in various ways confronted with what Francis Thompson wrote in his famous poem *The Hound of Heaven*:

I fled Him down the nights and down the days
I fled Him down the arches of the years
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways

Of my own mind, and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

There is no getting away from the fact that it is our own conscience that pursues us. And it won't let go until it is satisfied. It appears as if we are more than one person, many in fact, each vying for attention. The question is how to reconcile them in that cramped space of our own mind so there can be peace?

We can drown the voices with artificial excitement of which in our day and age there is no limit. We can gravitate to alcohol or drugs or excessive intakes of food to appease our frustration and brittleness in the face of forces that can terrify us. We can endlessly fritter our time on the internet. We are willing to do anything so as not to be arid and yet deny the possibility that the door of heightened perception could swing open again if we but stop and engage in what seems at first sight, like boredom.

Meditation is that conscious act by which we confront our weaknesses and ignorance and say: this is who we think we are. Meditation is the tenacity with which we are prepared to be bored by our thought processes. Because we are resolved that we cannot continue the way we are, an ever-so-silent latch is released and automatically a new horizon opens up. We may believe that it is all new and that it is exclusively our own discovery but no, we are all on the same path that has influenced and guided untold generations of seekers.

With sufficient commitment and dedication, we can open up the possibility of being accepted and thereby enter a family. If it happens to be the one in the name of Sri Ramana Maharshi, we are beneficiaries of all the blessings generated under the auspices of sacred Arunachala, that mysterious power that cannot be approached by our minds but only won by our hearts. We must become willing to give up our ludicrous sense that we think we know what we are doing. In actual fact, it is we as separate entities who are being thought.¹

¹ M.S. Venkataramiah, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§551.

A man asked Sri Bhagavan: 'How is it that *Atma vidya* is said to be the easiest?'
M.: Any other *vidya* requires a knower, knowledge and the object to be known, whereas this does not require any of them. It is the Self. Can anything be so obvious as that? Hence it is the easiest. All that you need do is to enquire, 'Who am I?'

Our bodies, our thoughts, our feelings are objects. Just as our bodies change over time, so too do our thoughts and emotions. We may try to cling on in a futile attempt to hold onto our youthful bodies or our prized thoughts that can eventually become nothing but prejudices. Or, although we endeavour to hold tight to our sensitive feelings, we may find that what was once sweet may become bitter. Indeed, our journey is not one of acquisition but of sacrifice. The purpose is to let go of our limited ideas and feelings of who we think we are. To discriminate between what is ephemeral and what is eternal.

The key to this receptivity to ceaseless change, while remaining at the ever still centre of the heart, is to actively seek that which is greater than ourselves. We ceaselessly throw into the fire of *jñāna* all our ideas of who we think we are.

We are like a fruit slowly maturing, which will inevitably be eaten one day by who knows what force? We are living under the assumption that we are the eater and that we will get something at the end of our journey, which will resolve all our problems and desires. Not so. Though we may imagine we control our destiny, it unfolds irrespective of our pride and our desire. We are consumed by the inexorable power of Time.

Bhagavan sang in *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*:

[Arunachala!] There is no benefit in eating overripe fruit. (I, a virgin maiden who loves you, am like a ripe fruit. Therefore) discerning that now is the time of the ripeness that is conducive to blissful pleasure, grant your grace and enjoy me with delight.²

Like any variety of fruit, some of us are sour, some tart, some tiny with just a sliver of flesh. And some are plump and sweet, ripe for the picking. It does not matter what we are, we are all fruits that serve a divine principal. The function of our journey is not the obtaining of something that will magically make our lives one long song of delight, but to make ourselves an appetizing offering by purifying our hearts and minds. Our sense of comical self-importance is lost and we surrender to a higher power that we call by any number of names. Followers of Sri Ramana Maharshi, we call that power, Arunachala. ▲

² Verse 61, *Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*. Detailed Commentary by Mugavai Kanna Muruganar. Translated by Robert Butler. Pp. 112-113.

Loka Vichāra versus *Ātma Vichāra*

Social Networking versus Self-Enquiry

SANJEEV KUMAR NATH

The word *one* describes so many facets of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's life. Bhagavan is the foremost example of complete one-pointedness of devotion. Bhagavan surrendered to one God, Arunachala, staying at *one* place, Tiruvannamalai, the abode of Arunachala, for the entire period of his life from his flight from home in 1896 to his *Brahmanirvāṇa* in 1950. Bhagavan had one lesson for everyone, and it can be summarised as: 'Enquire and find out who or what you are. Leave all discussions about the world and its ways, even about noble intentions like the desire to serve humanity, and first solve the mystery about yourself.' What is Self-enquiry but one-pointed attention to one's own true essence? To do Self-enquiry is to withdraw attention from the many (the world, the variety seen in the world) and focus all attention to the One, i.e., the Self. It is a negation of the subject-object duality in such a manner that the subject alone remains.

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All his life, Bhagavan taught Self-enquiry, and all his answers to seekers can be seen as exhortations to do Self-enquiry. Countless serious seekers found the magic of Bhagavan's physical presence kindling Self-enquiry in them. And now, when Bhagavan is no more in the body, the magic continues: one who genuinely seeks Bhagavan's grace, has Self-enquiry kindled in him. Indeed, Bhagavan has said that there are two paths for a seeker to consider according to his predispositions: Self-enquiry and surrender, but Bhagavan is quick to point out that surrender does not involve merely surrendering one's possessions to God, but essentially surrendering oneself to God, and to surrender oneself, one has to first know oneself. Also, real surrender results in the complete extinguishing of the ego and the consequent attainment of true knowledge of oneself. Bhagavan was never tired of emphasising the need for absolute one-pointed devotion.

One may wonder if such single-minded, one-pointed devotion to God is possible for an ordinary person involved in numerous activities, and tied up with numerous relationships in the world. To that Bhagavan would say that one could very well give one's entire attention to God and still carry on the activities of the world with an attitude of surrender; one need not worry about the activities; they would go on anyway.

Sri Ramakrishna used to explain how one could keep one's mind on God even while being engaged in worldly activities. He gave the example of a village woman in rural Bengal selling puffed rice. She would be cooking the puffed rice, stirring the pot as required, breast-feeding her baby, and negotiating with a customer, all at the same time. The mind can likewise be kept on God, and yet also function normally in the world.

Sri Bhagavan gives a similar example: "When village women walk with their water pots on their heads and chat with their companions, they remain very careful, their thoughts concentrated on the loads on their heads. Similarly, when a sage engages in activities, his activities do not disturb him because his mind abides in Brahman." (Talk§231)

As devotees of Bhagavan, we need to at least try to keep our minds engaged in the Self alone. The world is constantly demanding our attention; or rather, our minds constantly rush out to the world. Added to this, is the problem of endless social media messages and

relations that people today get entangled in. But do we need to worry about flimsy relationships in the virtual world? In any case, what is the actuality about worldly relationships, and even about the world itself? Are the relationships and the world real or is the Self real? Should one pay attention to that which is unreal or to that which is real?

The greatest bane of our modern scientific civilisation is that it constantly throws at us a thousand things that are not real but seek to engage our attention. Bhagavan's way is attention-oriented. Single-minded, continuous, unbroken attention to the 'I' is required until firm establishment in the Self is ensured. What does a seeker engaged in such *sādhana* do when his school friends call upon him insistently to join their WhatsApp group or some other such group?

If the seeker is unable to resist the temptation of gossip, the desire to 'catch up with the old gang', then surely, the seeker will drown in the sea of unreality. Of course, it is not a great sin to socialise, but the problem for the majority of human beings is not that they are great sinners, but that they fritter away their energies in satisfying silly temptations. The problem with the avid social networker is that he cannot realise God for he cannot find time for *sādhana*.

Of course, many people today do not even believe in God. There are a whole group of contemporary western philosophers called the New Atheists who make it a point to tell the world that there is no God, and that we should just live life as happily as possible. (Of course, their idea of happiness is a completely materialistic, worldly idea) Many ordinary people today also do not actually have any firm faith in God, or do not have any serious engagement with Self-enquiry or any such *sādhana*. Many consider all this mere nonsense. All these people need not be bad people at all. In fact they may be very good people in the ordinary, worldly way. They may be very interesting people for many.

On the contrary, a true *sādhaka* may be a very boring person for many people today. They may feel that this fellow is too huddled into himself, that he does not care for the world, that he is not fun enough. It is said that the *sādhaka* should have *satsaṅga* – relationship with *Sat*. But what is *Sat*? It is the Self. Bhagavan said that *satsaṅga* in fact implies being in constant communion with the Self rather than anything or anyone else. Of course, *satsaṅga* can mean the company of

the good and wise, but essentially, the ‘good and wise’ implies people whose attention is not in the least deflected by the temptations and attractions of the world, and are firmly established in the Self. Their company evokes Self-enquiry in us, their company finally results in our establishment in the Self. That is *satsaṅga*.

In Tulsidas’ *Rāmcharitamānas*, there are startling instances of the occurrence of *satsaṅga*. When Hanuman enters Lanka, taking a tiny form like a mosquito, the demoness Lankini sees him and challenges him. With one blow of his fist, Hanuman fells Lankini. She is injured and she vomits blood because of the blow, so she must be in great pain, but then Lankini says, “When Lord Brahma gave boons to Ravana, he also said that when a monkey fights and injures Lankini, then it will be the time for all the demons to perish at the hands of Lord Ram and his army. Oh, I am indeed blessed to see you, who must be Lord Ram’s ambassador.”

Thus, Lankini, although a demoness, is shown to be a devotee at heart, and she too longs for *satsaṅga*. In fact, Lankini tells Hanuman that *satsaṅga* is far greater than anything else in life.

Later, when Hanuman is stealthily looking around in Lanka, trying to spot Sita, he is not in the least attracted by the pomp and glory of Ravana’s palaces, but he is attracted by the look of one particular house. His attention is drawn towards this house in front of which there is a beautiful Tulasi plant. On the wall of the house, the great bow of Sri Ram is drawn.

These signs indicate that it is the house of a devotee of Lord Ram, and in all his wanderings through the glittering city of Lanka, it is only at this place that Hanuman is truly happy, and he goes inside the house. Just at that point, Vibhishana, the owner of that house, wakes up, and immediately on waking up he takes the name of Lord Ram. When Hanuman hears Vibhishana¹ taking the name of the Lord he is confirmed in his belief that Vibhishana is indeed a devotee of Lord Ram.

Now Hanuman, thirsting for the company of a devotee of Lord Ram (thirsting for *satsaṅga* not because he has to gain anything from it, for he is already fully realised, but simply enjoying the company

¹ Also spelt as Bibheeshan or Vibhīṣaṇa.

of true devotees) in Lanka which is full of the enemies of Lord Ram, takes the garb of a Brahmin and takes Lord Ram's name. Vibhishana is overjoyed to see a devotee and to hear about the Lord from him. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that just as cannabis (*bhāṅg*) addicts like to meet one another and enjoy the addictive stuff together, similarly devotees like to be in one another's company and talk of the Lord. So both Hanuman and Vibhishana are happy to meet one another. They both have only one interest in the world – total devotion to the lotus feet of the Lord. Hence, they take no time in becoming friends. This is *satsaṅga*.

Both Vibhishana and Hanuman have sterling qualities as devotees. Vibhishana exemplifies steadfastness in devotion even in adverse conditions. He tells Hanuman that he lives among the demons like the poor tongue stays among the sharp teeth. He has been thirsting for the company of a devotee for so long, and now he is so happy to meet Hanuman. He expresses immense gratitude for what he sees as Lord Ram's compassionate act of sending a true devotee, Hanuman, to him.

When Vibhishana says this to Hanuman, then Hanuman on his part can only think of the generosity of Lord Ram. He says that the Lord is always compassionate to his devotees, even to inferior creatures like himself, a monkey. Look at Hanuman's humility! He is the greatest devotee of Lord Ram, and the Lord himself tells Hanuman (in *Rāmcharitamānas*) that he could never repay him back, that he would forever remain indebted to Hanuman for all that Hanuman had done for him. Yet Hanuman never ever feels even the slightest tinge of pride for being such a great devotee. His humility is limitless. Such is the character of a true devotee.

When we observe the behaviour of these two great devotees, we learn about what true qualities to imbibe as *sādhakas*. They feel so happy to meet one another because each is full of devotion for the Lord and nothing else, no vanity, no pride, no selfishness. When one is saturated with devotion, then one cares for nothing but the Lord, and is not attracted towards anything but the Lord and the Lord's devotees. Is that the case with friends one socialises in social media platforms? Can anyone who is serious about his *sādhana*, indulge in the endless idle gossip, silly jokes and vicious slander that social media platforms are full of?

Ultimately, a *sādhaka* has to choose for himself what he wants to give his attention to: ordinary, worldly relationships or Self-enquiry; social networking or Self-enquiry. One may think that one can enjoy all relationships and also do Self-enquiry, but that is just not possible. One may feel that it is too boring – in this age of the Internet and social networking – not to be involved in networking with friends. Such a person can also be a good person in an ordinary, worldly way, but he can never be a *sādhaka*; it is certain that at least in this life, he will not realise God or the Self.

Bhagavan's way is the way of Truth, and social media consists of a virtual world, a world of illusions. Even this world we see with our eyes is illusory, our bodily existence is illusory, and the world of social media is even further removed from reality. The more you get involved with social media, the more enmeshed you become in the stranglehold of lies, half-truth, verisimilitude, illusion, slander, and unnecessary information.

All this is nothing but garbage for the mind. You get a message that such and such person is suffering so terribly, and you must forward this message to as many people as possible because each time you forward the message that person will get one rupee. So you forward that message relentlessly, without finding out of course, if the message has merely originated in the brain of some freak addicted to practical jokes or is a conspiracy to garner revenue for telecom companies.

While you think that by forwarding those messages you are helping out that suffering person somewhere on the planet, you perhaps have not had the time to enquire about a next-door neighbour who is sick and lonely. In fact, engagement in the virtual world leaves many people today with little or no time to deal with the actual world. You hunt with search engines for good images and videos to send as good morning messages to your friends, but perhaps it has been a long time since you had beheld the subtle glory of the sunrise or looked up at the star-spangled sky, and thanked the Lord for the morning, the evening, the cycle of time.

Your school friends announce on social media that on such and such date there will be this great get-together, and you and your friends turn up in all finery at a resort to enjoy gossip, drinks and food. You meet your gym-going, fighting-fit friend who smiles and

says, “Oh, you look the same as you did in school! How amazing!” and you know that he is only making a sly remark at your changed physique, your weight, your not too perfect figure. You smile weakly and mumble something, trying not to be offended, trying to be happy in this happy gathering.

Meanwhile you also forget that Bhagavan, while not averse to physical fitness, never emphasised a body-centric philosophy of life, that He even remarked about an ailing body that “the body is the disease”. In that get-together, there will be talk of the few who did not come, or one or two who refused to be in the group from the beginning. They will all be called old-fashioned cavemen, unfit to be a part of an enlightened gathering like the one presently making merry, eating and drinking. But Bhagavan always taught his devotees not to be judgemental, but mind their own business (the business of Self-enquiry).

But don’t such social media groups also do social service? Don’t they go to orphanages and distribute food and clothing? Don’t they take part in flood relief and drought relief and such activities? Yes, they do. But Bhagavan said that the greatest social service one can do is to realise the Self. This must not be misunderstood. Bhagavan never discouraged anyone in their social activities or their worldly activities, but he emphasised the foremost importance of Self-Realisation.

It is salutary to consider whether the do-gooders not do their social service in order to feel nice and proud of what they do, in other words, to fatten one’s ego. Only if one kills the ego first, can one act correctly. Of course, when your ego is destroyed, there is no world, no others to serve, although what is called social service can be performed perfectly by one in this state of mind.

Are the social media groups doing their social service with perfect detachment, without any desire for fame, or for fattening one’s ego? What do all the status updates with photos of aid being distributed, to the needy, for example, say? In fact, no selfless work can be done by anyone but the *jñāni*.

Once, when someone asked Bhagavan about what *niškāma karma* was, Bhagavan did not say anything, but later that person saw Bhagavan picking up a branch on his way to the mountain, sit down and work on the branch, cutting the thorns away, and polishing the

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surface. Bhagavan, never hurried for time, worked for a long time, ultimately producing a beautiful walking stick, and just as he had finished his seemingly arduous task, a shepherd boy who had lost his stick appeared on the scene crying. When he said that he had lost his walking stick, Bhagavan simply gave him the lovely stick which he had just made, and walked on. Without a single word or explanation or advice, Bhagavan had demonstrated what selfless work or service was. Are we capable of such selfless work, such service? Shall we be hooked to the illusory world of social media and engage in a million meaningless tasks or shall we give all our heart and soul to what Bhagavan has pointed out as the only purpose of human life – the realisation of the Self? ▲

To Follow a Ray of Your Light

Rahul Gudipati

To follow a ray of your light
even matching its divine pace
play in dark shadows
and think them to be real
would it not take an age or too many
with all their attendant sorrows?
It is better perhaps, for one and all
to see the folly of one's desire,
turn back, even in mid-flight
and look to the one Source.
For, You are the only Light
and its sweet pleasant glow!
Spare me the long journey
call me, to the Heart,
your own errant child
O Arunachala Ramana!

Mahatma Gandhi

An Epic of Devotion

BHARAT M. MEHTA

Anyone looking at the staggering achievements of Mahatma Gandhi, would be awestruck by the enormity of his innumerable accomplishments.

Then, if one were to see a picture of the Mahatma on the last day of his life, as he walked through the garden of Birla House, where he lived since a couple of months, going for his daily prayer, one wondered if he could reach the prayer meeting. To ensure he did, he sought the help of the two ‘sticks’ as he jokingly referred to Manu and Abha, the girls who were his constant companions through the day and on whose shoulders he rested his limp arms to transfer some of his weight to them, so his weak legs could be spared the burden of bearing his full weight. But what did he weigh that even this short distance seemed so physically demanding? He looked emaciated and frail as his body was reduced to a bag of bones, weighing just around 47 kg.

This was the same man who had almost single-handedly evicted the mighty British out of the country. The same man who led a crusade against untouchability. The same man who fought for women’s rights.

The same man who inspired the spirit of Swadeshi, national pride. The same man who fought for human dignity of his fellow brethren in an alien land, South Africa. The same man who inspired the uneducated to stand up in defiance against the brutality of the British, without as much as raising an arm, not just in self-defence but even in averting a blow. The same man who worked ceaselessly for Hindu-Muslim unity.

He was undoubtedly a colossus who strode the world stage with the courage of a hundred lions. It is not surprising that the foremost scientist of the world at the time, Albert Einstein paid him this awesome tribute by saying, “Generations to come, will scarce believe, that such a one in flesh and blood, walked upon this earth.”

So what is it that made this man tick. Instead of theorising on his character, I would like to narrate instances from his life, that sprung up without notice and to which he instinctively reacted, without as much as a second to think. This is what he was. This was what he represented. This was what he stood for. He imbibed these values and integrated them into his psyche so much so, that you could say they percolated down to the cellular level of his body. They were never principles that he had to refer to in a moment of crisis. He epitomised them and they became part of him, not as tools to be used, but as living those principles, day in and day out.

The first instance that stands out prominently is when Gandhiji was boarding a train compartment and one of his slippers got loose and fell through the gap between the train and the platform. In an instant, he removed the other and threw it in the same place so when the train departed, they could be of use to whoever noticed them. Such was the overflowing compassion in his thinking that he did not have to plan his next move after the first slipper fell.

The following story is attributed to both Sri Ramakrishna and Mahatma Gandhi. Both are known to teach by practice and not by precept.

During his stay in Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat in those first years after his return from South Africa, he began to establish the principles which governed his actions that ultimately lead to Independence. In was during that time the mother of a young child approached him for some advice, as her young son was eating his chapattis with only jaggery. After patiently hearing the woman, he asked her to return in a

week. When they met, Gandhiji took the child aside and advised him on the advantages of a wholesome diet of vegetables, milk and dal. Pleased with this, the lady thanked the Mahatma and was planning to leave but again went up to the Mahatma and asked him, why he did not instruct her son the same last week when they first met? The answer was interesting and revealing. He said, he himself had the same weakness for chapatti and jaggery and felt diffident in advising the boy to mend his ways, till he had overcome it and for which he needed a week!

He could not tolerate any transgression however insignificant, jarring with his deep convictions, even if there was no way for the public to see the dichotomy in his actions. His uncompromising sense of values made him be true to himself first, always and every time. Practice and precept were two sides of the same coin and had to be in tandem, if he wanted to be truthful and honest.

One of the great abilities of the Mahatma was the manner in which he blended diametrically divergent virtues seamlessly into his life. From a timid and shy lad, he had become the epitome of courage, that too without abandoning his sensitive, empathetic side. He could stand up to the coachman raining blows at him in South Africa without even trying to fend them off, or feel the pain of a limping goat and hastening to tend it with a mud poultice.

Once he lost a pencil and endeavoured fervently to find it, despite the protests of his secretary and others who tried to hand him a replacement. He would have nothing to do with the new one, because the one lost was presented to him by a friend's son. Seeing his adamance, everyone chipped into a frantic effort. When it was eventually found, the pencil was noticed to be a mere stub, just a couple of inches long. It was not for the value of the bit of pencil to which he was attached, but to the love that was showered upon him by a little child, who perhaps had only that to gift him. How could he be negligent in looking after such a precious gift?

It was in this manner that he ennobled and dignified everything that came within the ambit of his influence.

Once the Mahatma and his stenographer were travelling by a narrow gauge train to Darjeeling. For some reason, the engine got disengaged from the bogies and very soon the rest of the train was

hurtling downhill uncontrolled. There was panic and when he was told about it, he insisted on continuing with his dictation. He had sized up the situation in a jiffy, seeing two outcomes. If by some miracle they were saved, the Mahatma said they would have wasted so much time if he stopped the dictation, so he insisted that they continue. If they were going to die, there was nothing they could do to avert the disaster.

His clarity of thought and presence of mind at critical junctures and constant awareness of the importance of time, even in life and death situations, ensured that he complied with his priorities and never strayed from his chosen path.

It was not uncommon to see Gandhiji writing as many as 50 or 60 letters each day. This physical effort would often leave him tired. Instead of resting before continuing to write, he chose to write with his left hand so he need not waste even a couple of minutes. While studying in England, he noticed that vegetarian restaurants were scarce and he would often have to walk as much as 10 miles for his meal. He considered this to be a waste of time and so he learnt how to cook. By the same logic, he became adept at using the barber's scissors so he could groom his own hair.

The assailant who killed Gandhiji, fired two bullets at point blank range and still in a fit of rage, fired a third. There was no doubt that the first two were fatal enough and he began to fall. Even at this point, he remembered God and before crashing dead to the ground, he had the presence of mind to whisper, "Hey Ram". He could stall his death as it were, till he said his last words.

One day a competition to spin the *charkha* was organised at the Ashram. As a result most inmates of the Ashram slept late, utterly exhausted from the exertion. The Mahatma was no exception, except that around 2 am he woke up restless, having realised that he had not followed his routine of prayer before sleeping at night. The guilt from this inadvertent slip had him sweating on a cold night. Unable to come to terms from this omission, he could not sleep anymore. As was his nature, he sought to repent for his sin, by sitting up the rest of the night, praying till morning. When those around him woke up as usual, they were dismayed at seeing his state. They reprimanded him about not being careful about his health, inflicting such a severe punishment on himself, for what was an inadvertent error.

He replied that he did not consider it a small mistake, because he should never have forgotten Him, who provides the sustenance to live, day and night. It showed his uncompromising commitment to a disciplined way of life. It also brought out the Mahatma's dependence on the efficacy of prayer. It is this unflinching faith in God, that was the driving force in all his diverse endeavours, be they political or social. It equipped him with a sense of righteousness and courage, that together ensured achieving his objectives.

It was a daily ritual at Sabarmati Ashram for the Mahatma to go to the banks of the river for his morning ablutions for which he sparingly used just about a *lota* (a round water pot, typically of polished brass) of water. One day Sardar Patel in a lighter vein, remarked that there was no need for the Mahatma to restrict himself to just one *lota* of water, as it could compromise his appearance, especially when there was a river full of water flowing before them. The Mahatma replied that this water was not for them to waste, as there were hundreds of cattle, other animals and birds and countless people living on the banks of the river, who needed precious water for living and therefore, had as much right to it. Wasting water would deny them their rightful share.

From these incidents, it can be clearly discerned that the Mahatma lived his life in tune with his convictions, that there simply was no other way, than being natural, simple and forthright, without putting on a façade. His language, manner of speech and actions were used solely to communicate his essential intentions, for which he trained his mind to remain unemotional, under the most trying of circumstances. This, he believed, can only be possible, if one was free from hypocrisy, uncompromising in being honest and adhered to simplicity. On his priorities he stayed adamant and steadfast even under the most provocative circumstances. No one could be more critical of his own actions than he was.

During Gandhiji's stay in South Africa, he would often reproach Kasturba for attention to her looks while philosophising on the impermanence of the body. Kasturba, being the docile and uneducated person that she was, would remain silent. On their return to India, when Gandhiji was taking his customary walk in Sabarmati Ashram, he hurt his foot badly and rushed to Kasturba to have it treated. Seeing this as an ideal situation to answer his rebukes on her obsession with

her appearance, she mustered courage and remarked that one should learn to ignore the body! The Mahatma was not slow in noticing the reference to his earlier sarcastic comments and not to be outdone, he calmly replied that he had long ago surrendered his body to the service of the nation and if the bleeding was not stopped soon, he would not be able to carry out his avowed objective.

Apart from bringing out this quality of remaining impervious to ridicule and that also in a vulnerable moment, he could extricate himself honourably. He had unflinching presence of mind to deliver a retort because he had total control over his emotions. This incident also brings out his commitment to serve the nation as his highest priority.

One of the turning points in Gandhiji's legal profession, was his acceptance of a case while in Rajkot to represent a client, Dada Abdullah. In accepting this assignment, he had to travel to South Africa. After studying the case, he realised strangely that the two opposing parties would stand to lose substantially through lawyer's fees and somehow this thought did not go well with him. He believed in the innate goodness of man and this prompted him to suggest that the two warring parties should meet out of court and settle their differences under his guidance. With reluctance they agreed and as luck would have it, the matter was resolved amicably and rather soon, aborting the need for a protracted legal dispute. Obviously, this approach denied Gandhiji a huge income which would have otherwise accrued to him from professional legal charges, but this did not deter him from his chosen path of suggesting 'out of court' settlements in hundreds of his cases.

In other ways also he differed from most lawyers. He never tried to win a case by 'tutoring' his client to answer questions in the court. He refrained from reminding his clients if they had not paid him his professional charges. He fiercely guarded his sense of righteousness and never compromised on it.

From these incidents, it can be clearly discerned that the Mahatma lived his life in tune with his convictions, that there simply was no other way, than being natural, simple and forthright, without putting on a façade. His language, manner of speech and actions were used solely to communicate his essential intentions, for which he trained his mind to remain unemotional, under the most trying of circumstances.

This, he believed, can only be possible, if one was free from hypocrisy, uncompromising in being honest and adherence to simplicity. On his priorities he stayed adamant and steadfast even under the most provocative circumstances. No one could be more critical of his own actions than he was. We also notice that these small incidents, apparently inconsequential, conveyed to us that they were actually the logical outcome of a trained and disciplined mind. Told in the form of a story, we can relate with them easily and it can help us to emulate the greatness of the Mahatma in some ways. I sincerely hope a little bit of Gandhi can come into our lives through these incidents. ▲

Elegy

Upahar

One perfect night we offered into fire,
with circling prayers,
your passing form, a lovely, fragile shell.
The ancient common knowledge moved within us,
a subtle wind, a light.
Where you belonged, we laid you down.

Kindness and steady faith shone true in you,
we'll not forget; but, brother,
let no remembrance hold you here. Be gone, now.
Be now the all; be sky, be spirit, rainfall
and flowering branch. Sweet nothing may you be.
Rest now in Love.

Red mountain take you to its heart.
Blue mountain enfold you forever.
Dear one, be gone.
Mountain of gold be now your endless home.



Tamil Siddhas

Part Three

Thirumoolar: The Captain of the Siddha School of Thought

P. RAJA

Literary historians aver that there existed no Tamil text that speaks of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy before the time of Thirumoolar. Therefore, Thirumoolar's *Thirumantiram*, the first of its kind in Tamil, became the source book for the latter day saints Thirugnana Sambandar, Thirunavukkarasar (Appar) and Sundarar who moved from place to place with the mission of spreading Saivism in the Tamil country.

Thirumantiram is a three-word combo. *Thiru* means sacred, *Mant* means one who seeks and *Tiram* means protect. In common man's parlance *Thirumantiram* simply means 'The Seeker's Sacred Armour'. In other words a beacon to show the sacred path to the Divine, evading the invisible pits of sin or ignorance right through.

"Let the world have the feel of the ecstasy I have experienced," is an oft-quoted line from Thirumoolar. This is to say he was sharing his vast experience of divine knowledge to the common man through

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his monumental work containing three thousand verses, believed to be written one per year.

Three thousand verses! Three thousand years! Such a long life is possible only for the Siddhas, realised souls. No wonder that the sacred poet's experience is vast. And he is sharing it with the common man, the seeker of knowledge and wisdom. This may be one of the several reasons for his employing a good amount of spoken Tamil in his verses.

Written in a simple and telling language, every word in these three thousand stanzas is the result of the author's complete realisation. It is also an expression of his disdain for those engrossed in worldly matters. In one of his stanzas he writes:

Follow you all to offer a herb to the Divine
Follow you all to offer a sheaf of grass to the cow
Follow you all to offer a handful of rice to the needy
Follow you all to say a kind word to everyone.¹

This particular stanza seems to be the very essence of Thirumoolar's philosophy. God is in everyone, man or animal or plant and it is the duty of everyone to love others. By showing love to others one shows love to God and God reciprocates. God's love is wonderful, so wonderful. The experience Thirumoolar has gained is admirably expressed in several of his stanzas, and his life too is a fitting tribute to his philosophy.

As per legend, the hero of this chapter is a blessed disciple of Nandi, the chamberlain of Lord Śiva, and the chief of *ganās*, the Lord's personal attendants. Nandi is the gate-guardian deity of Mt. Kailasa, the abode of Lord Śiva.

Since waiting is considered the greatest virtue in our culture, Nandi facing the Lord symbolises eternal waiting. This is not to say that he is waiting to take commands from the Lord. But he is only waiting... waiting forever, that forms the very essence of receptivity. And it is this receptivity that makes Nandi the greatest devotee of and closest companion to Lord Śiva.

Tradition states that Nandi had eight principal *chelas*. To come up under the tutelage of Nandi, was a double blessing for all of

¹ *Thirumantiram*, 'In Praise of the Charitable', verse 251.

them. They included Thirumoolar. The other seven were Sanakar, Sanandanar, Sanat Kumarar, Sanatanar, Śivayoga Mamuni, Patanjali and Vyagrapadar.

Our special disciple blessed by both Nandi and Lord Śiva had gathered and absorbed under their tutelage a profound knowledge of the purest Saivite path, Saiva Siddhanta and as well, he became an adept in yoga practices and was well-versed in *ashtamā siddhis*.²

According to legend, desiring to meet his old friend Sage Agastya, Rishi Sundaranatha as he was then known, walked the long journey from Kailasa to reach Podigai Hills in the Tamil country. On the return journey to Mount Kailasa he spent time worshipping at various shrines among which was the sacred temple at Tiruvavaduthurai.³

The renowned temple at Tiruvavaduthurai stood on the banks of the perennial river Kaveri and after his holy dip, he entered the temple and prayed to the Lord seated there with all delight. As he moved out of the temple, his eyes fell on a sight, rare for the human eyes to come across.

He saw several milch cows stand surrounding the dead body of a man. One was trying to lick him back to life. Two others were affectionately butting him with their small horns attempting to wake him up. Several others were virtually in tears and belching out *mow... mow*, a language not too difficult to decipher.

He moved closer to the scene, only to find that the affectionate cows simply refused to find their way without their cowherd. And it was already the cow-dust hour.

Since his mission was to bring peace in every perturbed mind, be it human or animal or insect, he thought it was his bounden duty to bring the dead cowherd back to life all to wipe away the tears of the cows.

As a *siddha* who had attained *ashtamā siddhi*, he decided to use one of the eight kinds of occult or supernatural powers achieved by hard penance and constant practice, called *prākāmyam* (the power to disembody and enter into other bodies). His decision was final.

² *Aṇimā; Mahimā; Laghimā; Garimā; Prāpti; Prākāmyam; Īsitva; Vaśitva.*

³ Tiruvavaduthurai is located at a distance of about 10 kms from Tiruvidaimarudhur and 17 kms from Kumbakonam on the Kumbakonam to Mayiladuthurai road.

As per his decision, he moved to a secluded spot in the woods, left his own body and entered the body of Moolan, the cowherd. The weeping cows gamboled in joy at the very sight of the dead man awake. A few minutes ago they were lowing with grief, but now they lifted their tails and gently moaned in joy, all their grief gone.

The resurrection of Moolan, the cowherd resulted in the birth of Thirumoolar. Strange was the combination. A siddha's soul in a cowherd's body.

Glad at heart all the cows grazed, drank from the flowing Kaveri, climbed up the bank and rested awhile in the shade.

Thirumoolar too was happy to see the happier cows getting ready to move back home. They gleefully moved towards Sathanur, a nearby village. And the newly transformed cowherd too followed them. At each doorstep a cow halted. And when all cows were gone, Thirumoolar found himself alone in the village.

As it was getting dark, Thirumoolar congratulated himself for the wonderful job of herding the cows back to their homes. He heaved a sigh of relief without knowing in the least that a whirlpool of problems was at his heels.

Moolan's wife became very anxious of his absence and so she was out of the house, her eyes frantically trying to locate him.

She found him at last. But to her great dismay Thirumoolar did not even allow her to touch his hand. Unable to tolerate his indifference she wanted to know what was going on in his mind. He came out with the truth: "O Woman! I am not you husband. There exists no relationship between you and me. Think of Lord Śiva and spend the rest of your life in His service."

The poor lady unable to make head or tail of what she heard, took up the matter with the village elders. They for their part tried to probe into the matter.

Thirumoolar looked at them. Every nerve of the elders began to vibrate. They understood that the new person had come with a higher purpose in life. They then turned towards the anxious lady and said, "He is for the world and not for your home. He will no more herd cows and but will herd men to their right path. Go home and think of him as you would think of the Divine."

As she went back home thinking of what life would be without her dutiful husband, Thirumoolar went into the woods where he left his body.

A frantic search yielded no fruit. He probed into himself to know where his body had gone. He understood that whatever happened happened for a reason and there was logic to it.

It took little time for Thirumoolar to realise that it was Lord Śiva Himself who had cleared away his original body and given him a new one, so that he would take the Sanskrit *āgamas* into the land of the Tamils, especially for those who could not understand the text in the original. And that gave him the courage to say that he was the chosen one:

Unblessed are those who long await their turn
 For in their previous births
 Did not perform their divine duty well,
 But blessed am I to be shaped perfect by the Divine hand
 To do a perfect job in Tamil language.⁴

Once he understood the very purpose of his transformation, he went back to the temple that showed him a new path, sat in the shade of the pipal tree and began writing his monumental work *Thirumantiram*, which is the basis of Saiva Siddhanta.

The term Siddhanta appears for the first time in the *Thirumantiram*. Thirumoolar specifically employed this term to denote the teachings and final conclusions of the *Śiva Āgamas*. The school of Siddhanta reveals the *sadhanas* and practical disciplines which bring one to the final Truth.⁵

Thirumantiram is the tenth of the twelve books of the *Thirumurai* or 'Holy Books', the Saiva canon of the Tamils. The stanzas are in the form of quatrains and they emphasise the truth that God is Love, and Love is God – *Anbe Śivam*. Since the body is the temple and the

⁴ *Thirumantiram*, 'Agamic Truths in Tamil', verse 81.

⁵ The *Āgamas* are a collection of Hindu scriptures. It literally means tradition or 'that which has come down'. They describe cosmology, epistemology, philosophical doctrines, precepts on meditation and practices, four kinds of yoga, mantras, temple construction, deity worship and ways to attain sixfold desires. The *Āgamas* were the foremost texts in South India and were later put into Sanskrit. There are some suggestions that they are pre-Vedic compositions dating back to over 1100 BCE.

heart the seat of Love, it has to be nourished for receiving higher knowledge and thereby salvation.

Comparing *Thirumantiram* with the rest of the books of the Saiva Canon, the eminent Tamil literary historian M. Arunachalam writes:

A point to be noted about *Tirumantiram* is that among the twelve books of the Saiva Canon, it is the only sastra or scripture, i.e., a book devoted to philosophy; the others are all devotional songs. The place of Tirumular in Tamil literary history is unique. He is a mystic and lays bare his spiritual experiences in all his verses. He gives out the experience both in classical language and in the language of the masses; the ecstatic outpouring of the siddha are also there in his work. These three elements perhaps tend to make his poetry uneven and a little obscure in places, although the overwhelming ecstasy of experience and the flash of brilliance are always present. Tirumular is a canonised saint.⁶

It must be mentioned in passing that Thirumoolar had sixteen disciples, the most eminent being Kaalanki Siddhar and Ganjamalai Siddhar.

There are two stories about the *mahasamadhi* of Thirumoolar. One is that his *jiva samadhi* is in the Tiruvavaduthurai Gomuktheeswarar temple precincts. It is also said that the Lord Nataraja temple at Chidambaram is where Thirumoolar dissolved and merged with the Supreme Lord.

During his lifetime, he composed the immortal verses near a banyan tree at Tiruvavaduthurai where there was a *swayambhu lingam*. That *lingam* is revered by Saivites even today in a small shrine within the walls of the Lord Nataraja Temple at Chidambaram. ▲

Note: All the translations from the verses of Thirumoolar included in this essay are free renderings done by the author.

⁶ Arunachalam, M., *An Introduction to the History of Tamil Literature*, Gandhi Vidyalayam, Thiruchitrambalam, 1974. p.144.

A Wisdom That Transcends All Times and Places

An Introduction to the Perennial Philosophy

SAMUEL BENDECK SOTILLOS

There is a unanimous recognition, encompassing the diverse cultures of the world across time, that the human being is inseparable from the Absolute and that there are many paths to realising this Truth. To be human is to exist in both the horizontal and vertical domains; that is, in time and in what is timeless, both in the physical and metaphysical realms. Yet we require a spiritual path to partake of the Divine and thus realise the full potential of our human condition. A defining symbol that is used to describe the perennial philosophy and the diverse spiritual paths is the *circumference and the centre* of a circle, and correspondingly the *mountain and the summit*.

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Regarding the circumference and the centre, the outer dimensions of the religions are situated along the points of the circumference, while the inner or mystical dimensions of the religions are the radii leading from the circumference to the centre. From this schema, it logically follows that in aligning oneself with an authentic spiritual form, one can by similitude know other traditions and where they converge—as radii travelling from the periphery of the circle to its centre. The centre, being the Ultimate Reality or the Absolute as Truth, is one.

The symbol of the mountain and the summit illustrates the diverse religions and at the same time the ‘transcendent unity of religions’ or ‘paths that lead to the same summit.’ At the bottom or the base of the mountain the distances between the various religions or paths up the mountain appear to be wide and incompatible, yet at the summit there is the unanimity of the One or Ultimate Reality. There are many other names for this universal and timeless wisdom known as the perennial philosophy. Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) is responsible for popularising the term in recent times with his anthology *The Perennial Philosophy* (first published in 1944).

It was in the early twentieth century that several key figures, later regarded as the Perennialist or Traditionalist school of comparative religious thought, became associated with the perennial philosophy. Among the most prominent of these luminaries are René Guénon (1886–1951), Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), and Titus Burckhardt (1908–1984). Other noteworthy individuals are Marco Pallis (1895–1989), Lord Northbourne (1896–1982), Martin Lings (1909–2005), Leo Schaya (1916–1985), Whitall N. Perry (1920–2005), Joseph Epes Brown (1920–2000), William Stoddart (b. 1925), and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933).

Although the perennial philosophy is not a monolith and has innumerable variations and expressions, this does not mean that there are multiple or divergent forms of the perennial philosophy. To suggest the existence of perennial philosophies in the plural is erroneous and contradicts the very principle of its underlying transcendent Unity. It is also of paramount importance to clarify that the existence of a single perennial philosophy means neither that all religions are the same nor that one religion or spiritual path is superior to another.



René Guénon (1886–1951)

The perennial philosophy, like metaphysics, cannot be the exclusive property of any individual or school.

Philosophy as it is associated with the perennial philosophy, pertains to the ancient understanding of *philo-sophia*, or the ‘love of wisdom’ that grounds a way of life devoted to the primacy of truth. The central pillars of the perennial philosophy have been underscored as Truth, Prayer, Virtue, and Beauty; and all these integral elements of the perennial philosophy are situated within an authentic religion.

Truth is essential here, as without it there would be no way to discern between the Real and the unreal, the Absolute and the relative, or *Ātmā* and *Māyā*. *Prayer* is a bridge to the Divine and provides the means to access our transpersonal dimension. There are three basic modes of prayer: *personal prayer*, which is free and spontaneous; *canonical prayer*, which involves prayers that are common to believers of all faiths; and *invocatory prayer*, its highest form, which connects us to the inner dimension of religion through repetition of a Divine Name. Examples of invocatory prayer include *japa-yoga* in Hinduism, *nembutsu* in Buddhism, the Jesus Prayer in Christianity, and *dhikr* in Islam. Prayer is what gradually transforms our nature and brings us closer to our source. For this reason, St. Paul urges us to “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). *Virtue* pertains to intrinsic morality, which requires humility and impartiality toward oneself and one’s neighbour along with service. *Beauty* is vital to the human condition, as it encompasses all forms, our surroundings, our clothing, and how we live our lives. We recall Plato’s dictum here that summarises the role of beauty and our conformity to the Absolute: “Beauty is the splendour of the True.”

This approach recognises that there exists a divine Reality that the religions express differently, yet each human being needs to practise one of these religions. To embark upon and travel the spiritual path requires both doctrine (theory) and method (practice): doctrine provides Truth, and method provides a way of practising and assimilating this metaphysical Truth.

Metaphysics refers to a way of knowing that is the direct apprehension of the Real pertaining to a universal order of reality, particularly as it is actualised in the human realm as a realisation of our true identity. What can be known through the five senses pertains

to the corporeal realm and cannot transcend it. Empirical perception is only one way of knowing, just as reason is another. The Intellect (*intellectus*), as traditionally understood, is a transpersonal faculty that grasps things in themselves. It relies on unmediated intuition, not on the senses or rationality, which are much more restricted in their capacity to discern reality as it is.

One Truth, Many Religions

Perhaps no theme is more perplexing to the contemporary mind than religion and how to understand religious pluralism in today's world amidst all of the confusion that surrounds it. Due to the militant secularism and skepticism of these times, an integral framework for building bridges between the religions is imperative. Without the integral framework of the perennial philosophy, authentic bridge-building between the religions cannot take place. As the Real is both absolute and infinite, it provides *upāyas* (or 'saving means'), which allow for diverse religions to emerge. This plurality satisfies the great variety of spiritual needs and temperaments to be found among human beings.

While the word 'religion' has become off-putting and is less used today than 'spirituality,' it is necessary to remember that the etymological root of the English word 'religion' is the Latin *religare*, meaning to 'to re-link,' or 'to bind back' to the Divine or the Supreme Identity that is at once transcendent and immanent, or to that which is beyond the human and at the same time resides within us. There is a timeless and universal recognition found across the religions, as emphasised in the Hindu tradition, when the Divine speaks in the first person through Krishna: "I am ... seated in the heart[s] of all. (Śrī Bhagavad Gītā 10:20); however, this presupposes a prior recognition of transcendence. The etymology itself alludes to religion's role in restoring the integral human condition, which has in large part been forgotten in the present day. Originally, religion was understood to be essential for both the individual and the human collectivity, as it was seen as the unitive force of humanity.

All of the religions establish that there is an inseparable link between the human and the Divine. The task of the world's religions and their inner dimension is to awaken or reintegrate into our

primordial nature (*fiṭrah*), the ‘image of God’ (*imago Dei*), Buddha-nature (*Buddha-dhātu*), or Self (*Ātmā*), our true identity *in divinis*. The traditional doctrine of identity that can be found across the religions is closely related to the image one has of Reality itself. It is the metaphysical order that restores harmony to a consciousness that has been bifurcated into mind and matter or subject and object.

The human being exists in both the horizontal and vertical domains, in both time and what is timeless, in both the corporeal and the spiritual. The human being is therefore a bridge between these two domains, and this is why religion is imperative for understanding what it means to be human and consequently for the realisation of the human condition.

The Perennial Philosophy and the Perennialists

Despite some noteworthy selections, Huxley’s work is incomplete because of its adoption of an individualistic pick-and-choose approach, rather than letting the wisdom traditions speak for themselves. Very different from Huxley’s anthology is Whitall N. Perry’s work *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (1971 – later republished as *The Spiritual Ascent: A Compendium of the World’s Wisdom*, 2008), consisting of more than a thousand pages; this work has been praised as the ‘Summa of the Philosophia Perennis.’ Perry came into close personal contact with Coomaraswamy in 1946, and it was through this contact that Perry first conceived of the idea of compiling an anthology underscoring the world’s religions and spiritual traditions, both in their universality through their esoteric (or inner) dimensions and in their necessary differences in their exoteric (or outer) dimensions. In 1943, Coomaraswamy had written of the pressing need for an authentic portrayal of the *philosophia perennis* or perennial philosophy. After seventeen years, Perry’s labour of love bore fruit; unfortunately, Coomaraswamy was not alive to see its publication.

Tradition as it is understood through the perennial philosophy in its fullest sense pertains to the supra-formal order which includes all that can be known by the human being through revelation as it applies to all dimensions of human existence and cannot be in any way reduced to the observance of customs, habits, or the transitory events of history. Tradition is therefore the infusion of the sacred into

an entire civilisation and its culture. This said, Tradition is in a sense ineffable like the notion expressed in the *Tao Te Ching*: “The Tao that can be expressed is not the eternal Tao.”

Huxley attributed the initial use of the Latin term *philosophia perennis* or ‘perennial philosophy’ to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716). Leibniz used the term in a letter that he wrote on August 26, 1714 to Nicolas-François Rémond de Montmort, yet the term was employed earlier by the Vatican librarian and theologian Agostino Steuco (1497–1548). However, careful research indicates that the idea dates even further back, to the Middle Ages. The influential philosopher and priest Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) termed it the *philosophia priscorum* or *prisca theologia* (ancient or venerable philosophy). The leading Byzantine scholar and philosopher Gemistus Plethon (1355–1452) used the term *vera philosophia* (true philosophy). Within Hinduism this teaching is known as the *sanātana dharma* (eternal religion) and in Islam as *al-ḥikmat al-khālīdah* (eternal wisdom; *jāwīdān-khirad* in Persian) or *al-dīn al-ḥanīf* (primordial religion). Other phrases that are also used to articulate the perennial philosophy are *sophia perennis* (perennial wisdom), *religio perennis* (perennial religion), and *religio cordis* (religion of the heart). It is sometimes known as the transcendent unity of religions, the underlying religion, the Great Chain of Being, the Primordial Tradition, or simply Tradition.

One Truth, Many Truth Claims

A fundamental question remains as to how to make sense of the world’s different religions, when each asserts its own exclusive validity and truth claims. How can all of the religions be true? And if they are all true, does this then suggest that one religion cannot possess the fullness of Truth? The integral framework of the perennial philosophy is able to reconcile these apparent differences.

The main criticism of the perennial philosophy is that the affirmation of the universality of religion comes at the expense of the loss of the distinctions between the faith traditions. Yet it is the metaphysical framework of the perennial philosophy, especially its ability to reconcile and discern vital differences between the religions, which is necessary and providential. From one point of view the

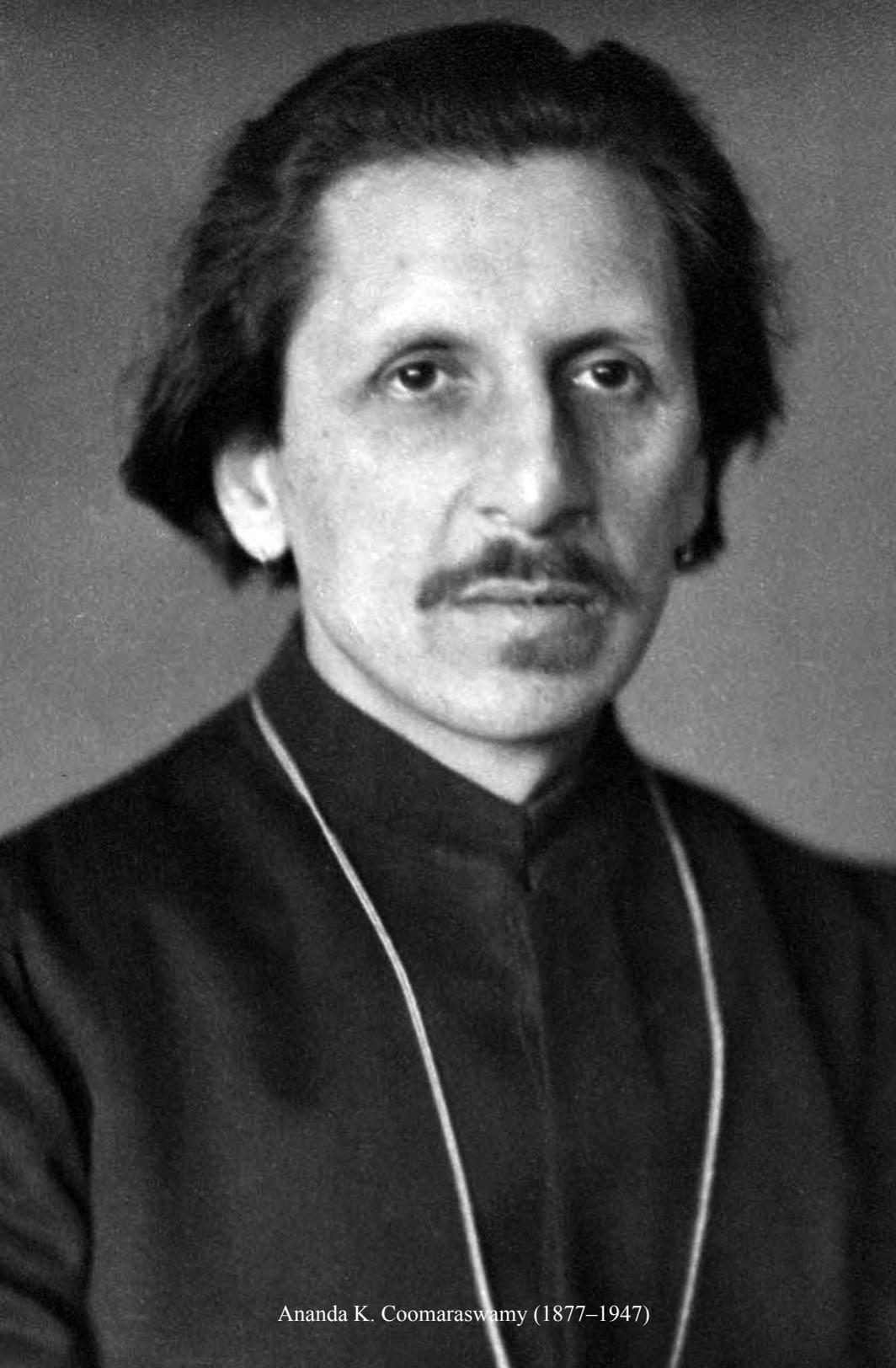
validity and truth of a given religion appears to contradict the validity and truth of the other; yet when viewed through the metaphysics of the perennial philosophy, their inner dimensions illuminate the validity and truth of each faith or tradition without falling into religious exclusivism or syncretism.

Numerous passages from the world's religions can be found demonstrating the formal incongruities among their theological perspectives. We recall the Latin phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, 'outside the Church there is no salvation,' which is the dogma of the Catholic Church. Yet within every religion, similar exclusivist claims can be identified, as the founder of each faith tradition represents the eternal Logos. According to the Christian tradition, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6); in Islam, "No man shall meet God who has not first met the Prophet" (*ḥadīth*); a corresponding principle, although not exclusivist in its outlook, can be found within the Buddhist tradition: "He who sees the *Dhamma* [Dharma] sees me, and he who sees me sees the *Dhamma* [Dharma]" (*Samyutta Nikāya* 3.120).

While passages expressing religious exclusivism are to be found, it is also vital to balance these passages with the abundant examples of statements exemplifying universality to obtain a fuller understanding of the perennial philosophy. In the Hindu tradition, the Bhagavad Gītā declares, "They worship me as One and as many, because they see that all is in me" (9:15).

Within the Christian tradition, we need to recall that Jesus declared that "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2), and that there are "other sheep who are not of this fold" (John 10:16); Jesus also emphasised that "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). All of these passages allude to Jesus as the Logos. The manifestation of the Logos in Christianity does not therefore suggest that it is in anyway limited to a single religion, for the principle of the Logos can manifest in other religions as well. We recall the often-cited passage with reference to this idea: "The wind [or Spirit] bloweth where it listeth" (John 3:8).

According to the Islamic tradition, "We never sent a messenger save with the language of his folk, that he might make the message clear for them" (Qur'ān 14:4). The validity of the diverse religious



Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947)

paths is also illustrated in the following Qur'ānic passage: "Truly those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabaeans — whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and performeth virtuous deeds — surely their reward is with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve" (2:62). The metaphysical reality of the Prophet of Islam is expressed in the *ḥadīth* that attributes to Muḥammad the words "I was a Prophet when Adam was between water and clay." Another point regarding religion is that one's religion is often determined by the family that one is born into and not necessarily by one's own choice. According to a famous *ḥadīth*: "Every child is born according to primordial nature (*fiṭrah*); then his parents make him into a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian."

To go beyond the exclusivist or formalistic interpretations of religion requires the vantage point of metaphysics to realise the common ground among the religions, without which the 'transcendent unity of religions' or 'paths that lead to the same summit' is indiscernible. This point of view provides a higher or more inclusive perspective than exclusivist or formulaic interpretations of religion.

While a deep immersion in the sapiential traditions is needed to comprehend what they say about each other, to recognise their uniqueness and even the necessary and providential nature of these differences, the goal is simultaneously to realise their multiplicity-in-unity and unity-in-multiplicity.

This does not in anyway minimise the formal practise of religion, as each orthodox faith tradition provides the fullness of truth through its doctrines and methods, which contain truth sufficient for salvation. When the religions are understood through metaphysics, they are no longer viewed as a limitation, but rather as a necessity leading to the doorway of the supra-formal.

The Religions and the Absolute

The notion of religious exclusivity can be understood and even reconciled with pluralism if we recognise the 'relatively Absolute,' a term established by Frithjof Schuon that signifies the existence of the Absolute within the relative that is each religion. Each religion derives from the Absolute, yet each religious form is relative in and of itself. The Divine expresses itself in absolute terms because it alone

is Absolute, yet the distinct religious forms are not absolute; they are relatively absolute.

All of these exclusive truth claims, while necessarily differing from each other in their exoteric or outer dimensions, do not present contradictions or irreconcilable differences within their esoteric or inner dimension.

If each Revelation differentiates itself from others, it is because of its supra-formal essence, which cannot be reduced to its formal manifestation. Without the perennial philosophy, the complexities of how the religions differ on the formal level and where they meet on the supra-formal level cannot be fully understood.

We are reminded to approach the spiritual path on the terms of the Divine and not on our own terms: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). As it has been pointed out, we should “enter houses through their proper doors” (Qur’ān 2:189). The inner dimension of religion is only accessible through the outer dimension. The inner and outer dimensions of religion are inseparable from one another and are complementary, since both are revealed by God alone.

The Inner and Outer Dimensions of Religion

The particular forms of religion and spirituality become intelligible through understanding the relationship and interdependence of the exoteric and esoteric. Again, in order to participate in the inner or mystical dimension of a religion, the outer dimension needs to be present; religion cannot be discarded in an attempt to solely practise its inner dimension. While the saints and sages transcended the formal limitations of their respective religions, this does not mean that they therefore abandoned the doctrines and methods of these faith traditions; they in fact conserved the outer dimension or exoteric elements while practising the inner or esoteric dimension.

The perennial philosophy, while timeless and universal, does not in anyway advocate a religion or tradition of its own: that it does so is a common misconception. There cannot be a ‘supra-religion’ or ‘meta-religion’ that places one religion above all others, as the diverse religions correspond to the diverse human beings and derive from the Absolute. Each faith tradition is sufficient for the return or reintegration into the Divine and requires diverse means of facilitating this function.

An *ad hoc* all-encompassing construction of religion is erroneous, as no such formation can exist that replaces all the sapiential traditions. This would distort the intrinsic tenet of the perennial philosophy that all the religions are fundamentally unique manifestations of the Absolute. As the perennial philosophy acknowledges the ‘transcendent unity of religions’ or ‘paths that lead to the same summit,’ it can sometimes be confused with New Age pseudo-spirituality, which is syncretic in nature and is a parody of integral spirituality. Let us be clear: the perennial philosophy has nothing to do with this counterfeit spirituality. Although it is certainly true that “The wind [or Spirit] bloweth where it listeth” (John 3:8), every human person must travel one of the timeworn paths that have been travelled since time immemorial by the distinct saints and sages of the religions.

One Truth, Many Paths

This recognition of many paths leading to the unanimous Truth differs from endless dabbling in the various religions or mystical practices, as it is decisive that one path be taken and traveled until its end. The non-committal way of approaching religion is very deceptive and ultimately goes nowhere. There are exemplars, like Śrī Rāmakrishna (1836–1886), who have demonstrated the unique ability to remain firmly rooted within a single religion (in his case that of Hinduism) and at the same time to be universal in their orientation, allowing them to simultaneously travel other spiritual paths. In fact, Rāmakrishna spent time devoutly practising both Christianity and Islam to verify these religions from within.

Rāmakrishna in no way repudiated or brought into question his participation in Hinduism but rather affirmed the universality of all sapiential traditions, while abiding within the fold of his own faith tradition. It goes without saying that Rāmakrishna is unique and a rather remarkable embodiment of the perennial philosophy, yet it needs to be remembered that the universality of religion can be realised by practising a single religion; and that one need not attempt, nor is it recommended that one attempt, to travel multiple spiritual paths. It is important to point out that the ‘transcendent unity of religions’ does not absolve one from the responsibility of following the moral precepts of a chosen path. All the traditions have prescribed codes of

conduct, as morality is an important dimension of any religion. Each human being has a choice in the matter, as the Qur'an asserts: "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256). With that said, morality is not prescribed just to induce fear, even though some individuals may require it. Rather, it allows wayfarers to remain on a straight path towards the Divine, which is our sole good. This demands humility, generosity, vigilance and gratitude, along with the patience and trust required to efface the ego. We recall the saying of Christ, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God" (Matthew 19:17). Here we need to make a distinction between moral virtues and 'social' morality. The first pertains to the divine qualities inherent in the spirit, and the second relates to the conformity of actions to this morality. Ultimately, however, no virtues are ours— they belong to God alone. The saints and sages of the world's religions never ignored the importance of moral precepts. Some demonstrated unconventional behaviour or paradoxical teaching methods, but this cannot be confused with antinomianism or a repudiation of morality as a whole.

Truth Both Beyond and Within

Attempted revisions of the religions or their mystical counterparts of the perennial philosophy essentially lead to relativistic pluralism that cannot go anywhere and ends in a cul-de-sac. Privileging immanence at the cost of transcendence is not only a reduction, but a fundamental error, for it must be remembered that transcendence is prior to immanence and there can be no immanence without transcendence. In the same way, the horizontal dimension cannot access the vertical dimension, as the former is of time and contingent, whereas the latter is timeless and Absolute.

We are first called to recognise that "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), yet this is coupled with the second recognition that "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). Within Islamic spirituality, we are reminded of God's transcendence: "Eyes do not perceive Him" (Qur'an 6:103) or "There is nothing like Him" (Qur'an 42:11) and yet also of God's immanence: "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God" (Qur'an 2:115) or "We are nearer to him than the jugular vein" (Qur'an 50:16). In the Divine, both can exist simultaneously without contradiction, as there are distinct

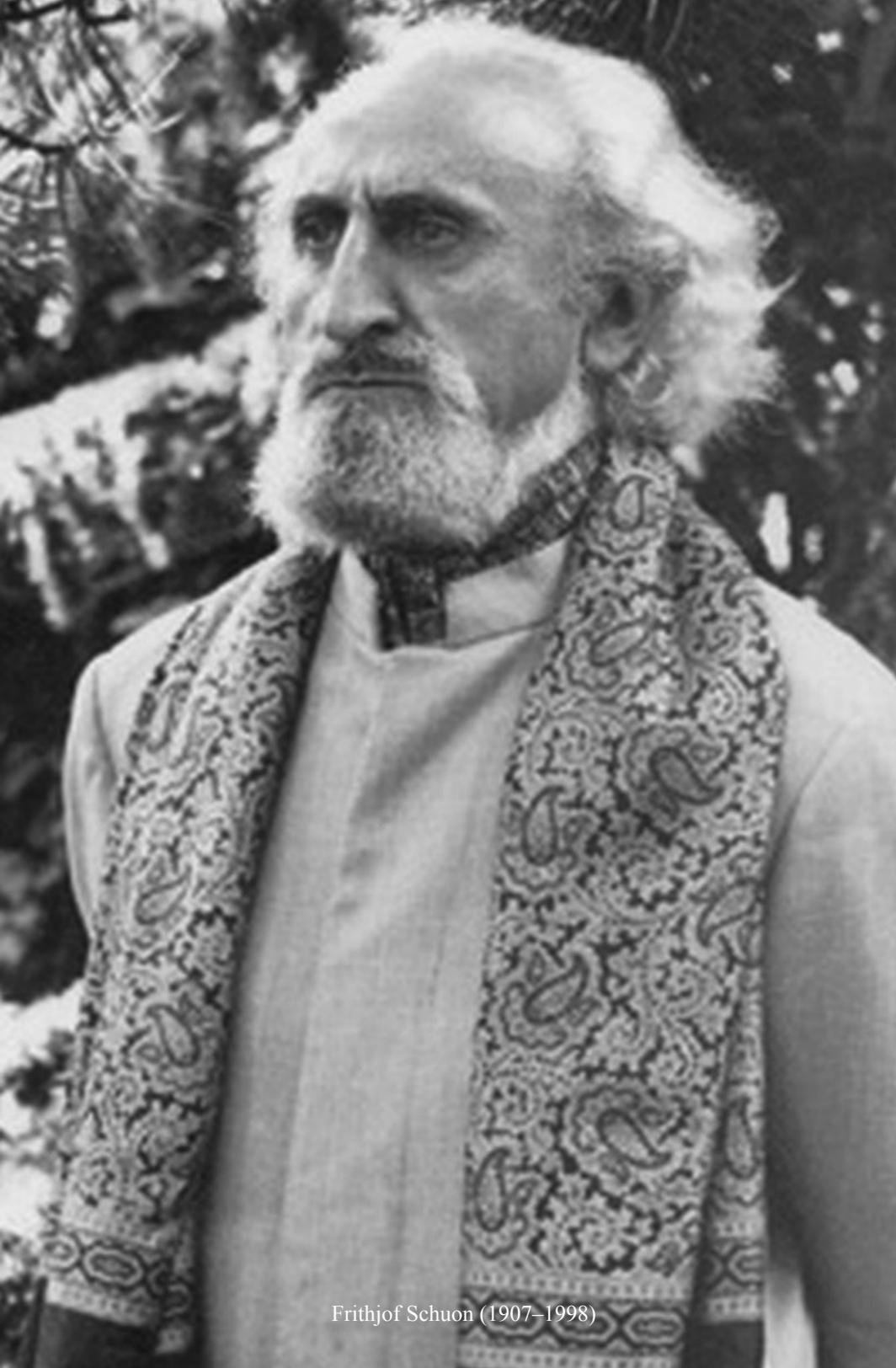
levels of perception and modes of knowing depending on the diverse understanding of human beings. Metaphysics pertains to the domain of immutable principles, to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken away. As stated earlier, there is only a single metaphysics and a single perennial philosophy — which is timeless and universal, originating in the supra-formal reality.

The relative and the Absolute characterise two distinct domains of knowing; however, the perennial philosophy also includes all contingent modes of knowing and levels of reality that connect them. The perennial philosophy provides a framework that remedies the Cartesian dualism between mind and matter, which has plagued the mindset of the West since the seventeenth century. Rather than asserting that matter is the origin of all things as modern science does, the perennial philosophy upholds that, in the beginning, was consciousness itself or the Absolute.

The One and the Many

Some have criticised the perennial philosophy as it privileges a purely metaphysical perspective in keeping with the teachings of Ādi Śāṅkara, the great eighth-century exponent of *Advaita Vedānta*. Such a view overlooks the fact that his doctrine of Unity, or Nonduality, is the essence of metaphysics. It is universal and timeless and can be found within all the world's religions and their mystical dimensions, including the religions of the First Peoples and their Shamanic traditions. This view does not deny that each of the religions provides the fullness of truth through its doctrines and methods, which is sufficient for salvation. Through metaphysics, the religions are not seen as limitations but, rather, understood as a necessary path to the supra-formal or Absolute.

Ultimate Reality transcends linguistic limitations and the rational mind's definitions and conceptualisations; it is beyond all categorisation. The cataphatic way, also known as affirmative theology (*via affirmativa*), concerns what can be articulated about the Divine or God. By contrast, the apophatic approach, also known as negative theology (*via negativa*), pertains to the unknowable nature of the Divine Essence or Godhead. These are both valid ways of approaching spiritual reality.



Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998)

The correlation between human diversity and religious pluralism is made evident in the application of the perennial philosophy to psychology or the ‘science of the soul.’ Each religion originates in the Absolute and requires the integral metaphysics of the perennial philosophy to discern and reconcile human diversity and the corresponding diversity of religions. It is the perennial psychology rooted in metaphysics that provides integration of the human being consisting of Spirit, soul, and body and its diverse modes of knowing and treatment.

Esoterism as a Basis for Ecumenical Dialogue

Contemporary ecumenical or interfaith dialogue, although often well-intentioned in accepting other faiths as legitimate and advocating tolerance towards other religions, does not truly plumb the depths of the religions and radically falls short of understanding how authentic bridges may be established between them. Without necessarily realising it, such dialogue ends up concluding that no one religion can possibly possess the fullness of the Truth: since they are thought of as all being the same and each facilitating a part of the Truth, it is implied that each religion is an imperfect receptacle of Truth. Paradoxically, concluding that no religion is true contradicts the very rationale of ecumenical dialogue. It goes without saying that no amount of tolerance is the same as understanding, and, while tolerance is much needed, it is limited, to say the least. Again, while we need to be cautious and critical of religious exclusivism, the same applies to ecumenical or interfaith movements.

Most ecumenical dialogue unequivocally restricts the full scope of what religion signifies, and therefore it cannot facilitate a true understanding and authentic meeting between the diverse religions. What is needed is to build bridges between the religions based on an ‘esoteric ecumenicism,’ as Schuon noted, which transcends sectarian boundaries, is rooted in metaphysics, and is an expression of the universal and timeless wisdom of the perennial philosophy that is “neither of the East nor of the West” (Qur’ān 24:35).

The expositors of the perennial philosophy in no way attempt to alter or update the religions and their mystical dimensions, as this would be unnecessary and even mistaken, but rather allow the

traditional sources and their saints and sages to speak for themselves on their own terms, in order to present the universal and timeless wisdom to contemporaries seeking the one Truth hidden in all the forms. From this perspective, each human being praises the Divine in accordance with his or her own essence. Likewise, each human being is a receptacle with distinctive and unique beliefs and traits that assimilates one and the same transpersonal Essence.

The Necessity of Living One's Religion

What is of essential importance in this topsy-turvy and radically confused time is to adhere to an authentic religious form and to practise it with all of one's heart and mind. Yet this commitment cannot be imposed from without and needs to come directly from the individual, as we are reminded: "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'ān 2:256).

While religion derives from a supra-formal order, human beings need forms to travel the spiritual path in order to return to the Spirit. Forms themselves are the disclosure of the supra-formal order. Human beings live in the world of forms and analogously require them for their return to the Divine: Spiritual forms correspond to both human diversity and religious pluralism.

The resolution to the confrontation between the plurality of religions and their transcendental unity is none other than the universal metaphysics that has existed at all times and in all places, known as the perennial philosophy. Yet it needs to be made clear that the recognition of the perennial philosophy is not a prerequisite for a human being's salvation or for spiritual realisation and should not serve as a substitute for a divinely revealed tradition.

What any serious seeker on the path must understand is that not all facets of religion will be comprehended at once and that these matters are not dependent on the human (for "He guides whomsoever He will to a straight path" [Qur'ān 10:25]), but derive from a higher source, from what is above. We cannot ask God, along with the Psalmist, to "take off the veil from mine eyes" (119:18) without first adhering to an authentic religious form. The veil exists for the protection of the seeker and cannot be lifted prematurely without grave consequences, and this is articulated in various ways through the traditional exegeses.

MOUNTAIN PATH

In the same way that we give common courtesy to a friend by entering the house through the front and not the back door, we must likewise embark on the spiritual path through one of the revealed traditions and not attempt to access its precinct without the consent and blessing of the religion. Travelling the spiritual path requires defending the True and the Real within the heart and mind in order not to be diverted away from the “one thing needful” (Luke 10:42), which is none other than the remembrance of the Divine. Each human being again is a reflection of the diverse and unique religions and spiritual paths that lead to the same summit. In the same way, each of the religions is a path of return. ▲

What’s the Chemistry?

Suresh Kailash

A billion, zillion photons,
gently bounce off
your form and face,
fall on a strip of acetate,
(or photographic plate)
coated with halide salts
of sodium, potassium
and silver nitrate,
where they react and create
a replica of your image.
How this happens,
any chemist can illustrate.

But, the chemistry
between your devotees
and your portrait?
This, Ramana,
is a mystery.

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Forty

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

6th January 1979 (continued)

Sadhu Om [in continuation of the discussion about verse 15 of *SUḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* recorded in the previous instalment]: When Bhagavan says in the third sentence of this verse, ‘*nihaṛvu ondrē*’, which means ‘The present alone [exists]’ or ‘The present is the only one’, this can be interpreted in two senses: Either we can take it in a relative sense to mean that among the three times, past, present and future, the present is the only time that has at least some degree of reality, because it is the time in which the one reality, ‘I am’, is always existing and shining; or we can take it in a deeper sense to mean that what is ever present, namely ‘I am’, is the only thing that actually exists, so none of the three times are real even to the slightest extent.

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan’s Tamil writings and *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.

The latter is what he goes on to imply in verse 16 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

When we investigate, except we, where is time, where is place?
 If we are a body, we will be ensnared in time and place. Are we
 a body? Since we are the one, now, then and always, the one in
 place, here, there and everywhere, there is we, we. Time and
 place do not exist.

In this verse he reveals the ultimate truth that neither time (past, present or future) nor place (the first, second and third persons) actually exists, because what actually exists is only we, the one reality that always exists and shines as ‘I am’.

The first sentence of this verse, ‘*nām anḍri nāḷ ēdu, nāḍu ēdu, nāḍum kāḷ?*’, is a rhetorical question that means ‘When we investigate, except we, where is time, where is place?’, which implies that when we investigate ourself, we will find that there is neither time nor place but only ourself. The key to understanding that this is the implication is the word *anḍri*, which is an adversative conjunction for which there is no single equivalent in English, but which depending on the context can be translated either as ‘except’ or ‘besides’ or as ‘but only’.

For example, in English one could say ‘There is no furniture in the room except a table’ or ‘There are no chairs in the room but only a table’, whereas in Tamil *anḍri* would be used in both cases, in the first case to mean ‘except’ and in the second case to mean ‘but only’. In English ‘except’ is used in the first case, because a table is a piece of furniture, but could not be used in the second case, because a table is not a chair. This is why ‘but only’ is used in the second case but could not be used in the first case.

In the first sentence of this verse *anḍri* is used in the sense of ‘but only’, because we are neither time nor place, but in English we cannot say ‘Where is time, where is place, but only we?’, so we have to use ‘except’ in such a question, even though the implied meaning is that there is neither time nor place but only ourself. As Bhagavan says in the seventh paragraph of *Nān Ār?*, ‘What actually exists is only *ātma-svarūpa* [the real nature of oneself]’, so all other things, including time and place, are just mental fabrications, like silver seen in a shell.

THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

Time and place seem to exist only when we rise as ego and consequently mistake ourself to be a body, which is bound within the limitations of time and place, so in the second sentence he says, 'If we are a body, we will be ensnared in time and place', but then he asks, 'Are we a body?', thereby implying that we are not a body. What we actually are is not a body, which is confined within a certain time and a certain place, but only the one fundamental, immutable and unlimited *sat-cit* (existence-awareness), 'I am', in which time, place and all other things appear and disappear, and which therefore remains unchanged and equally present in all times and all places, so he concludes this verse by saying in the last two lines: 'Since we are the one, now, then and always, the one in place, here, there and everywhere, there is we, [only] we. Time and place do not exist'. Thus in these last two lines he reiterates what he implied in the first sentence, namely that what actually exists is neither time nor place but only ourself.

Though he implies in this verse that we are not a body, as he repeatedly taught us either explicitly or implicitly in so many other passages of his teachings, on superficial observation it may seem that he contradicts this fundamental principle of his teachings in the next verse (verse 17), in which he seems to answer the second rhetorical question he asked in this verse, namely 'Are we a body?', by saying that the body is only 'I' not only for those who do not know what they actually are but even for those who do know:

For those who do not know themselves [their real nature] and for those who have known themselves, the body is actually 'I' [or only 'I']. For those who do not know themselves, 'I' is [limited to] only the extent of the body, [whereas] for those who have known themselves within the body, oneself, 'I', shines without limit. Consider that the difference between them is only this.

There is a deliberate touch of humour in Bhagavan's decision to place this verse immediately after verse 16, because what he says in the first sentence of this verse seems to fly in the face of what he said in that verse. If time and place do not actually exist, no body or any other phenomenon can exist, so why does he say that the body is

actually ‘I’ and only ‘I’ for those who know what they actually are? In what sense is the body only ‘I’ for them?

As Bhagavan often explained, ‘*jñānamē jñāni*’ (*jñāna* alone is the *jñāni*), and *jñāna* alone is what actually exists, so in the clear view of the *jñāni* nothing other than *jñāna* exists, as he implies in verse 31 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*: ‘*taṅṅai alādu aṅṅiyam oṅḍrum aṅṅiyār*’ (They do not know anything other than themselves). Therefore in the clear view of the *jñāni* there is no time, space, world or body, but in the body-bound view of the *ajñāni* all these things seem to exist.

Since nothing other than *jñāna* actually exists, whatever else seems to exist cannot be anything other than *jñāna*, which is what the *jñāni* experiences as ‘I’. Therefore what the *ajñāni* sees as time, space, world, body and all other phenomena is what the *jñāni* experiences as ‘I’, so in this verse Bhagavan explains that whereas for the *ajñāni*, ‘I’ is limited to the extent of one particular body, for the *jñāni* ‘I’ shines without limit, and hence it includes within itself not only the body but also everything else that seems to exist in the view of others.

In other words, the experience of the *ajñāni* is ‘I am only this body’ whereas the experience of the *jñāni* is ‘I am also this body’. It was from this perspective that Bhagavan replied when he was asked whether he was not experiencing pain as a result of his cancer: ‘Yes, there is pain, but it is not other than me’.

Therefore the difference between the *jñāni* and the *ajñāni* is that for the former ‘I’ is not limited in anyway whatsoever, so no other limitations of any kind exist, whereas for the latter, ‘I’ is limited to the extent of a body, so countless other limitations of all kinds seem to exist. Thus if we understand this verse correctly, we will see that in it Bhagavan is encouraging us by pointing out that the difference between the *jñāni* and the *ajñāni* is actually only a very slight difference of perspective, and that all that we need to do, therefore, is to give up the fundamental limitation, ‘I am just this body’, because when we give up this limitation all other limitations will cease to exist along with it, and what will then remain is only the one unlimited ‘I’, other than which nothing exists.

Likewise in the next verse (verse 18) he says:

For those who do not have knowledge [of their real nature]
and for those who have, the world is real. For those who do

not know [their real nature], reality is [limited to] the extent of [the forms that constitute] the world, [whereas] for those who have known [their real nature], reality pervades devoid of form as the *ādhāra* [support, foundation or container] for [the appearance of the forms that constitute] the world. This is the difference between them. Consider.

What the *ajñāni* sees as a world consisting of numerous names and forms is what the *jñāni* sees as the one formless and hence indivisible reality, which is what he described in the previous verse as the ‘I’ that shines without limit. All forms are limited in various ways, so what is unlimited is formless. What is unlimited and therefore formless alone is real, and hence that alone is what we actually are.

Why then do we see ourselves as this world of names and forms? Only because we have limited ourselves as the extent of a body, as Bhagavan says in verse 4 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

If oneself is a form, the world and God will be likewise; if oneself is not a form, who can see their forms, and how [to do so]? Can what is seen be otherwise [or of a different nature] than the eye [the awareness that sees or perceives it]? The [real] eye is oneself, the infinite [and hence formless] eye.

If we see a rope and mistake it to be a snake, the rope is the *ādhāra* (support or foundation) and the snake is just an illusory superimposition. Likewise, we are the *ādhāra* and all names and forms are just an illusory superimposition. Just as the snake is actually nothing other than a rope, the world of names and forms is actually nothing other than ourselves, the one and only reality.

The snake is unreal as a snake but real as a rope. Likewise, the world is unreal as the world but real as ourselves, so this is why Bhagavan says that the world is real not only for the *ajñāni* but also for the *jñāni*. However, whereas for the *ajñāni* the world is real as the world, for the *jñāni* the world is real as ourselves, the one unlimited and therefore formless reality, so this is what he means when he says: ‘For those who do not know, reality is the extent of the world, [whereas] for those who have known, reality pervades devoid of form as the *ādhāra* for the world’.

(To be continued)



KEYWORD

Ananta- mahāmbhodhi

Boundless Ocean

B.K. CROISSANT

There comes a time in every serious seeker's life when a push is in order. Not a small one, but a jolt that can lift you from the plains to a mountain top. One exceedingly reliable resource for such a remedy is the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā*. It must be approached, however, with unshakable faith, a pure and open mind and an intense willingness to surrender. Are you willing to break illusory bonds and truly let go? It's within your reach!

In great mystical poetry coming from the highest plane of Awareness, the message is carried on the wings of rhythm, sometimes rhyme, often individual words, repetition of all sorts and metaphors or similes. The *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā* is no exception. Accompanying the *anuṣṭubh* metre, which remains steady throughout its 298 sublime verses, and deployed to great effect are arresting and often original words, creative repetitions and soul stirring images. One shining example of the latter is figures of speech involving water. They are a favourite in the text and appear using different words and taking

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different forms. Evoked almost twenty times in the *Gītā*, one might say water is the most memorable image and that the entire poem is soaked in it. From a shimmering mirage to an ocean or a vast lake, water is capable of taking us into depths of contemplation that are totally foreign to the relative world of pain and sorrow. The most outstanding analogy with water uses the term *ananta-mahāmbhodhi*, Boundless Ocean. It first appears as the grand finale to Chapter II, then as the opening salvo to Chapter VII and, finally, as a resounding echo in Chapter XV.¹

Chapter I is a masterpiece in a nutshell. The rest of the poem constantly refers back to it. Here Aṣṭāvakra brilliantly expounds the principal teachings of Advaita Vedānta to King Janaka who asks in the first verse how wisdom, liberation and dispassion can be achieved. Its twenty verses leave us spellbound and in a state of wonder. We are not the five elements, not even water (*jalam* in verse 3)! We are not the body or the mind but Pure Consciousness. We are bound only because we think we are bound, falsely believing we are the ego, a separate self. When we are told the ego and the world it creates are a mere illusion not separate from the Self, turn our attention unswervingly to Pure Consciousness and contemplate It deeply, we experience all as One. The rest simply slips away.

Chapter II is an ecstatic, passionate exaltation of the state of Oneness. It opens with Janaka's dramatic assertion in the first person of an immediate and direct transcendental experience. "*O! I am the taintless, serene, pure Consciousness, and beyond nature. So long have I spent my days bewildered by delusion.*"²

There are several instances of water here. In verse 4, water meaning ocean, is linked with waves, foam and bubbles in a beautiful analogy that shatters the notion of any separateness whatsoever from Pure Consciousness. "*As waves, foam and bubbles (taraṅgāḥ phenabudbudāḥ) are not different from the waters (toyataḥ) so the universe, streaming forth from the Self, is not different from the Self.*"

¹ The reader is referred to Les Morgan's excellent book, *Croaking Frogs*, for an extended treatment of Sanskrit metrics and figures of speech.

² Unless otherwise noted, all verses quoted are taken from Swami Chinmayananda's translation and commentary, *Ashtavakra Gita: Song of Realisation*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 2019.

In verse 9, the poet employs three stock images from Vedānta, including one with water, to explain why the world arises. “*O Marvellous! The universe appears in Me misapprehended through ‘ignorance’ just as silver in the mother-of-pearl, snake in the rope, and water in the sunlight (vāri sūryakare).*”

In verse 10, he explains, how the world falls. “*Just as the pot dissolves into clay, the wave into water (jale vīciḥ) or the bangle into gold, so the universe which has streamed forth from Me will attain dissolution.*”

In verses 11-14, the poet bursts forth with a song of great beauty that begins with a haunting refrain, ‘*aho aham namo mahyam*’ (Marvellous! Prostration to the Me in me), and describes the indescribable divinity of the Self. Many breath-taking verses expressing Janaka’s wonder at his own discovery of the Self follow. Finally, this lilting chapter ends in three thrilling verses (23-25) with *ananta-mahāmbhodhi* as its theme.³

अहो भुवनकल्लोलैर्विचित्रैर्द्राक्समुत्थितम् ।
मय्यनन्तमहाम्भोधौ चित्तवाते समुद्यते ॥

aho bhuvana-kallolair vicitirair drāk samutthitam,
mayyananta-mahāmbhodhau citta-vāte samudyate.

*When the winds of the mind rise up in Me, the Boundless Ocean,
waves of differing worlds instantly appear. What a wonder!*

मय्यनन्तमहाम्भोधौ चित्तवाते प्रशाम्यति ।

अभाग्याज्जीववणिजो जगत्पोतो विनश्चरः ॥

mayyananta-mahāmbhodhau citta-vāte praśāmyati,
abhāgyāj jīva-vaṇijo jagat-poto vinaśvaraḥ.

*When the winds of the mind are stilled in Me, the Boundless
Ocean, the ship of the world and its merchant the jīva head by
misfortune to wreckage and ruin.*

मय्यनन्तमहाम्भोधावाश्चर्यं जीववीचयः ।

उद्यन्ति घ्नन्ति खेलन्ति प्रविशन्ति स्वभावतः ॥

mayyananta-mahāmbhodhāv āścaryam jīva-vīcayāḥ,
udyanti ghnanti khelanti praviśanti sva-bhāvataḥ.

³ Translations by the author.

How marvellous! Waves of souls rise up in Me, the Boundless Ocean, jostle about, play roles according to their nature, and enter back therein.

Here, Aṣṭāvakra, the exuberant poet in full use of his powers, has recast verses 9 and 10 in fancy dress, and water takes on a captivating allure. The Boundless Ocean (*ananta-mahāmbhodhi*) is there on centre stage as the eternal substratum, the anvil. The waves, the worlds, the ship, the ego/merchant and individual souls, all imagined, strike against it before they fall. What a wonder!

Once when G.V. Subbaramayya, a well-known and intimate devotee of Sri Bhagavan, went to Him to inquire how the deadly tumour would go, He simply replied, “*As it came, so it will go.*” About to take leave the next day and in extreme distress, he was consoled by Bhagavan with these reassurances.

“Don’t worry. Be at peace. Everything will be well. To be is our nature, not to go and come. But if you must think in terms of coming and going, think that you are coming to the Ashram and not going from it. It is all a trick of the mind.”⁴

[Note the use of *aho* (O marvellous!) and *āścaryam* (wonderful!) to indicate Janaka’s continuing state of wonder and amazement. The harshness of colliding sounds in the first *pāda* of verse 23 (*bhuvana-kallolair vicitrair drāk*), imitating the mind’s agitation, and the second *pāda* of verse 25 (*udyanti ghnanti khelanti praviśanti*), imitating jostling egos, are extremely expressive.

As for repetition, *ananta-mahāmbhodhi* is repeated three times, and the first *pāda* of verse 24 is identical to the second *pāda* of verse 23, except for one word. The analogies in verse 23, using the Boundless Ocean, winds of the mind, and waves of worlds, get hijacked in the second *pāda* of the following verse! Suddenly a ship and a merchant appear to replace diverse waves of worlds.

Svabhāvataḥ is a significant word meaning according to their nature, i.e., *karma*. Warning! If you set about to read these verses over and over again, aloud if possible or preferable, a profound stillness will come over you.]

⁴ G.V. Subbaramayya, *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, 1994, p. 195.

Chapters III and IV contain a sharp dialogue between Aṣṭāvakra and Janaka in which Aṣṭāvakra aggressively challenges Janaka's assertions of being established in the non-dual Self. How can a king, surrounded by luxury in his own kingdom with obligations to his queens and worldly affairs to attend to, still claim to be a man of wisdom?

One of his jeers, in verse 3, that is meant to test and draw out Janaka's depth of knowledge, invokes waves and water. "*Having realised 'I am That', from which the universe arises, like waves from the sea (taraṅgā iva sāgare), why do you run about like a wretched creature?*" In Chapter IV, Janaka meets the challenge head on with six stunning verses. They begin with "*O marvel! The man of understanding, the knower of the Self, who plays the sport of life, has no comparison with the deluded beasts of burden of the world.*"

Chapters V and VI continue the dialogue between King Janaka and his guru. The subject of Chapter V is dissolution of the ego or *laya*. Aṣṭāvakra, in four forceful and impassioned verses, each ending with a refrain, urges clearing the mind of thoughts with a continuous contemplation on the Self.

In verse 2, he uses a simile with water as a means for attaining one-pointed focus. "*The universe rises from You, like a bubble from the sea (vāridher iva budbudah), thus comprehend the non-dual Self. In this way, enter into 'laya' – the state of dissolution.*"

In Chapter VI, Janaka responds with four equally zealous verses, each ending with a refrain. From the mountain top he asserts that true self-realisation goes beyond such exercises, since they do not totally eliminate the mind. In verse 2, the poet as Janaka again refers to the image of water, this time speaking from the first person. "*I am like the ocean and the universe is like a wave (mahodadhir ivāham sa prapañco vīcisannibhaḥ): this is 'true Knowledge'. There is nothing then to be renounced or to be accepted or to be destroyed.*"

Chapter VII opens exuberantly with three verses on a familiar note.⁵

मय्यनन्तमहाम्भोधौ विश्वपोत इतस्ततः ।
भ्रमति स्वान्तवातेन न ममास्त्यसहिष्णुता ॥

⁵ Translation by the author.

mayyananta-mahāmbhodhau viśva-pota itastataḥ,
bhramati svānta-vātena na mamāstyasahiṣṇutā.

The ship of the universe, propelled by its inherent wind, moves to and fro in Me, the Boundless Ocean. I am not affected by it.

मय्यनन्तमहाम्भोधौ जगद्वीचिः स्वभावतः ।
उदेतु वास्तमायातु न मे वृद्धिर्न च क्षतिः ॥

mayyananta-mahāmbhodhau jagad-vīciḥ sva-bhāvataḥ,
udetu vāstam āyātu na me vṛddhir na ca kṣatiḥ.

Let the waves of the universe rise and fall naturally in Me, the Boundless Ocean. I neither enlarge nor diminish thereby.

मय्यनन्तमहाम्भोधौ विश्व नाम विकल्पना ।
अतिशान्तो निराकार एतदेवाहमास्थितः ॥

mayyananta-mahāmbhodhau viśvaṁ nāma vikalpanā,
atiśānto nirākāra etadevāham āsthitaḥ.

The so-called universe in Me, the Boundless Ocean, is a fancy. Supremely peaceful and devoid of form, in the Self alone I abide.

There is an unmistakable drumbeat here. ‘I am the Ocean’ and the rest is a mirage. Do you catch it? It’s calling everyone of us. The Chapter consists of only seven verses and ends on a resounding note. “O Marvellous! I am really pure Consciousness. The world is like a magic show. Hence, how and where can there be any notion of rejection or acceptance in Me?” Recite the chapter over and over again. Once when a devotee asked Bhagavan the meaning of some verses, he responded that the meaning was in the repeating of them.

[Note how the first verse recalls the ardent finale of Chapter II with the poet’s beloved ship and merchant analogy! The rhythm of *itastataḥ* at the end of the first *pāda* perfectly captures the notion of a ship’s incessant rocking.

The second verse brings to mind the Vedic mantra *Om pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate, pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate. Svabhāvataḥ*, at the end of the first *pāda* in that verse, refers to inherent nature or destiny. The second *pāda* opens with a beautiful rhythm imitating the rise and fall of the waves of the world. Consonants rubbing each other in *ca kṣatiḥ* at the end of the verse underline the finality of destruction.

Like the two previous verses, the third verse opens with *mayyananta-mahāmbhodhau*, clearly signalling its predominance and gravity. *Vikalpanā*, meaning imagination, is a strong and potent word in this context. *Śāntaḥ* is a frequently used word in the *Gītā*, but here it appears emphatically as *atiśāntaḥ*.

What better way to end this string of intense and emotional verses than with the words *etadevāham-āsthitaḥ* (in the Self alone I abide)? Inspired, the poet repeats these same words at the end of verse 4 and makes them a refrain in Chapter XII as *evam evāham āsthitaḥ* (thus do I abide in Myself).]

Chapter XV is a brilliant recapitulation of Chapter I containing the same passionate ideas and practical instruction. The image of water occurs as an effective, familiar echo first appearing in verse 7. “*O you, pure Intelligence! In you the universe manifests itself like waves in the ocean (taraṅgā iva sāgare). Be you free from the fever of the mind.*”

Then again in verse 11, “*In you, who are the infinite ocean (tvayyananta-mahāmbhodhau), let the waves of the universe (viśva-vīciḥ) spontaneously rise and disappear. There can be no gain or loss to you.*” In verse 18, the poet transports us to a place free of dualities. “*In the ocean of existence (bhavāmbhodhau) the one Self only was, is and will be. There is neither bondage nor liberation for you. Live fulfilled and roam about happily.*”

In Chapter XVII Aṣṭāvakra, the eminent poet, paints a stunning and memorable portrait of a true *jñānī*, the rarest of the rare. Among its twenty scintillating verses is one that includes water. According to verse 9, “*There is no attachment for one in whom the ocean of the world (saṁsāra-sāgare) has dried up. His gaze becomes vacant. His bodily actions are purposeless and his senses inoperative.*”

In Chapter XVIII, the portrait is extended to one hundred magnificently descriptive verses on the Perfect Man. Verse 60 is the last water image in the entire *Gītā* and beautifully conveys the notion of absolute stillness. “*One who, due to his inner disposition even when engaged in practical affairs of life, does not have any distress, like ordinary people have; he remains unagitated like a vast lake (mahāhrada), with all his sorrow extinguished, he indeed, shines.*”

G.V. Subbaramayya saw his Master for the last time ten days before His *Mahā Nirvāṇa*. The following transpired.

Sri Bhagavan lay alone facing the entrance as though He was expecting to see someone. As soon as I got up from prostrating at the doorstep Sri Bhagavan said, "Come in." As I went in and stood before Him, Sri Bhagavan asked me:

"What do you want?" I said, with streaming eyes: "I want *Abhayam* (security from fear)." Sri Bhagavan replied with overwhelming Grace: "*Saree, Icchanu.*" (Yes, I have given it.) Sri Bhagavan added, "*Don't fear. As it came, so it will go.*" At once I felt as though a heavy load were lifted from my heart and as I touched His Lotus-Feet with my hands and head a thrill of ecstasy passed through my frame, and I felt like being plunged in an ocean of Peace and Bliss.

That vision of Sri Bhagavan and His gracious words granting me *Abhayam* have taken permanent abode in my being and are guarding me from all life's ills.⁶ ▲

Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ.

This article is dedicated to my son Nate in honour of his own mystical experiences.

⁶ G.V. Subbaramayya, *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, 1994, p.215. Italics inserted by the author.

The Archival Films

Sri Ramanasramam is pleased to announce that many thousands of the frames in the original 'Archival Films' video have been restored and rendered by Sri Karthik at Chennai into a cleaner image.

Though containing almost no audio track, this complete record of the footage of Bhagavan and Arunachala spans the years 1935 to 1950. For approximately one hour, in images of heart-stirring simplicity, the video enlivens Sri Ramana's 'form'.

Each individual frame has been scanned to 2K resolution, giving more than 70,000 single frames restored to archival (.dpx) format. The new image has been compiled as closely as possible to the original restored film produced by Sri Dennis Hartel.

The final output configuration and location is available at:

<https://youtu.be/laWDhxhwh7w>

BOOK EXCERPT

Sri Mahaswami

The Sage with Eyes of Light

SERGE DEMETRIAN

Śrī Mahāswami, *The Sage with Eyes of Light* relates the direct experiences of the author with Śrī Kāñci Pīṭhādhipati Jagadguru Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Śrī Candraśekarendra Sarasvati Svāmī, which took place from 1968 until the mahāsamādhi of Śrī Mahāswami in 1994.

The book is available at Indica Books, Varanasi. The price for PB ₹1,095/- & HB ₹1,500/-; pp.816. ISBN: 978-93-81120-20-0. The book is available in Amazon and other webpages. If Indica Books is emailed at indicabooksindia@gmail.com they will send the book by post.

‘I am Shiva’

One night, a few days ago, Shri Mahaswami was staying in the room adjacent to his usual room where he sleeps, towards the south. The upper half of the wall had been cut and it had been replaced by a folding mat; when this is raised up Shri Mahaswami appears as in a store-window and the visitors pass by in front of him.

This time a quiet group, of some thirty to forty persons, mostly men, stood before him and seemed to be waiting for something. All of a sudden, Swamiji started uttering words in English, conveying the meaning as follows:

MOUNTAIN PATH

Remember always: Śivo'ham, I am Shiva.

God exists in us, in men, in every one of us.

The human being starts as a cell which metamorphoses in an embryo. In this way a child is born; he transforms into an adult that eventually becomes an old man; after his death nothing is left from that human being.

However, the base on which the man appears, develops and is obliterated, the foundation on which he carries on his existence, the force from where he draws his life is God, Shiva.

Think always that you are Shiva, repeat always: 'I am Shiva, Śivo'ham.'

Think of Him as an Ocean of light made up by the glitter of all the stars assembled in one point.

We all stood thoughtful a while, when a listener pointed his finger on the sky, towards south, and exclaimed:

"Look up there!"

The entire group, myself included, turned our eyes towards the sky. An extraordinary luminous shooting-star, a quite large white shaft, was falling through the sky. Its shimmer illuminated the sparse clouds. It had started from the southern side and crossed slowly the night sky and then disappeared on the eastern side of the Lotus Pond. It was as if the starry vault was agreeing with the words of Shri Mahaswami by declaring itself ready to come down and assemble in a single point of brilliant light!

While the listeners were commenting among themselves about this apparition, Shri Mahaswami, with a perfect ingenuity, was asking questions: where did the meteor appear? What was its precise trajectory?... as if he did not know all this! I could not remember anybody, until then, to better play the role of an ingenuous person.

We had all seen the shooting star, and comments came from all sides.

Some affirmed that the asteroid came at the order of Shri Mahaswami, that it was confirming the words of *Īśvara* with human form. Who else could have had the celestial body at his command?

Others considered that Shri Mahaswami, knowing the meteor was to fall, had given his discourse just at that moment; a happening that



was as marvellous as the first one! Indeed this would have meant that Shri Mahaswami, knowing beforehand the timetable of all celestial bodies, had placed his discourse exactly when a shooting star was about to fall.

Finally, others, among the people who took part in the discussion, insisted that the event had happened by chance and there was no conscious intention.

Shri Mahaswami listened in silence; he did not accept nor reject any of these propositions. He considered, maybe, that each argument matched a different level of understanding, or — what I was thinking — he was far above all the levels of ordinary understanding.

Why are we unable to recognise *Īśvara*, even when He moves among us? How is it that we are discussing with Him as if He was an ordinary man, somewhat more talented, but that is all? Strange! This is also a marvel. As if *Īśvara* reveals Himself only to whom He wants. He chooses His man by a criterion known only to Him. He prepares him by purifying his heart, by widening his mind, by clarifying his senses. When He is sure that all the forces of this person are directed towards the good, and only then, carefully, *Īśvara* uncovers His own Nature. In order to make Himself known to this one and to other humans He bestows, at least from time to time, on this human being, which is in fact His own creation, the Unity with Himself, that is, the Knowledge of Himself.

Karvetinagar, Thursday 16th September 1971

Pradoṣa-kāla-pūjā

This morning I woke up after a good rest, the fact being that it is so rare with me that it takes on the aspect of a memorable event. I happily meditated for some time and then read with pleasure some pages from *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma*. Indeed, I had stopped myself from learning the entire book by heart. I then left my abode for the hermitage of Shri Mahaswami as if ‘drawn by a string’. From the mill one had to walk three hundred metres, on an almost straight road. I had just started when a dense spiritual atmosphere, charged with Presence, came to meet me.

At my arrival, I understood the reason of this good beginning of the day. Shri Mahaswami, alone, sat meditating, facing east, on his favourite stone, the last stair of the reservoir. He was a silent flame, an orange ruby, whose brilliance was turned towards the interior; a large burning charcoal controlling its reddish ardour; a sun concealing its rays in order not to blind us.

I dipped my feet in the reservoir on the northern side, furthest from the hermitage; then I washed the mouth lightly and sprinkled six times a few drops of water on my head: these were Hindu purification procedures. Then I went to the southern side and came nearer to Shri Mahaswami. Under a corner of his cloth there appeared half of his left foot with the five rose pearls of the toes. After the prostration, I remained standing, at some five metres on his right, that is facing north, and I easily plunged inside for meditation.

After about thirty minutes, he stands up and heads towards the tall *pīpal* tree behind the hermitage. He effortlessly climbs onto the platform, which encircles its base and sits in order to meditate among the three small statues: Vinayaka, Hanuman and two serpents shaped in an 'eight' form in bas-relief on a granite slab. Shri Mahaswami places himself in such a way that, from down below, I could clearly see his face. The *Puruṣa* without fear and death, and the *kuṇḍalini* appear very soon, the first one in the heart and the second one in the centre of the spine, in its lower half (*mūlādhāra*).

However, Swamiji stops me from bringing the last one too high; surely, my body could not have stood the double presence. I accept on the spot this curtailment, with the attitude of 'a model child'. He better knows what is proper for me.

After some time he came down the platform and strode straight towards me. I was so much surprised that I did not have the idea that I should stand up with respect for him. Only later, I realised that he wanted to look at me at close quarters. All the rest of the morning, back at the mill, I was bathed in a luminous feeling of well-being. But let us not trust these mental and physical excitations, even if they be positive: one should move beyond.

In the afternoon, I lost a rare opportunity to become a guru myself. V.S. Narasimlu, my friend, who is a primary school teacher, came to

see me towards 5 pm at the mill and started talking about his interior life. I listened attentively to him and offered some counsels, perhaps with too much assurance. At my surprise, in a sudden outburst he prostrated in front of me and on the spot he declared himself my disciple: one quickly becomes enthused in this country! I hardly had a few seconds to decide: accepting I could have rendered him some aid — he is a faithful friend — but such a responsibility would soon become too heavy. I told him that I am myself a disciple, meaning by this that I was not able to accept such an obligation without the permission of my master. He could address directly Shri Mahaswami as he was the best one to properly guide him.

Convinced as I was of being almost nothing before Shri Mahaswami, I was enough persuasive towards my friend; he did not come again with such a request. I do not know if he has listened to my advice and if he appeared before Shri Mahaswami.

By 6:15 pm I reached the Lotus Pond and was somehow this time directed to stop on the northern side, at some ten metres from Shri Mahaswami, on the third step of the flight of stairs.

Shri Mahaswami, standing on the last step, was talking with some visitors. Round him were waiting the materials for the *pūjā*. As soon as I arrived, he immediately accepted my prostration, sat down and started the service. I felt that I had to stand at his back. Today, *dvādaśī*, is the day of the *pradoṣa-kāla-pūjā*, so favourable for the worship of Shiva. Mahaswami was in a severe mood. From the beginning, his eyeballs had become gaping black holes and remained like this all through the office while the little flame of the oil night lamp flickered. His features were cruel; one could distinguish neither nose nor mouth: an apocalyptic aspect. Strange, I did not feel any fear; on the contrary, I was even more convinced that he is God, that he is Shiva showing Himself at that moment as the Destroyer.

Shri Mahaswami stretched his hands and commenced straight away the movements of salute, of calling, of discussion. For some time I was the subject of the debate: was I worthy of some of his attention? Yes, decided Shri Mahaswami. Instantly he encircled me with joined hands, the fingers covered with light. Then he searched, by repeated movements, as if among the branches of a tree, for a ripe fruit and plucked it. In fact he picked me from the interior of my physical body

and put me, a little fluffy ball of silk, like a one day spring chicken, near him. He kept me there during the entire office. I had totally forgotten the old structure of a dead tree, the old body, at several metres distance behind Shri Mahaswami, frozen, in the darkness, on the side of the pond. How was it possible that it could stand without slipping into the lake?

The real 'I' felt so good among the coconut shells which were full of the materials necessary for the *pūjā*: *vibhūti*, *kumkum*, rice. Nearby was a little basket woven of bamboo fibres, with white smelling, freshly picked flowers inside. I had become myself an item for the *pūjā* of Shri Mahaswami.

Therefore, when my turn came, he took me along with some petals in the palm of his hands, which he stretched out towards the water. I felt that I should do something. I cut myself free of every lingering thought, and nestled in his palms. He seemed to have waited for this: with a quick movement, he poured me towards the east. I fell down into the bottom of a precipice. For a very short time only the 'I' feeling was there, alone, empty, divested of everything that could be considered as interior or exterior. Then everything perished... for how long is impossible to say. What reappeared was a faint light in a known place... my old heart. That is, I had been sent back to revitalise the old structure of the dead tree that waited, frozen, at ten metres distance behind. It slowly started moving, while the mind, overwhelmed with wonder, heard effortlessly resounding on its stage:

Śivo'ham, Śivo'ham... I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

Shri Mahaswami had finished the service, but I was too numb to greet him; I simply followed him by sight until he entered his hut. Then only I started moving, walking carefully in a slow *pradakṣiṇā* round the hermitage. Having come back to the front of the half open door, I saw him seated on his bed, facing south, as if waiting for me; nobody was there. I could prostrate properly before the threshold and I stood for a long time kneeling. I was slightly trembling and my eyes were moist. In my mind, I uttered these words:

You are God, I have recognised you.

Cut the knot of the heart, I beseech you,
destroy the five sheaths!

I finished with the eyes full of tears. Shri Mahaswami surely knew what I was thinking. He always knows... He remained as if dreaming. From his body of matt gold there emanated a luminous ether, hardly visible, which spread out in the room and rendered translucent all the objects: the bed, his cloth, his staff leaning on the waved wall, the *kamaṇḍalu* resting on a makeshift table — a hardboard box covered with an orange towel —, the three units shelf with some stacks of change of cloths and the thin blankets of the bedding, the accessories for eating — everything made out of wood —, plate, bowl, spoon; finally his wooden *pādukā* on the well beaten earth floor. I saw him smiling, in that fine way of his. He got up and stood near his bed, the right hand held in *abhaya* towards me. I thought I heard in my heart: “Go, and be happy.”

I painfully left the holy hut. While remembering the trifles that kept me busy day-by-day, instead of thinking every moment of him, there arose a certain feeling of regret and disgust. What to do other than try, as much as I am capable of, to follow the path towards *Īśvara*? Today, six months ago, in an afternoon, I came to this place for two or three days and since then I had not left for more than ten days in all.

The *kuśa*-grass mat

Shri Mahaswami meditates or performs his services twice a day on the last step of the reservoir, near the water, while sitting on a small square mat, some 40 centimetres on all sides. It is woven out of *kuśa*-grass, and is brought from the hut and then taken back by one of his assistants. It has become old and the woven threads that keep the grass together are worn out. As Shri Mahaswami replaces things as they run down or are overused, this *kuśa*-grass mat will have to be changed soon, for it got threadbare. I was waiting for such a moment as I intended to recover the old mat which is usually thrown by the assistants either onto the roof of the hut where the old cloths of Shri Mahaswami end up as well or may be left in some corner of the hermitage, if not simply thrown away in the forest. I liked the idea of possessing an object directly touched by him, especially during such particular periods as these last profound days. I would have considered this as a favour bestowed by him on me.

The good day came for the replacement mat, and the old disappeared without my being able to locate it: it was neither on the roof nor in the

neighbouring wood. In order not to arouse any suspicion, I had the thought to come at night to minutely inspect the close neighbourhood, the interior yard, and the shed. That same evening, I lay down on the stairs, as I did so often, but this time carefully avoided going to sleep too quickly. I got up towards midnight and, being helped by a half-moon that intermittently appeared from behind sparse clouds, I started to carefully explore the immediate surroundings of the hermitage. A first attentive and slow round did not reveal anything, neither a second one. The doors stood closed and everybody seemed to be asleep inside. I stood up as high as I could and looked behind the fence into the courtyard. I searched even in the red box on the tricycle. I ferreted without success in the shed. I thought, 'The mat must be concealed in some corner of the hut itself; I will have to be attentive the next days and come back, as the mat has to come out in some way or other.'

Still, I took the chance of one last round, which I started in front of the door of Shri Mahaswami's room and which I should have ended up at after a complete circuit. If nothing happened I would go to sleep on my habitual step at the pond. After five minutes, I was about to finish my round, when I suddenly stopped a few metres before the starting point, that is, the door of Shri Mahaswami's room: an 'object' was there, which had not been there five minutes ago. I suspiciously went round the thing, from a distance. It was oblong, but not an animal, as it was not moving and seemed quite real. I summoned up my courage and, in the favourable partial light of the moon, I came nearer and examined it. It was the old mat of Shri Mahaswami! It was carefully rolled up leaning against the side of his room, just near the opening of the door. It could not have been kept there but by him or at his direct order, and this for me. He had felt that I wanted it and he was replying to my wish!

I did not touch it straight away lest it should disappear. I forced myself to perform another round, thinking: 'If Shri Mahaswami has brought out the mat for me he will safeguard it for me.' While coming back I saw the roll waiting, calmly, in the same place. I thanked Swamiji by prostrating in front of his room; then I respectfully touched the mat with the right hand, took it and brought it to the eyes and then on the top of the head. I covered it with my shawl and kept it close to

my heart. As a sign of thankfulness, I walked three times round the hermitage. That night I did not remain on the stairs but picked up the bedding and went to my room at the mill.

Since then, this mat has been one of the most beloved objects by which I have been blessed by him during his lifetime. It soon had its place and proved useful: I kept it wrapped in the *valkalam*; this way the dress of the ascetics protects it and in its turn, is better protected by being rolled round in a bundle. Both objects are the tokens of the same status, that of the hermit-sage. ▲

(To be continued)

**The Complete Archives of Paul Brunton
Are Now Available Online**
(www.PBarchives.org)

When Paul Brunton (who referred to himself as ‘PB’) died in 1981, he left a large literary and personal legacy. In addition to over 20,000 pages of his philosophic writings, the archive contains over 10,000 pages of correspondence; thousands of pages of journals of people in close relation to PB; documents, interviews with teachers, reviews, and articles by and about PB; 4000 mostly photographic images (many of Maharshi and of many holy sites); and a large ‘Traveling Library’ of articles and books by others that PB wanted with him for reference.

In 2018, Cornell University acquired the physical collection of original documents which are now available to read in Cornell’s Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections (Carl A. Kroch Library) on campus. Most of the philosophic writings and other sections of the archives were retyped — under the direction of the Paul Brunton Philosophic Foundation — to create a searchable version of his legacy. The website contains all the original documents as well as searchable files, to assist in the study of PB’s life and legacy.

Visit:

www.PBarchives.org and the general website www.paulbrunton.org

Is the World Unreal?

Part Two

M. GIRIDHAR

In the previous article of this series, we examined what is Advaita Vedanta and why we should study it. One of the most confusing and misunderstood aspects of Advaita is the oft-quoted statement, ‘The *jagat* (world) is unreal.’ Among all the six *darśanas* mentioned in the previous article, including the various sub-schools of Vedanta, Advaita is the only school of thought that asserts the ‘illusion’ of the world.

However, the word ‘unreal’ has to be understood properly. Ādi Śaṅkara says ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः.¹ This means Brahman alone is real; the world is *mithyā*; *jīva* is non-different from Brahman. What is *mithyā*? To understand this, we need to define real and unreal. The *Bhagavad Gītā*² states:

नासतो विद्यते भावो नाभावो विद्यते सतः ।
उभयोरपि दृष्टोऽन्तस्त्वनयोस्तत्त्वदर्शिभिः ॥

This means “Of the temporary, there is no permanent existence, while of the eternal, there is no destruction. Those who know the Truth have reached this conclusion by deliberating on what is temporary and

¹ 20th verse of *Brahmajnānavali Māla*. *Brahma satyam jagat mithyā jivo brahmaiva na aparah*.

² Chapter 2, verse 16.

what is eternal.” Thus, what we consider real in common parlance is not actually real. For example, we consider the bracelets, necklaces and rings to be real but according to Vedanta, only gold is real and these forms are unreal as they can undergo change from one form to the another. Thus, in Vedanta, the following is defined:

sat (Reality) is defined as that which is *trikalābādhyami*³. Only Brahman is *sat*.

asat is *tuccham*⁴. An example of *asat* would be the horns of a hare or, in traditional literature, *vandhyāputra*⁵.

mithyā, refers to something that is neither *sat* nor *asat*. The world, *jagat*, is not *sat* like Brahman, because it is subject to time and space and is absent during our deep sleep but it is also not *asat* like *vandhyāputra* because we directly perceive it in the waking state. For the Brahman, *jagat* is non-existent while for *jīvas*, *jagat* is existent in two forms: appearing as real for the *ajñāni* and understood as false for the *jñāni*. It is this unique combination of non-existence and existence that is called *mithyā*.

This is explained lucidly by Bhagavan⁶:

The *tantriks* and others of the kind condemn Śri Śaṅkara’s philosophy as *māyā vāda* without understanding him aright. What does he say? He says: (1) Brahman is real; (2) the universe is a myth; (3) Brahman is the universe. He does not stop at the second statement but continues to supplement it with the third. What does it signify? The Universe is conceived to be apart from Brahman and that perception is wrong. The antagonists point to his illustration of *rajju sarpa* (rope snake). This is unconditioned superimposition. After the truth of the rope is known, the illusion of snake is removed once for all. But they should take the conditioned superimposition also into consideration, e.g., *marumarichika* or *mrigatrishna* (water of mirage). The mirage does not disappear even after knowing it to be a mirage. The

³ Available during three states: waking, dreaming and deep sleep.

⁴ Unfitness to appear as existent on any locus.

⁵ Son of a barren woman.

⁶ Munagala S. Venkataramiah, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§315.

vision is there but the man does not run to it for water. Śrī Śaṅkara must be understood in the light of both the illustrations. The world is a myth. Even after knowing it, it continues to appear. It must be known to be Brahman and not apart. If the world appears, yet to whom does it appear, he asks. What is your reply? You must say the Self. If not, will the world appear in the absence of the cognising Self? Therefore the Self is the reality. That is his conclusion.... Similarly the universe cannot be real of itself – that is to say, apart from the underlying Reality.

Thus according to Advaita, the *jagat* is *mithyā*, it has not been created. It has dependent reality, being simply the *namā-rupā* (name-form) of the nondual Brahman. Thus it depends on Brahman and not the perceiver, who is part of the *jagat*. So long as the substratum of all, the nondual Brahman is not seen, the world seems real, like illusory silver in a piece of mother-of-pearl.⁷

Seeing something as other than Brahman is the mistake of *adhyasa* (mixing up real and unreal). The *jīvas* attribute reality to the world due to *avidya* (ignorance) and delusorily think he is himself the seer, the doer and the knower.⁸ This *avidya* is negated when they realise the Self to be Brahman but this *avidya* cannot affect Brahman just like a wrong perception of the snake in the rope does not affect the rope.

This snake-universe is a superimposition upon the rope-Brahman. There is no more causal relationship between this world-appearance and Brahman than there is between the snake and the rope. Thus, the universe has no existence apart from Brahman, just as the snake has no existence apart from the rope.

Now, the question arises that if Brahman is always pure, how did the world arise? Why are so many creation theories mentioned in the Upanishads? To understand these concepts, we need to understand the three levels employed to describe Truth (or Reality).

The first is, *pāramārthika satya*, which is the absolute Truth. It means that which remains the truth in all states at all times, present everywhere, without beginning or end. This only refers

⁷ Swami Nikhilananda, *Self-Knowledge (Atma Bodha)*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002, v.7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, v.26.

to Brahman. In this view, there is no creation, no dissolution, no individual soul, no *Īśvara* and no liberation. There is only Brahman.

The second is the *vyāvahārika* point of view, which is the practical reality and is what is perceived in day-to-day affairs. *Saguna* Brahman (*Īśvara*) is regarded as the cause of this *jagat*'s origin, existence, and dissolution, because this world indeed has an empirical reality. As *Īśvara* is *sarvajna* (all-knower), *sarvasaktimān* (all-powerful), etc., and is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of *jagat*, *Īśvara* is worthy of worship. But *Īśvara*'s reality is restricted to *vyāvahārika*.

The *prātibhāshika satya* represents subjective or relative truth. For example, the appearance of the snake on the rope, or the objects seen in the dream-state belong to subjective reality. What appears to be real at one stage is termed to become unreal at some other time. For example, the snake appears to be real in semi-darkness but is seen to be a rope under clear light. Thus, the snake is not real as it is sublated when a light is shown.

Though *pāramārthika satya* is the ultimate truth with only Brahman and no world, at the *vyāvahārika* level, the Brahman, *jīva* and *jagat* appear as “independent” realities. The *prātibhāshika* view indicates the relative truth. The dream that appears real to the dreamer is rejected by the waker. The needs in the dream cannot be satisfied by the materials in the waking state.

This is illustrated by a famous story titled, *Is This True or is That True?*⁹. The mighty emperor Janaka was asleep in his palace, and he was suddenly jerked awake. The army general told him that the kingdom was being invaded. Janaka slipped on his armour, led his army, and fought the battle. Unfortunately, he lost and the new emperor banished him from the kingdom. Janaka wandered around in his old kingdom with his clothes in tatters and his body was covered with filth and dust. No one dared to even offer him food or water because they did not want to upset the new king. Janaka crossed over to the next kingdom. He saw poor people being offered food in an ashram.

⁹ Adapted from the talk: Vedanta in five parables, by Swami Sarvapriyananda, <https://youtu.be/BMRbh3M4AGw>.

He stands in line for the food, and receives the last morsel. However, by the time he reaches the bowl to his lips, a crow knocks it out of his hands. Janaka collapses on the floor with a scream asking the Lord to end his life.

Janaka, the emperor, wakes up on his bed with his heart pounding and his body drenched in sweat. His wife and guards run in upon hearing his scream and enquire about his well-being. Janaka starts mumbling, “Is this true, or is that true?” His queen, his ministers and the finest doctors, are unable to diagnose the problem. Hearing about the state of the king, the sage Ashtavakra comes to meet him. He asks who was the common entity between the person begging for food and the current king. Janaka replies ‘I’. Ashtavakra emphatically says “Neither this is true nor that is true. You are the truth, and the worlds appearing both in waking and dream are *mithyā*.” A similar story can be found in the Buddhist literature.¹⁰

The fundamental nature of consciousness and how it exists in all the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep has been deeply explored in Advaita, starting from the Gaudapāda’s *kārikā* on *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*¹¹. For example, the 19th century Tamil text, *Ellam Ondre*¹², suggests that three states (waking, dream and deep sleep) should be taken to form one long dream and the fourth state (*turiya*) i.e., the consciousness witnesses all these three states and this consciousness is the Truth and the Ultimate Reality.

Though the fundamental question about consciousness and its nature has been discussed in philosophy for several centuries, it has recently intrigued the scientific community. How is consciousness connected to matter? Though many scientists still believe that consciousness is generated by the brain, it is often asked “how can a physical system such as the brain and nervous system generate first-

¹⁰ Chuang Tzu was a sage in ancient China, who, one night went to sleep and dreamed that he was a butterfly. On waking up, Chuang Tzu asked himself the following question: “Was I Chuang Tzu dreaming I was a butterfly or am I now really a butterfly dreaming that I am Chuang Tzu?”

¹¹ Swami Nikhilananda, *Mandukya Upanishad with Gaudapada’s Karika and Shankara’s Commentary*, Advaita Ashrama, 2006, Chapter Two: Unreality (*Vaitathya*).

¹² Vaiyai R. Subramaniam, *All is One*, (translated from *Ellam Ondre*), Sri Ramanasramam, 2007, II.7.

person experience referred to as *qualia*.¹³ This has been termed as the hard problem of consciousness.

What is the relationship between the consciousness and matter? There are only four possible options. The *Charavākā*¹⁴ (and most scientists) view is that matter is primary and the consciousness is a by-product of matter (brain). The second approach is based on almost all theological schools including the *Dvaita Vedanta* school that Consciousness is primary with matter (and everything else) being a product of it.

The third option, expounded recently,¹⁵ is that consciousness cannot be reduced to the brain and it is fundamentally irreducible in principle. Thus both matter and consciousness are fundamental independent realities that interact with each other. This is *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* in the *Sankhya/Yoga* philosophy.¹⁶ At least a few scientists have come around to the view that consciousness is not confined to biological entities but is a fundamental feature of all physical matter — from subatomic particles to the human brain.¹⁷

The fourth approach is the Advaita Vedanta view¹⁸ that neither does matter produce consciousness nor does consciousness produce objects but there is only one nondual reality that is the Consciousness. It is nondual because it appears to be two such as consciousness and the world but in reality, Consciousness alone exists. Advaita Vedanta further claims that every individual can “experience” this Consciousness right here and now. In fact, these viewpoints have been extensively discussed in the work *Sarva darśana saṅgraha* written by Madhavacharya Vidyananya¹⁹, which is a compendium of

¹³ David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, Oxford University Press, 1998.

¹⁴ *Charavākā*, aka *Lokāyata*, is a philosophical Indian atheistic school of materialists.

¹⁵ Annaka Harris, *Conscious: A Brief Guide to the Fundamental Mystery of the Mind*, Harper Publications, 2019.

¹⁶ For a detailed exposition on *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*, refer to the ongoing series in *The Mountain Path*.

¹⁷ Philip Goff, *Galileo's Error: Foundations for a New Science of Consciousness*, Pantheon Publishers, 2019.

¹⁸ William M. Indich, *Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2000.

¹⁹ He should not to be confused with the Dvaita teacher Madhavacharya. This person was the brother of Sayana, the commentator of all Vedas. He is often identified as

all schools of philosophies existing at the end of the 14th century. Radhakrishnan²⁰ says the *Sarva darśana saṅgraha* “sketches sixteen systems of thought so as to exhibit a gradually ascending series, culminating in the Advaita Vedanta.”

As Advaita considers the world as *mithyā*, it does not give too much importance to the happenings in the *jagat*. Bhagavan used to give a story to highlight this concept.²¹ Let us suppose one person is sleeping while the other person is awake in the same room. The sleeping person is dreaming that all his belongings have been stolen and that he is running behind the thief shouting that someone should help him catch the thief. If the other person in this room hears this shout, should he run to catch the thief or just wake the dreaming person up? On waking up, will he not know that there was neither a thief nor a theft, but instead know that he alone exists?

Likewise, if one gets to know the eternal, fundamental, and supreme truth, one will obtain clarity that all the worldly problems are only a dream and that one has never really got entangled in the misery/sad affairs.

However, it is easy to get upset by the world and also perturb the world by our actions. That’s why Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*²² says:

यस्मान्नोद्विजते लोको लोकान्नोद्विजते च यः |
हर्षामर्षभयोद्वेगैर्मुक्तो यः स च मे प्रियः ||

This has been translated into Tamil as:²³

எவன்பால் உலகுபயம் ஏதும் உறாதோ

எவன்உலகுக்கு அஞ்சானோ ஏதும் – எவன்தான்

the same as Swami Vidyaranya, the author of *Pañcadaśī* and *Madhavia Shankara Vijaya* and also the spiritual head of the Sringeri Sharada Peetham during 1377 to 1386 AD. However, according to the records of the Sringeri Sharada Peetham, Vidyaranya was a different person, and Sayana and Madhava were actually his disciples.

²⁰ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Volume 1. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1929.

²¹ Adapted from the website: If this life itself is a dream then does Ramana Maharshi exist only in that dream? <http://prashantaboutindiaa.blogspot.com/2010/02/if-this-life-itself-is-dream-then-does.html>

²² *Bhagavad Gita*, XII.15.

²³ *Bhagavad Gita Sara* by Sri Ramana Maharshi, verse 36.

MOUNTAIN PATH

உவப்புஉவர்ப்பு பீதி உளக்கலக்கம் அற்றோன்
அவள்ளனக்கு மீப்பிரிய னாம்தேர்.

This means “He, owing to whom the world is not disturbed, and who is not disturbed by the world, who is free from joy, impatience, fear and anxiety, know that he is very dear to Me.”

Once Indra and his friends were travelling in the sky. They looked down and they saw pigs living in a terrible condition. Indra told his friends : “My God! Look at those pigs, why are they living so horribly? I will go and teach them how to live nicely.” In order for Indra to come and teach these pigs, he became a pig to teach them. After some time, Indra’s friends said: “Let us go and see what progress Indra is making.” They were horrified with what they saw! They came and said to Indra: “Why are you in this condition? We thought you came to reform these pigs!” On hearing this, Indra got upset and said “What are you talking about? I am a pig living happily with my wife and children. We have good food here and having a wonderful time. Go away.”

The story²⁴ goes on that the friends of Indra went and complained to Lord Vishnu about this state of affairs. Vishnu then heaped suffering on the pig till Indra realised who he was actually. Life after life we have been conditioned to feel that we are this body, this mind, this ego, this individual and believe that the world is real in itself. Like Indra we have forgotten our true nature, which is existence, knowledge and absolute bliss. Subsequently, it seems we need to undergo some sort of suffering to get out of the notion that the world is real in itself and then realise the *sat*. Bhagavan explains:²⁵

M.: If there were no suffering how could the desire to be happy arise? If that desire did not arise how would the Quest of the Self be successful?

D.: Then is all suffering good?

M.: Quite so. What is happiness? Is it a healthy and handsome body, timely meals, and the like? Even an emperor has troubles without end though he may be healthy. So all suffering is due to the false notion ‘I am the body’. Getting rid of it is *jnanam*.

²⁴ Adapted from the book: Swami Prabhavananda, *Patanjali Yoga Sutras*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2008, p.87.

²⁵ Munagala S. Venkataramiah, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§633.

However, until all the *vishya vasanas*²⁶ subside in the Heart through self-enquiry²⁷, a person with just an intellectual understanding that the world is *mithyā* will still hanker after external objects just like a parched man who sees a mirage in a desert may still get attracted by it. An illustration given is based on the Tamil saying: நாயைக் கண்டால் கல்லைக் காணோம், கல்லைக் கண்டால் நாயைக் காணோம்.²⁸

This sentence is assumed to mean that no stones are seen when you want to chase away a stray dog while you see plenty of stones when you see no dogs around. But this saying has a much deeper philosophical meaning.²⁹

There used to be two dogs carved out of stone, one on either side of the gate in a house. A boy used to pass by this house daily and used to mistake them to be real dogs. This caused an undue fear in him whenever he passed by the house. An onlooker told him that these were just sculptures of dogs and there is nothing to fear.

However, despite this assurance and some understanding, the boy was still quite afraid to walk near the house. A saint passing along that way noticed this and said, “Dear child, there is no need to be afraid.” He took the boy near the gate, stood nearby and told the boy to touch and feel the dog sculptures. The boy realised the dogs are indeed made of stone and no longer saw the (false living) dogs.

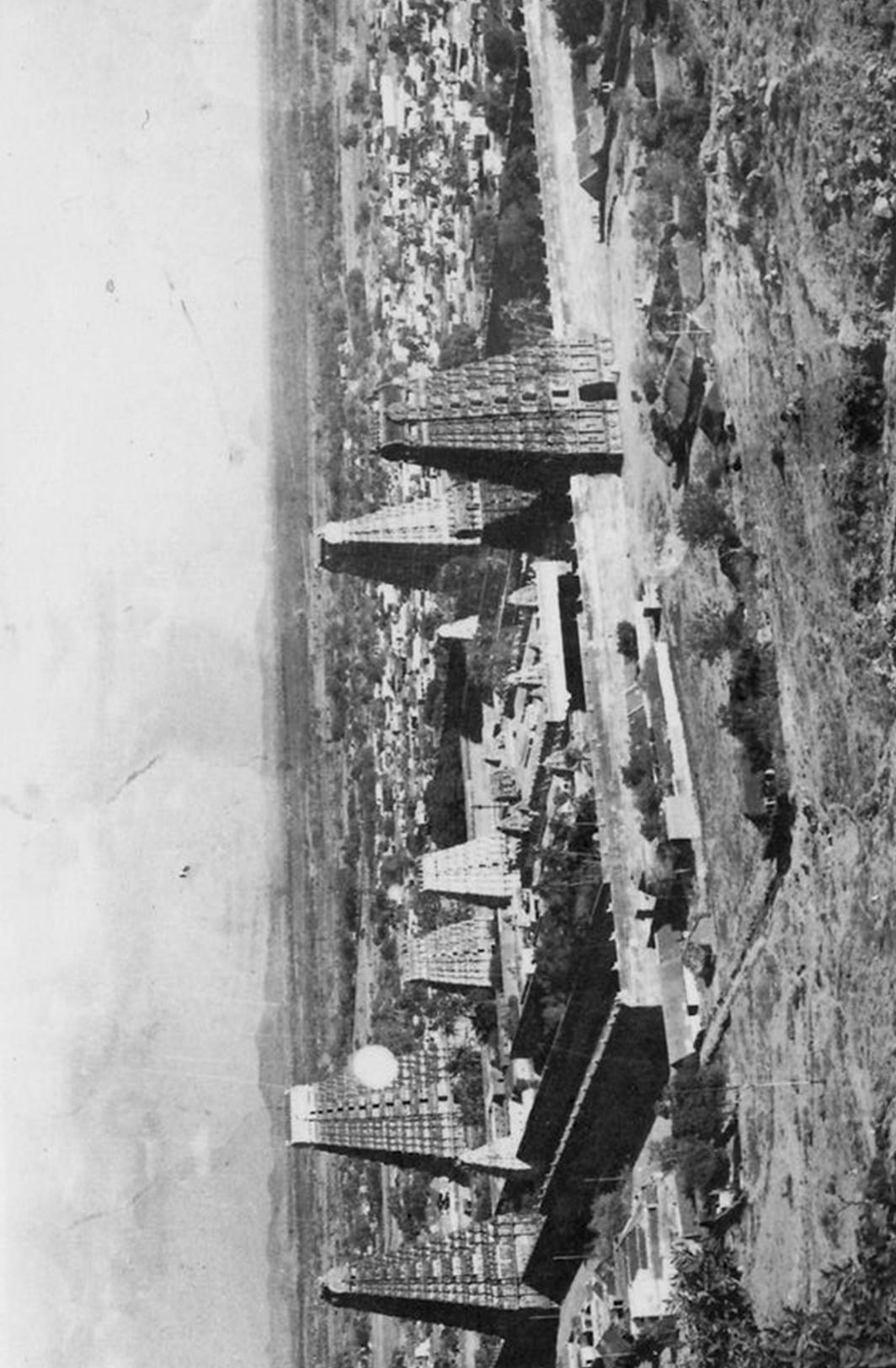
Similarly, on the realisation of the Self, one will realise the world is not something to be worried about as it is merely *mithyā* because it is impermanent, an abode of sorrows and will never give true happiness. We should take refuge at the lotus feet of Arunachala Ramana, who like the sage in the above story, will make us realise that the world is *mithyā*. ▲

²⁶ Subtle tendencies of the mind in relation to objects of sense gratification.

²⁷ Ramana Maharshi’s *Who am I?* – Paragraph 11.

²⁸ Literally means ‘When you see a dog, there is no stone. When you see a stone, there is no dog.’ Colloquially it means when you have the proper tool to solve a problem, you don’t have the problem, but when the problem reappears you no longer have the right tools on hand to fix it.

²⁹ Adapted from the book: Suri Nagamma, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 2006, Letter 141.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Wandering Through India

Part Three

THELMA RAPPOLD

1948 Sat Apr 10

Mrs. Talyarkhan a Parsee lady took me to her nice little cottage, hemmed in by the neighbouring cottages – built practically on her doorstep, so to speak. She told me about Lisa's madness when she was here two years ago and said that Lisa was not supposed to have returned to Tiruvannamalai. No wonder Raja was so anxious about Lisa's wanderings. She is supposed to report her whereabouts to him at all times. Life IS strange in India.

1948 Sun Apr 18

After the Vedas this morning I went over to see Lisa. Seemingly after I left her last night she went calling in a state of semi-nudity. She called on Mrs. MacIver and demanded some food and then she went over to Chattopadhyaya's, frightened their servants half to death and smashed some of their earthen pots.

She locked herself in her room, removed all her clothes and proceeded to scatter and tear everything she got her hands on. Somehow in the shuffle she had lost a front tooth. She disturbed the

entire neighbourhood with her loud singing and yelling. When I took breakfast to her she threw it in a heap with the rest of the debris. I foolishly let her out of her room for a few minutes and thought I'd never get her back in. When I did I bolted the door from the outside so she couldn't go wandering about the streets in her birthday suit again.

When I returned at 11:00 o'clock she threw several things at me but fortunately I ducked in time. She was posing as a nude artist model, going through all sorts of contortions. She really became violent and her screeching and yelling brought people from all directions. We reported her condition to Bhagavan. He suggested sending her to the hospital.

We were from 2:15 to 7:30 o'clock getting her into the Government Hospital, the result of Indian efficiency and red tape. Once the papers were signed authorizing her to go to the hospital everyone made a hurried exit and left Rappold and me to take her to the main hospital. As we 'clicked glances' a current passed through us indicating that he was the one to be counted on to the end. When Lisa was safely in the hands of the hospital attendants Rappold and I walked back to the Ashram to report her condition to Bhagavan. No sooner had I got home than he came to offer me half of his dinner – how thoughtful.

1948 Fri Apr 23

Today Mrs. Talyarkhan cornered me and served notice that I must vacate my abode by the first of June as her friend Mr. Cohen arrives then and needs a place to stay. I cornered Mrs. Syed as to why she didn't tell me inasmuch as the house was hers. She wouldn't even discuss the subject much less give me a reason. Oh well perhaps it is for the best.

1948 Sat May 01

Sleeping in the open with 'horizon-ends' for a bed-stead and the starry sky for a cover was actually like being in heaven. Especially after sleeping in the 'girdle berth' for two nights.

Harin came to have me type all the poems he has written in March and April. Never have I seen one give birth to so many poems in such a short time and yet he says when he is in full swing a new one comes out every few minutes.

1948 Tue May 04

Today began my term of excommunication – seems foolish – but convention is convention. Mrs. Syed gave me some grapes and a papaya grown in her garden, which she had not tasted this year as yet. The reason is that she is waiting to share the first taste with Dr. Syed. Until his arrival from Allahabad all that ripens will be given away. A beautiful sentiment.

1948 Wed May 05

Swami Vishwanathan came to call on Mrs. Syed and me this evening. He offered some very helpful suggestions for keeping on the path. NIGHT OWLS we were, staying up until after 9:45 o'clock.

1948 Sun May 16

Dr. Syed arrived this morning and brought with him some melons from Allahabad which were cut and passed to everyone in the Ashram. He also brought some holy water from the spot where the Ganges and the Jumna meet. This particular water had been bottled for six months and yet showed no signs of deterioration. Everyone in the hall got some to sip and to sprinkle over the head, eyes, etc. Bhagavan in his child-like impishness too made three quick 'gesticulated' shampoos with his share and then drank the rest.

1948 Mon May 17

Dr. Syed came to see me this morning about vacating my quarters for Dr. Cohen. He said it wouldn't be necessary to leave the compound as something satisfactory could be worked out for everyone.

1948 Wed May 19

Part of the thatches came off the roof last night and the other half came off today. At 9:30 this morning, without a moment's notice Sakur announced it was time to move. In half an hour all the things were moved into the little 5' x 10' room which is to be my future home. The *mistry* [mason] started building a little patio to keep the sun out. That plus a few shelves and some whitewash should make the place an ideal Sanyasin's abode with a full view of Arunachala to keep careful watch over all.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Dr. Syed feels a little squeamish about my going into such a tiny room and suggested I return to the two-room setup as soon as possible. However, this is much more to my idea of what a Sanyasin should have.

Today another character came to pay his respects to Bhagavan. He was a short stubby would-be pompous person wearing a flame red cloth over his head with two horn-like ends flying in the breeze which made him look like Mephistopheles playing the role of the Court Jester.

1948 Fri May 21

Before breakfast this morning the 'Court Jester' appeared before the door and ordered me to come to the Ashram immediately to do some typing for him. Peewee's ego, refusing to be pushed around had a leisurely breakfast, did a few chores and then went to the Ashram. It was well I had dilly-dallied so long because I still had to wait for two long hours before he could find the two poems he had composed in Bhagavan's presence. His one poem claims that he is Vivekananda reborn. Now he calls himself R. Satyanandaji.

Went over to Krishna's place to lunch so that his mother could show me how to make puris. She is by far the best cook in Tiruvannamalai.

1948 Sat May 22

Went to parayana this morning but spent the rest of the day sitting outside the hut guarding my belongings while the bricklayers and white washers were busy completing the verandah, painting and putting in shelves. The place is beginning to look a wee bit homey.

1948 Sun May 23

Little by little the hut is coming into its own. From now on it shall be known as the 'Sannyasin's Aspiration Abode' – and always Arunachala is ever watching over.

The 'Court Jester' delivered a lecture in town tonight and tried to raise money under false pretenses to defray his expenses to the United States to take up the work he started as Vivekananda. He had used the names of several of the well known ashramites to head his list. Mrs. Talyarkhan, Dr. Syed, Lady Mazda (as he calls Miss Merston) to



Thelma Rappold making chapatis

MOUNTAIN PATH

name a few. Someone reported him as an impostor and the authorities gave him twenty-four hours to get out of town.

1948 Mon May 31

Typed 'Jai Sri Ramana' a poem composed by Mr. Yogi to be read before Bhagavan tomorrow. The Ashram has certainly undergone many changes these days in preparation for Mahapuja tomorrow.

At parayana Bhagavan was sitting in a small enclosure in front of the temple. The coloured lights and hundreds of people moving about like dazed sheep all went to make the scene appear like a lively county fair. Ate dinner at the Ashram with hundreds of other devotees. Sat next to Mr. Rappold. We compared notes on our trip to India. He brought me home.

1948 Tue Jun 01

Thousands of people came to the Ashram today to celebrate the Mahapuja of Sri Matrubhuteswara, Bhagavan's Mother. At the time of her death Bhagavan held his hands on her forehead and heart to insure her reaching the Ultimate.

At lunch time we were jostled about to such an extent that my sari nearly went home on another body. Major Chadwick was the big front man elbowing his way through the frenzied crowd that stampeded the barricade. Policemen were stationed at the entrances to beat the people back when they got out of control – all of this for something to eat. In addition to the poor feeding lunch was served to approximately 3,000 persons.

Bhagavan sat blissfully through the entire performance as though nothing were going on about him. Many poems, speeches, and songs were composed for the occasion. The people were packed so tightly in the meditation hall it is a wonder someone didn't suffocate. Even the big elephant from the temple in town came to pay its respects to Bhagavan. He has been taught to go down on bended knee before Bhagavan and to 'Nameste'. He is always rewarded by several bunches of bananas, volumes of rice, coconuts and gallons of water.

1948 Wed Jun 02

The Ashram is getting back to normal again. The barricade is on its way out and once more we shall be able to get some air. It is much

easier to meditate without so many distractions although sometimes it is surprising how effective meditation CAN be in a crowd when one really lets go.

1948 Thu Jun 03

Miss Merston gave me a 12-page article to type for Bhagavan. Interestingly enough everything is for Bhagavan. In one sense of the word it is, but at the same time everyone uses Bhagavan's name to cover up his own selfish demands.

1948 Sat Jun 05

At parayana this morning Mr. Rappold said Mrs. Bose had invited us to have lunch at the Ashram. Frequently one of the devotees gives what is called a 'Biksha' i.e., he gives the Ashram a certain sum of money for a big feed and then invites all his friends.

The feed is elaborate or simple according to the amount donated. The permanent residents who ordinarily eat at home welcome these occasions as they afford an opportunity to eat with Bhagavan which is always a pleasure and a privilege.

After parayana this evening Swami Vishwanathan read Miss Merston's article to Bhagavan which gave us the pleasure of staying with him for an extra half-hour.

1948 Sun Jun 06

The Aspiration Abode was humming with excitement all morning as preparations went full speed ahead for its first dinner guest, Mr. Rappold. He said it was the first real meal he had had since leaving the ship last December. We lingered until 3:30 pm. enjoying every minute of it. He was more natural today than he ever has been. After a little of the starch was gone, I found he could actually bend a little.

1948 Sat Jun 12

I went to Krishna's this afternoon to celebrate his mother's birthday. Krishna's mother never lets anyone leave her place without first giving him some goodies.

Krishna has recently moved in to 'Purity' and so this acted as a house warming. Later he showed me through Palakuta [Palakothu] where the sadhus stay, mostly in mud huts. Each one is required to pay the sum of 4 annas (approximately 4 cents) per month for rent. Paul Brunton stayed in one of the little huts while he was here.

1948 Sun Jun 13

Last night the visiting rat gorged himself on sarees and towels. The night before it was sheets and draperies. Sakur set a trap but nothing happened. There doesn't seem to be much point in setting a trap anyway in that the rat isn't harmed, only caged for the night. The next morning he is taken out in to the open field and released.

1948 Mon Jun 14

Upon awaking this morning I thought a star had dropped down from heaven. Instead it was a firefly making its way up the terrace wall. What a glorious way to greet the dawn.

Struggled until 10:00 o'clock trying to make some chapatis which I wouldn't have dared offer to anyone. In fact I could hardly eat them myself.

Went to see Major Chadwick at 4:00 o'clock. He always gives me such inspiring talks. Today he touched on Soma Juice and Grace with a closing on Patience. Mr. Rappold also added colour to the occasion by telling of some of his experiences. Am going to try to get the new D.C.M. (Desire cutting machine) working on a 24-hour day basis. Then perhaps it will be possible to make some headway.

1948 Wed Jun 16

At parayana this morning everyone got a dose of a concoction of castor oil and bananas – Why? Ask Bhagavan. According to Raja whenever Bhagavan takes a laxative, enough is prepared for everyone. What next?

Krishna and I went to see the little temple on the rock mound in town where Bhagavan had stayed for a while. We took some fruits to the sadhus who are doing tapas there now, and then we climbed up on a prominent rock and sat 'milking mangoes' while the evening sun set over Arunachala's left shoulder – a gorgeous sight.

1948 Thu Jun 17

After parayana this morning Rappold and I found a comfortable spot on the platform of one of the ruined temples and sat there talking for two hours. By this time it was much too late for him to go to town as he had planned. Instead he came to Aspiration Abode to get some bananas for his breakfast. I told him what Raja had told me about

going around the hill alone and he very generously offered to go around with me tonight.

9:00 o'clock was the hour set to start around the Hill. What a beautiful night; moonlight, a cool breeze and Arunachala for inspiration. According to legend there are seven rishis dwelling in the vicinity of Arunachala. One we know is Bhagavan but who are the other six and where is their abode – in the constellations perhaps?

Rappold really slowed down compared to his usual gait and he broke through his shell of aloof rigidity. When he emerged he was really a different person, human like the rest of us and with a dynamism heretofore undreamed of. We rested only once to watch the moon, the stars and to take a quick look at us. This was a new experience for him to walk eight miles barefooted, but the miles were surprisingly short tonight. We got home long after the moon had retired for the night.

1948 Fri Jun 18

Lakshmi the favourite Ashram cow who used to take walks on the Hill with Bhagavan died at 11:45 o'clock this morning. Bhagavan was with her to the end. She is said to have been a reincarnation of the old lady who always used to bring greens to Bhagavan and through his Grace she, as Lakshmi has attained final liberation; hence will never have to be reborn again.

She was buried in the Ashram grounds this evening. The women were given special dispensation to stay for the ceremony. A special puja was performed. She was covered with ghee, curds, spices, garlands etc. and placed in a pit prepared according to the Shastras with her head facing East.

1948 Wed Jun 23

Mr. Rappold stopped by at noon to give me some empty tins. I was busy making chapatis on Mrs. Syed's wood fire when he came. Dr. Syed joined us; he got such a kick out of seeing me squatted on the floor in his kitchen. He insisted upon my giving Mr. Rappold a chapati for him and one for me. He furnished the chutney. When the chapatis were gone I gave him some melon desert and some cookies which he ate on the spot. Dr. Syed said it is an honour and a privilege to offer food to an ascetic.

1948 Wed Jun 30

This afternoon Dr. Syed suggested we go to town together for protection it would seem. Last night 40 to 60 homes were burned in town and the air is tense with riot rumors. Sakur didn't go to the bazaar as a result of the fear of what was to come.

Miss Merston, Rappold and I went to the opening ceremony of the Draupadi Temple via the picturesque Palakuta trail.

1948 Thu Jul 01

At 4:45 o'clock the crowd from the Ashram went to Draupadi Temple to see the fire walking ceremony. One of the Pujaris gave us ringside seats and even though we were several feet from the blazing charcoals we could still feel the heat.

The firewalkers paraded from the town to the new Temple (about 2 miles). By the time they reached their destination they were worked up to an emotional pitch so high they had no idea of what they were doing. Some had to have whips taken to them to return them to their normal senses.

Literally hundreds of devotees walked over the burning bed of charcoals (approximately 20' x 50') led by the Temple Priest, who went so slowly and deliberately and with such calmness. Many of those who followed him rushed madly; even Krishna tread the burning path. In the excitement of the occasion I too wanted to tread the burning coals and would have done so had not someone pulled on my punjabees to hold me back. If others could do it why not I, and now I shall never know. Stephen Hay put in his appearance also. He is a young American touring the world to make a study of comparative religions.

How refreshing at the end of such a busy day to just sit, relax, watch Arunachala and the fireflies.

1948 Fri Jul 02

The morning meditations are becoming more and more wonderful, especially now that we watch Bhagavan all the way to the cow-shed. Selected another rock farther East on the Hill Trail from which to watch the sunrise; little realizing that from there it would be possible to touch the hem of eternity – not knowing how or where or when it happened. Tonight we read Bhagavan's *Upadesa Saram* the quintessence of Instruction.

1948 Sat Jul 03

After parayana this morning it was the Arm Chair rock, an ideal spot from which to see both East and West. Household duties have been suffering severely these days because of the prolonged meditations and at the moment no decision has been made as to what can be done about it.

This afternoon Stephen Hay, Rappold and I made a trip to Skandashram and returned via Virupaksha Cave and the Temple grounds. It is always such a delight to go wherever Bhagavan has done tapas. One seems to capture a certain intangible something in the atmosphere of these places.

1948 Thu Jul 08

Only the birds were on hand at parayana this morning to chant the Vedas. Proceeded to the rocking-chair rock for further meditation. Hurried back to the hall in time to hear Rappold ask Bhagavan a series of questions. Always Bhagavan comes back to the same 'Who Am I' and 'There is nothing – Just BE'.

1948 Fri Jul 09

Now that the Syeds have gone I am definitely on my own. From now on I shall be sleeping outside the Abode. Tonight I again put the cot out in the middle of the yard so as to get a full view of the stars and the Hill. I certainly hope the nightly 'sniffers' don't nibble at my nose or my toes. Let's hope one sniff was enough.

1948 Sat Jul 10

Krishna gave me his bicycle to use. Before leaving for town I had to get his friend Unwalla to help pump up the tire. I really had my troubles getting on and staying on the bike. It was so high I could hardly reach the pedals. With the aid of some passerbys I eventually got to town.

1948 Sun Jul 11

This morning a trip to the temple on the Hill proved to be very thrilling. The two large tanks are very picturesque in their rocky beds. One is where sadhus from miles around come for their early morning ablutions and the other is for bathing the sacred cows. Sat for a while on one of the huge rocks in Nature's Rock Wall cavern. How full each silent moment is. The air was filled with the scent of wild roses – yellow like the buttercups.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Returned Krishna's bicycle tonight. He has started his complete silence today. Unwalla has gone into partial silence and so I decided to take the vow of Inner Silence.

1948 Tue Jul 13

Made a trip out to the Lighthouse Shrine via Palakuta. This being Tuesday large crowds were on their way to the Cow Festival around the Temple corner. One is really high on a rock top at the Lighthouse and what a buoyant perspective can be had from there. The only discordant note came when 'Time' stole in and dragged us back to apparent reality.

1948 Wed Jul 14

Returned to Saddle Rock this morning where hardly a word was spoken – only the voice of the mystical mountains on the distant horizon could be heard. These morning meditations have such an expanding influence.

1948 Thu Jul 15

Silence now becomes the most effective means of communication on Saddle Rock. Not a word was spoken during the prolonged meditation, not even when the 'thief' Time came to steal the moment of bliss. Here there is always a caressing zephyr to blow away all that isn't there – what an exhilarating purification. ▲

(To be continued)

***'Aham Sphurana'* Manuscript**

We have become aware of a manuscript titled *Aham Sphurana* purportedly written by a Gajapathi Aiyer in 1936 when he is said to have spent some six months with Bhagavan at Ramanasramam. An editorial team is currently investigating the validity of this manuscript. The ashram management will in due course inform devotees of the conclusions reached and what the future course of action may be regarding the manuscript.

Śivalingavva: A Saint and Singer

S.L.M. PATIL

There are quite a number of women saints in India who have richly contributed to the spiritual lore of their respective languages over the centuries. They belong to different social and cultural backgrounds. Akkamahādevi for example, is a very brilliant, much loved and much translated twelfth century Kannada woman saint. Likewise, many others have been noted for their love of God, in their expressive brilliance, and strikingly plain speaking. But some others have passed away without much recognition. One such was the Kannada woman saint called Śivalingavva (1867-1930). She was from a small bilingual town called Jat in the present state of Maharashtra on the border of Karnataka where people speak Kannada along with Marathi the state language.

Śivalingavva was initiated into spirituality in an event which may be described as a coincidence, but it appears to be a divine plan. One day she, just a chit of a girl, was playing in front of a temple near her house. She was then noticed by her guru to be, Sri Bhau Saheb Maharaj (hereafter only Maharaj, an honorific title) who had come there from a neighbouring village Umadi (he was also called the saint of Umadi). He beckoned her to him and asked if she was interested in receiving the divine Name. She did not know what it was. She nodded dissent, declining the offer. Even then the guru imparted it to her. She later

wrote, “He beckoned to me, and imparted the original divine Name (I had) forgotten.” The word ‘forgotten’ perhaps indicates an event in her previous life. That was the beginning of her spiritual life, and a wonderfully productive bond between her guru and herself. But at that young age, Śivaliṅgavva did not know the method of meditation. Therefore her guru, with the permission of her father, took her to other spiritual practitioners to acquaint her with the essentials of meditation. The young lady began to dwell on it seriously, and grew unconcerned about the pleasures of worldly life.

When she came of age, she was asked to get married. But she was reluctant. However, when her guru prevailed upon her, she relented. But she was not destined to be happy in her family life as she lost her young son and daughter in quick succession. She, therefore, engaged herself in more intense meditation and sought the guru’s solace to overcome the grief. But her growing spiritual progress surreptitiously made her proud. The guru noticed it and did not like it one bit, and warned her of forthcoming troubles in her life.

Thus corrected, Śivaliṅgavva further intensified her meditation on God and began to revel in its bliss. From *dhyān* meditation, she progressed towards *dhyāsa*, a higher state of contemplation. But when her husband also passed away, leaving her deep in debt, the guru became all in all for her; she addresses him as *Appā* (father in Kannada). Spirituality became the *raison d’être* of her life. Her desires began to vanish and the Experiences began to expand rapidly like a bird’s flight. After the husband’s death, she stopped seeing men altogether, except for the honoured few. She began to sit behind a curtain avoiding all contacts with men while in group meditation. When at home, she rarely came out.

Śivaliṅgavva’s name spread among other devotees, and one day some men devotees of her guru wanted to see and talk to her after being permitted by Maharaj. They planned to meet her when she was on her way back from farm lands. But she came to know about it and tactfully avoided the meeting. Later they asked her, “Why did you avoid seeing us, after all we are also disciples of your own guru?” Her reply was, “Why should I look at you in the first place, and then justify it saying that you are also my guru’s men? Is it not better to avoid seeing you at all”? It was how her guru had shaped her moral sense.



It is said that she used to sit for meditation continuously for nine hours at a stretch without letting her back touch the wall. (Sri Gurudev Ranade, an eminent scholar saint, and her spiritual brother, used to call her a ‘wrestler’ in spiritual field). With no real family ties existing anymore, she was drawn more and more towards the divine Name and immersed herself deeply in meditative praxis.

This woman saint belongs to the Nimbargi house of *bhakti* tradition whose basic tenets are strict morality, *bhajan* the congregational singing and daily readings of *Dāsabodha* and *Manache Shloka*, the Marathi canonical scriptures. Of course, the core activity is meditation. Śivaliṅgavva missed none of them. The nine hours-a-day course of meditation, and accessibility to her guru rewarded her richly and bountifully. This resulted in a need to express herself through songs, and she was supremely articulate. It is interesting to know that the Maharaj who had snubbed Gurudev Ranade’s attempts to write poems, encouraged Śivaliṅgavva to sing her Experiences. “Come on Śivaliṅgavva, sing a song”, he used to say. And of course, without attributing it to him. But she had been doing exactly the opposite.

The gamut of her writings includes Kannada *vachanas* (a genre of poetic prose), songs of Experiences in Kannada (mainly) and Marathi, and a few letters. The *vachanas* reflect her reading of the above mentioned scriptures, and deal with the role of a guru, method of meditation, and advice on how to make one’s life worthwhile. The *vachanas* are complementary to her songs in the sense that the former are mainly in preaching mode, and the latter are pure Experiences. She is a preacher because she was also preached. She is a singer because she is a saint and has an uncontrollable urge to share the joy of her Experiences. They are remembered pleasures. Some representative *vachanas* can be witnessed first:

One turns and returns over and over again
through many a vagina, and suffers.

This is certain.

Therefore brave it once.

Meditate merrily, under oath,
on the Lord’s feet.

Then the arrival here pays dividends,
and elevation is possible.

For her, a guru's grace is equal to knowledge of the Self. Without a guru, life is 'inauspicious, ominous, a defiled pot. But when burnt, it gets purified.' The Nimbargi tradition is never tired of extolling the importance of a guru. It is reflected in her words when she says, "My guru's grace is all my fortune. My guru's grace is my eternal bliss. My guru's grace is here before my eyes. It is the reality I witness."

She further writes,

Guru, it is you who cleansing my mind to a sparkle
absorbed me into your light.

Guru, it is you who inserted me into your form.

Guru, it is you who dissolved my being
in your meditation and divine Name.

He, showed me the very real Lord,
and that very moment
vanished into spacelessness,
and raised me to Kailas.

By the grace of her guru she realised the 'endless and beginningless Self.'

In another *vachana* Śivaliṅgavva describes the mental worship, *mānasa pūjā*, offered to her guru. She says her mind is the well, her love is the holy water, and submitting all else to his feet the *pūjā* illumines:

The worship, without anything,
with everything,
gets absorbed in itself
and pervades the mind like a tree.

The ears are all sound,
the eyes are all light.

Thus the worship of my Father
goes off joyously.

Overcome by extreme sense of gratitude to him, Śivaliṅgavva exclaims that even if she cuts off her head and places it before him, it will not reflect on the grace he has bestowed upon her. Her *vachanas* include many aspects of meditation. Some of them are, naturally, related to the mind. Here is one of them:

MOUNTAIN PATH

The house of the mind is the eye.
The eye should see the Self's image.
Then the eye remains chaste.
Dwelling deep inside the mind,
and burning the fires of the mind,
one must keep saying 'Śiva Śiva'.

Describing a mystical experience she writes:

After ascending the nine steps,
and fixing the gaze between the two peaks, there,
it sights the foods.

Look, seeing the joyous Self
I stood amazed.

Look, doing *rājayoga*, revelling in pleasure
and merriment,
I got my worldly woes over.

Look, strengthening the mind thus,
one should lose the body-sense.

Another *vachana* on the method of meditation goes like this:

Allying one's Self with *līnga*, the visible form,
one should worship that form and seek a favour from it,
and offer it the three-leaved bael.¹

The favour thus sought is to rememberer
that divine form incessantly in one's awareness.

And that form should always hover around.

Talking about the mantra bestowed by the guru, she says, "When, by guru's grace, the body absorbs the *Śivamantra*, and it rushes through, and plays within every organ, and matures, then does the world frighten him/her?" Amid these easy flowing verses Śivalīngavva makes a complex statement: "Getting into the interior of the word (mantra) and meditating on it is the greatest of all. Only the knowledgeable one knows how to intuit [the transformative power of the mantra] like this. It is the fruit of meditating secretly, seeing the form of the Thing (seen) and enjoying the bliss in that ecstasy. It

¹ The three-leaved bael leaf symbolises the two eyes and the middle of the forehead.

is beyond me to describe it. If not told, it cannot be understood. But I cannot. It cannot be told either.”

Śivaliṅgavva thus urges us to meditate passionately and incessantly on the *gurumantra*. It is the very purpose of our coming to this world, she says. Her *vachanas* do not carry sensuous images, social criticism or satirical comments. They are her earnest appeals to not waste this life here but to endeavour towards God-realisation. She uses the word *svadharma* which means to see the Self for oneself and merge with it.

Śivaliṅgavva is at her best in her songs which are called *padas* in Kannada. A silent few can be mentioned here. The first song, perhaps written after the guru's death, celebrates his *līlā* (divine play) in her life which granted her *mokṣa*. Here, she suddenly asks us to get into the east [meaning the source or Heart] and see the ripened fruit. And the colour of ripeness is different, she says. Then she briefly explains the secret benevolence the guru bestowed on her. She witnesses millions of lights around the holy place Inchageri, which he used to visit frequently. In the second song she reverts to her early life. She candidly admits that she is like a street dog, just eating and roaming about. Worries and desires still haunt her. Therefore, in the third one she requests his grace. Then suddenly Śivaliṅgavva carves a couple of beautiful lines indicating his grace:

Once the merger is over, will it merge again?
The Thing gazed and meditated upon,
will it part,
leaving you behind?

In another song she exclaims there is nobody for her who equals her guru because he ended her worldly woes, made her 'see' the bliss he had had. He showed her 'the eye within the eye'. The divine form, subtle and very tiny could be witnessed by *jñāna*, she explains.

Her fervent devotion to the guru and the effect of her intense meditation are reflected in these poetic lines:

Singing your praise, seeing your form,
Illumining in you,
Desiring nothing else,
I became one with you.

In a complex description Śivaliᅅgavva tells us what she saw in her meditation. It is her guru dancing with his devotees in a highly charged atmosphere of fragrance, roaring sound, brilliant pure light, flight of pinkish powder, and melodious sound. Lord Shankar showers flowers, and holds the ceremonial umbrella on her guru, she narrates.

Song after song, in the beginning, middle and at the end of each one, she extols her guru's power, grace and glory, and she floats in pure bliss. He is in her heartbeat. He is in her breath, in her consciousness, shining and dazzling.

In an artistically well-wrought song *Yāva Deshada Hoviddava!* Śivaliᅅgavva is amazed at the showering of jasmine flowers in the assembly of Devendra, the Supreme Lord. The flowers are not of this land. They are star-coloured, red, white, of moon's glow, tender, fragrant, and celestial. In the 'lovely, lovely light' they pour down profusely and riotously at the feet of the handsome *ātman*, as she witnesses. At the end she says, "These are the flowers of the plant born in the mouth of her Umadi guru," which may mean the divine seed was sown by him here and it bloomed in heaven. This song, like her many others, transmits a palpable sense of thrill to the listeners/readers.

In another song, she watches what all happens in her body, and realises that it is not just a body but a temple of Experiences, an abode of the *ātman*. Engrossed in meditation, she has a vision of God's feet. Her body levitates. Her heart is in worship. She hears the peal of bells on this 'golden temple', watches tiny lights and showers of jasmines. The body is up in the air, and after experiencing such glorious scenes, she is unwilling to return.

The saint of Umadi used to ask the newly initiated ones to meditate for nine hours a day for nine months and watch the results. Śivaliᅅgavva had gone beyond this, and the result was that a son was born to her. It was the birth of a spiritual son. She says her body ached for nine months. At that time she saw her house was brightly lit up, and there were fire shows. She calls it the birth of a son who cut through her worldly bondage. She places him in a cradle, touches him, rocks him, and sings lullabies for him. She believes this baby is her guru himself. All this happens when she fixes the gaze at the centre of the forehead and the eyes. The spiritual dimension of this

Experience is unmissable. She had come a long way, from the death of a biological son to the birth of a spiritual one.

In the next song she describes three significant Experiences among others. One, she merges with her guru. Second, she witnesses her own Self. In such a state all her sense organs surrender, and every hair on the body stands erect like the rays of the sun. She calls it *ravichitra* (sun-picture). Thirdly, she hears a scaring thunderous sound, and when she gets up, she sees the *nirbayal* yogi (yogi of spacelessness).

One of the popular songs by Śivaliṅgavva is *Sai, sai, sai, Kuntidene* which literally means ‘I am Seated’. I am seated here, but I see all, an assembly of yogis, and Lord Śiva in a colourful and exotic atmosphere in heaven, she says. There is an interesting anecdote related to this song. Some very young disciples of the Maharaj were eager to know the authenticity of her Experience of heaven. But they were afraid to ask the Maharaj. Therefore they sent Gurudev Ranade, a young boy then, to ascertain the fact. The Maharaj said he did not know about it. “You do not meditate, but simply ask questions”, he chided. However, the next morning he called Gurudev and said that what she had seen was true!

In a deep meditative state she experiences *samarūp* and *tadākār* (the same form and the same shape). It means what she watches, the *ātman* or guru, is her own self and shape. She looks at them with a sense of wonder. As a result, the vision rids her of further births and deaths, she says.

Another significant Experience she reveals in the song ‘What a Sight the Sadguru Showed!’ is that her guru illuminated every place which was covered with darkness. She says the *suṣumnā* passage of the *kuṇḍalini* was opened, and her navel expanded to the size of four fingers. The *Kuṇḍalini* ascended to the *Brahmarandhra*. Thus the guru showed her everything she had desired.

Some other Experiences narrated include waving *ārati* to Śiva, her guru who dazzles in different colours, and yet is formless. Loud, unstruck sounds are heard. In the song *Tottil, Toogidene*, she narrates complex Experiences like placing the subtle and handsome form of Śiva in a strange cradle, and rocking it in a particular method. This makes her forget herself and she swoons. This Experience reappears in the next song also. The method to rock it is to “fix one’s gaze on

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the top”, she says. This cradle swings in the ‘*batta bayulu*’ (the wide open space). Interestingly, she invites her women friends too to join her in swinging which is a typical Indian practice. They sing lullabies and name the baby Śiva.

The Marathi songs are not different from the Kannada ones. Witness this one:

Gazing at Rama’s form, I sat inside (of myself).

I guzzled its pleasure;

Oh! What shall I say, what shall I say?

I remembered nothing.

I asked for nothing.

I sat hypnotised seeing your form.

Drinking nectar, delighted I was.

I forgot my thousand woes.

My meditation intensified,

I witnessed the Primal form.

I woke up.

It was like a mega celebration!

Śivalīngavva’s accomplishments owe to her determination expressed below:

‘Let this body fall or live on,

But let my faith in Panduranga be strong’.

Saying so, I put the holy ash on. That very moment

I was transformed into a new person.

The Able One’s doings are beyond our knowing.

Śivalīngavva’s songs share some interesting patterns. At first, they are collages of multiple Experiences happening to her in a single song. They range from sights of varied colours to unstruck sounds to Self-realisation. Secondly, she seems to address, and share them with imaginary women companions. Thirdly, there is no searching or longing for God because her songs begin with mystical Experiences including God’s vision along with her guru’s. Therefore she is intensely ebullient over the rich dividends she receives. Finally, after a very enthusiastic narration of her blissful moments, she suddenly withdraws herself at the end, and says in utter humility that all that was Experienced was but his grace, as if she was just a watcher!

Her letters also contain the same advice, and descriptions of deep meditative bliss. She writes about her fear of people honouring and respecting her. She felt she had not done anything to deserve them. One of her letters expresses her deep anguish at the death of her guru. She was a bit shattered. She died of cholera.

Author's Note

Some years ago I had been to Jat Śivaliᅅgavva's place, to gather more information about her. But it was too late. Fortunately I could meet two persons who had seen her in their childhood. One of them said that he was eight years old when Śivaliᅅgavva died. Her body was interned in her house with special permission because usually it is done outside the town. Her body was immersed in salt.

He further said that the children felt a little restless if they did not see her in the morning. "Seeing her was seeing God," he said. She was slim, and slightly dark-complexioned, and of medium height. When she was in trance she was unaware of what was happening around her, he informed.

I was told in Umadi, her guru's place, that whenever she visited his house she used to feel she was visiting heaven. Śivaliᅅgavva's guru held her in high regard. He once famously said that she was equal to him, the only difference was that she was a woman. Gurudev Ranade was also imbued with reverence for her. Whenever he met her, he would request her to show him her feet so that he could touch them, and she used to oblige him, and gently tease him saying, "Ramaraya, why do you trouble me?" Whenever Gurudev was in his Nimbāl ashram, he would send someone to bring the holy ash from the pot in which she used to light a camphor. Further, he got his only daughter initiated by Śivaliᅅgavva. It is believed that she is the only one who was initiated by her.

Śivaliᅅgavva richly deserves proper recognition, attention, and a closer study though she always preferred to remain incognito. ▲

The translation of the *vachanas* and songs by the author.



HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

How Bhagavan Brought Me to His Divine Feet

Seek and Ye Shall Find

MAHADEV MORRIS ROZARIO

Over my teenage years I did not find the answers I was looking for or gain comfort in the churches I had attended. Only the same old, tired doctrines and practices riddled with inconsistencies and bias were espoused, none of which resonated within me. Disillusioned, I drifted away from orthodox religion.

Although I had turned away from the Catholic Church, I never lost faith in God Almighty or Lord Jesus Christ. However, I did not actively petition God's help for any specific desired outcome with day-to-day events as I felt at that time and still do, that it is not right to worship or pray to God for material favour.

Mahadev Morris Rozario is of Tamil Pillai ancestry and lives in Sydney, Australia with his wife Rani. He graduated as a Chartered Accountant in the UK and pursued his career in International Tax Consultancy working with large multinational companies in Singapore, Australia, Japan, Kenya and Oman. At 54 years old, he was drawn to Bhagavan's feet and has since been graced to spend time at the ashram with one or two stays each year.

During times of distress or before the determination of key life events, I left the outcomes to the Divine Will accepting consequences as destined. Deep within, I knew that without the Inner Strength and Light (insights) the Divine provided, I could not have overcome the seemingly impossible hurdles and pitfalls that life had presented. This has always provided me with resolute confidence and faith to face whatever life presented.

A Life Changing Holiday

In March 2004 my wife Rani organised a holiday in Noosa on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland, Australia. An idyllic beach resort where one spends the day watching the waves rolling in and surfing to cool down. And winding the day watching the sun set over the lagoon over a sumptuous dinner.

On this occasion, late one evening my thoughts drifted to recent life experiences and I recalled the loss of loved ones, painful career setbacks and traumatic close calls accidents we were fortunate to emerge from unscathed. Though the woes and setbacks seemed distant, I remained troubled by a deep-seated hurt and unhappiness within. Surely, there must be more to life than just drifting between periods of fleeting happiness and profound pain or despair.

For nearly two decades since moving to Australia in 1987 we had led a full and active life with social interactions and experiences many would consider exciting. But somewhere inside I increasingly sensed that I was merely going through the motions, riding a roller coaster to nowhere.

Over time I became aware of a deep-seated unhappiness and sensed something was missing, but did not know what. Only the meaningful relationships I shared with family and friends brought some measure of happiness. Yet, whenever it felt that life was good, some painful setback, threatening experience or death ended it.

It seemed like everything we experience was as impermanent as a pleasant dream destined to end at any time. And the spectre of death hung like the sword of Damocles, repeatedly reminding me that life was tenuous. The unexpected loss of loved ones and near-death experiences led me to ask myself, “What is life really about? What’s the point of it?”

Increasingly aware that material possessions and life experiences as pleasurable as they might be were only transient, I was always looking for more of the same. Surely, there must be more to life than just drifting between periods of fleeting happiness and despair. Gradually it dawned on me that I was happiest in pristine natural surroundings. There was something about the peace and quiet of nature that resonated deeply within myself and gave me a sublime joy that remained deep within my Heart.

Increasingly turning within for solace, unconsciously I began thinking of God. Perhaps it was the solace of the Divine that I was missing but I did not know where to look. In my heart, I longed to know God, not as a narrative but as a personal experience.

An Unexpected Intercession

The next morning we headed to the weekend market at Eumundi in the hinterland hills to browse through the artisan stalls of local craftspeople admiring their creativity and ingenuity and later headed to the food stalls. After the indulgence of the previous evening, we decided on a simple Hare Krishna vegetarian lunch.

Later, we stopped at a book stall to pick some reading for the beach. Whilst my wife Rani was an avid reader I seldom found time to read. Shifting through stacks of titles, I was looking for some easy reading when a little book caught my eye.

On the cover was a portrait of an old man with a gentle, enchanting smile and as I gazed at his face, a feeling of calm and peace coursed through me.

Enthralled by the presence that emanated from the portrait, I stared at the simple title, *The Spiritual Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*. Turning to the back cover, I read:

As all living beings desire to be happy always without misery, as in the case of everyone there is observed supreme love for one's self, and as happiness alone is the cause of love, in order to gain that happiness which is one's nature, one should know one's self. For that, the path of knowledge, the inquiry Who am I? is the principal means.

For some reason, the question, "Who am I?" confronted my sense of identity. It was something I had assumed I knew, and never questioned before. And the source of happiness being within myself, was not something I had ever considered before.

Then I read Carl Jung's very moving foreword,

Once a man is set to the pursuit of external things, he is never satisfied, as experience shows, with the mere necessities of life, but always strives after more and more, which, true to his prejudices, he always seeks in external things. He forgets entirely that in spite of all external success inwardly he remains the same.

.....and the less this voice is heard in the hunt for the wonderful things of this world, the more the inner man becomes a source of inexplicable unhappiness in the midst of conditions of life from which one would expect something quite different.....

With this synopsis Carl Gustav Jung could have surmised my own feelings on life based on my discerning inner self and the personal predicament I faced. Clearly, he was not a run-of-the-mill psychologist bound by the confines of physical scientific observations and related to Bhagavan Ramana's teachings.

It seemed as if this book was a response to my pleading for help and directed at my own hapless being.

Rani bought this book and a few novels and we headed to the beach at Noosa Heads. However, 'the book that picked me' was not one that one reads on the beach. I certainly did not anticipate that the power of such a simple enquiry 'Who am I?' would change my life forever. As events transpired, it was two years before I read it.

Bhagavan Reaches Out

In March 2007, my wife Rani left for Sydney to spend Easter with our sons and for the first time since we had moved to Kenya in July 2004, I was alone in Nairobi.

With the weekend to myself, I decided to settle down with a good book and a nice mug of hot tea. Browsing the bookshelf, the book titled *The Spiritual Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* which we had purchased three years earlier in Noosa, Australia caught my eye.

The title gripped my attention. And I was drawn to the portrait on the cover, as the compassion and love that emanated from the gentle, smiling face of Sage Ramana Maharshi captivated me. For the rest of the evening and a good part of that night, Bhagavan Ramana shared with me a new understanding of life and myself.

Providing startling new insights that addressed the many doubts and questions about life and God that had confounded me for most of my life, Bhagavan stirred within me an effusive love of the Divine. Not for a moment had I expected that the little book which came to me almost of its own volition, would provide such a profound understanding of who the Supreme Being is. An insight so at odds with lifelong beliefs I had held, they were turned inside out.

The question “Who am I?” confronted my sense of identity as it was something I had never questioned. And Bhagavan’s assertion that the source of happiness is within us was something I had never considered before. The new awareness I gained literally turned my outlook on life outside in, with my focus then on turning to that which is within myself.

Moved deeply I knew this was what I had spent a lifetime searching for. An inner yearning rose within me and I was filled with a longing to know more. At the time, I did not know that Bhagavan’s revelations run in the same vein of understanding that Buddha, Lao Tzu, Socrates and Jesus Christ shared with their calling to ‘Know Thy Self’.

The Hill of Grace Calls

A week later while browsing the internet for spiritual resources I found (or was directed to) the Sri Ramanasramam website - a treasure trove of spiritual knowledge that kept me engrossed for hours. Then, just as I was about to leave the site, a ‘Visit the Ashram’ link caught my eye, and I felt a prompt deep within.

A few minutes later, I went into the living room and told my wife that I would like to visit Bhagavan Ramana’s ashram in Tiruvannamalai about 170kms from Chennai. She responded, “We’ll include it on our list of places to visit. Perhaps over the Christmas break.”

I hastened, “Not Christmas, as soon as possible.”

She saw that I meant it, and three days later we were booked to travel to Chennai in August. We assumed we would catch a taxi or train there from the airport.

Bhagavan Paves the Way

A month later in May, we invited a few of our friends including Neeta and Aseem Soni who were Indian nationals, for dinner.

On this occasion, Neeta and Aseem were unusually late and when they arrived Aseem announced, “We have some good news and not-

so-good news to share. I've been transferred back to India so we'll be returning home in July."

Looking unnerved Neeta added, "We are going to be based in Chennai and we don't speak any Tamil. As Hindi speakers we are not sure how we will cope."

Seeing her troubled, Rani shared, "We plan to travel to Chennai in August on our way to an ashram in Tiruvannamalai. So, I can give you a hand settling-in as I speak Tamil."

Neeta's face lit up as she said, "Oh, it will be so good to have you visit! I'll meet you at the airport and you must stay with us before you head to the ashram."

Asim's out of the blue transfer to Chennai was a Godsend, as we realised how helpful it would be to have someone meet us at the airport and help with local arrangements.

As clear as daylight I saw Bhagavan Ramana's Grace in motion.

The Return to India

Three months later, as Rani and I walked out of Chennai Airport's Arrivals Concourse, we faced a wall of signboards and people awaiting family, friends and visitors.

From behind the façade of faces, we heard our friend Neeta's sweet voice, "Rani, I'm here!" She was waving to us from behind the four-to-five deep crowd of locals.

I joked cheekily, "Wow! Neeta, I have not seen so many Indians in one place before!"

Without the slightest pause she responded, "Welcome Home, Morris."

That hit me like a boomerang. And a strange feeling arose deep within me as I realised that I was returning to my ancestral home. It was a connection I had never felt before or envisaged. The surreal experience left me speechless, and smiling sheepishly I followed Neeta and Rani to the car, where she introduced us to her driver Kumaran.

With a welcoming smile Kumaran greeted, "Hello Sir, Welcome to Chennai."

I replied, "*Kumaran, ennodu Tamil ondre pesu.*" (Please speak to me in Tamil only).

He responded, "OK Sir."

I repeated, “*Tamil ondre*” (Tamil only) and Kumaran corrected himself, “*Seri Sir.*”

I guess he met me half-way.

Since that day, whenever I visit Tamil Nadu, I only speak in Tamil when conversing with anyone who speaks the language.

While in Chennai Neeta introduced us to Geetha a friend she had met since moving to Chennai. It was illuminating to hear Geetha share that Arunachala was a hallowed mountain that had been home to renowned Indian saints and sages over the ages.

When Geetha learnt that my grandparents were from Tiruchi, she suggested that we also visit Tiruchi to renew ties with my forebears. Swept by emotion I agreed to leave the ashram a day earlier than planned to indulge in some sightseeing.

During the day, Aseem arranged for a driver and car to take us to the ashram and anywhere else we wished to visit.

That night as I quietly reflected on all that had unfolded over the previous three months, in my Heart I knew that the remarkable concurrence of circumstances and events that had transpired to bring me to Arunachala was more than mere coincidence, synchronicity or destiny. There was much more at work.

As clear as daylight I felt Bhagavan Ramana’s hand of Grace on the sequence of events and happenings that literally paved the way to the ashram in Arunachala.

A Haven of Timeless Peace and Serenity

Entering the ashram compound, the calming peace and quiet that prevailed was unmistakable.

The 400-year-old Iluppai tree in the courtyard, the thatched roof buildings and the calm demeanour of the devotees and workers, all reflected a quiet harmony.

The towering Arunachala Hill that rose from the perimeter of the ashram grounds, exuded a pervasive presence. It seemed as if we had walked into a realm of stillness that was somehow alive.

As we walked towards the ashram office to check in and pick up the keys to our room, we were met by Sri Sundaram who was in charge of the ashram. A soft-spoken, unassuming gentle soul, he made us feel at home with his heart-warming smile and welcome. After completing

registration formalities, we walked to the Samadhi Hall, venerated at Bhagavan Ramana's Samadhi and then sat in quiet contemplation. Later we visited the old meditation hall where Bhagavan had spent most of His time. I felt as if I had been transported in time to the days when Bhagavan received countless visitors from the world over. In the silence that prevailed, His presence was palpable. The only reminder that He was not there physically was the large reclining photograph on the sofa He used to sit on. As I sat in quiet reflection, this thought, too, disappeared into peaceful quietude.

Later, as we walked the grounds we were kept company by the dogs, monkeys, squirrels and peacocks that roamed around the area and on the thatched roofs of the old buildings. When the ringing of a bell at 11.30 called time for lunch we joined a queue of devotees into a large dining hall where there were banana leaf plates arranged in neat rows on the floor. Taking our place in turn, we enjoyed a simple but tasty Tamil *sāppādu*.

In the evening, we attended a recital of Bhagavan's teachings in the main hall.

The next morning we joined a group of devotees in singing *Śrī Aruṅācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* an insightful, 108-verse hymn-of-praise to the Supreme Being. It resonated deep within myself. The experience was made even more special when one of the ashram dogs trotted into the hall and sat by me, cajoling me to stroke her neck and pat her. Rani was tickled pink.

With no organised programme to adhere to, our time at the ashram was largely spent in quiet reflection in the Old Hall and our two days went by in a flicker. As we departed for Tiruchi, my heart was filled with guilt and regret as I felt that I had rushed the visit.

After an interesting journey through country roads we arrived at the Samayapuram Mariamman Temple on the outskirts of Tiruchi, to pay homage to my great grandfather Dhairia Pillai who had worshipped there. At dawn we visited the Uchi Pilliar Temple at Rock Fort, a monolith that towers over the city. As we approached the temple entrance, a friendly Hindu priest ushered us in asking us to hasten so as not to miss the *pāl pūjā* service. As we walked across the threshold into the inner sanctum, I could not help notice a sign which read, 'Hindus only'. After a moment's hesitation, I stepped in feeling as Hindu as my great grandfather undoubtedly did.

HOW BHAGAVAN BROUGHT ME TO HIS DIVINE FEET

Then, we headed to the downtown Koil Teruvu area where my family had lived before my grandparents migrated to Malaya in 1910. We visited the Lady of Lourdes Church where my grandmother's brother who had converted to Christianity had been an Archbishop.

Later, watching the rising sun bathe over the Kaveri River, I could not help reflect on all that was happening to and around us — it was as if a new journey was unfolding.

The next morning, as we boarded the plane to head back to Kenya, an overwhelming feeling of unfinished purpose weighed heavily in my Heart.

Whilst I knew that Bhagavan Ramana's presence had been inimitable, it bothered me that I had not met the spiritual Master in person to guide me through my spiritual journey. How was I to understand and grasp His teachings which were profound but challenging? Troubled as I was, a 'knowing' arose deep within me that I should return to the ashram.

The mere thought of Bhagavan evoked a welling of love in my Heart, as well as a gnawing that something remained unfulfilled. I regretted that we planned our visit as we would any other holiday visiting places instead of spending more time at the ashram.

A few days after we returned to Nairobi, I told Rani that I felt a deep yearning to return to Arunachala as soon as possible. Once again, my dear wife was most understanding and made the travel arrangements.

A month after our first visit I returned to the ashram by myself to sit at Bhagavan's feet. My second visit to the Ashram was a more contemplative experience as I spent most of the five days in the old hall, absorbed in the peace and silence that prevailed.

One morning before dawn broke as I sat in the stillness of the Old Hall, an unfathomable silence seemed to permeate my very being. As I savoured the peace, a 'knowing' arose within that it was Bhagavan's Presence that I was experiencing. With that, the notion that I needed an in-person Master to guide me on my spiritual journey was gone forever. I knew that Bhagavan Ramana was the Guru I had been searching for.

Over my stay, in the prevailing silence I learnt that inner silence is not emptiness as we normally know it, but the bliss that is in our Heart.



ASHRAM CALENDAR 2022

Pongal	Friday	14th January
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Monday	17th January
Sundaram Iyer Day	Monday	21st February
Maha Sivaratri	Tuesday	1st March
Sri Vidya Havan	Friday	18th March
Telugu New Year Day	Saturday	2nd April
Sri Rama Navami	Sunday	10th April
Tamil New Year Day	Thursday	14th April
Sri Bhagavan's 70th Aradhana	Thursday	28th April
Maha Puja	Saturday	7th May
Cow Lakshmi Day	Sunday	10th July
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Wednesday	13th July
Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day	Thursday	1st September
Navaratri Festival Commences	Monday	26th September
Saraswati Puja	Tuesday	4th October
Vijayadasami	Wednesday	5th October
Deepavali	Monday	24th October
Karthigai Festival Commences	Sunday	27th November
Karthigai Deepam	Tuesday	6th December
143rd Jayanti	Saturday	7th January 2023

Vairagya Catakam

The Hundred Stanzas on Dispassion

Part Five

TAVATTIRU SANTHALINGA ADIGAL
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

Sāntaliṅga devotes the second 50 verses of his *Catakam* to *Tōttiram* – *Praise of the Lord*. These beautiful verses form an admirable counterpoint to the preceding 50, portraying as they do in poetic form the intimate relationship between *bhakti* – *devotion* and *jñāna* – *discrimination*, *vivēkam* of which we have spoken earlier. *Bhakti* fosters *jñāna* and *jñāna* fosters *bhakti*, a ‘virtuous circle’ as it is called. The conviction that we are the Self, the absolute Reality, fires us to investigate the false nature of the ego-based seeming reality and that investigation serves to strengthen that conviction.

Chidambara Swamigal did not provide us with any form of commentary for these latter fifty verses. However, a *pariccheda urai*, a phrase by phrase, word-split, translation, made by Sri Kasikananda Nanacariya Swamigal, was consulted in the translation of them. The verses are numbered 1-50, following the practice of previous editions, not 51-100, as one might expect.

Robert Butler has published, independently and through Sri Ramanasramam, a number of translations and commentaries on works by Sri Ramana, Muruganar and earlier authors of works in the Tamil advaita tradition.

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Not even for a moment does
my wicked mind
take refuge at your feet with love,
instead with the senses five, it does consort,
leaving me without resort.
Lord whose light in holy Tillai shines,
pray speak and tell that wicked mind
that it must go and there reside. (1)

If you do not grant your grace
to me, a sinner
whose heart is wicked and untrue,
I can think of nought that I might do
to bring me closer unto you.
Pure Lord in Tillai's Hall enthroned,
embrace me now and stand by me,
never let me go,
and reveal to me some means whereby
an evil devil such as I
your holy presence may come to know. (2)

Holy Tillai's Lord,
in my mind you surely dwelt,
yet still remained so far from me.
No means to reach you could I see.
You whose long and matted locks
like bolts of lightning shine,
pray, vouchsafe to me, poor wretch,
that this knowledge will be mine. (3)

Detained by lust for pretty maids,
whose beauty shines,
how could I see your holy feet,
worshipped by those in whom
that base desire has known defeat?
Great Lord upon whose head
the chaste moon's lustre glows,

may it please you now
to take my mind as your abode. (4)

You who're a sure remedy
for birth's disease
in those who worship Thee!
If, when I constrain my mind
to meet and join with thee,
it eludes my grasp
fleeing far across land and sea,
for me, our Lord of Tillai,
what salvation can there be? (5)

You who in Tillai's Hall reside,
once, mounted on the lordly bull,
with Lady Ambika at your side,
so swiftly towards me did you ride;
your presence to me, poor knave,
so readily you gave.
But now, as I remain undone,
seeking you and calling out,
'Our Lord have you not yet come?'
still you do not appear to me,
mere cur, your lowly devotee.
O why, my Lord, should this be? (6)

Lord, God, whom hosts of heaven adore,
leader of the demon hordes,
who danced in fair [Tillai's] golden Hall,
If you do not now,
through your rare grace,
raise me to liberation's high estate,
then who else holds the power,
me to save
and all my sinfulness efface? (7)

Wielder of the battle-axe,
deadly, sharp and bright,

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will there ever come a day,
when for me, poor wretch,
an end is made
of the wily senses' endless pranks;
when, praising your feet
with heart that melts,
even I shall in your presence stand,
shedding tender tears
with upraised hands?
[If it ever shall be so]
tell me now [that I may know]. (8)

Lord of Tillai,
to daily sing your praises in a voice that booms
I did not learn.
To do worship offering fragrant blooms,
I did not yearn.
At the very thought of you
my heart did not tender grow.
To cross birth's surging ocean,
fraught with good and evil deeds,
what worth in me did I show? (9)

Master, why do you despise me so?
Once you appeared before me,
mounted on the bull,
but now no whit of mercy show.
Shall I not then your greatness know?
Pray, forbearance for my sins afford,
and henceforth rule me as my Lord. (10)

All knowing One,
who flexed Mount Meru as a bow,
there is nothing that I do,
beggar that I am, so low
that is not known
and ordained by you.

So you, the author of my evil deeds,
 must be the pardoner of them too.
 Henceforth do not abandon me,
 as I languish in [birth's stormy] sea. (11)

Blue-throated, three-eyed Lord,
 who brandish fire in your hand!
 Primal Flame,
 that Mal and Ayan, weary,
 sought in vain in days of yore!
 As I languish, caught in *maya*'s net
 of lust for maids with perfumed tress,
 may you grant to me your grace,
 and keep me in your embrace. (12)

You whose forehead bears an eye,
 worthless as I was,
 you used to see in me some good,
 and engulfed me
 in your compassion's flood.
 So why has this now ceased to be?
 Pray speak and let me know,
 O Wearer of the elephant hide,
 in you, the Lord of heaven's host,
 can hate or fond desire reside? (13)

Tell me, Siva Sankara,
 Holy Tillai's Lord,
 how I, the lowest of the low,
 may your salvation come to know.
 Matchless One,
 You with holy ash adorned,
 in my heart I did not keep you,
 trembling with awe.
 So let me in my understanding
 henceforth clearly know
 how I for you my love may show,
 so that my suffering shall be no more. (14)

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In you I do not fix my thoughts,
quelling the might of hostile senses'
unparalleled onslaught.
I languish wondering how on earth
to escape the inescapable
ocean vast of birth.
Tell me Lord, whose form's
adorned with holy ash,
if my desire will ever come to pass. (15)

Once did you your holy feet,
on me, poor wretch, bestow,
coming in a human form
that I could easily know.
I gained them yet did I remain
as one who nothing gains all.
Under my dominion
the senses five did not fall.
So now, my Lord,
to me some means convey
by which I might those senses slay. (16)

God of gods, Tillai's Lord,
Consciousness' very form,
my mind for you no love did know.
My heart had hardened like a stone.
So bend now that stony heart,
as once you bent a rocky Mount
and used it as bow,
and drown it in the love of you. (17)

With love O Lord, no *puja*
to you did I make.
[In bliss] before you
I did not dance,
nor my tongue your praises
loudly chant.
Thus with my wicked mind

whose wandering ne'er abates
 I here do dwell.
 Alas, I know not what
 henceforth shall be my fate. (18)

Is it not the great ones' way
 to overlook and pardon
 the many faults of lesser ones,
 who through ignorance are wont to stray?
 You whose divine hand holds a deer,
 since your bounden duty it must be
 to expunge the evil deeds of lowly me
 and rule me as my Lord,
 what need is there for me, a false one,
 to appeal to thee in urbane words? (19)

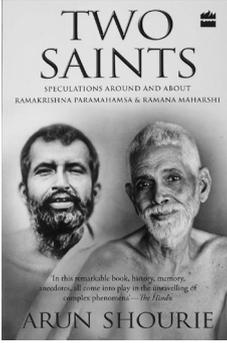
Supreme perfection, reached by those
 in whom no falsehood lies,
 other than yourself, is there any place
 where I, devoid of any truth, might reside?
 Safe haven,
 you who to the Lady Uma granted
 a place to dwell as your left side,
 vouchsafe to me your glance of grace,
 my deep delusion to efface. (20)

Whatever I do here, Tillai's Lord,
 whatever should befall,
 grant it to me that,
 as all mind's endless imaginings fade,
 with awareness focussed to a point,
 and senses and *upadhis* all duly erased,
 I may your matchless Self perceive,
 as clearly as in the palm
 a ripened *nelli* fruit is seen. (21)



(To be continued)

BOOK REVIEWS



TWOSAINTS: SPECULATIONS AROUND AND ABOUT RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA AND RAMANA MAHARISHI by Arun Shourie. Publisher: Harper Collins (1 January 2017); 496 pages; ISBN: 9789352645046; ₹799.

The book is organised in sixteen chapters and is well annotated. The early chapters are the biographies of the saints. The author looks at how events are connected to the placebo effect (ch. 10), hallucinations (ch. 7) and hypnotic suggestions (ch. 9). The chapters also examine the science behind the nature of the Self (ch. 12), consciousness (ch. 13), and Reality (ch. 15). In the last chapter, he tries to highlight the sincerity, wisdom and compassion of these two saints.

One should not be fooled by the title because it is not really about the sages. It is about cherry picking and trying to understand Universal Consciousness (Brahman) from a materialistic view. The author tries to reduce everything to neurophysiology and tries to examine experiences with the chemical changes in the brain. His arguments to explain everything as biology are probably influenced by his own painful experience with the courageous efforts of himself and their extended family to support his disabled son who has cerebral palsy and his wife having Parkinson's disease.

The author, undoubtedly a brilliant person, unfortunately does not seem to appreciate the nuances of Advaita philosophy. He constantly confuses the self with the Self. While this may be a problem in the translation of the works from Tamil/Sanskrit to English, a careful student of Advaita would immediately understand what those terms mean. By definition, self refers to our personality/ego while Self refers to Atman/Brahman or Universal Consciousness. Further, Advaita uses three planes of reference to describe reality: *paramārtha*, *vyavahāra* and *pratibhāsa*. Jumping from one plane of reference to the other will lead to lots of confusion. For example, only Self exists in the *paramārtha* level and there is no self. This, of course, does not mean self does not exist at any level of reference. Misunderstanding this

principle can lead to all levels of confusion and the author seems to be caught in this web.

The view that consciousness results from the brain alone is a materialistic viewpoint. However, this view is being constantly challenged even by scientists as more neurological studies indicates a paradigm shift is required to understand and explain consciousness. The theory that consciousness is a fundamental reality is not mainstream science yet but it is moving away from being considered absurd. In fact, books such as *Galileo's Error* by Philip Goff and *Conscious* by Annaka Harris present these theories. Maybe the author was unaware of these modern interpretations that are now available in the western literature on consciousness.

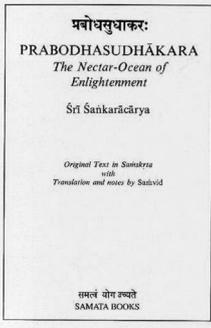
Though chemicals can cause changes in the brain, these changes can also occur due to long hours of meditation. Matthieu Ricard, the Buddhist monk, was a volunteer subject in a study performed at the University of Wisconsin – Madison on happiness, scoring significantly above the average of hundreds of volunteers and was termed as the 'happiest man of earth'. A similar study showed that monks were able to reduce activity of the left brain and this was 4.5 standard deviation above normal indicating only a few among hundred thousand people will be experiencing such levels of happiness. Furthermore, fMRI machines can now measure the complete cessation of the default mode network, as shown by Gary Weber. All these scientific studies indicate that the mind can be trained, controlled and finally disappear. Thus it is not the changes in the brain that induce deep meditation but it is the meditation that causes changes in the brain.

When the sage is abiding in still Awareness, he does not get caught up in the emotional upheaval of the others. Rather, he touches the others in peace. Slowly, the other person tries to reach the same Awareness not just by effort but my constant communion with the sage. Thus, the peace one gets in the presence of the sage is not due to auto suggestion, as suggested by the author.

At the launch of this book, Shourie's son, Aditya, was supposed to present the first copy of the book to the guest of honour, Dalai Lama. As the Dalai Lama approached him, Aditya did not move his head, as he usually does, but raised his hand as if to bless the Dalai Lama, who bowed low and accepted the absolution. The humility evinced by these sages cannot be explained by neurophysiology.

The experiences and teachings of Ramana Maharshi have been vindicated by several sages over several millennia though he had not heard of these teachings before his Self-realisation. His outpourings of love in *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* and of deep Upanishadic philosophy in *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* show that mere changes in brain cannot result in such output. In fact, if epilepsy is the cause of Ramana Maharshi's Self-realisation (as implied by the author), compassion and love, and his marvelous outpourings in prose and poetry, maybe all of us should get this epileptogenic foci in our cerebrum stimulated!

– M. Giridhar



PRABODHASUDHĀKARA: THE NECTAR-OCEAN OF ENLIGHTENMENT Śrī Śaṅkarācārya
Translated and Notes by Samvid; Samata Books;
112 pages; ISBN: 8185208506; ₹200.

The literature of Advaita Vedanta, especially the works of Ādi Śaṅkara, can be classified into three types of works: (1) those centered on *bhakti* (2) those that are intended to serve as instruction manuals for a *sādhaka* seeking realisation through *jñāna* (*ātma vichara*) (3) those that seek to show through dialectics and arguments that the philosophical positions that oppose Advaita are untenable.

The poetic works of *Śivānandalaharī*, *Subrahmaṇya Bhujāṅgam* and *Saundaryalaharī* etc. fall into the first category. The works such as *Upadeśasāhasri*, *Ātma Bodha*, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* etc. can be classified under the second category. The *bhāṣyas* of *Brahma Sūtras* and various *Upaniṣads* fall into the third category.

Prabodhasudhākara (प्रबोधसुधाकर) does not fall into any of the above categories. It could be considered as a *Samanvaya Śāstra* as it completely reconciles *jñāna* and *bhakti* [to Krishna] as equally valid paths for the direct experience of the Reality (Brahman). *Prabodhasudhākara* is a relatively unknown short treatise of Ādi Śaṅkara that deals with the highest level of Advaita. It consists of 257 verses divided into 19 sections. This is the first translation of this work into English and the translator has done an excellent job in keeping the spirit of the original Sanskrit text.

Just like a teacher taking a pupil through various grades of knowledge, it begins with the description of the gross body, subtle and causal bodies, senses, then the mind, dispassion finally leading to the realisation of the Self and resting in the non-dual Reality. In the presentation, clarity, lucidity and directness, this work is as good as or even better than many of his other works. The devotion detailed in the last four chapters of the book is elegant.

The depth of the book can be gauged wherein the complex subject of *māyā* is explained in Chapter 8 that contains 15 couplets. Verse 2 says that *Nirguṇa Brahman* and *Saguṇa Brahman* (Śiva and Śakti) are like husband and wife. Consciousness or *Nirguṇa Brahman* always remains only as a witness and appears to get bound due to *māyā* and becomes limited as 'I' consciousness. *Saguṇa Brahman* is not only the creator of the universe but also controls *māyā*. The only difference between the *paramātma* and *jivātma* is the sheath of *māyā* is present in *jivātma* encasing it, where as in the case of *paramātma*, *māyā* is inherent and controlled by *Saguṇa Brahman*.

Śaṅkara is clear that *bhakti yoga* guides the mind to get rid of its turbulence and mental purification takes place. He composed beautiful poems and his verses that can be studied not merely for the philosophical depths of his writings but also for the beauty of his language. The several verses describing the beauty of Krishna singing in Vṛndāvan are so resplendent that it is sung even by followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism though they are strongly opposed to the philosophy of Śaṅkara.

Śaṅkara, in the same chapter, describes the waking, dream and deep sleep state. In the dream state, we see many objects. When we wake up, the dreams no longer exist. Similarly, when we realise the Self, duality is dissolved. How? It is similar to entering deep sleep state from the dream state.

Śaṅkara emphasises the need for the cessation of thought: either by its absorption in the Heart or surrender to *Īśvara*. *Prabodha*, being the awakening from the sleep of ignorance is a progression that eventually leads one to losing one's separate consciousness and being immersed in the *sudhākara*, the ocean of nectar, irrespective of the path we follow. How we do it is by either the non-identification of Consciousness with external objects or by surrendering oneself to the timeless appeal of the transcendental flute player and stealer of our hearts.

– M. Giridhar ▲

ASHRAM BULLETIN

Navaratri

Navarātri began in the Ashram on Thursday, 7th October. Owing to the Covid-19 restrictions, Goddess Yogambika was neither taken out in procession nor installed in the front *Mantapam* in Mother's Shrine. Like *Navarātri* last year, all the *pūjas* were simple without themed *alankārās*. The devotional singing at *pūjas* by Ramanan Balachandran and Aditi Aiyer, and daily recitation of *Lalitā Sahasranamam* and *Devi Māhātmyam* were extraordinary this year.

This year's festival was only for eight nights, owing to the *tithis* timings and on the last night devotees sang the 21-verse *Mahiṣāsura Mardini Stotram*, venerating the 'slayer of the buffalo-demon'.

Worship in the Ashram on the last night consisted in a brief performance by Ramanan Balachandran who sang along with his veena followed by a brief discourse by Shabari (Ṣaḍakṣara Ghanapāṭhigal), the late Senthilnatha Ghanapāṭhigal's younger brother.

Karthigai Deepam

On 10th November 2021, the festival started with a flag hoisting ceremony. Each day and night processions were taken out but paraded only in the fifth *prākāra* inside the premises of the temple like the previous year. On the 19th November, the *Bharaṇī Deepam* was lit at 4 am in the early morning. The *Maha Deepam* was lit at 6 pm in the evening on top of sacred Arunachala. On that day miraculously the incessant heavy rain stopped and when the *jyoti* was lit at 6 pm on top of the Hill, the Deepam could be seen in all its glory, to the delight of everyone.

The Tamil Nadu government has not been allowing crowds in important places and Covid-19 protocols have been followed by the public. Vehicles were stopped two kms from the town. From the 7th November until the 17th November only approximately 13,000 devotees were allowed to have darshan of Lord Arunachaleswara. 30% devotees were from Tiruvannamalai district and 70% from other outside districts.

It rained heavily the day before the *Maha Deepam* but on the great day the rain abated and pilgrims were able to do *giripradakshina* without undue discomfort. 20,000 people were officially allowed to

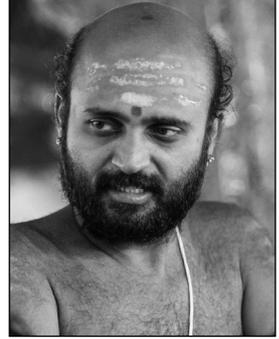
walk around Arunachala on *Maha Deepam* day and the day before by online booking.

This year a new copper vessel (*kopparai*) had been manufactured at Swamimalai. It is five feet tall and holds a ton of ghee. Some 65 men hauled the cauldron to the summit and installed on top of Arunachala the day before *Maha Deepam*. A special cotton cloth of some 300 metres was placed inside the cauldron.

Brahmasri Senthilnatha Ghanapāṭhigal (1973-2021)

Born on 15th July 1973 in Kavanur village of Cuddalore district, Brahmasri Senthilnatha Ghanapāṭhigal came to Sri Ramanasramam in October 2002 when the Ashram *Vedapāṭhaśālā* was in need of a new teacher. Towards the end of 2002, the family settled at Tiruvannamalai where he took up the task of reorganising the *Vedapāṭhaśālā*.

Senthilnathan had learned the Vedas two decades earlier with the blessings of Kanchi Math Paramācārya, H.H. Chandrashekarendra Saraswati Swamigal, the 68th Acharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. It was in the early 1980s, when the nine-year-old Senthilnathan was to undergo *upanayanam* (sacred thread ceremony) and he and his father went to Paramācārya for his *darshan* and blessings. The Paramācārya told Gowrishankar that Senthilnathan was not meant for secular education and asked if he ‘would be willing to spare the boy.’ Gowrishankar was at a loss to know what service his nine-year-old son could render to such a great saint as the Paramācārya. As he marvelled at the thought, the Paramācārya stated plainly that ‘the Vedas should be chanted for the benefit of the world’ and wanted Senthilnathan to enter Vedic life. Without the least hesitation, Gowrishankar gave his assent.



Senthilnathan went to the Kanchi Math *Vedapāṭhaśālā* in Bangalore where he took up formal training for the next eight years and studied up through *Kramam*. Paramācārya then sent him to Tirupati for advanced training in *Jata* and *Salakṣaṇa Ghanam*. Upon graduation, Senthilnathan was appointed as *Vedapāṭhaśālā* teacher at Palghat where he remained for eight years before coming to Sri Ramanasramam.

Senthilnathan was an *agnihotri* and performed *homas* each day at his home. He showed himself to be a gifted teacher, exhibiting patience

with his students and earning their deep love and respect. He was more than a teacher, and saw to it that they got to see the important *kshetras* and he took them annually for several years to Pandharpur. On one occasion, he took senior students and teachers to Kailash.

With Senthilnathan's contacts with *Vedapāṭhaśālas* and Pandits, his excellent organisational skills and the respect he commanded in Vedic circles, the Ashram *Vedapāṭhaśālā* grew in stature and was even designated as one of South India's examination sites. From 2015, *Veda Parīkṣā* began to be conducted annually at the Ashram.

Senthilnathan was the *hota* and master of ceremonies during special rites and rituals at the Ashram including the annual *Jayanti*, *Aradhana*, *Maha Puja*, *Sri Vidya Havan* and *Samvatsara Abhishekam*. His adeptness at organising and overseeing liturgically complex rites and rituals was by all accounts outstanding. He hosted the annual *Ghanapārāyaṇam* during the Karthigai Deepam festival at the Tiruvannamalai branch of the Kanchipuram Sankara Math.

Senthilnathan aided local *pāṭhaśālās* in finding teachers for them and assisted in placement for his students. He gave advanced classes at his home in the early morning.

With the onset of the pandemic lockdown in March 2020, Senthilnathan's health became fragile, and he underwent treatment in January 2021. On 29th September 2021, He went to Pondicherry JIPMER hospital for a routine check-up. The following day, however, he suffered two heart attacks and became unconscious. The family was with him. On Friday morning 1st of October, he was fully conscious again and talked with his wife, brothers, and sons. But then suddenly around 11.30 am, at the tender age of 48, Senthilnatha Ghanapāṭhigal succumbed to a heart attack and merged at the Feet of Arunachala.

In the Ashram, the ever-smiling Senthilnathan will be remembered for his kind, gentle nature and his willingness to help others in whatever way needed.

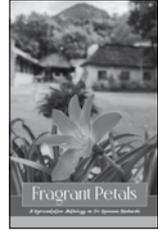
Brahmasri Senthilnatha Ghanapāṭhigal is survived by his wife Akhila, his two sons, Virupakshan and Purandhara Vitthalan, his daughter, Bhavatharini, his mother Gita, his two brothers, Tatvamasi and Shabari and his two sisters, Nivedita and Aparna. In the days following his demise, his numerous former students came from all over India to pay respects to their beloved teacher. Senthilnathan will be missed by all. ▲

NOW AVAILABLE...

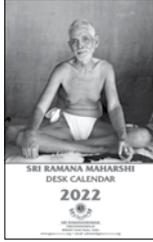
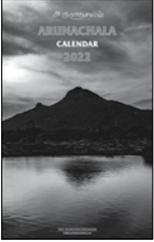


Ramanayanam (TAMIL) — Poems (Venba) on the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi by Crazy Mohan; Venba Prosody Edited by J. Jayaraman; Illustrations by Maniam Selven — pb. x+106; ISBN: 978-81-8288-294-2; Price: ₹80.

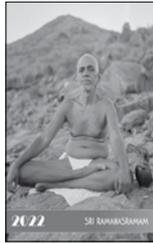
Fragrant Petals (ENGLISH) — This is a reprint of an Anthology on Sri Ramana Maharshi written by various devotees who basked in the sunshine of his boundless Grace. pp.viii+319. ISBN: 978-81-88018-52-9; Price: ₹140.



DIARY AND CALENDARS - 2022



The wall calendar 2022 has six sheets (12 pages) of the photographs of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. The special days of ashram are mentioned in the calendar. The calendar is approximately 16 inches in width and 23 inches in height. Price: ₹150.



Two desktop calendars are available containing six sheets (12 pages) of the photographs of Arunachala and Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, respectively. They are 6.5 inches in width and 10 inches in height and contain quotations for each month from Bhagavan's teachings. Price: ₹100.

Sri Ramanasramam — Diary 2022 consists of 365 pages with quotations both in English and Tamil based on the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and 12 full page photographs of Bhagavan. Price: ₹200.

Available from: Sri Ramanasramam Book Depot, Sri Ramanasramam & PO
Tiruvannamalai 606603, Tamil Nadu, INDIA.

Also available online: <http://bookstore.sriramanamaharshi.org>
(Postage and packing charges extra).

7. If these four — mind, intellect, memory and egoity — are one and the same why are separate locations mentioned for them?

M: It is true that the throat is stated to be the location of the mind, the face or the heart [is the location] of the intellect, the navel [is the location] of the memory, and the heart or *sarvāṅga* (all the limbs) [is the location] of the egoity; though differently stated thus yet, for the aggregate of these, that is the mind or internal organ, the location is the Heart alone. This is conclusively declared in the Scriptures.

— Sri Ramana Maharshi, *Self-Enquiry*.
