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

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in the conditions of our modern world.**

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Divine Names of Arunachala

28. ॐ सामप्रियाय नमः

Om sāmāpriyāya namaḥ

Prostration to the One who is fond of the Sāman hymns.

Sāma refers to the *Sāma Veda* and *priya* means lover.

The *Sāma Veda* is the *Veda* of melodies and chants. It also contains the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* and the *Kena Upaniṣad*. Studying the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* alone, a serious student can come to know all the major topics of the *Upaniṣads*. Although the *Kena Upaniṣad* is considerably shorter in length, its power is undeniable. Listen to Chapter I, verses 1-4.

*The Disciple asked: Om. By whose will directed does the mind proceed to its object? At whose command does the prāṇa, the foremost, do its duty? At whose will do men utter speech? Who is the god that directs the eyes and ears? The teacher replied: It is the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, the Speech of speech, the Life of life, and the Eye of the eye. Having detached the self [from the sense-organs] and renounced the world, the wise attain to Immortality. The eye does not go thither, nor speech, nor the mind. We do not know It; we do not understand how anyone can teach It. It is different from the known; It is above the unknown. Thus we have heard from the preceptors of old who taught It to us.*¹

No wonder Śiva loved the *Sāma Veda*! So did Sri Ramana Maharshi. In speaking of Adiannamalai, an ancient village on the western side of Arunachala Hill, He said, “It is a good place. I used to stay there occasionally. Once on a *giripradakshina* we were caught in the rain and we stayed the whole night in the temple there. It was then I heard the *Sāma Veda* chant.”²

What a thrill to hear exalted songs of praise from celestial beings themselves! — BKC

¹ Nikhilananda, Swami, *The Upanishads, Volume One*, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 2003, pp. 229-231.

² Mudaliar, A. Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 10-1-1946 afternoon.

EDITORIAL

True North

Nothing happens by chance or coincidence. Events, where we are, and what we do or not do are all part of a dance. We are where we should be at this moment, no matter how puzzling or seemingly inappropriate. The apparent so-called mistakes we make are necessary for our growth and deepening of understanding. The guru, like a farmer, rolls the fruit of our soul between loving hands till the unripe, hard flesh becomes soft, malleable and tasty. And like fruit that is slowly matured we too are made ready to receive Grace.

It is no accident that we come to the ashram if but for one visit, which, for some, may be sufficient. When we are in the ashram whether we are aware of it or not, we are radiated by the subtle, concentrated power of Arunachala. It is not an accident that the ashram is situated on the southern side of Arunachala. We are facing north when we receive the direct *darśan* of the sacred hill. We are in fact within ourselves searching for true north, by which we may know where we are and in what direction we should travel in our journey through life. We experience the external world of Arunachala and the ashram, and the internal realm of our consciousness as one. This is why without being able to rationally explain it, we are attracted to the softening process, *pakva*, no matter what the discomfort or suffering we may endure in the process. All of us to various degrees suffer because of our connection to Arunachala but one almost never hears of anyone saying that it is not worth it.

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To receive wisdom requires acceptance. Acceptance of who we think we are and to accept responsibility for our past actions that made us who we are. Until we accept our limitations, our ignorance, we cannot open up and through the softening process of the guru's grace, be transformed.

Consider our physical body which say for many years has not done any physical exercise. It is stiff and resistant to stretching the muscles. It complains that it cannot do it and that any exercise is not worth it. We know this is not true. If we want to be more supple and healthy there is no question that we should develop some discipline and regularly exercise our bodies. Our mental health and well-being are no different.

But exercising and developing our resilience and understanding is not a straight line. Our bodies are composed of electro-magnetic forces and as a consequence we are influenced by the ebbs and flows. In the course of meditation, we will, like the cycle of the moon with its magnetic influence on the ocean tides, encounter change. In Vedic astrology the new moon (*amāvāsyā*) and full moon (*pūrṇimā*) days are important and exercise a specific influence on us. As do other days and certain times during each day.¹ In other words, we are constantly affected by all that is around us. And it is not just the planets and the moon, but what happens in another part of the world. Today with global communication that we can perceive more easily the forces at work.

So, if we expect like a train speeding on a rigid track that the journey will be smooth and straightforward, it is anything but! There will be periods when we feel dry and desolate and nothing right happens. At other times, seemingly without effort, we fly like a bird in our positive emotions and mental agility.

There are not only ups and downs but also what we think are diversions and our goal may appear farther away than when we began. Once we make a *saṅkalpa* (vow or intention) to begin the journey dedicated to discovering the truth about ourselves, a whole slew of unresolved negativities will spew forth. We can also for example, undergo periods when our everyday mind falls asleep during meditation and we enter a half-world of being neither here nor there.

¹ An example of this is *Pradoṣa* (*pra*: remover and *doṣa*: negative karma) whose influence varies with the days of the months.

This is a positive indication that we have broken through another obstinate ring of thoughts that we took to be our identity. These habitual thoughts are much like rocky projectiles orbiting a planet. We are not always aware of our thoughts as they revolve about but when we are, we see them with a clarity much like our recognition of the earth's full moon.

It is not for nothing that in some spiritual traditions notably Zen Buddhism and Sufism the sudden perception of the moon's presence causes a state of *samādhi*. For a few moments or a few hours, we lucidly see and all is at peace because our mind is not obscured by thought.

Seeing is not a question of eradicating a problem, but seeing it for what it is. We all have enemies. It is the nature of human life. It is a more refined version of predator and victim. Whether we are aware of it or not we all participate in this eternal round of eat and be eaten. It is not just physical annihilation but also psychic in which bullies like vampires feed on the well-being of others by intimidation and fear.

There are those who consciously choose to be eaten. A stark example is the Catholic priest Maximilian Kolbe, in Auschwitz who volunteered to take the place of another person in a group of ten who were to be starved to death as an example to others when a prisoner had escaped. In the Sufi tradition of the 'way of blame' (Arab. *malamatiyya*), the practitioner deliberately accepts responsibility. This is not dissimilar to what every loving mother faces with her children. More often than not the children are not aware that mothers take the blame for many of the problems in a household. If they did not who else would and preserve the harmony of the family?

In military culture the soldier who sacrifices his own life to save his comrades is admired for his courage and selflessness. When we place others first before our own interests we practise acceptance and self-denial which enhances the kernel of consciousness developing within.

There will always be a scapegoat for the unacknowledged failings of everyone in a group, clan or family. The trait we refuse to recognise in ourselves as a negativity we transfer to another and criticise him or her, though if we are calculating we keep silent and appear unconcerned. What Germany learnt in many years of painful introspection after World War Two, was that the whole country was complicit in the appalling slaughter of the Nazi regime.

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There is a confessional prose statement by the German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller (1892–1984), titled ‘First They Came...’ about the silence of those who could have spoken out against the rise of Nazism and their consequent feelings of guilt that they could have done more. They had refused to believe what they saw and heard.

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—

And there was no one left to speak for me.

This is a compelling message against fear but far more effective for those sincere seekers who have the ears to listen, it is not speech but Bhagavan’s silent transformative radiance in all circumstances. Though Bhagavan would readily respond to questions he often remained silent and that miraculous silence dispelled the fears, doubts and troubles of the one who asked.²

That Radiance is still here and it is up to us to listen. Granted it is not always easy, in fact at times, we are met on the surface with a unfeeling brick wall but that should not deter us. It means we have to work hard enough to make ourselves ready. To be *pakva*, soft and malleable, ready to face the true north and be consumed in the quiet ferocity of Arunachala. To do that we should listen and wait. ▲

² M.S. Venkataramiah, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§262. Sri Bhagavan said: A Madhva saint Tatvaroyar had composed a *bharani* on his master Swarupanand. Pandits objected to the composition, saying that it was reserved to such as have killed more than a thousand elephants in battle, whereas Swarupanand was an idle man sitting somewhere unknown to people and he did not deserve that panegyric. Tatvaroyar asked them all to assemble before his master so that they might see for themselves if he could slay one thousand elephants at a time. They did so. As soon as they appeared they were struck dumb and remained in beatific peace for a few days without the least movement. When they regained their senses, they saluted both the master and the disciple, saying that they were more than satisfied. Swarupanand excelled the warriors in that he could subdue the egos, which is a much more formidable task than slaying a thousand elephants. Maharshi said that the moral was clear. Peace is the sole criterion of a Mahatma’s Presence.

Maharshi, the Spiritual Magnet and Kanakammal, an Iron Filing

Part Two

APARNA KRISHNAMURTI

Kanakammal's narration of incidents that happened in the Old Hall and the nostalgic remembrance of Bhagavan's utterances that were like Vedic *mantras* deeply impacted the devotees. The lessons, positive and negative, subtly but unmistakably taught (and never to be lost sight of), learnt and practised by her were passed on. All arguments among those gathered were brushed aside at a single stroke by the admonition, "Let us steer clear of all these *pūrva, uttara mīmāmsa* debates." Discussions of unsavoury aspects of devotees both old and new were dissuaded in their entirety.

While expounding the process of Enquiry itself, she brought her own practice to bear upon her explanation. She amply clarified that the 'I' to be caught hold of, is not simply the thought 'I' but the feeling or awareness 'I'. It may take even years of practice to isolate it but if one held on to it tenaciously one day of its own accord it will fall away.

A lady once voiced her doubt as to whether the behaviour and qualities described in *Devi Kālottaram* and *Ātma Sākṣātkāram* are descriptive of one who has attained Self-awareness, or are prescriptions for the '*sādhak*'. Pat came the emphatic reply that they

were indeed for the aspirant. “If so, far from being spontaneous will it not be like putting the cart before the horse?” asked the doubter. She effectively cleared the doubt with the oft quoted saying of Bhagavan that “*Jñāna* is both the way and the goal.” What is natural to the state of *jñāna* becomes the disciplinary course for a *sādhak*. What is practised with effort in due course becomes spontaneous.

She also recollected that reverence of the highest order was extended to ‘Mother Veda’ by the Maharshi who was Himself the ‘personification of Vedas’. The moment the *Veda Pārāyaṇa* started in His presence, the Maharshi would instantly pull back his outstretched legs notwithstanding the rheumatic pain. He would sit upright with a far off look that merged in the Transcendent Beyond. Yet she, following the teaching of Bhagavan, strongly dissuaded people from leaning on Vedic Chant as a support (*ālambanam*) to dive in, quoting *Devi Kālottaram*.

She brought home to us the equanimity of Bhagavan to which everyone was a constant witness by dwelling on an incident. Sweetness of voice was not one of the natural endowments of some earnest devotees who had the habit of singing songs of saints in Maharshi’s presence. But His visage manifested the same unwavering joy and the Bliss of the Beyond whether the voice was harsh and grating on the ear or the sweet one of an eminent maestros like Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar or Musiri Subrahmanya Iyer.

She brought to our notice to many a little known – and therefore unsung – devotee of Bhagavan who were spiritually evolved, but simple, silent and mostly unseen with eyes and ears only for Bhagavan. They basked fully in the glory of His Grace only to vanish from the scene after His *Nirvāṇa* as suddenly as they had appeared.

She said Bhagavan had kept her for Himself. She, in turn made over herself and her possessions to Bhagavan as His belongings. She converted her ancestral inheritance in the form of Silver into various differently shaped articles of ‘*ārathi*’ to Bhagavan.

Her reverence and adoration of Muruganar was next only to Bhagavan. Following Muruganar, she too espoused his ‘Divine Chastity’ and worshipped none other than Bhagavan. She knew that Muruganar who lived mostly on food acquired by ‘*bhiksha*’ never cared for anything in particular. It is on record that Bhagavan was

aware of his fondness for ‘Aviyal’. But his liking for ‘*jāngiri*’ was known only to Kanakammal, so much so that on the *Āradhana* day of Muruganar every year she ensured its presence as an item in the menu.

An incident revealing the surrender and *ekabhakti* of Muruganar was narrated by her. The spring of poesy welled up in him and poured forth as if floodgates were opened specially after the *nirvāna* of Bhagavan. The apparent rough welcome and treatment meted out to Bhagavan by Arunachala moved the poet so much as to distil his emotions in a verse.

He chided Arunachala thus: “A mere lad of sixteen, forsaking hearth and home and unknown to the ways of the world came seeking you as his All. But Thou shearing him of his tuft of hair, disrobing him of his shirt and dhoti, adorning him in a loincloth robbed him of his money. The first meal provided well after a day of starvation was a scanty one of boiled rice soaked in water overnight turned cold and stiff with some dry hard pickle. What would it have cost you to provide a good meal to the lad, a perfect devotee. Further you were not unknown to provide food and succour to devotees like Guhai Namasivaya. At least a begging bowl, a pot of water and a rough coir cot could have been provided by you. If this is the way you treat a devotee surrendered to you who will come to Thee?”

Muruganar himself then answers for Arunachala. “This was done to reveal to the world what true surrender means and the stuff the lad was made of. His intense devotion and severe dispassion mark him out as a totally surrendered devotee. Did he ever complain about it? Not only was there not even a whimper but he relished it as nectar. (Bhagavan later reminisced that ‘that nectarine taste is not there now in the *bhikshas* that you offer here’). He was uncomplaining but supremely loving with total surrender. Did I ever let him off my lap? (the caves of this Hill). Did I not ensure that the whole world come and pay obeisance at his feet basking in his presence and singing his glory?”

But unfortunately these along with 2000 other verses were lost at Villupuram railway station when they were stolen away with the personal belongings of a devotee to whom the manuscript was entrusted to be taken to Madras to be printed.

But for a poet of Muruganar's stature it would have simply been a mere child's play to rewrite them. But he did not for he thought that Bhagavan did not relish the foul cry against Arunachala, thus revealing that Bhagavan's will was indeed his pleasure too.

On the whole, dwelling on Bhagavan and recapitulating the moments spent in His Presence catapulted her to a different realm altogether. This unbounded joy even made her disregard the doctor's advise to use her vocal chord sparingly. She records, "Only those who experienced the holy look of Grace and utterances of Bhagavan can know the wonderful power Bhagavan wielded through them. Those who had that fortune had gained all there is to obtain on earth." This was her firm conviction.

Bhagavan's Grace ensured that her spiritual progress was closely guided, watched and approved of in and out of Arunachala. Once at the behest of *Paramāchārya* she accompanied her family members on a trip to Badrinath though earlier she had declined the offer to go with them as she had already visited these places. On their way back they visited Ujjain and no sooner had she entered the shrine than an irresistible force drew her to the Deity and she was plunged into peace beyond description with all thoughts including sense of time and space totally stilled. Despite the repeated calls of her relatives to join them she stood rooted to the ground unable to stir. After her return when she met the *Ācharya* at his bidding he asked her "How did you feel standing before Lord Mahākāleshwara?" That he should question her about that particular moment was indeed a miracle and an assurance.

Hers was a well rounded personality with many a sparkling facet. Endowed with high native intelligence, her knowledge of the nuances of culinary art was incredible for she herself cooked and survived on the most meagre of meals. Her diary meticulously maintained, describing all the new places she visited both in India and abroad makes quite an interesting reading. When a new device or a mechanical contraption was brought to her attention, she with a childlike curiosity would by a flurry of questions come to know the nuts and bolts of it only to erase it all from the mental screen the next minute, true to the dictum of Avvaiyar, "Even the art of thieving must be learnt and forgotten."



Her life of dedication anchored on the teachings of Bhagavan received approbation from none other than the mahatma yogi Sri Ram Surat Kumar. Whenever he happened to see her on his way to Giripradakshina in a car he would invariably stop the vehicle, hail her by her name and would pat her on the back as a loving gesture of appreciative approval.

There is yet another service most invaluable for which posterity owes her an immense debt of gratitude.

For a decade and two since 1950, 14th of April was like any other day in the Ashram. The day Bhagavan attained 'Mahā Nirvāṇa' is celebrated as the Aradhana day on the 13th day of the waning moon in the month of 'Chittirai' according to Tamil Calendar. But this rarely coincided with the day 14th of April.

On *Jayanti* and *Āradhana* days, observed according to traditional Tamil Calendar, devotees from various parts assemble, the common belief among devotees being that on these days the holy Grace of Bhagavan will be felt more than on other days as has been vouchsafed by the devotees of the past as well. The Samādhi Shrine will be packed to its full capacity and the elaborate *abhishekam*, *alaṅkāram* and *pūja* will be followed by a sumptuous feast. There would invariably be a music concert or dance performance. In all the din and the flurry of activity, the solemnity of the day often would be lost. At least during the early eighties, before the revival of the evening *Pārāyaṇa*, one would find old devotees – many contemporaries of Bhagavan, as children, youths and a few adults now old – seated in cosy circles in the Hall sharing their reminiscences of Bhagavan. The animated voice and visage lit up by the remembrance of the Heaven they had witnessed would intensify the longing of the newcomers and would make them gravitate towards them to be within earshot.

The full grandeur of the solemnity of the evening on that momentous day in 1950 has been bequeathed to us by many chroniclers. With solid solemnity pervading the atmosphere, the ambience became spiritually surcharged when the assembled devotees suddenly broke into singing in chorus the wonderful hymn *Akṣaramaṇamālai* with the refrain in the midst of the pangs of heartrending pain at the imminent disappearance of the physical form of – Arunachala Ramana – the solid mass of *jñāna* – the substratum of All. On hearing the song, tear drops

of Bliss rolled down from the outermost corners of the Maharshi's eyes, affirming this unity forever. True, when beggars die no comets are seen. Heavens may blaze forth to mourn the death of princes. But how divine the celestial display would be when the ruler of the Empire of *jñāna* – the Lord of Earth – the very Lord Himself – sheds the Form He assumed was revealed for the first time in human history on that day and witnessed in many parts of the earth simultaneously. The devotees on that day were a witness to the most divine celestial phenomenon of Light merging in the Column of Light.

With the passage of years with the ever-increasing crowd of common folks and spiritual tourists, the noise rising to distressing levels stood in stark contrast to the solemnity the occasion demands.

If the devotees of past two decades get an inkling of that solemnity, a peep into that spiritual ambience and a holy remembrance of the majesty of celestial revelation the credit must go to Kanakammal. It was she, who once beseeched with tears in her eyes for the evening of that day to be observed in all solemnity by recreating the scene with singing of the devotional hymn *Akṣaramaṇamālai* before the *Nirvāṇa* Room even as the devotees did nearly 50 years ago. Her request was instantly granted to. Now the solemn remembrance of our Guru's physical departure from our midst coupled with the perennial and unhindered flow of Grace experienced by all enables us to reinforce our bond with renewed strength, conviction and devotion. The situation comes even more alive when the peacocks too send out their shrill calls as they did on that memorable day.

Kanakammal's life, lived in fullness ever absorbed in Bhagavan is a shining example worthy of emulation and an inspiration for the devotees young and old. Her life spent in feeding the spiritually athirst with the nectar of *Ramana Bhodam* (Ramana Knowledge) is indeed a benediction. ▲

(Concluded)



Acceptance and Meaning in Grief

Part Two

Finding Meaning in Grief

PETER EGAN AND WASYL NIMENKO

Grief not only puts our loss and our own life in perspective but it also offers the opportunity to revisit and review the meaning of our life. Our world may seem as if it is over and we might find it difficult to find a reason to carry on living. If we can find meaning in our grief, it protects us and our health both physically and mentally. Victor Frankl observed many times that the ones who survived the Holocaust of the German concentration camps were the ones who could find meaning. He supports Nietzsche's words, 'He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how.'¹

Deciding if someone is likely to commit suicide is deemed much more unlikely if they have 'protective' factors in their life, such as close family or a project they need to finish. That is, they have a

¹ Victor Emil Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*. (2004) Rider, p. 84.

Peter Egan is an actor and animal advocate. Wasyl Nimenko is a doctor and psychotherapist.

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meaning in their life. The principle of having enough meaning in their life to consider it worthwhile continuing living is used by all those assessing someone for suicidal risk.

It is not difficult to find ‘meaning’ in our own life, to have something or someone to live for. But trying to understand ‘the meaning of life’ is a different thing altogether. Perhaps this is best explained simply by the most highly regarded scientist and the most highly regarded sage of the last century.

Einstein says the aim is to stop seeing our self as being separated from the part of the whole, the “Universe.” He calls it a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. Ramana Maharshi says our knowledge and identity of what we are is false. He describes our deeper inner self as ‘eternal,’ which arises and returns to the same source.

So essentially they both say our experience of who we think we are, our experience of ourselves as separate individuals is incorrect and that we are part of everything.

We know there is more to us than just thoughts which seem to disturb the peace of our consciousness. After much searching and enquiry we find out about our self by ourself, that there is no individual as the ego, that the ego we thought we were is just a bundle of thoughts. It is only when we experience we are not what we think we are that we begin to ask ‘Who am I?’

Yoga Swami, a little known sage from Sri Lanka wrote about acceptance:

We do not know
All is truth
There is not a single thing that is wrong
It was all accomplished long, long ago.²

Natural Feelings

We seem to have a hidden unwritten agreement with the establishment, authorities and institutions to be in control of our emotions and to behave like obedient domesticated citizens. It is as if we are over-programmed to obey society’s orders instead of respecting and following our more natural wilder feelings. Because of this we

² Yogaswami, *Natchintanai*. (2004) Thiruvadi Trust, p. 3.

think we should be polite and have good manners all the time. We behave as if there is an expectation for us to be silent about our inner pain and be ashamed of showing our feelings of grief in public. We think we will make other people uncomfortable, embarrassed.

In *The Wild Edge of Sorrow* Francis Weller writes:

It is an act of protest that declares our refusal to live numb and small. There is something feral about grief, something essentially outside the ordained and sanctioned behaviours of our culture. Because of that, grief is necessary to the vitality of the soul. Contrary to our fears, grief is suffused with life force. It is riddled with energy, an acknowledgment of the erotic coupling with another soul, whether human, animal, plant or ecosystem. It is not a state of deadness or emotional flatness. Grief is alive, wild, untamed; it cannot be domesticated.³

We can also think what we will look like when we are in the middle of having a “nervous breakdown” or have a “mental illness,” when nothing could be more wrong. Although grief can overwhelm us and even incapacitate us, grief is not an illness or a mental health disorder. The misguided fear that grief can easily make us mentally ill, helps to programme us even more to be scared of showing the natural wildness of our feelings, especially of letting go. We are expected not to get ‘out of control,’ in front of others.

Our wilder emotions have been partly taken over and sanitised by following standardised religious services. Our language is full of phrases to stop us showing our feelings. ‘Now dry those tears,’ is a mantra we can probably all remember from adults trying to stop us showing our feelings. Tissues are used by emotional police as weapons to stop tears and emotions escaping and becoming embarrassing or shameful. At the slightest sign of revealing our emotions, we are told not to show any weakness, to ‘man up, to ‘crack on,’ to ‘soldier on’ and ‘to get on with the next task.’ If we disobey we have to apologise in shame and weakness.

Yes, natural raw wild feelings usually are uncomfortable for others to witness but expressing them and sharing them is one of the most important healing ways our grief shows that it is alive, moving and

³ Francis Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*. (2015) North Atlantic Books, p. 9.

trying to progress to eventually finding acceptance. These feelings should never be shushed to stop others feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed.

Freedom to Express and Society's Expectations

It is as if grief wants to let us be individuals and react in our own personal way, but society wants us to conform, to be just like every other person and behave as expected, so we do not cause any bother. Although they may seem completely at odds with each other, our personal expression of the natural wild feelings of grief and society's detached attitude to this actually share the same aim.

Albert Einstein, Ramana Maharshi, Rumi, Lau Tzu and the Buddha show us that our biggest problem is the error in thinking we are separate individuals. Grief can show us the natural wild powerful nature of our feelings and give us the opportunity to express this in our own way.

But perhaps grief also gives us much more than this because grief shows us that our own way is the same as everyone else's own way, that we are all the same. Experiencing what everyone else experiences lets us experience a universal consciousness which is common to all, irrespective of our culture or our religion.

Grief Without a Funeral

Funerals help to reinforce the reality of loss. They are an opportunity to gather together with family and friends to express our feelings and thoughts and to receive support from each other. They are also an opportunity to hear reflections of the person's life and hear and share memories of what the person meant to others. If a funeral takes place too quickly, loved ones can still be in an acute state of shock and feel so numb that the effects of the funeral on them are missed.

In a death where the body cannot be found, and there is no funeral the grief process is made much more difficult and it often comes to a halt. In situations like this, if the body is found and a funeral can take place, grief can progress once again. Even with no body, a funeral service can still help to move through grief.

We are hard wired to go through grief and not suppress it. Our feelings have a natural wildness which is healthy and needs to be

allowed to be expressed. Even though they might make others uncomfortable, they need to be expressed because there is nothing more uncomfortable than having wild feelings. We need to give our more feral emotions expression because not being expressed gives them more wildness and can have consequences.

If we can't express our emotions, they can be shut off, as if they have been dealt with. But instead of being worked through they can be relegated to the unconscious where, imprisoned they can unpredictably surface and can stop us getting through our grief and getting on with our life in more healthy ways. If we don't work through our emotions, they can grow like a festering wound and cause us all sort of physical and psychological problems.

At a crematorium, a friend's wife screamed out his name as his coffin started to move along the rollers towards the curtain. She screamed his name out so loud and long. It was the most piercingly painful scream which cried out the pain of loss. Everyone stood still and you could hear them all take a big breath in because here they heard and felt the natural raw wildness of grief which they immediately identified with.

We should not be scared of the natural wild feelings of someone's grief. Instead we should do everything we can to encourage a person in grief to let their feelings have a voice. We probably don't do this because we are scared we might encourage something to be 'un-boxed' which we can't 'box up' again. But this is just not the case as we are much better at regaining and maintaining our emotional equilibrium than losing it.

Unlike other cultures in the east, many western cultures have become more distanced and sheltered from close participation in funeral rituals. In India, family members not only prepare the body but are present during the cremation. In the west of Ireland, relatives are still expected to physically dig the grave for a family member who has died.⁴

In the UK it has been possible for the last five years to avoid the funeral process altogether. There are now 'Direct Disposal' funerals

⁴ Wasyl Nimenko, *Face to Face with Death: Dealing with Death Differently*. (2020) Goalpath Books.

which are unattended, without a service and without mourners present. Once the death certificate has been registered and the cremation form signed, the body is simply put on the next 'run' of cremations at the crematorium, which could all be completed the same day. Like many new ways of doing things, there can be positive and also negative aspects to not having a funeral.

Choosing not having a funeral creates a situation where we think we can separate our grief off and end it as soon as the body is removed from where the person died. We may even think they can avoid grief this way. Some people may prefer to do this but for others the presence of mourners is essential to express their thoughts and feelings and get support with other people. These are solemn opportunities to express ourselves not only as individuals or as family members but also as friends in unique ways.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, deaths were frequently in isolation in hospital, so relatives could not be present. Other deaths were at home with greatly reduced access to all the usual care which reduced medical and nursing support. Attendance at church services and funerals was strictly limited because of the risk of contracting Covid-19 which led to a sharp increase in the use of Direct Disposal funerals. Wakes after funeral gatherings and commemorative services were all severely reduced or not allowed.

The unusual combination of family, social and community isolation regulations together with social distancing and Direct Disposal undoubtedly prevented further infections and deaths. But the downside was the absence of people able to be present to show their compassion, to express and share their grief. This all resulted in reduced support to help us go through the grief process.

Instead of watching someone being taken hostage by their grief, we can intervene by looking and listening to what is happening to them. We can see them more than once or twice. We can look at grief as something that needs much more time than we think it needs for expression. Instead of letting someone quietly grieve alone, we can make more of an effort to actively be with them. Instead of grief taking someone as a hostage, we can help them grasp grief and use it to reshape them in a way which helps them keep moving with it and through it. We only have to be there. We only have to listen.



Some people have expectations about grief which assume that grief is a time limited experience after the death of a person someone loved. But this is not what most people experience. When acceptance is beginning to be felt, it is not the ending of grief but a change in how we are living with the person who has left their body. It is the continuation of the other person with us in a new way.

The Grip of Grief

When we see how others seem to have moved through their grief, we see that grief lessens its hold on them. We see they keep their treasured experiences and memories but have somehow let go of their old life and have changed, moving into a new life.

As grief lessens its hold on us, it gives us hope that our pain will eventually ease and we will be able to come out the other side of grief and have a new life and be happy again. But feeling some relief can make us feel guilty and disloyal for thinking about giving up our old life. This can make us feel more waves of the pain of loss.

Part of us wants to stay in the past with our old life but part of us wants to move into our new life, which sets up a struggle, like a tug of war. The tension can make us feel like we are frozen and can't move either way. It can be like a long dark winter with deep sadness and more suffering from the pain of loss. It can be helpful to ask what your loved one would say to you. It can also help if you ask what you would say to someone else in this position.

We do not understand what changes us and makes us slowly move on. Perhaps we can't endure any more pain and suffering, so we are almost forced to make a choice to move to a different place with our treasured memories and experiences, to a place with less pain.

Although we might appear to move away from suffering to happiness, the scars of suffering become the foundation of happiness. Maybe like building a house, the suffering we have endured has slowly, but unknown to us, been forming the base on which we can build. We see that our suffering has carried us through but perhaps we don't carry suffering, suffering carries us. Maybe suffering and happiness depend on each other for us to experience full consciousness.

This slow letting go of our old life and accepting what can be our new life, requires energy and effort in taking steps towards making

a new life. For each step you take towards making a new life, your new life takes several steps towards you. At this time we may start to be grateful to the person we have lost in new ways, realising they showed us certain things no one else did. We might see what they showed us about ourselves.

Grief gives us an opportunity to question and to re-vision what we see in our life. A place can be reached deep inside us where we can begin to see everything differently. In grief we can ask again 'Who am I?' in relation to the wider world, to everything and the whole Universe. It is an opportunity to see we are not isolated but along with the person we have lost, we can see our Self as part of everything.

Perhaps when we look outside we see the world but when we look inside we see the Universe. When we look at the daytime sky we can see the bright blue sky, the sun, the moon and maybe some clouds. At night when we look at the sky, the sun is not seen but we can see more because we can see the stars and we know there is so much more we cannot see.

Although we are taught to think that time and space are real and even though this may be true, we know time and space are only ideas from thinking. We are conscious there may be other planes of existence and levels of consciousness which we cannot see or understand because they are beyond thinking. If we close our eyes and look inwards, we can see with our consciousness that we are not just an individual but part of everything in the Universe.

Albert Einstein, Ramana Maharshi, Rumi, Lau Tzu and the Buddha show us that our biggest problem is the error in thinking we are separate individuals. Perhaps it takes grief to show us we are not and to begin seeing ourselves as one. ▲



A Day with Sri Ramana

V.S. ARUNACHALAM

My grandfather the late Sri. V.S. Arunachalam was born in Arani (Tiruvannamalai district) on 24th April 1897. After going through many hardships during his childhood he finally decided his future lay in Mumbai (Bombay) in 1916. Apart from carrying on with his duties with a corporate job in the city, he was more of a poet, philosopher, and a writer sans name and fame. As conveyed to me by his daughters viz. the late Smt. Saraswathi Iyer who is my mother, and the late Ms. Padma Iyer who is my aunt, my grandfather was an ardent follower of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, as he would visit Bhagavan as often as possible and he even continued his visits after settling in Mumbai. There are many of his writings that my parents preserved and one of his precious writings described his visits to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Though his manuscripts have been well preserved with us, it took me many years to put them in an appropriate order. After my mother's demise in the year 2017, there has constantly been an unknown force to make me act upon his precious writings, many of them being his wish to have them published. Today I am overjoyed, emotional and overwhelmed to share this precious piece of writing by my grandfather who has been a devotee of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi from the very beginning of his visits. On behalf of my entire family, I am highly grateful for the opportunity to share this manuscript. — Ravi Iyer.

I am based out of Mumbai with my family.

My official website is: www.raviiyer.space

V.S. Arunachalam (24th April 1897 – 30th August 1956)

Is it ready to compose an essay on my experiences with Sri Ramana. The timepiece before me frantically ticked away but nothing was written. What I wanted to write had now become a big void. No amount of staring at the ceiling or peering at the pensive stratus clouds through the windows would bring forth any thought into that void. It was slowly absorbing within it the very thought of 'I' in me! It seemed to me that the clock has stopped ticking.

However, this unconscious lapse of time did not last very long, for the void inexplicably transformed itself into a long vista, giving me the thrill a crystal gazer would have felt, but after many hours of contemplation, staring into nothingness! It was the vista that led me to one of my cherished memories, which had been formed one day thirty-seven years ago. It related to a day when I had the fortune of spending time with Sri Ramana Maharshi during my junior years of apprenticeship in life.

From the moment his own *Sannyāsin*-Mother attained *Samādhi*, there was the dawn of a new era in which Mother Earth took up the duty of looking after and cherishing this great world-child, and there gradually emerged an ideal Ashram around Sri Ramana.

This Ashram covers a large area at the foot of Arunachala on the outskirts of Tiruvannamalai and exemplifies how an institution of ancient traditions and ideals can flourish in modernity, with not a single beam of its glory beclouded.

Many people – the materialists, those of blind faith, the curious, the extroverts and the introverts, – visit the ashram and are at the first sight impressed by the Sage. They see the mother's temple from the entrance, her *Samādhi* a little farther, the Ashram's office, the cowshed, the water-supply and bathing arrangements, the lighting arrangements, the garden and many other facilities including the dispensary and the Post Office, all appropriately located in an atmosphere of tranquillity. They go to see the Maharshi and find Him reclining on a sofa at one corner of a long hall. The materialistic takes note of the fine things around Him including the peacock-feather fan and the *kamandal*. Those of blind faith get lost in their own faith in the Sage's divinity. The curious look keenly at the *rishi* and wonder what profundities



MOUNTAIN PATH

can emanate from a man who has no beard or *jata* (matted hair), who does not even wear the orange clothes (of *sannyāsa*). The extrovert who sees Him scours the objective surroundings for explanations of the irreconcilable thoughts and emotions, which arise in him. If one happens to be an erudite sceptic or a socialist, you put one or two philosophic questions to the *rishi* and after He answers them in essence, in his inimitable way, and in the diction of the child, they leave not knowing exactly whether they got an answer or not! The introvert too has untold problems to solve within himself in that mystic Presence. The keener he studies Him the more he finds Him divorced from His surroundings; further, he finds Him divorced from the sofa on which He reclines at the far end of the hall. He sees Him in an atmosphere of His own, in a Noumenal expanse, and finds the silhouette of the structured Ashram arresting the view here and there!

The introvert then goes out musing, “This extensive precinct with scattered fixtures bearing His name exists; and yet He is aloof and unbound!”

The Noumenal is hidden by structured silhouettes but blends gloriously with the phenomenal. It is to have glimpses of this blending and to enrapture myself in His Presence that I frequently visited Tiruvannamalai in those days. Sri Ramana was then living in Virupaksha Cave on the slope of the hill, about fifteen minute’s ascent from the foot of the hill.

This is a natural cave forming a circular living space of about 18 feet diameter and roofed by a single rock. Its inside ruggedness is moulded by masonry and its frontage is formed into a court. There is a large open space in front compounded by a rough stonewall for protection against the adjoining precipice. On the lower side of this cave, another small rock cave serves as a second room or kitchen. On the upper side, a small rill of water babbles down and charmingly cascades into a precipice of about fifteen feet. However, this lovely rill dries up in summer when the dwellers of the cave have either to ascend a little to its source where the spring is perennial or go a little down the hill to a well. There are but a few trees in front and on the sides of this cave that sparsely shadow the front space in the fore rooms. Other than the impressive ascent of the rocky ground that gradually narrows to encompass the imposing peak, which is often

encircled by white clouds and appears like a turbaned head, there is the panoramic view of the temple and town below, and the appealingly open and pure atmosphere.

What was remarkable was the daily life of Sri Ramana. In the early morning when it was still quite dark, He took a walk uphill. Quite alone, treading the rough and undulating ground as easily as one would a metalled road, and so softly that not a pebble was displaced. He returned to the cave at sunrise, after a visit to the tiny terrace-garden.

At the time, He was creating near the spring, source of the rill that ran beside Virupaksha Cave, the place that was to become Skanda Ashram a few years later.

After returning to the Cave, He then sat in the Court giving a slight nod, whenever a visitor prostrated. This period was only about a couple of years after the discarded *mounam* (silence) and when He began to talk freely: yet He appeared to give out His greatest teachings through silence. Occasionally He spoke out great philosophic truths couched in basic expressions. He paid greater attention to the birds and other small creatures that lived around and His intimacy with them was noteworthy. He spent most of the day now advising a squirrel where to safeguard her young one, now settling a quarrel between two monkeys, now talking to a forlorn myna and so on without end. He was able to identify the creatures individually, understand their characters, and infuse in them love and learning without ever using any artificial aids to understanding them.

At the time of which I am writing, Sri Ramana's brother and mother had not yet taken *sannyasa* to enter an Ashram and come to live with Him. A few other *sannyāsis* were His companions, rather than disciples and co-dwellers of the cave. They gathered food in the night from the *grihastas* (families) of the town and offered it first to Sri Ramana who partook of it with delight. One widowed lady-disciple, Echammal by name, daily brought Him one midday-meal. Visitors in the mornings and evening brought him fruits and other eatables. Except for the gleaned food, all other foods were shared immediately among all those who were present at that moment. There was neither cooking nor any thought of food for the morrow within these hallowed precincts.

One morning when I was there, no visitor came. Sri Ramana, four other *sannyāsis* and myself ate for our breakfast a few plantains left

over on the previous day. Echammal too was not in town. Sri Ramana was either sitting silently or chatting with the creatures. The *sannyāsis* sat meditatively. Hour after hour passed and it was one o'clock. First, I had no more money with me other than my return train fare. Moreover, I was too young to think of spending that and bringing some food. I became extremely hungry, but that hunger was so instructive and so deep that I still carry it in my memory and perhaps will carry until I 'wake up'. At two o'clock Sri Ramana, addressing me, said, "We are accustomed either to eat any amount or be without food. You go down and have something." I said. "I can bear up at least this day: I have come here only to learn greater things." He did not say anything more, and we all sat up, I with an effort and the others ordinarily.

At three o'clock a line of people, men, women and children were seen ascending towards the ashram. I thought they might be pilgrims climbing to the top for worship, but no! They were all coming to the cave, to see Sri Ramana. Each visitor brought large quantities of fruits and other eatables.

The reason of such a throng, or rather a mob, was that somebody had either predicted or dreamt that Sri Ramana would pass off into *samādhi* that day. This vague information spread like wildfire in the town and moved the hearts of so many that it made them hurry up to have a last glimpse of Him and to offer to Him what they could.

Hearing this, the Sage smiled and said, "How so soon! It seems still there are many things to be seen and done!" ▲

Can the Moon?

Suresh Kailash

Can the waxing, waning mind be stilled,
except by the master's divine will,

Or our dense darkness ever be erased,
without the showering of his grace,

Say, can the moon shine bright at night,
without the sun's generous light?

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Forty Three

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

16th January 1979 (continued)

Sadhu Om: The grace of Bhagavan is always shining in our heart as our own being, 'I am', and its nature is to draw our mind inwards to merge it in him, as him. However, instead of submitting oneself to the sway of his grace by willingly turning within to attend to him in our heart, we generally submit ourselves to the sway of our *viṣaya-vāsanās* [inclinations to attend to phenomena], allowing our attention to go outwards and thereby obstructing the work of his grace. Therefore, if we sincerely wish to avoid obstructing his grace in this way, we must surrender ourselves wholeheartedly to him by trying to be steadfast in clinging fast to self-attentiveness.

To illustrate that his grace will do everything for us, provided that we surrender ourselves to him with all-consuming love, Bhagavan would sometimes tell the story of Rukmini. She was the daughter of 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.

a powerful king, and having heard about the heroic deeds of Krishna, she had fallen in love with him and decided that she would not marry anyone else. When she told her parents of her love for Krishna and wish to marry him, they were happy at first, but her eldest brother was a friend of one of Krishna's enemies, so he opposed her marriage to him and persuaded his parents to arrange her marriage with one of his friends. Rukmini was distraught, but was powerless to oppose her parents and brothers, so she sent a message to Krishna, opening her heart to him, telling him of her love for him, her desire to marry him and her plight. She also told him that on the morning of her wedding she would go to worship in a particular temple, and she begged him to come and rescue her at that time. Hearing the prayer of his devotee, on the pretext of attending her marriage Krishna at once came to save her, and when she went to worship in the temple, he eloped with her, taking her back to his kingdom, where he married her.

As Bhagavan pointed out, this story illustrates that God will do everything for us provided that our love for him is so wholehearted that we are ready to give up everything else for him. Rukmini was powerless to escape the marriage planned for her by her parents and brothers, but her love for Krishna was so great that to marry him she was willing to give up everything else that she held dear, including her parents and brothers, so he intervened and came to her rescue.

Likewise, we are powerless to escape the bonds of *samsāra* without the help of his grace, but so long as we are unwilling to cease rising as ego and consequently attending to anything other than ourselves, we are thereby obstructing the work of his grace, just as Rukmini would have obstructed Krishna's act of rescuing her if she had been unwilling to leave her parents and brothers. Therefore our love to know and to be what we actually are must be so strong that it leaves absolutely no room in our heart for any liking to know or to be anything else.

24th January 1979

Sadhu Om: Lakshmana Sarma was once asking Bhagavan about the way in which some people had misinterpreted his teachings, and Bhagavan remarked: 'According to the purity of the *antahkaraṇa* [the 'inner instrument' or 'inner organ', the various functions of which are classified in four divisions, *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *cittam*

(will) and *ahamkāram* (ego)] the same teaching reflects in different ways. If you think you can write a better commentary, you may write your own'. Taking this prompting to be Bhagavan's blessings, Lakshmana Sarma wrote his Tamil commentary on *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* and his English book *Maha Yoga*.

There are various stories in the *Upaniṣads* and *Purāṇas* that illustrate what Bhagavan said, namely that according to the purity of the *antaḥkaraṇa* the same teaching reflects in different ways. One such story is as follows: Indra and a *rākṣasa* [demon] both received the teaching '*tat tvam asi*' [that you are] from a *guru*. The *rākṣasa* understood this to mean that his body is 'that' [*brahman*, the ultimate reality], so he began to do *tapas* to make his body immortal and to gain power and pleasures for himself. Indra, however, carefully considered the meaning of this teaching for one hundred years, and finally concluded that his body could not be *brahman*, so he returned to the *guru* and asked whether his *prāṇa* [life] could be *brahman*, to which the *guru* replied: 'No, you are not the *prāṇa*; you are that'. After another hundred years of *manana* [deep and careful consideration] he decided that perhaps his mind is *brahman*, but when he asked the *guru* he was told: 'No, you are not the mind; you are that'. After a further hundred years of *manana* he decided that perhaps his intellect is *brahman*, but the *guru* told him: 'No, you are not the intellect; you are that'. After yet another hundred years of *manana* he decided that the *ānandamaya kōśa* [the will, which consists of *vāsanās*] must be *brahman*, but the *guru* said: 'No, you are not the *ānandamaya kōśa*; you are that'. After carefully considering this, he understood that he is the awareness in which all these five sheaths appear and disappear, so he turned his attention back within to investigate awareness itself, and thereby he merged forever in that, as that.

Since the mind of the *rākṣasa* was very impure, he did not pause to think carefully about the teaching he was given, so he hastily concluded that his body is *brahman*. In other words, he stopped at the stage of *śravaṇa* [hearing the teaching] and did not go on to do *manana*, so he failed to understand the deep import of the teaching. Indra's mind, on the other hand, was more pure, so he did not jump to any hasty conclusion, but carefully considered what the teaching actually meant, and as a result of his careful and patient *manana* his

mind was further purified, so he eventually understood the correct meaning and practical implication of the teaching, and hence he did *nididhyāsana* [deep contemplation], turning his attention back within to investigate and know who am I.

From beginning to end, the teaching of the *guru* remained the same: ‘*tat tvam asi*’. However, because of his dedicated *manana* Indra’s mind was progressively purified by meditating on the words of his *guru*, so he steadily came closer to understanding the correct import and practical implication of the teaching.

Another story is one that Natananandar refers to at the beginning of his *nūṁmukham* [foreword] to *Śrī Ramaṇa Vari* [the Tamil original of *The Path of Sri Ramana*]. The *ēkāḁsara* [single syllable] *mantra* ‘*da*’ was given to *dēvas* [gods], *asuras* [demons] and men. The *dēvas*, who enjoyed indulging in sensual pleasures, took it to mean ‘control yourself’ (*dama*). The *asuras*, who were cruel, took it to mean ‘be kind’ (*dayā*). And men, who were avaricious, took it to mean ‘give’ (*dānam*). Each of them interpreted the same one syllable in a different way in accordance with the nature and maturity of their respective mind.

Likewise, people understand and interpret Bhagavan’s teachings in various different ways, each in accordance with the purity of their own *antaḁkaraṇa*. For example, in verse 8 of *Uḁḁadu Nārpadu* Bhagavan says:

Whoever worships [it] in whatever form giving [it] whatever name, that is the way to see that *poruḁ!* [the real substance, namely *brahman*] in name and form. However, [by] investigating the reality of oneself, [and thereby] dissolving in the reality of that true substance, becoming one [with it] alone is seeing [it] in reality. Know.

The first word of the second sentence of this verse is ‘*āyiṇum*’, which means ‘however’, so Bhagavan is contrasting what he says in the first sentence with what he says in the second one. Obviously the means mentioned in each of these sentences is different. In the first one the means is worshipping name and form, whereas in the second it is investigating the reality of oneself. However, the contrast between these two sentences lies not only in the means but also in the result. In the first the result is ‘*pēr-uruvil a-p-poruḁlai kāṇ*’, which means ‘seeing that *poruḁ!* in name and form’, whereas in the second the result is ‘*uṇṁmaiḁil kāṇal*’, ‘seeing [it] in reality’.

The suffix ‘-il’ in both ‘*pēr-uruvil*’ (in name and form) and ‘*uṅmaiyl*’ (in reality) is the locative case ending, so it means ‘in’, and hence the contrast is between ‘seeing in name and form’ and ‘seeing in reality’, with the obvious implication that seeing in name and form is not seeing in reality. However, ‘-il’ can also be taken to be a poetic abbreviation of either ‘*illāda*’ or ‘*illāmal*’.

The former, namely ‘*illāda*’, is a negative adjectival participle that means ‘which is without’, so ‘*pēr-uru-v-illāda a-p-poruḷai*’ means ‘that *poruḷ*, which is without name and form’ or ‘that nameless and formless *poruḷ*’. This meaning is not wrong, because the one real substance is nameless and formless, but it is not the meaning intended by Bhagavan, because ‘*illāda*’ is an adjectival participle, so it modifies ‘*a-p-poruḷai*’ [that *poruḷ*] and not ‘*kāṇ*’ [seeing], and hence if we interpret ‘*pēr-uruvil*’ to mean ‘nameless and formless’, it leaves open the question whether worshipping that nameless and formless *poruḷ* in name and form is the way to see it in name and form or in reality.

However, some devotees take the ‘-il’ in ‘*pēr-uruvil*’ to mean ‘*illāmal*’, which is an adverb that means ‘without’, so ‘*pēr-uru-v-illāmal a-p-poruḷai kāṇ*’ means ‘seeing that *poruḷ* without name and form’. This is not the correct meaning, because seeing it without name and form is seeing it as it really is, which is what Bhagavan means by ‘*uṅmaiyl kāṇal*’, ‘seeing [it] in reality’, in the second sentence. Therefore, if we take it in this sense, there would be no significant contrast between the first and second sentences, in which case the word ‘*āyiṇum*’, ‘however’, would become redundant. That is, if we take ‘*pēr-uruvil*’ to mean ‘without name and form’, taken together the two sentences would imply that there are two alternative ways to see the real substance in reality, that is, without name and form, namely worshipping it in name and form or investigating the reality of oneself. That this is not the meaning intended by Bhagavan is made clear not only by the word ‘*āyiṇum*’, ‘however’, but also by his teachings as a whole.

Though this is clearly not the correct meaning, it appeals to those whose minds are drawn to *nāma-rūpa upāsana* [worship of name and form], so the fact that such devotees prefer to interpret it in this way illustrates what Bhagavan said about the same teaching reflecting in

the minds of different devotees in different ways according to the purity of the *antaḥkaraṇa* of each of them.

Worshipping God in name and form cannot be the direct means to see him as he really is, namely without name and form, but it can be an indirect means to do so, because if we worship him in name and form without desire for anything else but only for the love of him, that will purify the mind and thereby give it the clarity to recognise that the only means to see him in reality is to become one with him by investigating the reality of oneself and thereby dissolving in him, as Bhagavan implies in verse 3 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

Niṣkāmya karma [action not motivated by desire] done [with love] for God purifies the mind and [thereby] it will show the path to liberation [that is, it will make one recognise what the correct path to liberation is].

27th January 1979

Sadhu Om: We should always be able to withdraw ourselves from thoughts. If we are following any train of thoughts and see that it is not leading us anywhere that is conducive to our spiritual progress, we should immediately leave it by bringing our attention back to ourselves.

There is a game that children used to play. From a broken mud pot they would make a disc, on top of which they would place a coloured piece of paper of the same size and shape. They would then throw the disc up in the air, so up to a certain height it would push the paper, until it began to fall back to earth, whereupon it would leave the paper floating in the air.

As ego, the first thought, we are like the disc, and all other thoughts are like the piece of paper being pushed upwards by the disc. So long as we rise as ego, we allow our attention to go outwards, away from ourselves towards other things, so we are thereby pushing thoughts in front of us, like the upward-moving disc pushing the piece of paper. However, as soon as we turn our attention back to ourselves, we begin to subside, sinking back within towards the source from which we rose, being drawn back there by the pull of grace, like the disc that has lost its upward momentum and therefore begins to fall back to earth, being drawn back there by the pull of gravity. Just as the falling disc leaves the paper drifting in the air without any support, the inward-sinking

ego leaves all other thoughts behind, so without the support of our attention all other thoughts drift away into oblivion.

That is, what impels other thoughts to rise is only the attention we give them, so when we seem to be following any thoughts, we are actually driving them with our attention, like the rising disc pushing the paper upwards. Therefore, when we turn our attention back to face ourself alone, we thereby deprive all other thoughts of our attention, and since they seem to exist only in our awareness, when we thereby cease to be aware of them, they cease to exist, as Bhagavan implies in the sixth paragraph of *Nān Ār?* (Who am I?):

If other thoughts rise, without trying to complete them it is necessary to investigate to whom they have occurred. However many thoughts rise, [so] what? Vigilantly, as soon as each thought appears, if one investigates to whom it has occurred, it will be clear: to me. If one investigates who am I [by vigilantly attending to oneself, the 'me' to whom everything else appears], the mind will return to its birthplace [namely oneself, the source from which it arose]; [and since one thereby refrains from attending to it] the thought that had risen will also cease. When one practises and practises in this manner, for the mind the power to stand firmly established in its birthplace increases. ▲

(To be continued)

How Long Should I Wait?

Suresh Kailash

Before my eyes drink and my lashes trace
the soft contours of your face,

Before my ears breathe the calming fragrance
of words only you know to say,

Before my skin tastes the shiver of light
your touch leaves in its wake,

Before I am dissolved, sated and safe,
in the cascade of your grace,

Ramana, how long should I wait?

Synchronicity on the Spiritual Path

S. RAGHU RAMAN

For spiritual seekers, there are occasions when events line up with uncanny precision. More often than not these extraordinary coincidences help the seeker move forward on the chosen spiritual path. Paul Brunton had packed his bags to move on from South India after his unsuccessful search for a ‘real master’. Just then a yellow-robed Yogi, Subramanya, who he had met briefly, alludes to a ‘wisest man in India’ living on the mountain of Arunachala. But Brunton remained unimpressed and curtly dismissed Subramanya. The next morning, the writer Venkatramani, took him to meet the Kanchi Shankaracharya Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal. This meeting, again unplanned, turned out to be a life-changer for Brunton. The Shankaracharya too referred Paul Brunton to ‘the Maharishee’ who lived on Arunachala for guidance. That evening when Brunton returned to his home, he found to his immense surprise, Subramanya waiting patiently to accompany him to Arunachala.¹

¹ Paul Brunton, *A Search in Secret India*. B.I. Publications, New Delhi, 1970.

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It is also true that sometimes these stunning coincidences reach across and connect different states of consciousness, like dreams and wakefulness. Chhaganlal Yogi, an ardent devotee, wanted to spend his days with Ramana Maharshi but his family commitments tied him to Mumbai. But he did try to take a bold step forward and decided to sell his printing press in Mumbai. That early morning, when he was half-awake Chhaganlal had a vision in which Bhagavan Ramana appeared with a friend of his who had never visited the Ramanasramam and had little faith in Bhagavan. In this vision, Bhagavan pointed out to the friend and asked Chhaganlal to sell the press to him. When Chhaganlal asked about the selling price Bhagavan showed him a five-figure number ‘that were shining like a neon sign’. That day when Chhaganlal reached his press at 11 AM, the friend whom Bhagavan pointed out, was waiting for Chhaganlal in the printing press. He had come for some other work but when Chhaganlal narrated the vision to him he quickly agreed to buy the press for the same amount suggested in the vision. The deal was completed in less than a minute!²

Can these events be considered as mere coincidences; events conjoining perchance and so not worthy of further thought and investigation? Some of the towering intellects of the 20th century did not think so. Their conclusions about this phenomenon paint a picture that appears very similar to what many Eastern spiritual traditions have long maintained; the psyche or the inner world and the outer world are not separate and independent, rather there is unity between the two.

Physics, Psychology and Meaningful Coincidences

Carl Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist, coined the term ‘synchronicity’ for events that he described as ‘meaningful coincidences’ of external events with the inner states of the individual. He argued that the sequence of an improbable chain of events leading to ‘meaning’ for the observer could not be explained by mere chance. In his long clinical practice, he had carefully collected numerous episodes of synchronicity and documented it quite meticulously. Analysis of this evidence and a publication of a book-long treatise on the topic opened up to the world the reality of the synchronistic phenomenon. Take,

² David Godman, *The Power of the Presence, Part Two*, pp. 227-8. (2001) New Leaf Distributing Company.

for instance, a now-famous anecdote, that he recollected in his book *Synchronicity: An acausal connecting principle*:

*“A young woman I was treating had, at a critical moment, a dream in which she was given a golden scarab. While she was telling me this dream I sat with my back to the closed window. Suddenly, I heard a noise behind me, like a gentle tapping. I turned around and saw a flying insect knocking against the windowpane from outside. I opened the window and caught the creature in the air as it flew in. It was the nearest analogy to a golden scarab that one finds in our latitudes, a scarabaeid beetle...which contrary to its usual habits had evidently felt an urge to get into a dark room at this particular moment.”*³

Jung was also of the view that synchronicity, which to the western mind went against the principle of causality, was not alien to many Eastern civilisations. He observed that it underlay many Eastern divination practices. For instance, I Ching, the Chinese divination practice where sticks or toss of coins determine the shape of hexagrams which are then interpreted for ‘meaning’ by the participant, have been in use for hundreds of years. Carl Jung suggested that I Ching worked on chance events, like the tossing and counting of Yarrow stalks, and these chance details become an integral part of the moment and guide the participant towards an answer.⁴ It is as though what appear to be disconnected events like the throwing of a coin and the inner state of the individual are somehow connected. As Arthur Miller explained:

“In the Western world, we usually assume that events develop sequentially, one after the other, by a process of cause and effect. But Jung was convinced that as well as a vertical connection, events might also have a horizontal connection – that all the events occurring all over the world at any one moment were linked in a kind of grand network. Thus...(in) I Ching, the throwing of the coins coincided with one’s feelings

³ C.G. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1972, p. 31.

⁴ See C.G. Jung, Foreword to *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, translation Richard Wilhelm, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1968.

at that precise moment and the answer reflected the truth of that moment."⁵

Carl Jung's close and long interaction with the Physicist and Nobel Prize winner Wolfgang Pauli encouraged him to place synchronicity as another universal principle like space-time or energy. Synchronicity, for Jung, was no more mysterious than quantum physics. The reluctance to recognise synchronistic phenomena, he thought, stemmed from the almost unmovable faith in the power of causality. It not only created impediments in proper understanding but also made it 'unthinkable that causeless events exist or could ever occur'⁶.

However, in recent years, as the astrophysicist and Buddhist meditation practitioner, Victor Mansfield pointed out, advancements in our understanding of quantum physics have opened up a world that is filled with mind-bending surprises, like malleability of space and time, nonlocality or instantaneous communication between objects that are separated by vast distances and the role of observers or consciousness in bringing to actuality objects. This radically new world-view, Mansfield argued, is more 'accommodative' of a phenomenon like synchronicity.⁷

The insight that matter and psyche are sustained by a manifestation of a deeper 'something' that is beyond the material realm has provided some clues about synchronicity and its role. The physicist David Peat pulls these different strands together and notes how synchronistic experiences can give us a glimpse of the unity of psyche and matter:

"Just as the elementary particles are maintained by a dance that transcends the world of matter, so, too, is mind sustained by dynamics that lie beyond both mind and matter. Beyond mind and matter, there are therefore patterns and symmetries which have a generative and animating effect. During a synchronicity it becomes possible, for an instant, to touch these regions so that

⁵ Arthur I. Miller, *Deciphering the Cosmic Number*, W.W. Norton & Company Inc, New York, 2009, p. 188.

⁶ C.G. Jung, 1972, op. cit., p. 141.

⁷ See Victor Mansfield, *Synchronicity, Science and Soul-making*, Open Court Publishing Company, 1995.

within the conjunction of coincidences is enfolded something truly universal that lies at the heart of all creation and touches the most basic rhythms of existence.”⁸

Synchronicity in Devotees’ Lives

It is not surprising, given the power of synchronistic experiences to uncover the underlying unity, that such meaningful coincidences have turned out to be pivotal for many people undertaking spiritual pursuits. Typically, synchronistic experiences trigger in people a feeling of transcendence; a perception that the experience was beyond the ordinary realm of existence. That somehow an unseen hand had put together events. Such strong perceptions are not rare. For instance, Arthur Koestler collected a large set of synchronistic experiences from people from different walks of life and most of them see it ‘as the expressions of some agency outside of our normal psychic and physical spheres of experience’⁹. It has been suggested that such intense and genuine synchronistic experience carry with them the quality of ‘numinous’ or the presence of divinity and so it is a ‘sacred knowledge’ that imbues the recipients with ‘religious devotion’¹⁰. Ultimately as Bolen points out in *The Tao of Psychology* the benefits of synchronicity are that not only do we feel that we are part of something that is ‘far greater than ourselves’ but that such a force constantly reaffirms the validity of the spiritual path that we are treading on or the invalidity of it¹¹. Experiences of Bhagavan’s devotees do lend credence to such assertions.

Kunju Swami came to Bhagavan in 1920. His arrival was made possible when events and persons, known and unknown, strung together in unexplainable ways. Kunju Swami was desperate to go to Tiruvannamalai after the Jeeva Samadhi event of his first guru Samiar Gounder had failed. Out of the blue, his father asked Kunju Swami whether he owed anyone money during his stay with Samiar

⁸ F. David Peat, *Synchronicity: The Bridge Between Matter and Mind*, Bantam Books, New York, 1987, p. 111-112.

⁹ Cited in Roderick Main, *Revelations of Chance*, State University of New York Press, 2007, p. 54.

¹⁰ Victor Mansfield, *Head and Heart*, Quest Books, 2002.

¹¹ Jean Shinoda Bolen, *The Tao of Psychology*, Harper & Row, 1979.

Gounder. He said yes ('a harmless lie' to attain a 'lofty goal', and that's how he justified it to himself). The next morning, he left home taking five rupees that his father had given to settle dues. He reached the nearest railway station to be told that a ticket would be issued only till Katpadi junction (miles away from Tiruvannamalai). At Katpadi, although he was told that the train to Tiruvannamalai was at 6.30 AM, he realised that the train had left much early. He waited for the evening train and to his utter shock was told that tickets will not be issued to Tiruvannamalai. An elderly stranger drew him aside and gave him an idea. The person said that trains do not stop at Tiruvannamalai because of a plague outbreak, however, as the epidemic had now reduced he can, instead, buy a ticket to Thirukovilur (beyond Tiruvannamalai) and when the train made a brief stop at Tiruvannamalai to unload mail bags he could slip out. Refreshed by this piece of unsolicited and timely advice Kunju Swami went to the ticket counter and asked for a ticket to Thirukovilur. To his utter despair, he found that he was short by quarter anna. A deficit so trivial and yet for a young man fresh out of home completely unbridgeable. But synchronistic events continued to unfold. Downcast Kunju Swami moved to a corner of the platform and there right on the railway tracks was a quarter anna! He stood transfixed but had enough presence of mind to grab it and buy the ticket just as the train rolled into the station. At Tiruvannamalai, when Kunju Swami arrived in the presence of Bhagavan, the path that he had chosen was strongly affirmed when Bhagavan told his mother that another young man has come to take the place of Annamalai Swamy (an attendant who had just passed away due to plague). Kunju Swami in his reminiscences refers to these events as 'miraculous coincidences' and could not but be 'wonderstruck at Bhagavan's act of grace' and how significant these events proved to be in establishing him in the path of Ramana.¹²

In the same vein, synchronistic events can also point to the futility and the wrongness of the path adopted. Annamalai Swami (not the attendant referred to earlier but a devotee who almost single-handedly built many structures at Ramanashram) had wanted to leave the ashram

¹² Kunju Swami, *Reminiscences of Kunju Swami*, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 2017, p. 24.

and continue spiritual practice elsewhere. He left without telling Bhagavan. What happened subsequently made him realise his folly. He recounted the following:

“I spent the whole night walking and reached Polur [twenty miles north of Tiruvannamalai] just after dawn. The walk had made me very hungry so I decided to go for bhiksha in the town. It was not a great success. I begged at about 500 different houses but no one gave me any food. One man told me that I should go back to Tiruvannamalai while another man, who was serving a meal when I approached him, shouted at me, telling me to go away. Eventually, I gave up and walked to the outskirts of the town. I found a well in a field and spent about half an hour standing in it, with the water up to my neck, hoping that the coldness of the water would take my hunger pains away. It didn't work. Then I made my way to the samadhi [shrine] of Vitthoba and sat there for a while... It was clear that things had not turned out in the way that I had expected. This indicated to me that the decision might not have been correct...I took a large handful of flowers, placed them on the samadhi of Vitthoba and started to remove them two at a time. I had decided in advance that if there were an odd number of flowers I would return to Bhagavan...the result indicated that I should go back to Bhagavan. I immediately accepted the decision and started walking towards Tiruvannamalai... my luck began to change. As I was walking into town a hotel owner invited me into his hotel and gave me a free meal and some money. He even prostrated to me...more people invited me into their house and asked me to eat. I ate a little food there and then excused myself on the grounds that I had just eaten a big meal. I had decided to try to travel without a ticket, wrongly assuming that the money I had been given would not be enough for the journey. My good luck continued on the train. Half way to Tiruvannamalai a ticket inspector came to inspect all the tickets. I seemed to be invisible to him, for I was the only person in the carriage who was not asked to produce a ticket... On my arrival I went straight to Bhagavan, prostrated before him, and told him everything that

*had happened. Looking at me he said, 'You have work to do here. If you try to leave without doing the jobs that are destined for you, where can you go?'"*¹³

These types of events are also transformative. The core beliefs that people hold often shift as they stand mute witness to the sheer improbability of the seamless connection that some synchronicities bring about between what is typically considered as different states of consciousness. In some cases, these experiences propel them on to a spiritual path that they had never considered before. Shri Prabhakar who came to Bhagavan in the late 1940s was a rationalist and had no special interest in anything spiritual. But a dream and subsequent meaningful coincidences changed him. He had a dream in which his boss introduced Bhagavan to him and told Prabhakar to have his darshan. In that dream, Prabhakar said that neither he had the intent nor the money to do it. When the boss offered to sponsor the trip, Prabhakar said that he required 60 rupees. The dream ended there. Prabhakar was reluctant to talk about it but finally, he did, but skipped the part about money. To begin with, the boss was indifferent but in a short while quizzed Prabhakar about his intent to visit Bhagavan. Prabhakar said he did want to go and before he could say anything more the boss had written to him a cheque for, of course, 60 rupees. The day he reached the ashram Bhagavan was eagerly looking at the entrance as though waiting for someone and when Prabhakar reached there he was welcomed into the fold with 'a beaming smile and a welcoming nod' from Bhagavan. That moment the rationalist Prabhakar simply melted away and morphed into a devotee who then on went on to compose verses on Ramana Maharshi.¹⁴

The available scholarly work differentiates mere coincidences from synchronicities. The key difference is the meaning that the latter imbues the observer with. These synchronous events communicate and often bring about a sudden understanding to the observer. On the 14th April of 1950, the French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson was in Tiruvannamalai to photograph Bhagavan when he observed a bright meteorite move from the South and disappear behind the

¹³ David Godman, *Living by the Words of Bhagavan*, pp. 30-32, 1994.

¹⁴ V. Ganesan, *Moments Remembered*, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 1990.

Arunachala. For Cartier-Bresson it did not appear to be just a celestial phenomenon, it signified something substantial. So much so that he recorded the time of the event as 8:47 pm. Later that night when he went to the Ramanashram he was told that Bhagavan had attained Mahanirvana at exactly 8:47 pm.¹⁵ Thousands of people had witnessed the meteorite across India. Suri Nagamma, a long-time devotee of Bhagavan noted in her diary that Bhagavan's devotees in places as far away as Madras realised, as and when they saw the meteorite, that Bhagavan had shed his mortal coils. They rushed to Tiruvannamalai immediately not even waiting for any official confirmation or news¹⁶. They simply knew.

Several devotees of Bhagavan have noted that synchronistic events occurred quite frequently in his presence. Of course, Bhagavan neither paid any attention to these events nor emphasised them. However, for his devotees, these episodes left them with a sense of wonder. Once, G. Ramaswami Pillai, an ardent devotee of Bhagavan, surprised at a turn of synchronistic episodes, asked for an explanation. Bhagavan, surprisingly, answered. He said "This happened because of *sannidhi vishesham* – the power of presence, of awareness. There is no interlude of thought or desire involved in this *sannidhi vishesham*."¹⁷

Ultimately, synchronicities point out that we do not live in a cold, mechanical, indifferent universe. It suggests that there are larger forces at play, which science is just beginning to understand, that guide us towards the realisation of who we are. As Bolan observed 'at the most profound level, synchronicity can lead us to the awareness that we are part of something far greater than ourselves, and to a sense of wholeness'¹⁸. That is a thought that should comfort us and keep us moving on our chosen paths. ▲

¹⁵ *Sadguru Sri Ramana Maharshi, Saridhamam Upadesamum* (Tamil), Volume 8, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 200.

¹⁶ Suri Nagamma, *Sri Ramanasrama Vāzhvum Ninaivum* (Tamil), Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 1999.

¹⁷ V. Ganesan, *Ramana Periya Puranam*, <http://aham.com/RamanaPeriyaPuranam>, p. 109.

¹⁸ Jean Shinoda Bolen, op. cit., p. xii-xiii.



The Understanding of an Ignorant Man

N.S. VENKATARAMAN

I am a 76 year-old Chemical Engineer, still working as Chief Executive in a Chemical consultancy organisation based in Chennai. I am a devotee of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi and a careful reader of Mountain Path for the last several years.

In his teachings, Bhagavan has given two alternative paths for individuals, namely surrender or self-enquiry to realise the essence of life.

Until recently, I have been following the path of surrender, visiting temple almost every day and implicitly believing everything said in the scriptures and by the saints. I believed that God will ensure my progress and relieve me from any distress and show me the path forward. I am sure that millions of people around the world follow this path of surrender to God without questioning or adopting self-enquiry efforts.

Unlike most other surrenderists, I have not memorised *slokas* to recite them in temples or in other religious functions. But, I know

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the names of several Gods and Goddesses and repeat them several times every day as part of my process of surrender to God. I think that most other surrenderists do the same either by way of reciting *ślokas* or repeating the names of God. In most of the *ślokas*, the content contains praise for Gods and Goddesses or words of surrender and the surrenderists believe that repeating them even without clearly understanding the significance will bring them good tidings. Such surrenderists rarely give up the passion for life and material affluence. Their expectations and desires continue along with the belief in God and hope for benefits in the present life due to their devotion to God.

While most of the surrenderists surrender to God totally with genuine belief and faith, many of them do not desist from dishonest dealings in personal and public life. This is why we see many rich business men, politicians and affluent persons, who indulge in malpractices to accumulate wealth and power, repeatedly go to temples. They opt for paid *darśan* unmindful of the large queue of poor people who cannot afford to pay and hence wait for *darśan*. Many rich people are seen ‘donating’ large sums of money and gold to God, to reap the benefits of their surrender.

In temples too, we see most of the priests doing *pūjas*, who are viewed by the devotees as an intermediary between the devotee and God, show special consideration for the rich and powerful devotees and care little for the poor and downtrodden. On many occasions, we see the priests openly demanding high fees for conducting *pūjas* and negotiating for the fees, just like autorickshaw drivers.

Most of the religious discourses seem like storytelling exercise mingling Sanskrit *ślokas* with regional language and sometimes, set to musical tune to impress the listeners. Those giving discourses and providing ‘teachings’ in most cases, take fees, treating it as profession. It appears that millions of people follow the path of surrender, with worldly expectations and desires, with the belief that their belief in God and strong prayers will get them benefits.

Of course, on several occasions in the past sixty years, I have felt relieved by surrendering myself to God and expecting that God would take care of the problems and relieve me from the distress conditions. While the surrender gives much relief to the mental state

(is it convenient and wishful relief?), the distress conditions stay in many situations, for whatever reasons.

After more than sixty years of surrender, I feel disillusioned. This surrender has not taken me anywhere and the net effect is I feel frustrated and uncertain.

I have come to the conclusion, may be due to lack of clear understanding and clarity of thought, that surrender to God may not make one realise God by itself. It has not happened to me or happened in the case of millions of surrenderists. In any case, the surrender path does not seem to be suitable for me. Am I going to temples and listening to discourses as a matter of routine, I often wonder?

I think as to what is the alternative path for me. The only alternative, as shown by Bhagavan, is self-enquiry.

Therefore, I have started the self-enquiry exercise process now. Self-enquiry obviously means self-introspection, which can be done only by thought process. But, then, several scriptures indicate that the thought process cannot go on beyond a level and reach and it has severe limitations. It is said that God cannot be understood and reached by utilising the physical brain in human body.

Then, does it mean simply that one should take the religious preachings and advocacy for granted, without questioning and then resort to self-enquiry based on such preachings taken for granted? This seems to be what several devotees on the self-enquiry path are doing now.

Every religion and all sayings have advocated honesty in thoughts and actions, charitable attitude, hate for none, non-violence and so on. Those who are in the self-enquiry process wonder whether such approach of goodness is all that is required to realise the ultimate truth of life.

“Who am I?” Bhagavan asks and explains several aspects with respect to the concept of Self.

Go for meditation, keep the thoughts only on God and strive towards self-realisation in the process and reach the state of ‘*ananda*’. This is what devotees are told, as I understand. ‘*Ananda*’ is interpreted as ‘Supreme bliss’. Does it mean supreme human happiness? I do not know, as I have not felt it.

The basic question that haunts a person throughout his life is where he came from and where he would go after death. Meanwhile, one

MOUNTAIN PATH

is told about rebirths as if anyone would really know as to whether rebirths really take place.

As one becomes aged and have passed through 'best time of life', the thought process regarding where one came from and where one would go after death becomes intense, leading to a sense of helplessness and frustration and may be even fear.

At this stage of thought, people are told that one must go to a 'guru', to get clarity of thought. This is probably why many retired persons and senior citizens and some youth in the thought process are seen at the feet of a guru. The person runs everywhere and then surrenders to a guru desperately seeking to know the fact of life.

Ultimately, it appears that everyone dies unwillingly and helplessly and *unclear and uncertain*. People helplessly believe that there must be something that can be called as 'creator', thus interpreting in the same way as one would do in the worldly way of life. This is the end of understanding of an ignorant man as of now.

I am certainly an ignorant person still searching for the meaning of life. But, where are the less ignorant people? ▲

Feathers in the Wind

Suresh Kailash

Isn't it strange how we travel so far,
to get to the place we already are,
Only to find that we still had to try,
otherwise we could've never arrived?

But stranger it is, that all that we did,
is be unknowing feathers in the wind,
For, could we've ever come to this place,
if not carried by his abundant grace?

So, what can we do but daily prostrate,
to he who waits at our heart's open gate
And give gratitude for this flood of peace,
that flows to us unhindered from his feet.

KEYWORD

Āsthita

One Who Abides

B.K. CROISSANT

There is such a thing as mindless repetition. It may, in fact, get us through the day. But there is a higher plane, a kind of mind-full repetition that can help get us to the place we all want to be! In that case, what has been endlessly repeated, like a cherished *mantram*, slowly transforms the individual from the inside. It magically ripens the fruit.

Speaking of repetition, many great mystical poets are masters of it, and Aṣṭāvakra is no exception. A great place to prove that point is the skillful use of refrains in the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā*. There are all varieties to choose from, so we can start with a quick overview.

A refrain can simply be one word. For example, ‘*niścayī*’ meaning ‘one who has understood with certitude’. It occurs consistently at the end of the second *pāda* in all eight verses of Chapter XI. Standing alone majestically, it is pivotal, for without rock solid certitude and unless all doubts have been removed, it is impossible for the individual soul to merge permanently into the Ocean of Being. *Niścayī* binds

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the verses together like the thread in a necklace of gems that, in this case, constitute a glorious hymn to the Absolute.

A second example is the word ‘*kva*’ meaning ‘where’. It appears steadily, unwincingly even, throughout Chapters XIX and XX, the last two in the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā*. Janaka has the microphone, and, for our benefit, he is rapidly reviewing everything that must be dropped in a thrilling grand finale. Like a concert when the tempo increases at the end of a musical composition, the word makes an unmistakable impression that affects us both physically and emotionally. We walk away from the performance with it still pounding in our ears and palpably touching the heart.

Sometimes a refrain is a phrase that embellishes exalted verses and helps the meaning sink in through repetition. An example occurs in Chapter II where the phrase ‘*aho aham namo mahyam*’, meaning ‘Wonderful am I! Adoration to Myself’, consistently claims and entirely occupies the first *pāda* in verses 11-14. Janaka is speaking at the mountain top directly from the heart when, hearing the truth expounded by his guru in Chapter I and after totally surrendering, he sees the Self in all of its Glory for the first time.

An even more stunning example is found in Chapters II and VII where three successive verses begin with the phrase ‘*mayyananta mahāmbodhau*’, meaning ‘in the limitless Ocean of Me’. The bottom line in these verses, 23-25 in Chapter II and 1-3 in Chapter VII, is the Vedic message ‘You are the Ocean, not the waves’.¹

Sometimes a repeated phrase is in opposition to another repeated phrase, thereby highlighting an important truth. Chapter V and Chapter VI, for instance, are linked by their refrains. In Chapter V the phrase ‘*evam eva layam vraja*’, meaning ‘in this way, enter into *laya*, the state of dissolution’ ends every verse, and in Chapter VI ‘*iti jñānam tathaitasya na tyāgo na graho layaḥ*’, meaning ‘there is nothing to be renounced nor to be accepted nor to be destroyed’, does the same. In Chapter V Aṣṭāvakra is speaking to his disciple on a practical level, offering contemplation as a tool for reaching *laya* or dissolution of the mind. In the following Chapter, he uses Janaka as a mouthpiece

¹ See the *Mountain Path*, January-March 2022, pp. 53-60, for a detailed commentary on *ananta-mahāmbhodhi* as a keyword.

to teach that eventually even contemplation, which involves the mind, must be abandoned. In Pure Consciousness, there is simply no room for thoughts of any kind at any time!

Finally, a refrain can be a phrase that is repeated in every verse of a Chapter or in every verse with only one or two exceptions, a literary device the poet uses frequently. An outstanding example occurs in Chapter XII, which is conveyed by Janaka in an exalted state. The phrase ‘*evam evāham āsthitaḥ*,’ ‘Thus do I verily abide as Myself’ ends every verse except the last one, which majestically concludes the composition with its own rhythm and special beauty. ‘*Āsthitaḥ*’, the last word in verses 1-7, is a past passive participle from *ā*, an enhancer, plus the root *sthā*, meaning ‘stand or remain by’, in this case the Self.

Abiding or being permanently established in the pure, unconditioned Self, is a potent *leit-motif* throughout the entire *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā*, and in Chapter XII, the persistent and unrelenting use of ‘*āsthita*’ clearly underlies its importance.² It is the theme of the first introductory verse of Ramana Maharshi’s *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* which ends with “Know that abiding in the Heart as it is (that is, without thought, as ‘I am’), alone is meditating (upon the Reality).”³ It alone is to know God or the Absolute.

Chapter XII is one of many portraits of a *jñānī* that abound in the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā*. Spoken by Janaka, it is a very personal one, and, with only eight verses, especially succinct. Other more extended portraits are found in Chapter XVII, comprised of twenty verses, and in Chapter XVIII where, in one hundred inspired verses, Aṣṭāvakra summarises all of his teachings. Unlike the other portraits, here the poet explains in the first person the various stages leading to the final goal when only the Self is experienced at all times and in all places. Although quite different in both context and content, Chapter XII is reminiscent of Sri Ramana Maharshi’s unique and well-known description of his own enlightenment that took place as a young man in his uncle’s house in Madurai. Janaka begins the Chapter on an uncompromising note.

² Aṣṭāvakra uses other terms denoting abidance or rest in the Self, such as ‘*svastha*’, ‘resting, standing in one’s own self’ and ‘*svāsthya*’, ‘abidance in the Self’. A powerful refrain, ‘*svamahimni sthitasya me*’, meaning ‘for me who abides in my own grandeur’, occurs in Chapter XIX.

³ Translation by Sadhu Om.

कायकृत्यासहः पूर्वं ततो वाग्विस्तरासहः ।
अथ चिन्तासहस्तस्माद् एवमेवाहमास्थितः ॥

kāya-kr̥tyāsaḥaḥ pūrvam tato vāg-vistarāsaḥaḥ,
atha cintāsaḥas tasmād evam evāham āsthitaḥ. (verse 1)

First I was averse to physical activity, then averse to excessive speech and finally averse to thought. Thus do I verily abide as Myself.⁴

There comes a time when practices requiring the body are set aside. They seem redundant, no longer worthy of attention. Empty. Lectures, even the scriptures fall away. Finally every thought becomes a nuisance, even painful compared to the repose that swallows everything up. This is the state of the jñānī. All thoughts are distractions and all disciplines have been transcended. There is no more effort, just endless, unbroken Peace. No more wind to stir the flame or rock the ship.

प्रीत्यभावेन शब्दादेरदृश्यत्वेन चात्मनः ।
विक्षेपैकाग्रहृदय एवमेवाहमास्थितः ॥

prītyabhāvena śabdāder adṛśyatvena cātmanah,
vikṣepaikāgra-hṛdaya evam evāham āsthitaḥ. (verse 2)

Lacking enjoyment from the senses and knowing the Self is imperceptible, my mind being single-pointed and free from distractions, thus do I verily abide as Myself.

The surrender is complete. The world and thoughts have no more attraction. Unless the world is completely gone, the Self, which has no form and cannot be grasped by the mind through the senses, will not be reached nor can It shine.

समाध्यासादिविक्षिप्तौ व्यवहारः समाधये ।
एवं विलोक्य नियममेवमेवाहमास्थितः ॥

samādhyāsādi-vikṣiptau vyavahāraḥ samādhaye,
evam vilokya niyamam evam evāham āsthitaḥ. (verse 3)

Seeing that efforts to concentrate the mind are necessary as a rule when there are distractions from false impositions, thus do I verily abide as Myself.

⁴ Quoted Sanskrit verses translated by the author.

Inventions of the mind are all imposters. Efforts to control them through discipline and practise are at first necessary, and nothing is possible without that. But, beyond a certain point, those very attempts lose their power and simply drop off. When the mind is gone, there is only One. Who is to concentrate and on what?

हेयोपादेयविरहाद् एवं हर्षविषादयोः ।
अभावादद्य हे ब्रह्मन् एवमेवाहमास्थितः ॥

heyopādeya-virahād evaṁ harṣa-viṣādayoḥ,
abhāvād adya he brahmannevaṁ evāham āsthitaḥ. (verse 4)

Having abandoned the dualities of acceptance and rejection and now free from pleasure and grief, O Brahman, thus do I verily abide as Myself.

Good and bad, pleasure and pain are only in the mind. How can they exist without it? When there is total, absolute Peace the perceived world becomes a dream. Then we are mere performers on a stage, acting but not acting. Like dry leaves pushed by the wind or puppets on a string.

आश्रमानाश्रमं ध्यानं चित्तस्वीकृतवर्जनम् ।
विकल्पं मम वीक्ष्यैतैरेवमेवाहमास्थितः ॥

āśramānāśramaṁ dhyānaṁ citta-svīkṛta-varjanam,
vikalpaṁ mama vīkṣyaitair evaṁ evāham āsthitaḥ. (verse 5)

Having recognised that observing or abandoning the four stages of life are both distractions as well as meditation and accepting or rejecting thoughts, thus do I verily abide as Myself.

No more passion for doing the right thing, like passing through various stages of life as prescribed by tradition. No more need for the vagaries of the mind or attempts to control it when there is no mind. There are no divisions. No distinctions. Just One. And in that One is Everything. A fullness inconceivable to the mind, near at hand, intimate and always there.

कर्मानुष्ठानमज्ञानाद् यथैवोपरमस्तथा ।
बुध्वा सम्यगिदं तत्त्वमेवमेवाहमास्थितः ॥

karmānuṣṭhānam ajnānād yathaihoparamas tathā,
buddhvā samyag idaṁ tattvaṁ evaṁ evāham āsthitaḥ. (verse 6)

MOUNTAIN PATH

Just as abstaining from actions stems from the absence of knowledge so does undertaking them. Fully understanding this truth thus do I verily abide as Myself.

Actions are for the body and for the mind. When the mind is transcended, they play their role naturally without affecting the Peace within. They are not separate from the Self, but they are not the Self either. They are waves with no existence of their own. Miracle of miracles!

अचिन्त्यं चिन्त्यमानोऽपि चिन्तारूपं भजत्यसौ ।
त्यक्त्वा तद्भावनं तस्माद् एवमेवाहमास्थितः ॥

acintyaṁ cintyamāno'pi cintārūpaṁ bhajatyasau,
tyaktvā tad bhāvanam tasmād evam evāham āsthitaḥ. (verse 7)

Even thinking about what is beyond thought involves some kind of thought. So abandoning that thought, thus do I verily abide as Myself.

Practices like 'I am not this, I am That' are mere mental exercises. They are aids to a point but must be consumed by the fire before the Self can shine in all Its Glory. When there is Nothing, there is Everything. Where there is only One, there is Silence only.

एवमेव कृतं येन स कृतार्थो भवेदसौ ।
एवमेव स्वभावो यः स कृतार्थो भवेदसौ ॥

evam eva kṛtaṁ yena sa kṛtārtho bhaved asau,
evam eva svabhāvo yaḥ sa kṛtārtho bhaved asau. (verse 8)

He who has accomplished this and realised his own true nature becomes inexpressibly fulfilled in every way.

One of the most beautiful verses of the entire *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā* is this one! Simple.

Enchanting repetition. No more waves. Profound stillness. Total independence from the world and its vagaries. Freedom from all suffering. Total feeding of the soul on itself, totally swallowed up by the Self. Bliss! No more waves, just Ocean.

There is a wonderful verse from the *Yogavāsishtha* that wraps things up in a nutshell. The goal is inevitable and clear, the path is narrow and discipline is necessary, but we are all bound for the top. Mountaineers call it 'summitting'.

Even after enjoying thousands of years of the basest of sensuous enjoyments, from the Creator to a tuft of grass, no one has ever reached contentment. Having ruled over vast kingdoms for long years, having enjoyed a harem of wives, having destroyed all enemies around the world, what is the unique thing that one can gain? Laboriously struggle to gain That, having gained which, there is nothing more to gain. To gain This, continuously pant and struggle.⁵

Practise, practise, practise without interruption is the resounding message of scriptures and exalted Souls calling and encouraging us to persist. Then we will abide as the Self and become the Self, the only goal worth striving for and the only true fulfillment there is. Reaching the mountain top, coming home, is the theme of the last poem Ramana Maharshi ever wrote, the immortal *Ēkānma Pañchakam*. It ends in Silence and goes as follows.

*To forget oneself, taking oneself to be the body instead,
To pass through countless births until in the end,
We come to know and be our own true Self,
Is like roaming in the world in dream – until we wake again.*

*In spite of being the Self, to ask who one is
And, ‘How did I come to be here like this?’
Is it not like the drunkard who in his wine,
‘Where am I?’ ‘Who am I’ plaintively cries?*

*To think, when the body is within oneself,
That oneself is within the gross body instead,
Is like thinking that the underlying cinema screen
Is contained within the images that on it are seen.*

*Without gold, can we any ornaments see?
Apart from the Self, can there any body be?
The ajñānī is one who takes the body to be ‘I’.
The jñānī who knows himself, as Self alone abides.*

*The Self is the one reality that eternally endures.
When the primal Guru in days of yore
Revealed it by speaking without speech,*

⁵ Translation by Swami Chinmayananda.

*Who could now essay that truth in words to teach?*⁶

So His message never changed, not an iota. You are not just your body, there is only the Self, and you are That. Don't just repeat it, feel it, let it seep into your bones, abide there, and when the dream seems real throughout the day, constantly remember His *Brahmāstram* 'Who am I' to cut the knot that binds you. ▲

Om, śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ.

End of the series of articles inspired by the Aṣṭāvakra Gītā.

NOTES ON QUOTED SANSKRIT VERSES

There are many charming repetitions and captivating rhythms in Chapter XII, as in all other chapters of the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā*. To savour a few, slowly re-read verses 1, 7 and 8. Verse 8, especially, will grip you. It is a marvelous gem worth repeating over and over again. The Chapter's refrain is powerful, so don't dismiss or forget it!

Chanting the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā*, in Sanskrit if possible, can be a wonderful aid to those on the path, especially Chapters I, II, VII and XII. I especially recommend English translations of the treatise by Thomas Byrom and Swami Chinmayananda as well as recordings of the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā* and the *Ēkāṇma Pañchakam* on Sri Ramanasramam's website.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Robert Butler for agreeing to do a beautiful new translation of the *Ēkāṇma Pañchakam* as a fitting culmination to a series of articles inspired by the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā*. It catches the spirit of Bhagavan's poem perfectly and makes the English language dance to its timeless message. Thanks to Christopher Quilkey for allowing me to write more articles than anticipated and for his constant encouragement. Last but not least, thanks to Marcia Solomon for her gracious assistance with the Sanskrit and to various editors with sharp eyes and warm hearts. ▲

⁶ Translation by Robert Butler.

My Recollections of Bhagavan

SHANTA RAMACHANDRAN

I have been asked to recount my recollections of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi.

Of course, my thanks are due to my father. In fact I remember many persons asking my father: How is it that instead of going to [hill stations such as] Kodaikanal, the Nandi Hills, etc. as he went earlier, he was now going to Tiruvannamalai during summer? He used to say ‘those places will always be there’ but how could one say how long Bhagavan would retain his body.

I have vague recollections of the first trip. I think it was [in] 1943, when we were caught in cyclonic weather and the train was stopped at Vellore. We had to halt for 2-3 days and we were lucky to get a room in Voorhees Hostel before the train service to Tiruvannamalai was resumed. There were no rooms available at the Ashram then and we had to stay in a choultry in the town. We took a cart to the Ashram and we saw Bhagavan standing near the Iluppai tree and this was where we did our *namaskār*.

The other trip I remember was during the mid-term holidays when I went with my father and my cousin (Guhan, who was two years younger to me) and stayed for almost 10 days. We stayed on the terrace of a building in which Muruganar was staying in the main room.

Dr. Shanta Ramachandran is the second daughter of Professor K. Swaminathan, a great devotee of Bhagavan and who was the general editor of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*.

It just had a coconut front roofing (what in Tamil we would call – *Thennai olai tattap pandal*) open on three sides. We used to get up early, clean our teeth at a tap outside the Ashram wall [on the side where the Dakshinamurti Temple is situated] and then go into the Ashram for *Vedaparayana*, which used to start around 5 or 5.30 am.

Bhagavan was then staying in a thatched shed to the north and west of the Old Hall, adjacent to what is now the flower garden. It used to be so quiet and still. [There were] no buildings or traffic on the road, no blaring of horns or screeching of brakes, no people on the road and it was all deserted.

Bhagavan used to be on the couch, always reclining or upright when the *parayana* was going on. Near the end of his couch was a big cage which housed the white peacock gifted by the Rani of Baroda.

In fact, everyone wanted Bhagavan to stay in the Old Hall – as it was cold outside – but he said, when the guest (the white peacock) is outside – it was not right or good manners to let him stay alone outside!

One morning when the *Vedaparayana* was going on, the door of the cage was opened as usual. The peacock would normally strut across the hall pecking here and there and walk out of the *pandal*. But that day it strutted as usual in front of the couch and then suddenly turned back – facing the couch and with its feathers spread out it started dancing for almost half an hour. It was an unforgettable setting which has been etched in my memory: the absolute stillness – early morning – not yet fully bright – chanting of the Vedas – Bhagavan in *samadhi* and the peacock dancing away to glory. It must be almost 75 years since this happened but the scene is still fresh in my memory, as is the whole atmosphere that transported one to another sublime world.

On the other occasions when Bhagavan was in the Old Hall, I have seen squirrels come in through the window on His right. They would eat the nuts from his hand. But what was amazing was, the way the squirrels used to run over his arms and chest and it made me squirm to watch them run like that.

Once the nuts in the tin were exhausted and when the squirrels came, Bhagavan told them – *āyiduttudā* (it is over) in a cajoling, apologetic tone!! Then of course the attendant went and got some more nuts!

Another incident I remember is when someone brought some bananas as offering and left them on the stool in front of Bhagavan in

the Old Hall. Before one could realise, a monkey ran in and took away the bunch. The attendant tried to ‘shoo’ it but the monkey just ran away. Bhagavan then smilingly remarked – (*Avāvā avā kāriyattai sariyā pannaṇum*) that everyone had to do their job properly – implying that the monkey was only doing its job and the attendant should have been more vigilant. It was very amusing!

On yet another occasion a foreigner stretched her legs in the Old Hall while sitting on the floor opposite to Bhagavan. The attendant slowly went and indicated to her that it was a sign of disrespect. So the poor lady – unaccustomed to sitting cross-legged on the floor – tried with difficulty to sit as suggested. Bhagavan seeing this, tried to draw his legs up and sit cross-legged. This caused him a lot of pain because of his arthritis. So when someone tried to dissuade Him, He said: Rules should apply equally to all. He was very particular that no special treatment should be given to Him. It was the same in the Dining Hall also where he would not allow any special consideration to be given to Him.

May be, I may be permitted to transgress a little and tell you what happened to my elder sister, Maggi Mami, who passed away recently, who is six years older to me. She was a little girl of six or seven years and we were all sitting in front of Bhagavan for lunch.

It was summer and a full mango was being served. As usual it was served to Bhagavan first. This girl saw it and wanted it – (she could not wait for her turn) – she looked eagerly at Bhagavan and He understood the child’s longing and beckoned her to his side and put the mango on her palm, touching it! She was thrilled. I used to tease her, that this blessing was the reason, she did better than me in the medical examinations! She preserved the kernel in a box – no change – till recently – when someone found this unusual object in a box and threw it away. She said that she cried her heart out that day. It was her talisman for decades.

My father would insist that we stand near the well and watch Bhagavan when he came out after his bath. The first time I saw it, I could not believe my eyes. His body seemed to emanate a glow – like the glittering of gold – one had to see the radiance all round to believe it. It was awe-inspiring!

I would also like to mention that Bhagavan remembered his devotees and was very observant. Bhagavan would go through the morning newspaper and also the *tapals* (post) every day. One day as he was perusing the paper He remarked, “(Namma Swaminathan posting *vandhirukku*) Our Swaminathan’s posting has come.” A few days later, Dr. Srinivasa Rao and someone else from the Ashram, came home to tell my father that Bhagavan had not only noted but mentioned aloud about the posting. Also on another occasion when someone mentioned that Swaminathan was not there, Bhagavan commented that he will not come when there is a crowd!

Finally I would like to mention something which many others would not have had the chance to observe.

It was I think in 1949, when Bhagavan had been operated for the tumour, fibrosarcoma. We happened to be in Tiruvannamalai then. The doctors had come for dressing the wound. Since the surgeon was known to my father and I was a medical student, my father requested that I may be allowed inside during the change of dressing.

I noticed that the wound, the operated raw area extended from the left shoulder to the left elbow – it was a fibrosarcoma – a highly vascular tumour. In many places, the gauze was stuck to the tissue and was blood stained and the doctors tried to remove the bandage carefully. What with the extent of the wound, the whole area was raw, red and frightening! While I was squirming in anticipation of the severe, unbearable pain Bhagavan must be undergoing, His face and eyes were calm and there was no movement of any part of His body. He could have been in another world, totally blissfully unaware of what was happening to His arm. He had a beatific smile on His face as He looked at me.

I can categorically state that no ordinary human being could have been so calm and indifferent, when such an extensive raw area was being cleaned and dressed. One could see that all the doctors were squirming and watching Bhagavan, in anticipation of the pain they would be causing, but Bhagavan sat like a rock, smiling. His attitude, His calm, His indifference was amazing and breathtaking. I have no words to describe his indifference. Even if one watched it, the extensive raw, angry red wound, one would squirm or shout. How He sat through all that, about half an hour, was unimaginable. It

was evidence enough that He was no ordinary human being. I don't think anything more was necessary to indicate His Divinity. I don't remember this but my elder sister Maggi told me, I came out crying – “He cannot be an ordinary human being, He must be Divine, a God in human garb!”

Perhaps I should also add what Viswanatha Swami told me around 1972/73 when he stayed with us at Chinglepet, where we were posted. He and my father were working on the *Ramana Gita* to bring out a new edition.

When I went to drop him at the bus stand to return to Tiruvannamalai, he asked me what I was reading. I told him I was learning by heart *Subramanya Bhujangam*. He made me recite it and when I came to verse 18 (which is as follows),

इहायाहि वत्सेति हस्तान्प्रसार्या-	ihāyāhi vatseti hastānprasāryā-
द्वयत्यादशच्छङ्करे मातुरङ्गात् ।	hvayatyaādaśacchaṅkare māturaṅkāṭ
समुत्पत्य तातं श्रयन्तं कुमारं	samutpatya tātaṁ śrayantaṁ kumāraṁ
हराश्लिष्टगात्रं भजे बालमूर्तिम् ॥१८॥	harāśliṣṭagātraṁ bhaje bālamūrtim ॥18॥

he stopped me and asked me what it meant. I told Him ‘Siva welcomed His son, who came from his mother’s lap and the boy jumped on his father’s lap and Siva embraced him. Pray to that Balamurti (Muruga).’

He asked me what the significance was. When I did not know, he said it refers to Bhagavan, who came from Madurai, which is the seat of Meenakshi, his mother and then came to Tiruvannamalai where Siva, the Father, is all important.

It is amazing how Sankara could foretell this centuries earlier.¹

¹ ingē vā, kuzhandāy/ēndru/kaigaḷai nīṭṭi/Śaṅkarar
tāyiyi maḍiyilirundu (kudittu)/tagappaṅār (maḍiyil) ēri
aḍainda Kumaraṅgai
Śivaṅār āliṅgaṅam seyda uḍambai uḍaiya
kuzhandai vaḍivāṇa Kumaraṅgait tudikkirēṇ.

According to Sri R.N. Padmanabha Iyer a professor of Sanskrit, this stanza is important in two ways:

- i) It refers to Somaskandamurti as it refers to both Uma and Siva and Subramanya.
- ii) It may also indicate the importance of *Shadakshara Mantra*, as the first two letters refer to Uma, the middle two to Kumara and the last two letters refer to Siva. So if one recites the *Shadakshara Mantra* while meditating on Muruga along with Siva and Shakti, all good will be bestowed on them.

This also confirms what Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni repeatedly says in *Ramana Chatvarimsat* that Ramana is Muruga and also when he noticed six sparks coming and circling Bhagavan's head six times at Pachaiyamma Koil. This was a revelation to me.

Going through Suri Nagamma's *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, in the very first letter she writes that when the *arati* plate offered to Arunachaleswarar (when He was taken on *giripradakṣiṇā* after Karthikai Deepam that year) was brought to Bhagavan by Ashram devotees, he took a little *vibhūti* and applied it to his forehead saying *Appāvukkup piḷḷai aḍakkam*. The son is beholden to the Father and his voice choked with emotion as He spoke, confirming the assumption.

Last, but not the least, I would like to state what happened on April 15th 1950. When I went to Madras Medical College as I had a university exam that day. Five or six of my friends, who stay in the ladies hostel came and excitedly told me, how they had all seen the bright, shining, elongated meteor, travelling across the sky, just as they came to the upstairs balcony after their dinner. They wanted to know if I had seen it. But unfortunately for me, I had not seen it, as I was ill and resting so that I could attend the exam the next day. They knew I was a frequent visitor to the Ashram and that they also heard in the news about the *mahānirvāṇa* of Bhagavan. It was reported by a New York reporter (who was in Tiruvannamalai at that time) and that the elongated meteor merged into the Hill. K.K. Nambiar said he saw it and other people even in Bombay had seen it.

I would like to end this article with some reflections on Bhagavan in the light of his *mahānirvāṇa*.

The fiery meteor confirms that Bhagavan:

- a) Who had written poems eulogising Arunachala;
- b) Who lived on the Hill for around 20 years or more and wandered all over the Hill;
- c) Who never left Tiruvannamalai for 54 years, since he first came there in 1896;
- d) Where Arunachala is noted as the *Agni Kshetra* (of the *Pancha Bhuta Sthala*)
- e) Where the Hill itself is believed to be an embodiment of Siva, whereas Kailas is only his Abode.

Hence, it is natural that He disappeared as a bright, shining, splendid beacon, back into the Hill. ▲

Introduction to the Middle Way

M. GIRIDHAR

Chandrakīrti was a seventh-century Indian Buddhist philosopher, revered for his interpretation of Nāgārjuna’s teachings on the Middle Way. Chandrakīrti’s *Madhyamakavatara*¹ is one of the Dalai Lama’s favourite books and the interpretation by Tsongkhapa is the basis of his Gelug tradition. This book includes a verse translation of the *Madhyamakavatara* followed by an exhaustive logical explanation of its meaning by the modern Tibetan master Jamgön Mipham. Chandrakīrti’s work is an introduction to the *Mādhyamika* teachings of Nāgārjuna, which are themselves a systematisation of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, or “Perfection of Wisdom”. Chandrakīrti’s work has been accepted throughout Tibetan Buddhism as the highest expression of the Buddhist view and forms the fundamental basis of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. Rightly called the Middle Path, the *sūtras* steers a middle course avoiding the snares of eternalism or the abyss of nihilism and carefully explain emptiness.

The theory of Dependent Origination, *pratityasamutpāda*, is presented by all the Buddhist Schools but it is Nāgārjuna who

¹ *Introduction to the Middle Way: Chandrakīrti’s Madhyamakavatara with Commentary* by Ju Mipham; Shambhala Publications; 432 pages; 978-1590300091

interpreted it more emphatically and authentically than anyone else. Nāgārjuna emphasises “When the mind realises emptiness, it overcomes the subject-object dichotomy. It does not just break through the appearances that conceal the ultimate status of phenomena, it also penetrates the veils of mental construction that had concealed its own true nature and had made the misperception of phenomena possible. When the true nature of phenomena is discovered, the mind’s nature also stands revealed, for the realisation of emptiness is the experience of nondual wisdom.” Chandrakirti further developed the philosophy into a dialectic that stresses on *svabhāva śūnyatā*. His argument was, if something has an essential nature it could exist independently in its own right. All things originate only in dependence upon other things. Things have no essential nature (*nisvabhāvata*) and everything is empty of an essential nature (*svabhāva śūnyatā*). Therefore everything is empty (*śūnya*). Emptiness is the equivalent of *nisvabhāvata* which is the outcome of the understanding of dependent origination. It is the emptiness of the phenomena. This is the correct understanding of the Middle Way, because it avoids the two extremes of performance and annihilation.

As emphasised so often by Nāgārjuna, absolute identity involves permanence and absolute difference implies annihilation. Dependent arising is the middle way adopted by Buddha and Nāgārjuna in elucidating change and causation. The Dependent Origination or *Pratītyasamutpāda* is the central philosophy of Buddhist teaching. But it is by no means easy to grasp its full implication. Dependent co-arising contains many feedback loops and it is a self-sustaining process with the potential to maintain itself indefinitely until something is actively done to cut the feedback loops that keep the process going. Dependent co-arising operates on many scales — from the micro level of events in the mind, to the macro level of lifetimes across time in the cosmos — it shows how micro events can lead to rebirth on the macro scale, and, conversely, how the practice of training the mind can put an end to all forms of suffering at every level. What this means in practice is that no matter how much you observe the events of dependent co-arising in the present moment, if you do not appreciate their potential to sustain one another indefinitely, you do not fully comprehend them. If you don’t fully comprehend them, you

cannot gain full release from them. This the ultimate truth but requires deep understanding and practise.

Nāgārjuna made this philosophy of voidness comprehensive and systematic. He made the world as only an appearance, which is the empirical truth. Everything that belongs to the world is only empirical truth (*vyavahārika*). The Buddhist concept of aggregates (*skandhās*), the elements, bases and *dharma* are also empirical. This empirical world and its phenomena are only an appearance according to both Nāgārjuna and Śāṅkara. Nāgārjuna demonstrates the flux itself could not be held to be real, nor could the consciousness perceiving it, as it itself is a part of the flux. Nāgārjuna explains *Śūnyatā* is not nihilism but relativity and conditionedness, (i.e.) is not a rejection of the world of becoming and the meaningfulness of life but the very mundane existence is appreciated as a course of conditioned becoming. The objects of his critique are not the empirical facts of existence that inescapably appear to us but the erroneous assumptions that we make about these facts of existence.

Nāgārjuna distinguished two truths, *paramārtha satya* and *saṃvṛti satya*, through rigorous logical argumentation. It is impossible, he says, to grasp the teaching of the Buddha without a correct understanding of the way the two truths are differentiated. There is no liberation without the realisation of emptiness and there is no approach to the ultimate without correctly relying on the conventional. The doctrine of emptiness, however, is a double-edged sword, and has to be understood correctly. Understood correctly, it leads to liberation; understood wrongly, it can be a source of spiritual and moral degeneration — as dangerous as holding a poisonous snake at the wrong end. The concepts of *paramārtha satya* and *saṃvṛti satya* appear similar to the *paramārthika satya* and *vyavahārika satya* of *advaita*, respectively. To draw a one-to-one correspondence between the two would be what philosophers would call a category mistake. *Advaita* follows an ontological approach and tries to prove that existence alone is, which is pristine consciousness. However, Nāgārjuna employs an epistemological scheme to arrive at its two levels. *Advaita* uses one truth of Brahman and that alone exists in the *paramārthika* and the relative world is *mithyā*. However, the concept by Nāgārjuna is that the relative world is false and thus

reach the *paramārtha satya*. An *advaitin* is encouraged to abide in the substratum that underlines the *mithyā* world to get established in the *paramārthika satya* while the *Mādhyamika* buddhist asserts the untruth of *saṃvṛti satya* to get established in *paramārtha satya*.

In any case, the theory of *ajātivāda* that existence alone is was a landmark in the Nāgārjuna's Philosophy. It was taken and interpreted in the later Advaita literature, especially by Gauḍapāda's philosophy, logically. Both *Mādhyamika* and *Advaita* deny that the ultimate reality can be understood in a dualistic manner. In the *Mādhyamika*, this amounts to a subversion of separate self-sufficiency (*nivabhāvata*), while in *advaita*, non-difference is a proclamation of the reality of the nondual substratum underlying all experiences. Both philosophies would conclude "Ultimate reality, which is the essence of everything, can be neither being nor non-being. It cannot be both because they are contradictions. It cannot be neither also, as we have only the two alternatives and there is no third. All that we can say is that we cannot characterise it in any way. It is, therefore, that which is devoid of all characterisations, all determinations." This ultimate does not lie within the realm of intellect but it is not remote from the phenomena. The ultimate is said to be beyond the world only because it is veiled by the appearances of the world but for ordinary beings, appearances are the world. Thus the ultimate is not separate from phenomena; it is the very nature of phenomena. The ultimate is what the conventional really is; the conventional is the way the ultimate appears. The two truths are never separate; they merge and coincide in phenomena. The difference is not ontological but epistemic.

Nāgārjuna re-defines the nondual truth, *advaya*, which is similar to Advaitin's Brahman. But only in a negative sense. The final truth is negative conventionality. It is self-realizable, quiescent, above speech and mind, *Sūnyata* itself. *Sūnyata* means void or contentless. Voidness is not nothingness or vacuity of thought. It is the truth of perfection of wisdom, *Prajñāpāramitā*. Of course, fundamentally, neither does the world nor does the ignorance that is said to have caused it exist. What exists is one without a second (*advaya*), changeless (*avyaya*), and never born (*aja*). All the explanations about the cause of the world are given only to point to this one truth.

They are all ultimately negated by the ‘*neti neti*’ (‘not so’) *vākyas* (sentences). This is the method of the Vedānta — *adhyāropa apavādābhyām niṣprapañcam prapañcyate* — stating that the Reality is untouched by the world and is revealed through false superimposition followed by negation. The ignorance is falsely superimposed on the truth to seemingly give an explanation for the cause of the world to the beginner student, only to later negate the existence of the world and its cause.

The necessary first step towards a complete comprehension of the ultimate reality is the realisation of, not only the real root i.e., the universal ground of all, but as the real nature of everything. One should first of all cultivate the comprehension of the mundane nature of things, viz. they are possible source of suffering, impermanency and is devoid of substantiality. If *samsara* were truly existent, then liberation would also exist. But *samsara* is empty of real existence, and liberation is likewise empty of real and substantial existence as a thing. Emptiness is not a thing, it means that there is nothing that has a ‘distinct and independent existence’. All phenomena are free of distinctions and they only appear to have distinctions because of the interdependence on other phenomena. Thus, it would not be nothing but not a thing i.e., no-thing. Thus emptiness is not a thing; rather, it is no-thingness (not nothingness).

Consciousness (*viññāna*) is nondual, unborn, motionless and is not an object. It has the appearance (*ābhāsa*) of birth, the appearance of moving and the appearance of being an object. Thus, both philosophies seem to indicate existence as “no-thing”. The firebrand analogy and snake-rope analogy are akin to the imaginary appearances of object to the perception. The analogy of a firebrand was originally used by Buddhists to distinguish the real from the unreal. When firebrand is moved in a circular motion there appears to be a wheel of fire hovering in the air. The illusion of performance is created by the firebrand’s swift movements. Nāgārjuna also uses the famous rope-snake analogy to show the projection and illusion appearance of objects to the mind. Both of these analogies are extensively used later by Gaudapāda. However, Chandrakīrti, further argues that the view of consciousness and object is similar to two haystacks standing dependent on each other; as one falls, the other automatically falls. If experience can be

thought of as an object arising in consciousness, he argues that both arise simultaneously and there cannot be a single permanent witness consciousness.

Back to the book, the introduction is around 50 pages and gives an excellent background on this topic. One could even say that the introduction itself is worth the price of the book. The introduction is followed by the translation of the actual text of Chandrakīrti's commentary in verse form and lasts about 50 pages. Following this, we have Jamgon Mipham's commentary for over 200 pages. Obviously this is a work of profound depth and requires rereading and study to begin to appreciate the teachings. Mipham's text itself is both profound and charming, and he takes great pains to make something clear, repeating himself from different angles until he drives the point home. These texts are like good friends, their value develops in relationship over time as new facets are revealed in every encounter. These texts are read not as a duty in fulfilment of a study or a degree to be obtained but as an inspiration, as the very embodiment of the principle of the guru.

The Buddha said, "Of all footprints, that of the elephant is the deepest and most supreme. Of all contemplations, that of impermanence is the deepest and most supreme." This one word, impermanence, captures the full range of *samsaric* dissatisfaction. To understand impermanence, you need to understand dependent origination. To comprehend dependent origination, one has to understand the teachings of Nāgārjuna. To interpret his teachings thoroughly, there is nothing better than the commentary of Chandrakīrti. For that purpose, there is no better book than this. ▲

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 Candrasekarendra 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.

Kāñchīpuram, Tuesday 30th May 1972

Prāṇa-apāna

This morning, when I woke up by 5 am, Chandra, the moon, stood perched on the highest point of the sky and remained there until the appearance of *Aditya*, the sun. Between 7 and 8 am, the master of the day and the master of the night shared the same firmament. On the upper terrace I recited *Ādityahṛdayam* with the sun at my left side and the moon at my right side.

In the afternoon, I experienced two impressive phases when the breath calmed down along with the fusion in the nose of the two currents *prāṇa* and *apāna*. Under the protection of the Guru, they

melted one in the other on the tip of the nose or in the heart, and the residue was luminous, infinite, indescribable, composed of a comprehension coupled with beatitude. The last formal aspects of the mind that were destined to perish looked like clouds in semi-solid milk. It demanded a sustained effort to separate from them. What was left was an azure, ethereal light: it was as if this very light also had to perish!

Then the Queen Kamakshi appeared in white pearl-of-mother with two miniature suns instead of eyes. She entered into ‘this one’ and took stock of all problems and the greyish particularities which, together, constitute the bag called ‘this one’. Is there an ‘I’ left who can declare: “The Queen has taken everything on Her?” A very fine layer, perhaps a so-called ‘witness-reason’— as a witness must have still existed — had submitted to the Queen its perplexity concerning the external and the internal *pūjā* from the chapter Deva-pūjā in the Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha.

The Queen made it clear that She is the Wisdom, *jñāna*, the aim of these two kinds of *pūjā*. She, Herself, along with Chandramaulishwara and the Oceanic Light are the first and the last forms of *jñāna*. How can one make permanent these marvellous experiences or at least render their manifestation somewhat easier?

Adishankara and Shri Mahaswami are also forms of the Queen. It is possible to attain Shiva, that is, Chandramaulishwara, by the help of the Queen. And She wants this, She waits for this. She wishes to purify and unite with the one who has invoked Her, so as to render him a fit receptacle of Chandramaulishwara. The Queen is no other than Chandramaulishwara whose peripheral luminosity has solidified into the form of the Queen.

The entire Universe is the Queen and Chandramaulishwara, Chandramaulishwara is the Queen!

I feel and understand this. It is not merely an intellectual acceptance, which is already accomplished, and it is much more than an emotional acceptance. It is a matter of Comprehension, where both the combination of the rational acceptance and the emotional consent to the reality of the given situation create the experience. One believes as one knows, one knows as one has experienced it, that is, one has become that. What is clear is the indisputable value of the



mahāvākya, the Great Words, which are irrefutable experiences that do open a door to the realm of non-duality.

A very difficult afternoon: “Where the mountains are at the highest, the precipices are the deepest.” To escape from the oppressive situation, I worked with my books on the manuscript of Viṣṇu-sahasranāma-stotra and the Sanskrit grammar. This corrected the imbalance to such an extent that I had to break away from the fascination with words and start for Shivasthana. However, the illusionary cloud that seemed to envelop me did not give up so easily. The bus was full of local rough villagers. There was a delay due to the procession of Varadaraja Perumal. I would have liked to salute Him from the bus, but at that very moment two strapping lads came between and denied me the *darśan*. I had only a glimpse of the face of the *utsava-mūrti* of Varadaraja Perumal. Finally, even on the left bank of the Vegavathi river I was not at the end of today’s trials, as a lorry overloaded with fermented, greyish garbage passed by! Breathing was difficult, helped only by a few Great Words, which feebly flickered. Luckily, the gopura¹ tower of the Shivasthana temple thrust up itself above the trees and encouraged me to continue.

On the right bank the shift towards peace was striking. Materially speaking the presence of Shri Mahaswami was tangible. At the ashram there was no movement, no car, not a single visitor — a real miracle. Only a swami of the maṭh who tried to refresh himself with the help of a hand-fan. It was 6.30 pm and the sun, near to the horizon, stood concealed behind clouds weighed down by the heat.

“Shri Mahaswami must be locked in his cell,” I thought. After having sprinkled some water of the lake over me, I was on the point of starting my rounds, when passing in front of the narrow southern yard I stopped, surprised. Across from the opening of the well, Shri Mahaswami sat and stared into space. There was nobody around! He took me in charge so quickly that I did not even have the time to salute him. He did not speak nor did he show any sign.

In the semi-obscurity, his shaven head looked like a large seashell of silky mother-of-pearl. On his face, the two deep lines that descended

¹“(A single) *darśan* (of a) *gopura* (equals) hundred millions of *punya* (meritorious deeds)” runs a local proverb in South India.

from the nose to the mouth seemed even deeper. I thought, “He must be working on some important project.” To whom can he ask for help? We, we can pray to him, but he, Īśvara in human form, towards whom can he turn his eyes? The power he possesses compels him to act alone.

Suddenly he became a world of love. He radiated only love, gentleness... he is so different from us: a flower that poets dream of, that strays among the charcoal bags of transitory life. I took courage and submitted to him, in thought, a report of this afternoon’s adventures:

“It is of no importance,” his voice sounded in my heart.

I am ashamed to stand alone in front of him and to still drag in the transitory. Shri Mahaswami accepts my repentance; he becomes, on the spot, a statue of old gold delicately flickering with discreet waves of light. For a few seconds he was in me, although for the ordinary eyes he sat at three metres distance. I got permission to approach at two metres. The inferior mind, still too much bound by the illusory world, churned out yet again its illusory ills. Shri Mahaswami, significantly, coughed twice and his voice added within me:

“Leave the silly chatter.”

I understood the message and concentrated on the pair *pṛāṇa-apāna*. The experiences of today that began in the afternoon, at home, came to be repeated twice. It was clear that here, at home or in the temple, it was He or the Queen, or inversely, Chandramaulishwara as both of them, governed all the interior phenomena! Towards the end, as the night was advanced, I felt with my eyes, more than I actually saw with them, how Swamiji approached the edge of the well, which was one metre and a half away. He kept his pot on the rim and stood there as if waiting for something. I thought that I should try to plunge inside and instantly a tube of azure ether sprung up on the axis of the body, that is, along the vertebral column, from the top of the head to the coccyx. The tube soon burst and its contents flooded ‘this one’ and changed him into a cloud of bluish ethereal gold. For some time only this vapour existed, perhaps not even that.


I believe that I was ‘gone’ for some time. In the meanwhile Shri Mahaswami stood there, immobile, witness of everything, probably

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also of the Universe, waiting until I should come back. Only then he retired to his room and closed the iron door.

I succeeded in tearing myself away and started for two rounds of the hermitage. All the assistants had also retired after fixing the mat screen in the opening of the well.

If in the morning I could say: “Where the mountains...” now the opposite seems as true, for it was the day of two mountains separated by a precipice. And what if the precipice did not exist? No doubt then that the mountains would also not exist. There must exist that perfect space without mountains and precipices. Philosophers and mystics reply in the affirmative, and I too accept it, but I feel myself rather situated at the summits or sometimes even ‘beyond the summits’.



*This is the final installment in the series published
in the Mountain Path*

Consummate Love*

Geetha Ravichandran

It takes courage to accept this love.
Its white heat fills hollow bones,
narrow veins and stacks up inside cells.
It wipes away identities
and time swallows space
and turns the blue sky
to shimmering light.
When the body lies shrivelled
and memory proves to be a virus
replicating itself,
it reaches out as a smile from beyond
and allows you to let go.

* Poem excerpted from *Arjavan* by Geetha Ravichandran, published by Red River, 157/1 Patparganj, New Delhi 91. ISBN: 978-81-953056-2-9

Tamil Siddhas

Part Six

Bhadragiriyar: A Dreamer of the Utopian World

P. RAJA

Like Jeremiah of the Old Testament, Pattinathar's disciple Bhadragiriyar spoke out against the moral degradation of unfaithful men and women. The distinctive trait of his poetry is the personal tenor of his relation to Lord Siva. Though his poetry is full of lamentations, it shows an urgent sense of mission. He had the courage to speak out despite hostility.

Bhadragiriyar taught:

Say no god. You wallow in ignorance.

Say all things happen for a reason.

This means you have taken a rational attitude or outlook.

Say nothing happens without the will of God.

This then is true knowledge.

It was this third stance that Bhadragiriyar realised and his poetry reflects it. This may be the reason why all his poems fall under a common title *Mei-jñāna-pulambal* which in English translation would read 'Lamentations or Craving for True Knowledge'.

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Bhadragiriyar's intent was:

Should quell all eternal worries that shatter me and
dismiss the illusions of life -when will this happen?¹

The above lines, like the rest of the couplets in this long poem, speak of escaping from the world of illusion only to land on the world of Lord Siva – the world of reality. In fact, every couplet immerses the readers into the divine consciousness, and enraptures every heart.

To get rid of the 'I', 'Me' and 'Mine' seem to be this Siddha's goal. No wonder he craves for the day when he would get rid of his ego and that too before his fleshy body loses its breath².

What made Bhadragiriyar think on lines quite different from the rest of the thinkers who belong to the Siddha School of Thought? Why are all his couplets full of lamentations? A dip into his biography would help.

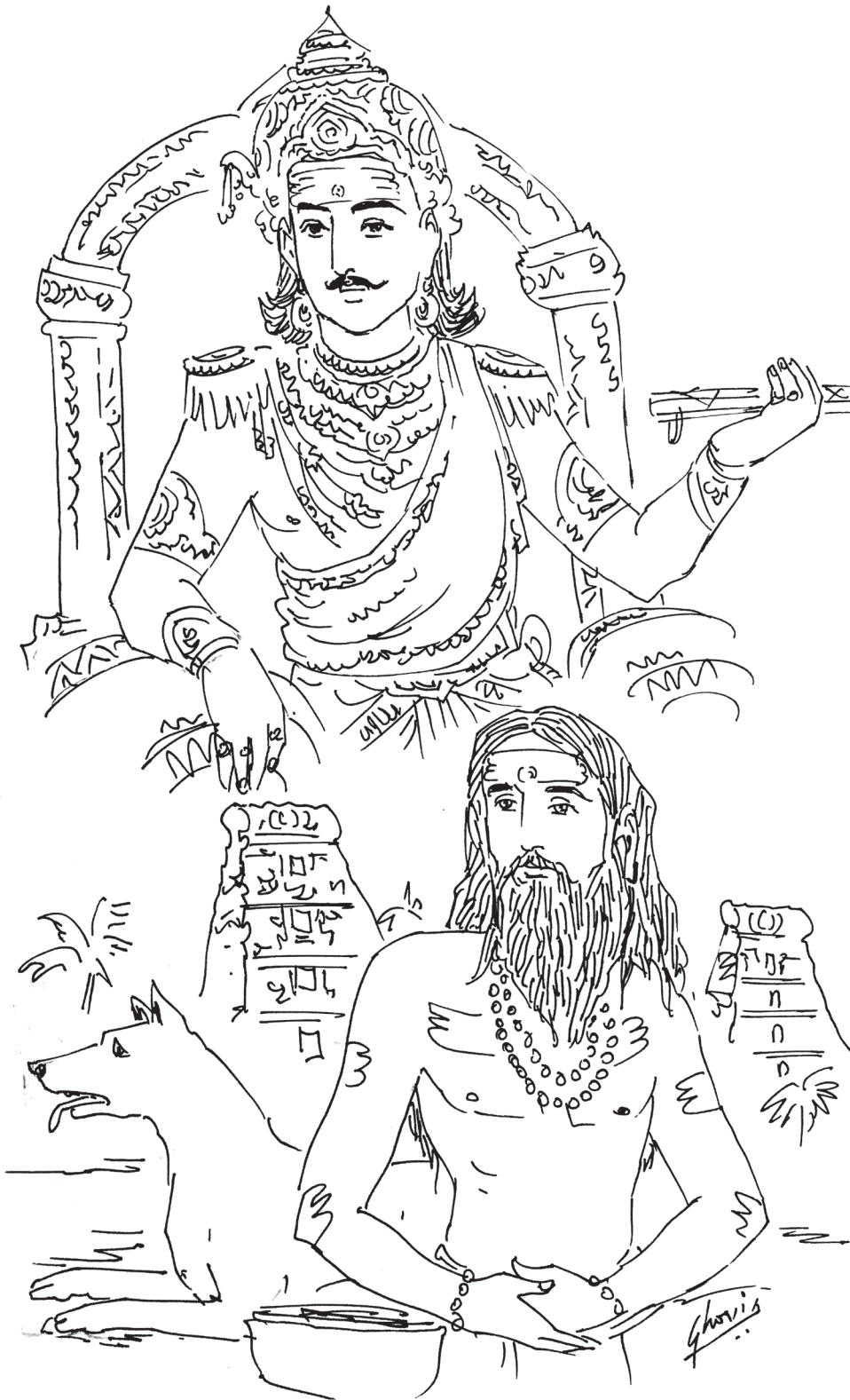
Bhadragiri was a king. Literary historians say Bhadragiri is the tamilised version of Bhartrihari, king of Ujjain. According to legend king Bhartrihari renounced kingship because of his wayward queen and entrusted his kingdom with his two younger brothers, Vikramaditya and Patti, before he became a mendicant and later a siddha. King Vikramaditya, who ruled the kingdom for six months and then moved on to the forests to spend the rest of the year only to allow his brother Patti to occupy the throne, is very well known to every lover of stories. His proximity with the *Vetala* has been a favourite among tellers and listeners of stories.³

King Bhartrihari, the author of *Nīti Śataka*, is not in any way different from Bhadragiri who poured wisdom into his Lamentations. A comparative reading of these two great works serves as ample testimony to the fact that their authors are like-minded, and most probably the same. *Nīti Śataka* (Century of Morals) is a series of poetical epigrams or rather sentences upon human life and conduct

¹ *The Laments of Bhadragiri*, couplet No. 5.

² *Ibid.*, couplet No. 90.

³ A *vetala* is a person who has returned from the dead in Hindu mythology, and dwells in a cremation ground. A *vetala* has paranormal powers. The *vetala* may be comparable to the vampires of Western mythology. The *Baital Pachisi* or *Vetala Tales* is a collection of stories compiled in the 11th century.



grouped loosely round a few central ideas, and stands as the first of three other similar works by one poet. Another collection of epigrams highlights *srīngār* (sexual attraction) and a third collection expresses with admirable beauty of form and intensity of feeling the sentiment of *vairāgya* (world disgust). The directness of expression, a crowded vividness and pregnant lucidity are the hallmarks of these verses.

Mahayogi Sri Aurobindo rendered the Sanskrit 'Nīti Śataka' into English and titled it 'The Century of Life'. "The renderings – 'free' rather than literal – generally manage to reproduce the content as well as the temper of the original," remarks K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar.⁴

Bhartrihari projects his idea of the proud soul in his epigrammatic and aphoristic work. Here is one:

But one God to worship, hermit Shiva or puissant Vishnu high;
But one friend to clasp, the first of men or proud Philosophy;
But one home to live in, Earth's imperial city or the wild;
But one wife to kiss, Earth's sweetest face or Nature,
God's own child.

Either in your world the mightiest or my desert solitary.⁵

In another piece, Bhartrihari craves for knowledge – perfect knowledge:

When I was with a little knowledge cursed,
Like a mad elephant I stormed about
And thought myself all-knowing. But when deep-versed
Rich minds some portion of their wealth disbursed
My poverty to raise, then for a lout
And dunce I knew myself, and the insolence went
Out from me like a fever violent.⁶

Again, Bhartrihari portrays 'the man of high action' in the following verse:

Happiness is nothing, sorrow nothing. He
Recks not of these whom his clear thoughts impel
To action, whether little and miserably

⁴ K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – A Biography and a History*, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, 1985, p. 85

⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Century of Life*, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, 2005, p. 95.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

He fare on roots or softly dine and well,
Whether bare ground receive his sleep or bed
With smoothest pillows ease his pensive head,
Whether in rags or heavenly robes he dwell.⁷

That was King Bhartrihari. His mind was that of a Siddha, ready to plunge into higher Consciousness, sacrificing all the bliss that is earthly.

Bhartrihari's *Nīti Śataka* "belongs to the class of gnomic verse, *subhashita*, a literary form rather peculiar to Sanskrit in which appeal is usually to the head and not to the heart. But as Sri Aurobindo has rightly pointed out, "in the work of Bhartrihari it assumes the proportions of genius, because he writes not only with the thought but with emotion, with what might be called a moved intellectuality of the feeling, and an intimate experience that gives great potency to his utterance. Even in translation there are flashes that penetrate deeper than the intellect and reveal more than the crystallization of worldly wisdom."⁸

Bhartrihari came to be known as Bhadragiriyar only after reaching the southern part of our country. What brought him to the South? There is an interesting story that reveals the secret.

Bhartrihari was in no way different from other poets. Yes, he too was fond of women. His harem was the only place he loved to spend days and nights in. Regarding matters pertaining to his kingdom, he left everything into the hands of his brother Vikramaditya, an excellent administrator, and the patron of the great Sanskrit *kavi* Kalidasa. Vikramaditya did his best to estrange the king's heart from the attractions of women. But whoever with wise counsel tried to turn his attention elsewhere incurred the wrath of the king whose philosophy was, 'Life is short, enjoy it to the core'. Hence, he was unwilling to devote his attention to the affairs of his kingdom.

Then there came a turning point in his life. That happened when he came to know of the infidelity of his queen. She was having an affair with the keeper of the horses in the palace. He didn't want to punish her, instead punished himself, by deciding to seek the forest in the garb of an anchorite.

⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

⁸ K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, op. cit., p. 86.

It was during that time he understood the unquestionable powers of a Siddha, which were more powerful than that of a king. That happened when he wrongly judged Pattinathar and sentenced him to die on a pointed stake. Pattinathar sang a song and the poor stake meant for impaling him was burnt to ashes.⁹

King Bhartrihari of Ujjain was perhaps waiting for such an opportunity. He threw away his royal attire and followed Pattinathar, whom the king accepted as his guru. The master was magnanimous enough to stretch a helping hand and together they travelled to Thiruvaidaimarudur.¹⁰

On one occasion, king Bhartrihari, now turned Siddha Bhadragiriyar, begged for food from homes of the devout and shared it with his master who spent all his waking hours in meditating upon Lord Siva.

Pattinathar chose the western entrance of the Mahalingeswar Temple at Thiruvaidaimarudur for performing his yoga, and the eastern gate for his disciple. It is believed even today, that by merely entering the temple, all the sins of the *bhakta* are washed away. With this in mind that the master Pattinathar chose that temple to spend the rest of his life in dedication so that he may reach the divine at the earliest. And he guided his disciple too for such a venture.

One day after giving food to his master, Bhadragiriyar came to his specified place and began to partake of the left-out food from the begging bowl. A female puppy came towards him wagging its tail. Bhadragiriyar scooped a handful from the bowl and gave it to the puppy.

As dogs are faithful creatures, better than our kith and kin, the puppy followed him wherever he went and cuddled up against him whenever he took rest. The animal became a part of his family. Time passed and the puppy grew to be an adult bitch.

To put His devotees to test, as was His custom, Lord Siva came to the temple and met Pattinathar. He was unable to recognise the Lord who had come in the guise of a mendicant. "I'm hungry," said the Lord. Pattinathar could not resist laughing, and after a while he answered the Lord who was in disguise, "O Mendicant! I too am a

⁹ See *Mountain Path*, July-September 2022, 'Pattinathar', pp.81-88.

¹⁰ Thiruvaidaimarudur eight kms from Kumbhakonam. It is a major Siva shrine and the principal deity is Mahalingeswaraswamy.

mendicant like you. I have nothing to offer you. Go to the other gate of this temple. You will find a family man with a bitch. He may have something to offer you.”

Lord Siva walked fast and reached his destination. He repeated to Bhadragiriyar His conversations with Pattinathar. Sorrow laden Bhadragiriyar felt pinpricks in his heart. It took little or no time for him to realise the meaning of his master’s words.

In a fit of fury, he took his begging bowl raised it above his head and dashed it against the floor. The bowl broke into smithereens and a powerful shred broke the skull of the female dog. She died whining in pain. Thereby Bhadragiriyar renounced everything on earth.

This may be the reason why he hungers for the day when he would realise that all family members and friends are nothing more than illusion and thereby sever the bond that pulls him down the earth.¹¹

Another legend takes the episode a bit further and gives a fitting finish to the life of Bhadragiriyar.

The dead bitch that Siddha Bhadragiriyar took care of, reincarnated as the daughter of the King of Kasi. That happened because of the love she enjoyed from a Siddha. When the girl attained the marriageable age, her father began searching for a suitable boy. It was a mental torture to her and so she secretly left her home in search of Bhadragiriyar.

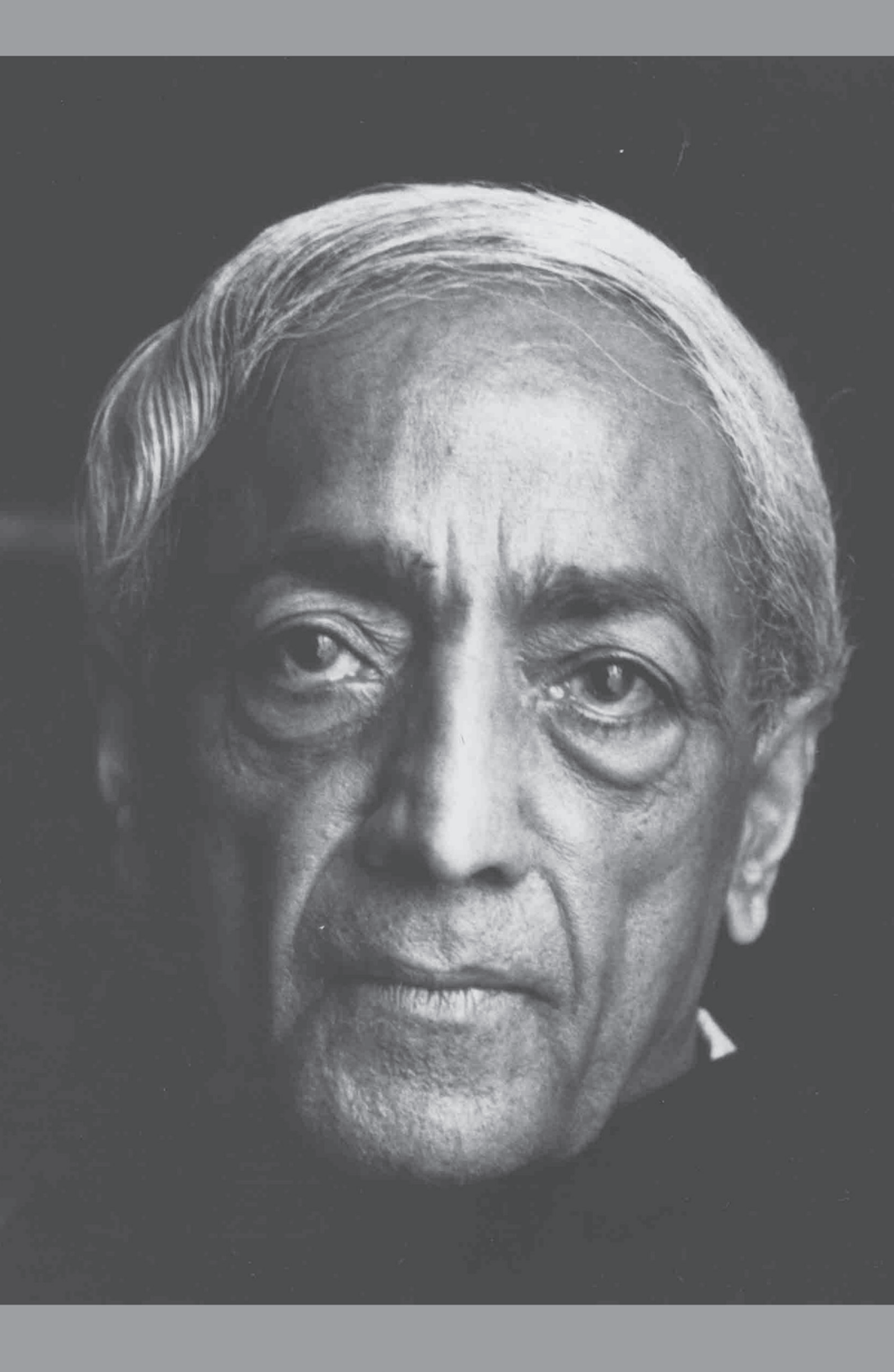
She met her master in the very same place where she, as a bitch, breathed her last. Bhadragiriyar sensing danger coming in the guise of a woman took her to the other gate to meet his master.

Pattinathar was not at all surprised to see the girl who was the female dog in her previous birth. Bhadragiriyar was about to ask him why the bitch that ate the leftovers from their bowls had taken the next birth. Pattinathar had read Bhadragiriyar’s mind. As an answer to his mind-query, he simply said, “Dust too cannot dance without Lord Siva’s will.”

It is said that no sooner was it said than there arose a huge ball of fire that consumed both Bhadragiriyar and the princess, who reached Sivaloka, the world of Lord Siva.

That event is the ultimate goal of all Siddhas. ▲

¹¹ *The Laments of Bhadragiri*, couplet no.14.



Death — A Figment of Imagination?

Transcript of Talk given at Indore
JK Centre on 30th January 2022

M.S. GOPALAN

Namaste all.

The title of this talk is somewhat provocative because the idea is to bring questioning from ourselves not what somebody else has said about death. So this is an atypical and out of the ordinary exploration into the phenomenon of death.

It's logical, scientific and is not based on any assumptions. In this talk I'll bring in references from Krishnamurti, Modern Science as well as our own individual experiences. There are numerous references available in other religious literature but I am not bringing any of them into this talk.

Now as you all know, there is a Krishnamurti database which contains most of Krishnamurti's talks and writings and, if you search that database with 'death and dying', it brings about 16,000 entries. That is exceeded only by 'desire' with 18,000 plus entries and by 'fear' with over 21,000 entries. If you want to search for the 'moon'

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you would get about 1,000 entries and if you search for ‘sunrise’ you get between 100 and 200 entries.

So, why did Krishnamurti refer to death, desire and fear so often in his talks as compared to the moon and the sunrise?

Is it that there is precious little that can be done about the moon and sunrise but everything is possible to be done to end death, desire and fear?

Why is this? Because it is within the capability of thought-intellect to see its own limitations and therefore allow another instrument to act by stepping aside and not obstructing that instrument. And that instrument, which is available to every human being, is Insight. But most of the time the Insight is obscured and obstructed by thought-intellect rising. So can death be looked at from this perspective?

Insight acts on its own. But Insight can be assisted by asking the right question. On the other hand, a wrong question can obstruct the action of Insight. And here is an example.

In a Saanen talk in 1976, Krishnamurti said:

‘I am confused, my mind is troubled, in conflict, broken up, fragmented, and that mind which is fragmented asks: is there a part of me which is clear, not fragmented? You follow? It is a wrong question. Of course. It is a wrong question, but we put that question.’¹

Now, why is this a wrong question?

Is it not because the question is based on the assumption that the entity — I — who is asking this question is separate, independent of body-mind and is perpetual? The question doesn’t allow for any doubt or questioning about the very existence of ‘I’ itself.

Therefore, it’s very important to ask the right question that encourages Insight.

Now, the word ‘death’ and its common meaning in the English language is ‘end of life’ or ‘ending’ as it is said in the dictionary.

This has come to us from Western culture and Western culture has originated from Western religion which over the last 1,500 years has primarily been the church dominated institutional viewpoint. We, the English speaking educated are conditioned very deeply by Western thought and ideas of Modern Science although we understand that these ideas and thinking have their own limitations. We also see that

¹ Discussion 4, Saanen, 31 July 1976.

this limitation prevents us from accessing or investigating ideas of other cultures.

All ideas have their limitations but they sometimes can give you perspectives from a different direction which one may not have thought of and can be a starting point for investigation. At the same time, although we are not able to accept other ideas of any kind we don't have our own clarity and perception. And, clarity and perception are the entire foundation of Krishnamurti's message.

And, this becomes our biggest trap that we can't accept any belief, doctrine or vision of another; we don't see that our intellect comes in the way of Insight and Perception and therefore intellect becomes supreme and keeps us going around in circles, living upon words. There is a Hindi idiom which brings the essence of this very succinctly — 'dhobi kā kuttā na ghar kā na ghāṭ kā'² — and that is really where I think we educated intellectuals get caught. But if we see that we are getting caught in this then perhaps there is a different movement possible.

So from this perspective, let us investigate death, objectively and logically, going beyond the word.

As stated earlier, death is considered to be the ending. But we don't ask, 'Ending of what?'

When we look at ourselves as human beings, very clearly there are three distinct components in us. We have talked about this in the earlier talks also.

There is a Life Energy and so long as it is there we say we're alive. Then there is the physical body and then there is the field of thought, intellect, emotion. Now, Life Energy cannot end because it is energy. Energy can have no end.

So the next question comes, 'Can the body die? Can the body end?'

Now, this is where we are stuck with our acceptance of Modern Science unquestioningly. Modern Science classifies objects and living forms as animate and inanimate. Matter is considered to be inanimate — until now. But, you know, 20th and 21st century developments in physics — Quantum Physics, Einstein etc. — have all shown that Matter and Energy are really inter-convertible. They continuously inter-convert — it's not even a one time activity. We have the example

² The washerman's dog is neither of home nor of the riverside.

of nuclear fission and fusion where Matter converts into Energy and we have the examples where photons collide and convert into Matter. So this happens between Matter and Energy — there is continuous conversion. So Matter is not independent of Energy as we think it to be. And Particle Physics is getting more and more complicated to understand but it essentially says the atom consists of a nucleus of Protons and Neutrons with Electrons orbiting around and these Electrons are particles of energy. And the Protons and Neutrons themselves are now divided into twelve fundamental particles and each of these particles, at the subatomic level behave sometimes like a wave and sometimes like a particle of Matter. So they have the properties of both Energy and Matter.

So when we say an atom of Oxygen or Carbon what do we mean? We only mean it is a unique combination of Protons, Neutrons and Electrons. So, Oxygen according to Chemistry has 8 Protons, 8 Neutrons and 8 Electrons. If you put 8 Protons, 8 Neutrons and 8 Electrons in a particular format you get Oxygen. Then, the uniqueness of oxygen as an element is only in the arrangement of its energy particles. And all arrangement is memory. So, can we then say when energy is trapped in the framework of memory the result is matter?

Now, classification of animate and inanimate is only explaining how far that energy is manifested externally. A living human being or an animal or an insect manifests a greater degree of this energy then, say because it is a rock, we identify it as inanimate.

So, can Matter then ever die or it can only become energy which is just a change of form?

Again, if you look at it from another perspective, when the human body dies it decomposes. Into what? Into Carbon, Hydrogen, Nitrogen, Oxygen, Phosphorus and the other minerals that it has been built from. This combination of Carbon, Hydrogen, Nitrogen, Oxygen, Phosphorus and the other minerals was never alive on its own. So what is there to die for the body? This comes to the third component of the human being which is thought, intellect and emotion.

Can it die?

One of the things that Krishnamurti pointed out again and again is etymologically, ‘Intelligence means read between the lines’. See what is the real meaning and discover that for yourself.

And in a talk in 1982 he said: ‘Death is the ending of everything. My pleasure, my memory, my experience, my attachments, ideals, beliefs, all that ends — that’s what you are. That ends. But we don’t like the ending’.³

Now, this ‘my pleasure, my memory, my experience, my attachments, ideals, beliefs’ — when we say all that ends, what does that really mean?

All these are in my mind. They can enter death only if they are stored in the body-brain that dies. But are they stored in the individual brain?

In an earlier talk Krishnamurti had said, ‘Our consciousness is made up of its content’. Therefore ‘my pleasure, my memory, my experience, my attachments, ideals, beliefs’ must be part of consciousness. They are not outside of consciousness. So what is this consciousness?

In a talk in 1966 at Mumbai he said:

But thought is the result of time and time is this consciousness. Whatever you do within the field of this consciousness, sorrow can never end.⁴

This brings in the concept of time.

Now, we know time by the sun, time by the clock, time to learn a language or a skill, time to go from one place to another and also this psychological time of gradually becoming less and less violent. And we conveniently classify this as time inward and time outward and in most of our discussions we say, ‘Time outside is not a problem we are only worried about psychological time because that’s an illusion’.

But in that argument we miss a very fundamental point. The common element in all forms of time, whether it is inward time or outward time, is that there has to be a thought and thinker. Without thought and the thinker, time is not — inner or outer.

So, when Krishnamurti says, ‘Your consciousness is not yours, it is the common ground on which all human beings stand and share’, if that consciousness is not individual then can that memory be stored in the individual brain?

And, therefore, the question arises, ‘Does consciousness end up on the death of the body?’

Now let us examine the actual process of death, especially from the scientific and medical perspective.

³ Talk 4, New Delhi 1982.

⁴ Talk 3, Bombay, 1966.

What are the conditions to determine that death has happened? In present modern day medicine there are three conditions:

First condition is there should be no breathing. Second condition is there should be no heartbeat and circulation. And because we have brought in a situation where both the breathing and the circulation are managed by machines on a life support system, there is also a third category when we say the brain stem is no more active then it is brain dead. So we have these three definitions.

No breathing, no heartbeat implies that breathing and heartbeat are continuing activities. But are they continuing activities? We have just assumed it as so.

If you look at breathing, it's a cycle. There is an in-breath, there is an out-breath and there is a pause. Every in-breath must result in an out breath because there is a pressure differential between the inside the body and outside of the body. So you don't have to do anything. If you have breathed in then you have to breathe out. But once you have breathed out, what makes the person take the next breath? That is the act of that Life Force in us. So the next breath can happen only if the Life Force is present and the instruction goes from the brain to the muscles to take in the next in-breath.

So, this is the beauty of it if you have ever watched a person take his last breath. Only after the breath has stopped do you realise that that was the last breath. You can't know it was the last breath when it is happening. It is after the event you can say, 'Oh! That was the last breath'.

Doesn't that imply that the pause which happens after every breath, before the next in breath is death? If the next breath happens, we say the person continues to live. If the next breath doesn't take place we say death has taken place. So breathing is not a continuous activity.

Now let's look at the second condition of heartbeat and circulation. The heart is essentially a pump which is what causes the blood to circulate in the body. And most of you would know that there are basically two kinds of pumps. One is a centrifugal pump which operates by rotation; as long as the pump is rotating there is activity of pumping going on continuously. The other is the reciprocal pump like a bicycle pump. It draws in air and then it pumps it out. It has a stroke — a two-stroke you can say.

The heart is very similar to this reciprocal pump. It's got the relaxing stage, which is called in medical terms the diastole, and then it has a contracting state which is called the systole. That's what we measure in blood pressure. If we look at an ECG graph the entire heartbeat cycle of both the systole and the diastole takes 0.8 seconds — that means about twelve beats per minute. If the heartbeat is higher then the time is even less. But after every diastole, which is that relaxing, the pacemaker cells in the heart have to give the signal — the pulse — only then does the heart contract and diastole takes place. And that is why when there are problems with the natural pacemaker, they insert an artificial pacemaker. So between every systole and diastole there is a gap. The gap is two milliseconds but it's still there — there is a gap of 2 milliseconds. After that gap if the diastole doesn't happen, the heartbeat will stop. But if the diastole happens, then life continues. So just like breathing, in every heartbeat there is a gap, and that gap is death.

Now, if you look at the number of breath cycles in a life of 60 years — you can do a calculation; my calculation comes to about half a billion. Half a billion breathing cycles in a life of 60 years means half a billion times I have died in those 60 years. And similarly, the heart beats five times as much. Two and a half billion in 60 years which means two and a half billion times I have died in those 60 years.

From this perspective Krishnamurti's statement, 'death is part of living, it is not separate' becomes very clear. It is thought which has separated living from dying.

Then I would ask is it correct to say that the body dies or is there a more precise way of saying Life Energy has withdrawn? Which is more precise and describes actually what happens?

If Matter cannot die and if memory is not necessarily in the body-brain then thought cannot die and energy itself cannot die, is not this process of death simply a withdrawal of energy? And this is supported by medical texts. They point out that skin grafts can be made up to 24 hours after the body dies, bone grafts can be made up to 48 hours after the body dies, arterial grafts can be made up to 72 hours after the body dies.

Here I would like to bring in a simile from the day-to-day common world. When you are flying in an aircraft you're flying at a height of about 35,000 feet and you have to land and come to the ground. That

process is not done in an instant. It is a process. About 30 minutes before you reach the destination and 250 kilometres before, the plane starts a descent, a gradual descent, and then when it approaches the airport there is a very steep descent and it touches down on the runway and then you taxi on the runway and come to the parking slot until you come to a complete halt. All three are part of the aircraft landing process. It's a process.

Is human withdrawal of Life Energy a process, a similar process? Does it start much before the event of what we actually call death?

In Mary Lutyen's biography, *The Open Door*, there is an interesting conversation that is recorded:

On his way to London a few days later he told Mary, while they were waiting on the station platform at Petersfield, that Scott had asked him how long he was going to live. He had answered that he did know but would not tell him. 'Do you really know?' Mary asked.

K: I think I know. I have intimations.

M: Are you willing to tell me?

K: No, that would not be right. I can't tell anyone.⁵

And he seems to have repeated the same thing to Mary Lutyens as well as to Scott because they both have recorded this. So, is it only a person like Krishnamurti who can have an intimation two years earlier, because later in the conversation when she asked him, 'When did you get to know?' He said 'I have known for 2 / 3 years'. So 2 or 3 years before 1986 he knew that death was coming and he knew the date, he knew when but said, 'I can't talk about it'.

Is that, then, a possibility that anybody can have such an intimation because it's a process and the descent has to start much before the actual event of death?

Now, therefore, this raises another question. Is there really continuity in living?

We have seen that breathing and heartbeat are discrete, separate events. It is our thought-intellect which strings them together and then says this is continuity, I have been alive for 71 years. That is an invention of thought. So is death, then, not a figment of imagination?

⁵ Mary Lutyens, *The Open Door, A Biography*. 1988. p.85.

“Sir, our daily life is like a vast river – watch it – like a vast river, and the whole human living is like that in which there is all these complexities, problems, pain, sorrow, anxiety – everything is that river of which we are a part.

When the part dies, the stream goes on. The manifestation of the stream is you, with your name, with your quality and so on, but you are still part of this stream.

Are you getting... are you following, sir? Part of the stream.

And we are saying the ending of that stream – you follow? – moving totally away from that stream, never belonging to that stream, because that stream is conflict, confusion, pain, attachment, detachment, or what is right, what is... you follow? – this battle that goes on within one.

So we are saying while you are living, conscious, alive, full of your mischief, your activities, all that – see that the ending of something voluntarily, not with a motive, ending voluntarily attachment is the beginning of something totally new.

You’ve got it? Because the ‘I’, the ‘me’ is a continuity. The ‘I’ has been not only genetically, from millennia handed down, generation after... it is a continuity, and that which is continuous is mechanical, there is nothing new in it.”⁶

So this ‘ending of that stream, moving totally away from that stream, never belonging to that stream, what is this, what does it imply?

In many of his talks, in every public talk in fact, Krishnamurti invariably emphasises the importance of looking, listening, observing. In looking, listening, observing there is only perception. Thought is not up and active with its imagination. It is an instant later when the compulsiveness to express, to analyse all that happens that thought arises. And this looking, listening, observation happens with every sense impulse that we get. And again if you do a calculation that comes to a couple of million in a day. So million times a day, we are in that state of perception for an instant and the next instant we’re back in thought so we seem to be shuttling between the two.

So, when we are in the instant of perception we don’t think about death — the idea is not even there. But when we come into that world of thinking then we say, ‘Now what do we do about that state?’ So it becomes an intellectual thing. Isn’t it only in intellect?

Therefore, I’m asking, ‘Isn’t death only in the imagination?’

⁶ Sixth Public Talk at Madras: 1978/79.



Lord Mallikarjuna Temple, Srisailem

Songs of Swings, Cradle and Reality

S.L.M. PATIL

A spiritual aspirant's advancement in realisation of God or Reality is revealed by the innumerable and varied Experiences undergone. However they are known only to himself or herself, to the Guru, and God. Others cannot have access to them unless they are gifted and articulate.

Dnyaneshwar, the Marathi saint-poet, says he saw God in His endless forms and endless garbs (*anant roope, anant veshe*). Sri Ramana Maharshi once said that his Experiences were in lakhs. In Kannada spiritual lore it is said that even if one witnesses a small sign, an insignia (*kuruhu*), it will strengthen his faith on the path. But that alone is not enough, it is only a beginning. Self-realisation is still a long way away.

This article intends to show how three Kannada and one Hindi mystics transport to the reader their complex Experiences of Reality. To begin with, the twelfth century Kannada woman saint-poet Mahādeviyakkā (also called Akkamahādevi) may be considered. She was a younger contemporary of Basavanna, another saint-poet and

social reformer, and lived with him among others in his famed *Anubhava Mantapa* (Hall of Experience) in Kalyana, Karnataka state.

Her *vacanas* (prose-poems) demonstrate her intense and passionate love for *Chennamallikārjuna* (The Lord White as Jasmine). She is a supremely gifted poet who, *vacana* after *vacana*, surprises the readers by her glowing images and arresting expressions. Weaving a narrative around her fascinatingly complex relationship with her Lord, Akkā ('elder sister' in Kannada) vividly describes her meditative praxis in the yogic language. As a result of such practices she plays in the bliss of Reality. Her song *Nijaduyyale*¹ (The Swing of Reality) best illustrates this point.

The song begins with Akkā rocking the real but imagined swing in the stillness of her mind. It is planted on her mental plane. Her emotions, *bhāva*, are the two pillars which support the *soham* beam. Using the *soham mantra*, and the skills of meditation, she enjoys the swinging movements. Akkā describes these movements happening in her three fundamental *nāḍis*, the *ida*, *piṅgala* and *suṣumna*. Then the swing jerks itself up and turns westward. Now she has the Experiences of the divine sound, form, and light. She sings the praises of the primordial *liṅga* residing in her lotus heart. Akkā further says that six feminine *śakti* forces, clad in pearls and jewels, sing songs in proper raga, fine-tuned with *jñāna*.

The swing is lovingly kicked forward by the sounds of the flute, trumpet, and drum. "In the interior of glowing light, diamond-studded pillars, I sat and played on the swing," she tells us. This is what she Experiences in the stillness of her mind. When she is thus playing in the luminous space of the *ida*, *piṅgala chakras*, the swing is again violently pushed forward and finally merges into the *suṣumna*, she says.

Lastly, after going beyond the six *chakras*, the swing soars higher and higher still and thrusts itself forward again. In a place beyond that, there, she stands in infinity and merges with her Lord Chennamalla, and plays on the swing.

The song is significant in many ways. First, one can notice certain developments or shifts in the song. It starts with the singer touching

¹ Hiremath R.C., *Mahādeviyakkāna Vachanagalu*, Karnataka University, Dharwad. 1968. pp. 182-3.



and giving a push to the swing. Then there is a progression: she sits and plays on it. And at the end she merges with her Lord and plays on the swing. Second, she graphically describes in yogic parlance how it all happens. Third, she undergoes a collage of Experiences like the divine sound, form, light, melodious song and finally, her union with God. But what is really surprising is the rapidity of movements in her interior landscape. It is ‘the violent gush of ecstasy’ (*unmaniya rabhasa* in Kannada), she says elsewhere. She mentions it three times in the song *Nijadyuyle*. Such a concentrated activity, such progress can be best described if we borrow her own expression from another song again, “bathing without getting wet, reaching without walking”.²

It is also possible to understand Akkā’s *Nijadyuyle* in the light of her other poems. Two lines from her two poems may be considered here. First, “Stepping on the root of *mūlādhāra*, I ascended to space... Chennamallikārjuna, take me by the hand,” she requests.³ Second, “My devotion merged into you, and look, I became spaceless,” she tells Him.⁴ Thus she narrates the unification of the individual soul, *jīvātma*, with the higher soul, *paramātma*.

According to legend Mahādeviyakkā walked a long way from Kalyan to Sriśailam in the present State of Andhra Pradesh, a place in dense forest and there she “died into oneness with Śiva, when she was hardly in her twenties – a brief bright burning.”⁵

Similar Experiences, in similar strain, but more expansively are described by Śivalīngavva, again a Kannada woman saint-poet (1867-1930). The only difference is that it is not a swing here but a cradle. She has written four songs on her cradle Experiences which can be treated as one. In the first song, she ties a strong, five coloured cradle for her spiritual son, born to her after intense meditation. This son is her Lord himself. She further writes, “I placed the Valiant One in the cradle, and touching Him with my hands, I swung Him. I named the Beautiful One, Ranga.”

These two lines are loaded with three significant aspects of spirituality. First, the cradle is utter space/spacelessness or *bayalu* in

² Ibid., p. 174.

³ Ibid., p. 139.

⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

⁵ Ramanujan A.K., *Speaking of Siva*, Penguin Classics, 1973. p. 114.

Kannada. (“Oh, mother,” she exclaims, “How beautiful is this wide openness!”). Second, she touches the Thing (any form of God) in the cradle. The act of ‘touching’, as in Akkā’s case also, is one of the rarest Experiences.

Śhivaliṅgavva’s Guru Shri Bhausaheb Maharaj, the saint of Umadi, once said, “The cradle swings. But it is difficult to touch it. After seeing it, it takes a *sādhana* (practice) of another twelve years to touch it”.⁶ Third, it is about assigning a name to the Thing thus witnessed.

The Maharaj also said, “The *Parabrahma* is nameless. But Guru gives it a name so that it can be realised by meditating upon the name imparted. Thus the Self/*Parabrahma* is born. Then a name is assigned to it.”⁷ Thus, it is a process of naming the nameless. The proceeding part of the process, as seen in the above narrations, is placing it in the cradle and swinging it.

Some other details of those Experiences are narrated, crowded rather, in Śhivaliṅgavva’s three other cradle songs. They are rich in visuals, and are uniquely fascinating, almost surrealistic. The cradle, she says, has nine windows and looks beautiful. It is of gold, artistically made, and decorated with pearls. It looks subtle and strange also. The Thing in the cradle is stared at, with her subtle eyes and in the unmoving gaze. When she sees it in the middle of her eyebrows, she is wonderstruck. It happens in the stillnesses of her mind, in her mindfulness, she writes. Moreover, it all happens in a flash.

Śhivaliṅgavva does not merely swing the cradle. Like Mahadeviyakkā, she too merges into her Lord’s form and plays in it. One finds no difference between the songs written by these two women saints. Śhivaliṅgavva’s songs look like an extension of Akkā’s song.

Gurudev Shri R.D. Ranade’s observation on this kind of union with the Self makes it clear: “It is not simply the losing of one’s individuality in the *Nirguṇa* or Absolute. It must be a positive entity God, in whom we have to resolve ourselves.”⁸ When this happens there is no more birth or death, says Śhivaliṅgavva. Again, her Guru, the saint of Umadi once explained: “When the self comes out of one’s body and makes

⁶ Kulkarni P.H., *Dasabodha Sudhe*, Self-pub, Bangalore, 1975, p. 305.

⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

⁸ Ranade R.D., *Pathway to God in Kannada Literature*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1989. p. 19.

itself visible, it does not enter another body again. Thus the cycle of birth and death ends, and the *sādhaka* comes to know about it”⁹

An interesting anecdote related to Shri Amburao Maharaj, another disciple of the saint of Umadi can be cited here. One night he was narrating how the Thing develops in the course of meditation from being a tiny light to one’s own form (*swaroop*). At the end there appears a cradle and *swaroop* or the Self sleeps in it, he confided, The listener got curious to know more, and therefore asked him what would happen next. Perhaps the Maharaj was unwilling to explain any further. “It is already late. Go home and sleep,” he quipped.¹⁰

Allama Prabhu, another Kannada mystic and poet is considered the Guru of Akkā and Basavanna. He lived with them in the Hall of Experience mentioned earlier. He has written some *vaćanas*, among many others, on the same theme, in his characteristic style of plain-speaking. Consider this one:

“A mother called Illusion, places a baby called Knowledge, in the cradle called Ignorance. She ties it to a noose called the Vedas and Shastras. Then she rocks it singing lullabies. Unless the cradle is broken, the noose cut off, lullabies stopped, the Lord of Caves cannot be seen.”¹¹

A similar intent is expressed in the following *vaćana* also:

I saw
a swan’s nest in a peepal tree,
and
a woman swinging inside it.

When
the swing cuts off
and
the woman falls to the ground
and dies,

Then
look, Guheśwara, one can see the Prāṇaliṅga.¹²

⁹ Ibid., p. 316.

¹⁰ *Dasabodha Sudhe*, op.cit, p. 447.

¹¹ Basavaraju, L., *Allamana Vacanagalu*, Geeta Book House, Mysore 1997, p. 105.

¹² Ibid., p. 78.

It is to be noted that Allama, unlike most of his contemporaries, is known for his *bedagina* or riddle-like poems. Many times he uses yogic and tantric images and symbolism. The above *vaćana* is one such example and typical of him. When deciphered, it means: In the web of words (peepal tree) lives the *jīvātma* (swan) in the body (nest) made of the five elements. Inside the nest, illusion (woman) is swinging. Its pallet is tied by woven ropes (latencies). When illusion and latencies are destroyed, one sees the *prāñaliᅅga*.

In yet another *vaćana*, Allama again talks in yogic terms, about the swing (swan, *hansa/jīvātma*) which utters ‘*soham, soham*’ while passing through the *īᅇa* and *piᅅgāla* channels. When all the mental impurities (*vikāras*) are removed, the swan undergoes the *Śhivoham* Experience. This *śhabda brahma* reverberates and fills it up. Then the swing (*jīvātma*) takes a flight and goes beyond without touching anything.¹³ Kabir the Hindi poet, puts it more poetically: “A Hansa has reached its final habitat, the Mānasa Sarovara.”¹⁴

There seems to be subtle differences among Akkā and Śhivaliᅅgavva, and Allama. If read comparatively, for the former, it is a dream come true. In one of her very famous, early *vacanas* (‘Listen, sister, listen, I had a Dream’) she describes her dream in which her Chennamallikarjuna appears as an ascetic – the one “who goes breaking all bounds and beyond.”¹⁵ She holds his hand and follows him on his heels, before she wakes wide open.

The song *Nijaduyyale* is a realisation of that dream. But Śivaliᅅgavva was already in a spiritually advanced stage and her Experience of Reality was imminent. The two yogins articulate their real Experiences of rocking the real swing and the cradle, that too with meticulous attention to details. They are vibrant, and their joy seems to course through every cell in their body.

Allama, on the other hand, describes the Experience in brief, as an observer, an outsider, and as a theorist. But It appears to be so only when his three *vaćanas* are taken in isolation. Those who know Allama know that his narrations are his felt Experiences too. But the

¹³ Halakatti F.G. (ed.), *Prabhudevara Vaćanagalu*, Bijapur, 1931.

¹⁴ Quoted by Ranade R.D., *Pathway to God in Hindi Literature*, GRS Trust, Nimbal, 1986, pp. 240-41.

¹⁵ Ramanujan A.K., *op.cit*, p. 124.

fact remains that the ecstatic state which the two women yogis enjoy is not to be found in Allama. He is cool and didactic. His words, besides being symbolic, have the precision of a mathematical theorem.

Shri R.D. Ranade's remarks on the Hindi saint Gulal (1119 Gaziapur) best sum up the present discussion. The former observes: "In his poem *tatta hindolava*,... Gulal says in almost the same strain in his post-ecstatic exclamations that the Self is a child in the cradle of Reality. The cradle is miraculous, having no poles to support it, no ropes to attach it to the poles. The bells attached to it ring continuously and lull the Self to Samādhī. The spiritual teacher gives it a swing and the cradle leaves the world altogether and flies into the empyrean and the Self, the supreme object of love, becomes dissociated with the world and entirely transcendent."¹⁶ ▲

(All translations are by the author)

¹⁶ PGKL op.cit, pp. 276-77.

Oneness*

Geetha Ravichandran

If words were to fuse into song,
the rhythm could only be my breath
that mingles with the fragrance of marigolds
which traps the salt of the breeze
that rises from the shore of the ocean
to converge upon the moon
hiding behind the dust of clouds
and fills puddles in the clay
where your breath pulsates
among the roots of the creeper
which tosses its fragrance to fill me
to rise again as my raw breath.

* Poem excerpted from *Arjavan* by Geetha Ravichandran, published by Red River, 157/1 Patparganj, New Delhi 91. ISBN: 978-81-953056-2-9

MAHA BHAKTA VIJAYAM

The Blessed Life of Sant Jayadeva

Chapter Three

Jayadeva Swami is Assaulted and Maimed

NABAJI SIDDHA

O pure ones! Noble souls! Now, let me unfold before you, some of the most amazing events of Jayadeva Swami's life.

One day, the Sant was walking in the street after his contemplation in the forest. A devout merchant from a neighbouring city, who had heard about the Sant's exalted state, happened to see him in the street at that time. He was enraptured at the sight and running towards him, he tightly held him in his clasp. He felt that he had obtained the Sant's darshan by his immense merits or by the austerities performed by his ancestors. He immediately carried him off with all honours in his palanquin to his town. The merchant and his wife worshipped the Mahatma with great devotion and faith. However, on realising that Padmavathy would be anxiously waiting for her husband's return and would be heartbroken if he did not reach home within reasonable time, the merchant having offered presents of one hundred gold coins to Jayadeva Swami and pieces of jewellery and silk clothes for Padmavathy and amidst *nāmasaṅkīrtan*, bade farewell to the Sant. He

arranged for his own chariot to take the Swami back to Kindubilvam. He instructed the charioteer and attendants to reach the Sant home carefully. Overcome by much love, he again heaped on the Swami manifold gifts with repeated prostration.

However much Jayadeva declined to accept the coins and costly gifts saying that they were fatal to one's spiritual welfare, the merchant forcibly loaded them in the chariot. He laid himself in complete prostration on the ground at the Sant's feet and prayed to him to accept them because those gifts were for the holy lady Padmavathy. He exhorted the driver to go fast before the noble mother became worried about the Swami's absence. The charioteer drove so fast that it looked as if the wind was conveying the chariot. As they reached the middle of the forest, some thieves heard the sound of the fast rolling wheels and ambushed the party. Wielding sticks and swords and shouting fiercely, they attacked the servants and the chariot-driver who jumped out of the vehicle and they all ran for their lives.

Jayadeva got out and started walking away calmly, leaving everything to the robbers with the benevolent attitude, 'let them carry away the gifts'. Ignorant of his greatness, the thieves ran behind him, roaring like wild animals, shrieking abuses and kicking him and beating him, they dragged him into the interior of the forest like a tiger dragging a helpless cow.

Jayadeva bowed to them and spoke lovingly, "I possess nothing. I am not fighting with you for anything. Why do you unnecessarily trouble me? Take away happily whatever is in the chariot. Please be kind and let me go unharmed."

The wicked barbarians were deaf to his pleas and snatching away the clothes from his body and leaving him naked, the evil-doers spat out cruel words, "We are not misled by your deceitful words. You were hurrying away only to find out our hideout in order to betray us to the soldiers. Do you think you can get away with such intentions? One can trust anyone in the world but not a brahmin. We won't let you escape alive." They jumped on him ferociously with their swords, cut off his hands and legs and threw him into a dilapidated well. Then, they left with the booties in the chariot.

"O avid listeners! Jayadeva Swami, who was the crest-jewel among devotees, who bore ill-will towards none, the very personification

of the *Parabrahman*, a great exponent of Truth, revered and praised by all, a panacea for seekers afflicted by ills of *samsāra*, conqueror of anger, a veritable fire that has burnt lust, extremely generous to the poor, fearless, dispassionate and equipoised, was not spared by the cruel hands of destiny. The supreme person's divine body went hurtling down at a great speed into the well. Even at this critical moment, an intrepid hero that he was, he felt that it was the result of his Karma, his past actions and he should not be distressed by the dismemberment of his limbs which were the principal agents in committing sinful acts. He called out to the thieves pleading with them to put an end to his life by dropping a big stone on him. As he was met with only silence, he became sorrowful.

Soon his body began to be tortured by pain issuing from the raw wounds brought about by the dismemberment and injuries caused when his body came crashing down the well. Sharp stones and thorns had pierced his flesh deeply. Flies alighted on the sores, ants crawled on his body biting into the sores. His body was hurting all over. Without the limbs, he couldn't turn or move to seek any relief. He became unconscious with the pain and the excruciating pain itself made him conscious again. How can words describe the torment he suffered?

He thought that life was leaving his body and he was at the last moment of bodily existence. He fixed his mind on God and launched into exultant praises, whispering His different names and attributes. With profuse tears streaming down from his eyes mingling with blood, he sought refuge at the Lord's feet, "I take shelter in You, O Kesava, O causeless Cause, Bestower of the holy state of liberation, O immaculate One, Friend of the helpless, O Lover of devotees, O Redeemer, my Master, Untainted, Self-luminous Lord, Giver of auspiciousness, Destroyer of ill-fortune, Caretaker of destitute, adored by *rishis* and gods, O Absolute, I take refuge in You! I take refuge in You! Save me from this difficulty. Didn't You hasten to rescue Draupadi in her critical condition? You alone are the safe haven for the entire universe. You destroy all sins. You are the father and mother of all. You cut asunder the aeon old Karmas and bestow fearlessness. I seek refuge in You! I seek refuge in You!"

As soon as his anguished cry reached the ears of the Lord of the universe, who was seated in His abode on a gem-studded resplendent throne, before which even the rays of the sun pale, surrounded by the demi-gods, sages and *rishis*, He became so restless that His green-hued body was drenched with perspiration. Agitated at the mishap of His devotee, His eyes became pools of tears. Without beckoning even His divine vehicle Garuda, or informing His consort or the celestial sage Narada, He got up abruptly and disappeared.

“O my beloved! Supreme among the devotees! Friend of all sadhus! Priceless gem among those who have surrendered to Me! Having annihilated the ego without a trace, you are established firmly in the Absolute. Can anyone glorifying Me ever remain helpless? Can anyone nurturing hatred towards Me attain to auspiciousness? What has brought upon you such a cruel destiny? I will reach you in a moment and lift you from the well of despair!” Exclaiming thus, as He rushed to Jayadeva’s rescue, His Tulasi garland slipped from His neck and His yellow silk garment came loose with its end sweeping the ground. He sped faster than wind and His divine disc hurried panting after Him. Beholding the amazing sight, the gods from heaven rained down flowers, Rudra and Brahma broke into hymns, elephants guarding the eight directions trumpeted loudly in ecstasy, the Mother Earth became thrilled with joy; Goddess Lakshmi was lost in wonder and Adishesha gaped at the sight in astonishment!

Rushing past the city of Puri Jagannath and reaching the well, the Lord entered the heart-lotus of Jayadeva in the form of an ocean of bliss and revealed Himself as the subtle essence. Blessing His dear devotee to be rid of all pain and torment, the Lord said, “Realise at this very moment My *Rūpa*, *Swarūpa* and *Nirūpa*.”

Forgetting all bodily anguish, Jayadeva cried out in bliss, “Ah! my Lord’s grace has enveloped me from within like the cool silvery rays around the full moon, spreading a rapturous delight in my heart! I have not realised this inner presence until now and have lamented like an ignoramus who takes his body as himself. Without recognising the *Swarūpa* on which yogis contemplate, the *Rūpa* which the devotees adore and the *Nirūpa* with which *Brahmajñānis* become united, how foolishly I sought the well-being of this physical body. The king of ego rules over the jiva, with the five senses enamoured by objects as

advisors, the deceitful mind acting as the minister, desires alluring like beautiful damsels, lust and greed mounting attack like warriors aided by the soldiers of sound, served by words as slaves further deluding the mind and life-force guarding the body. Alas! I dwelt on the welfare of such an illusory entity. Without being united with this bliss within, how did I become the victim of the demands of flesh? Why did I lose the self-attention? Let eternal doom descend on me! Instead of getting absorbed in His remembrance, I became distracted by the body. Instead of glorifying the Indweller, I became infatuated with the body. It is like ignoring the noble wife who resides at home and running behind a prostitute in the street.” Soon, Jayadeva was drowned in waves of divine ecstasy and becoming absorbed in the Self, he lost outer consciousness for some time.

Yet again, becoming aware of the external world, he sang praises of the Lord, visualising His form from crown to His lotus feet, “Before You, even millions of suns appear lustreless. O lotus-eyed One! How did You manage to hold up the huge Govardhan hill on Your little finger? O handsome Lord, adorned by the garland made of wild forest-flowers around Your neck! You hold the countless universes in Your navel. The Ganga water used for washing Your holy feet is carried by Lord Shiva on His crown with joyful pride.” As he kept glorifying the Lord, all his senses subsided and hearing within the mystical sounds of various kinds, he transcended the duality of seen and the seer and the realm of Maya, and again merged in the silence of Brahman, the state of total Perfection.

After some time, he surfaced from the absorption and offered prostrations, “O Supreme Person, holding the fierce disc! I prostrate before You! Lord of all Vedas! I prostrate before You! Protector of the entire world! I prostrate before You! O Beloved bearing beautiful names such as Govinda, and Sri Krishna, I prostrate before You countless times! O the Self in all creation! I prostrate before You! You are ignorance as well as knowledge, action and non-action, truth as well as falsehood! I prostrate before You again and again! You are the enjoyer, the objects enjoyed and also the instruments of enjoyment! I prostrate before You! You are the offering, the performer of *yajña* and also the manes receiving it. I prostrate before You! Yours are the Cause, the *Tattva*, the subtle and the gross, I prostrate before You!

Your *Swarūpa* is transcendental. Again and again I prostrate to You, O Purushothama!

“You are the Power of *Prakriti*, You are the *Jiva-Swarupa*. You are That which is beyond mind, that Existence which cannot be proved even by the wise ones, You, the most Exalted One! I prostrate to Your incomprehensible nature. You are beyond the clutches of Time, You are the One alone, unrelated, untouched by all else. To this Highest Excellence, I prostrate! The demi-gods who cannot grasp Your absolute nature worship Your Incarnations, the personal aspect. You are everything, You are also nothing. From whom all creation emanates and in whom all subside, to that High and Lofty One I offer my prostrations! One who dwells in all bodies and is the substratum of all, before such Omnipresence, I prostrate!” Overwhelmed by the thought of the Lord’s unfathomable glory, Jayadeva Swami became utterly silent.

While he was immersed in divine raptures, Padmavathy who was ripe in knowledge and whose eminence was like exalted Parvathy, who is fixed in sublime knowledge and who protects all *jīvas* and like that of the all-purifying Ganga, became restive when her husband didn’t return home till late in the evening. She was worried, “Has he forgotten the passage of time in his absorbed state? Has any disciple detained him with the power of his devotion? Is he lying asleep somewhere overcome by fatigue and hunger? Has he given up the householder’s life due to intense dispassion? Has he forgotten me in the bliss of the Self?”

Lamenting like this, she set out in search of him. Whenever she espied a hermitage, she would eagerly peep in only to turn back disappointed. She roamed in the lanes in a distraught condition. Her eyes clouded by tears of grief, she stumbled and fell down several times. Though exhausted and weak, she would pick herself up and suddenly speed like the wind to look for him in a remote corner. She, who had never exchanged a word with any neighbour or looked at the face of any stranger out of modesty, knocked at many doors and asked if her husband was there.

When her father learnt about his daughter’s plight, he hastened to her and said, “Your husband may be meditating in some cave as is his wont. Have no fear. I will bring him back.” After a long futile

search, he returned home and said, “He must be in a cave deep in the forest and will return on his own in a few days.”

How can Padmavathy’s pain be described? She lost the taste for food and sleep. She paid no attention to daily routines, like having a bath etc. She wore the same clothes for days. Sometimes, she rolled on the ground in agony. Sometimes, she kept staring at the ceiling or sat with vacant eyes for long hours. At times, she wept piteously saying, “O Lord, how long will I have to wait? What kind of calamity has overtaken him? Will I ever see him again in this birth? Where would he be sitting and meditating? Has he left this part of the country and gone somewhere else?”

Every morning, she set out and walked long distances into the deep forest looking for him in the caves and behind the bushes. Her whole body was scratched by sharp stones and thorns and her feet were bleeding. She spent her daytime in the forest and night in the town. She was plunged in indescribable sorrow, yet she kept reciting the hymns on the Lord. The pathos of the scene was beyond description.

(To be continued) ▲

A Few Advaitic And Zen Hi-Coo IV

Kevan Myers

A voice with no author, sings
from the space between things

Without my body
life would be so much easier.
But how would I know?

For some, this moment is their first
for others their last.
How does it look to you?

When flies walk on his face
the Buddha can feel
the touch of each foot



Sri Ramana Sahasram

Selected Verses

Followed by Sadhu Om's own verse paraphrases of relevant verses from Sri Muruganar's Guru Vachaka Kovai

SADHU OM

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

S*ri Ramana Sahasram* is a series of 1,000 *venba* verses in which Sri Sadhu Om pleads for the grace of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, and, in some cases, complains of his master's tardiness in granting that grace. They were first published in Tamil in 1990, some five years after his passing, although, according to the website sadhuom.net, they were composed in 1967. That they were not published till then is hardly surprising since, according to one of the dedicatory verses, they are an entirely personal testament to his devotion to Sri Bhagavan. In fact, he goes as far as to say, in the first prefatory verse, that it would be wrong for anyone else to read or hear them at all.

These *venbas* were not written to be printed, approved of by others or praised by friends. They are simply words of devotion which I in fitting manner offer with love to my Lord who

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.

dwells within my heart. For anyone else to hear them would be unseemly.

A prose translation of these verses has been published, although it may not still be in print. It is however available to be read online on the website mentioned above.

Another important work, one that was published in his lifetime, in 1980, is his expanded prose paraphrase of Muruganar's *Guru Vachaka Kōvai – Garland of Guru's Sayings*, which are sayings of Sri Ramana, recorded in poetical form by Muruganar in a series of 1254 *venba* verses. The verses as composed by Muruganar are dense and pregnant with meaning but are in most cases complex, elliptical and couched in the chaste form of Classical Tamil, employing a vocabulary which is highly coloured by Sanskrit terms and rare and archaic Classical Tamil vocabulary. In his prose paraphrases it is Sadhu Om's intellectual clarity, rather than his devotion, as he teases out and expands the cryptic sense of the verses in clear modern day Tamil, that comes to the fore.

It therefore seems appropriate to celebrate these two aspects of Sadhu Om's particular genius by offering a selection of verse translations of those devotional poems, followed by his lucid rendition of one of the *Guru Vachaka Kōvai* verses on the same, or a similar, theme.

The Heart

Let me bathe in the Self's blissful gaze,
With all the ego's posturing erased,
As the vision of the world forever fades.
In the Heart as the Heart make me subside
So that as one with you, united, I abide. (SRS 232)

The awareness that remains in the natural state, 'I am', without rising up to know things that are other than itself, is called *the heart*. This natural awareness, which remains without performing the function of knowing anything other, shines through its own self-nature as the real [the *ātman*, truth]. Therefore to be established in the *ātman* by investigating and abiding in that Heart [oneself], pure awareness, is the shining of the real. (GVK 435)

The World Appearance

Abandoning its true state as being,
 My foolish mind before it sees
 A body and a world externally perceived.
 How does this mind arise and come to be?
 This is no fitting fate for me.
 So, my Lord, from it make me free. (SRS 175)

If you abide in the Heart as the nature of being-consciousness, as the same awareness by which the whole world also exists and shines, this world will lose its unreal, dualistic nature, which causes the delusion that gives rise to fear, and will shine [free of duality] as one with *ātma svarūpa* (your true nature). (GVK 61)

The Seer and the Seen

Since the seen must as the seer be,
 As the [Self's] Eye may you establish me,
 In the blissful Heart of all thoughts free.
 And make me abide through your grace
 as the one [Reality] in the glorious *sahaja* state. (SRS 230)

In accordance with the axiom, 'The nature of the seen is not different from the eye that sees,' know that, to the knower of truth, whose vision has become entirely being-consciousness-bliss through the cessation of the play of the mind, this world also is in truth only that being-consciousness-bliss. (GVK 54)

True Sight

True sight is only the Self to see.
 The sight that outward things perceives
 Is only blindness; sight, how can it be?
 Therefore deign now to look upon me
 So that inward turned the Self to face,
 I may ever dwell established there
 With love, in that blissful gaze of grace. (SRS 10)

When the perceived world is seen as not different from the one who sees it, that is the effulgence of *jñāna*. To rid oneself of the

world by viewing it as nothing [a mere empty appearance] by remaining established in the Heart, so that the mind does not cling to an exterior world – that is *vairāgya*. (GVK 243)

The First Thought ‘I’

Grant through your holy grace the lofty state
In which I as pure being alone remain,
Not arising as the first thought ‘I’.
Enough I’ve had of sorrows, piled high,
By a hostile and deluded mind,
Unable, My Lord, as simple being to abide. (SRS 207)

The primal reality shines purely in the form of silence (*mauna*). Why torment yourself by thinking over and over again, ‘I am That’? When the thinking mind subsides in silence, that itself is to be established in *samādhi*. That state of *samādhi* is simply the absence of the first thought, ‘I’. That itself is mind-free *mauna*. Once the ‘I’ has ceased to exist in this manner, where is the scope for the thought, ‘I am Brahman’ to arise? (GVK 902)

The Destruction of *vāsanās* (mental tendencies or conditioning)

How can all these *vāsanās* continue to survive
Without recourse to the ‘I’, which rises as the mind?
If in grace you annihilate this ‘I’, the ego’s very form,
Thereafter, my Lord, can any *vāsanās* remain at all?
(SRS 119)

Mental confusion can never arise without the egoic nature that thinks, ‘This body is I’. For this reason, the *jñānis*, in whom all the mental conditioning (*vāsanās*) that stem from the ego have been destroyed, will never encounter mental confusion even in their dreams. (GVK 1131)

Mauna, the Language of the Real

Reveal to me the knowledge that cannot be described or shown,
The vision that unlike all other things, cannot be seen or known,
So that, as your devotee I truly learn, investigate and realise
The supreme *mauna* wherein, as prey to you, the ‘I’, forever dies.
(SRS 103)

When we consider carefully, the questions that are raised and the answers that are put forward in response to them exist only due to the defective nature of language. Know that they only appear to be real and that they have no validity whatsoever in the language of true knowledge (*jñāna*), the non-dual state of silence (*mauna*). (GVK 1181)

Illusory Nature of *siddhis* (preternatural powers)

When I survey the field of learning's manifold extent,
 With mind confused and the sense's power spent,
 I long for *siddhis*, special powers, to give it strength.
 May you direct all these longings to turn within,
 Giving me the strength established in the Real to live.
 (SRS 97)

To greedily beg for worthless *siddhis* from a God, who gives even his own self, that which is all that is, [to his devotees], is like going to a great philanthropist, whose generous nature is capable of giving all that is asked for, and begging for worthless, stale porridge. (GVK 219)

Objective knowledge – the Arts and Sciences

All outer knowledge is a veil that being-awareness hides.
 Let me not study this, but in that being-awareness subside.
 Save me, poor wretch, from restlessly arising as the ego, 'I'
 And let me not fall and be destroyed in that chasm dark,
 That is the desire for knowledge of the sciences and arts.
 (SRS 98)

When, by sinking into the Heart, the investigation as to who is the 'I' who has learned the arts and sciences is carried out, the ego, 'I', ceases entirely to exist, along with all the knowledge of those arts and sciences that it has gained. Only the one who then remains, having realised his true nature beyond all doubt, is a learned person (*pandit*). Otherwise, tell me, how could an egoic individual who does not know that true nature, *ātma svarūpa*, be a learned *pandit*? (GVK 133)

Destruction of the Ego by the Guru

If, through your sweet grace, not by any violent force,
In grace you kill this 'I' that rises in the ego's form,
So that it is annihilated forever at its source,
Father, no lack for me will there be anymore. (SRS 171)

Revealing in an instant the unreal universe, consisting of the body and the rest, as non-existent and the single, supreme radiance of the *ātman* as the real existence, the sadguru with his glance of grace [*kaḍākṣa*] kills, without killing, the ego, the *jīva*, which, although actually unreal, appears to be real.

(GVK 281)

The Self-investigation, 'Who am I?'

To be simply as I was, I could not.
I rose as 'I' and suffered on.
All this I clearly recognised.
The medicine that you prescribed
was the investigation 'Who am I'.
Pray feed it to me through your grace
And bring me to salvation's state. (SRS 69)

Thinking without thought [that is, remaining still as the simple being-awareness, 'I am'], one should become a vessel for the divine grace of the Lord and attain liberation. Otherwise, what can be achieved by rising up in the form of the egoic *jīva* awareness, 'I', or how? Therefore, to completely annihilate that ghost-like ego perspective that thinks 'I', one should enquire into [investigate] oneself, attain the experience of the luminous state in which oneself is that *ātman* and become established thereby in the state of supreme silence. (GVK 633)

Obsession with Past and Future Births

By what shall I come my true nature to realise
As it was before I mistook this body for 'I'?
And how shall I know that nature after I die?
Is it right to leave me in this confused state?
Pray reveal to me the truth without delay. (SRS 70)

What can we say of the mindset of those people who expend great efforts in attempting to discover the state they will be in after they die, and the state they were in before they were born, without the least inclination to correctly ascertain even what state they are in now, in the current birth! (GVK 603)

Merging with the Self

My own being do I value as nothing at all,
 Unless, merging with yours, it loses its form.
 Vouchsafe, then, your bounteous grace to me,
 So that my form shall with your Self united be
 With the deep bliss of awareness of the Real. (SRS 187)

Everything that is known is of the form of the consciousness (that knows it). If one becomes firmly established in abidance in the *ātman*, so that everything subsides into oneself, whose nature is consciousness, one's true state will shine alone with all distinctions entirely eradicated. Know that that state is the incomparable state of liberation. (GVK 436)

The Nature of *Mukti*, Liberation

Brahman, the supreme transcendental sky,
 That doth beyond bondage and liberation lie,
 Is the light that as our own self shines.
 If you do not kindle this knowledge's light
 So that it permeates my heart,
 who else might that knowledge impart? (SRS 254)

When one enquires and comes to know oneself through the investigation, 'Who is the "I" that is bound?' the very idea of 'bondage' is completely eradicated. Therefore the true mark of liberation is to realise one's true nature as the *ātman*, which remains over when even the idea, 'I must gain liberation,' the thought of 'liberation' [which forms a pair of opposites with 'bondage'], has been entirely eradicated. (GVK 1221)



A Tribute

V. Subramanian

8th February 1939 -19th July 2022

GEETA BHATT

My father, Shri Maganlal Bhatt (M.L. Bhatt) surrendered at Sri Bhagavan's feet and had visited the Ashram over the years, but had never taken his family to the Ashram. It wasn't until the summer of 1981, that we went to the Ashram as a family – I along with my parents, my sister and her sons, and my brother and his wife, went by train from Delhi to Madras.

We arrived at the Ashram around 12:30 pm, several hours after our expected arrival. V.S. Mani was outside the office building, on his way to go home for the afternoon. But, when he saw me and my sister, he stopped as he realised that we were the devotee family that was expected in the morning. The reason for our late arrival was that I had left my American passport in New Delhi, which made cashing the traveler's cheques a big challenge. But, the bank manager at a Citibank in Madras, upon hearing that we were going to Sri Ramanasramam, immediately agreed to cash my cheques without my physical passport

Geeta Bhatt is a long-time member of the New York Ashrama. She is a frequent visitor to the ashram.

– all I had to do was provide my passport number and other details. This was Sri Bhagavan’s first miracle.

Neither I nor Mani ever forgot that first encounter.

When he heard of the reason for our late arrival, Mani told us to proceed to the kitchen using the backdoor and that he would make sure we were taken care of. My response was “No, no, food is not important; please direct us to the Old Hall.” He laughed and said, “Yes, you may go to the Old Hall, but I am sure the kids are hungry.” Over the years, he always fondly recalled this interaction, as did I.

From that day forward, Mani anna always welcomed me as a younger sister and a close member of the Ramana family.

My next visit and a long stay at the Ashram happened in August of 1986. V.S. Mani had joined the Ashram recently and shifted his family from Mumbai to Tiruvannamalai.

I had come with Dennis Hartel for a month-long visit, but the pull of Sri Bhagavan was such that I decided not to return to New York but ask Mani anna if I could extend my stay. In the same breath I asked to be given some work to do.

Mani anna is a man of few words and in all these years I have learned to wait patiently for his reply. After a long silence, he said, yes to the stay and then said, “Come to the kitchen at 4 am – Balu will show you the work.”

The next morning, I showed up at the kitchen. The kitchen in 1986 was an old kitchen with no more than half a dozen people working, but at 4am, it was just me and Balu. He was boiling milk on the open fire, and he pointed to a place for me to sit, next to a very large heap of beans. He placed a wooden cutting board and a blunt knife with some rags covering the other end where once was a handle. The cutting board was concave and dark, testimonial to the fact that it had served for many years. Balu asked me to chop the beans and went back to his work.

I started to cut the beans and after a while he came and looked and laughed, took the knife from my hand and showed me how minuscule the beans had to be cut. Well, I struggled, but survived and was awarded with a single *idli* and a small measure of coffee.

I was in the kitchen for a few days, if I recall right, and after that Mani shifted me to work in the library. I passed the first test.

After I started to work in the library (it used to be in the Morvi compound), at 5 pm when the library closed, I rushed across the street and ran through the Ashram compound to go to sit on the Hill to watch the setting sun and then gaze at the peak.

There used to be a very large boulder on the right side of the path just 20 feet after the stairs. That was my seat. If I looked west, I saw the setting sun, and slightly to my right and north, the peak. I would sit and meditate. On the third day, when I opened my eyes, Mani anna was standing in front of me. To my puzzled look, he responded, “I see you running past my office, but then don’t see you at the evening *ārati*, and wondered where you were rushing to.” I couldn’t tell him that I was not even aware of the evening prayers, the Old Hall and the Hill were the magnet that had me in its grip.

I think he knew that, and since 1986 once the Palakottu rooms were built inside the Ashram compound, I always had a room closest to the Old Hall that could be assigned to a female *sādhaka*.

Since then, all these years whenever I have gone for long stays at the Ashram, Mani anna gave me some new assignments. One year I was there for a shorter stay, and he asked me to gather the flowers from the garden for the first morning *pūjā* at Matrubhuteswara shrine. Oh! An easy assignment I thought, till I stepped into the flower garden early next morning. The assigned workers were calm and quick with filling their baskets, but I could neither stand still nor gather flowers. The reason – an army of mosquitos were attacking the entire body and enjoying the feast.

If Mani anna was a tough teacher who worked to bring your ego under Sri Bhagavan’s Grace, then I would also endure and accept the apprenticeship. For two days, he must have observed or got some report from the workers and the priest, because on the third day he came to me, smiling and gave me the task of taking a Russian devotee to Pondicherry.

While I was at the Ashram in 1997, Dennis had written to Mani anna that the New York Ashrama would like to install a Sri Chakra at the new site on Clyde Street. Dennis asked me to remind Mani of his request when I arrived at the Ashram. I did that, days passed quickly, and my day of departure was approaching. But Mani anna had not said a word to me. On the very last evening, I was called to the President’s

office. The doors were closed, and Dr. Murthi solemnly opened the almirah in the President's office and brought out an object and placed it with due reverence in the President's hand. He unwrapped it, and showed me a beautiful Sri Yantra, and said this had just arrived with a courier from Madras. It was for the New York Ashram.

Sri Yantras are made to order, but the jeweller didn't have enough time to meet with Sri Mani's request. Thankfully, this Yantra, which was meant for someone else, became available this morning when for some reason the buyer was unable to meet his obligations. I requested that the Yantra be handed over to the Matrubhuteswara priest and given to me next morning at the time of my departure. Sridhar was summoned and instructed to put it in the *garbhagrha* for the night and give it to me after the morning *pūjā*. The small 10 inch by 12 inch Sri Yantra of five metals is installed in the New York Ashram.

V.S. Mani supported the activities of Arunachala Ashrama, New York, wholeheartedly. Every time any one of us visited, Mani anna sent with us a few dozens of Sri Aurobindo Ashram *agarabattī* for New York. Once, after I told him that with the donation receipts from New York Ashram, I'd like to enclose Sri Ramanasramam's *vibhūti* and *kumkum* packets, he never failed to keep our stocks full. That kind thoughtful gesture of his made New York Ashrama a true extension of Sri Bhagavan's abode in Tiruvannamalai.

We read accounts of how during Sri Bhagavan's physical presence, he chose a human instrument to guide a *sādhaka* on the path, and for me it was Mani anna. Anna watched and groomed me with love and tender care. Ramanasramam is my home and Sri Bhagavan the Sadguru.

A few years back when many devotees were buying land in the new Ramana Nagar, he forbade me to get entangled in that. He said, "The Ashram is your home."

My last memory is from 2018. I was at the Ashram. It was *Māṭṭu Pongal* day. Anna asked me to come to the office after breakfast. We were all going to the old age home for Ashram cows for a '*gopūjā*'. When we came back, I was summoned by him to come by the well. He placed a five-rupee silver coin in my open palm and said, "On Pongal day, brothers gift their sisters with a silver coin. My eyes

welled up and I silently did my most sincere loving *praṇām* to him. I didn't know that would be my last *praṇām* to him.

My limited ability doesn't help in expressing the void that the physical absence of Sundaram Anna and Mani anna envelops me. I came to the Ashram when the torch was being passed from Sri T.N.Venkataraman to the younger generation, and now a curtain closes for me and many of us who started to come to the Ashram in the 70's and 80's.

With Mani I had the longest relationship, but Sundaram and Ganesan annas both have given me the same love and affection. In hindsight I know that when I came to the Ashram as a young single woman, it was the support and care of these three brothers that was the outer expression of Sri Bhagavan's guidance and acceptance of this soul as HIS, in HIS Ashram, at HIS Feet. ▲

Still Here

For V.S.

Upahar

Around the mountain path, a wind is singing;
a fragrance fills the soul, a grateful prayer.
In quiet joy, the pilgrims move in circles.

Spirit we are; an ever-flowering light,
a mystery of love; through changing forms
drawn endlessly into our own Self-wonder.

In the Master's house, a blissful Gem is shining,
dispelling every doubt. No one is missing.
The Heart is all we are.
The Heart is All.

Namo Ramanaya

பசு லக்ஷ்மி நிர்வாணத்தினம்
சருவதா ரிப்பேர்கொள் சம்வச் சாத்து
வருமானி யைந்துசு வாரம் - மருவமுற்
பக்கத் துவாத்ஸீ சாகம் பசுவாமி-
லக்குமிவி முக்தநா ளாம். 18-6-1948.
ஸ்ரீரமணபகவான் அருளியது.

ASHRAM BULLETIN

Cow Lakshmi Day

A special annual *pūja* for Cow Lakshmi on her birthday was held on Sunday the 10th July at her *samādhi* located inside the Ashram. Devotees sang Manavasi Ramaswamy Iyer's song on her, and other songs composed by Ashramites.

Guru Pūrṇimā

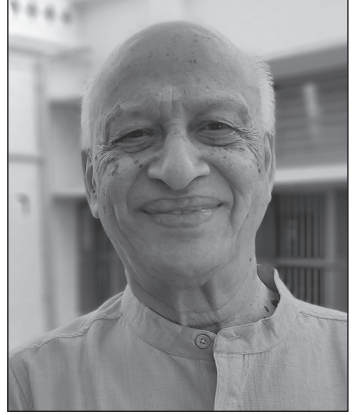
Guru Pūrṇimā occurred on the 13th July. On this occasion, a special *pūja* was conducted and clothes were gifted to *sādhus* and *sannyasins*.

Mani Anna Absorbed in Arunachala Ramana

The Ashram is sad to report the departure of our dear Mani Anna (V. Subramanian aka V.S. Mani) (1939-2022). Of the seven children of Bhagavan's nephew, T.N. Venkataraman (TNV) and his wife Nagalakshmi, Sri V. Subramanian was the first to be born in Tiruvannamalai. TNV, had taken up service in the Ashram

and according to custom, the new-born child was brought before Bhagavan. Bhagavan remarked, ‘Ganesha’s younger brother should be named Subramanian’. In no time, everyone in the family began calling him, ‘Mani’.

Mani Anna studied engineering and was posted to ACC-Vickers Babcock Ltd., Mumbai, where he eventually served as deputy general manager. In 1969, he was married to Ramani who had been fortunate to have Bhagavan’s *darshan* in her girlhood. Making annual visits to the Ashram, the couple set up house in Mumbai and played host to numerous Ashram inmates. In 1984, Mani Anna lost his mother, and the family in Tiruvannamalai felt deeply the pinch of her absence. Even though still having the responsibility of raising two young children, he took voluntary retirement and came to settle permanently in Tiruvannamalai in 1985. Already trained and experienced in management, Mani Anna proved invaluable as an administrator and worked hard to assist his father and brother in managing the Ashram.



The August *Saranagati* issue has a detailed obituary on Mani Anna. The link is: http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/saranagati/Saranagathi_eNewsletter_August_2022.pdf. One anecdote is quoted here from it:

“Once when Mani was about nine years old, his fourth standard teacher wrote a one-act play depicting Bhagavan’s teaching which the children performed in Bhagavan’s presence. The performance concluded with a line spoken by the young Mani with his fist firmly placed at the centre of his chest in a gesture of bold conviction, ‘I will strive and work hard for this noble cause till my last breath.’ A prophetic declaration for a young boy. Bhagavan turned his gaze to the child and smiled. He then turned to the devotees and family members and remarked, *Maṇi maṇiyāga pēsarāṇē* (‘Mani is talking like a gem [*maṇi*].)’”

Mani Anna also related later that his mother gave him *dīkṣā* once saying that his purpose and job was to serve the devotees who come

to the ashram to receive Bhagavan's Grace. All who know Mani Anna know how fully he fulfilled his mother's wish over a period of nearly 40 years. His kind, sweet, friendly smile will be missed by a multitude of devotees.

Mani Anna took his last breath around 4.30 pm on Tuesday, July 19th. Totally surrendered to Bhagavan and dedicated to Ashram and devotees, he is now Absorbed in Ramana, the Embodiment of Peace.

He is survived by his son Ramanan, his daughter Shanthi and two grandchildren and an elder brother, Ganesan.

Krishna Yajur Veda Pātasāla

The Ashram's Krishna Yajur Veda Pātasāla was founded in 1937. Dozens of students from different parts of India learn *Yajur Veda* from competent, dedicated *āchāryas* and at the end of the course, an examination is held and successful candidates are given certificates.

The Ashram conducts annual exams for Veda *Vidyārthis* of *Rig*, *Yajur*, and *Sāma* Vedas from other Pātasālas as well in different states for the past five years. The exams for this year were conducted on the 4th, 5th, and 6th of August.

On the 6th '*kal vaitha vāram*' (a method of examination) was held in the morning. In the evening, certificates were awarded to the students who qualified in the Vedic Examination.

Independence Day, August 15



Independence Day was celebrated at the Ashram as in every year. This year, the Tri-colour National Flag was hoisted at the Ashram premises by Padma Vibhushan Ilaiya Raaja, M.P. in the presence of Ashram President Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan and many other devotees. After National Anthem was sung concluding with *Bhārat Mātā Kī Jai*, Sri Ilaiya Raaja sang Poet Bharati's '*Vande Mātaram* Enbom' and a group of devotees sang Poet Bharati's '*Pārukkulle Nalla Nāḍu*'.

Sweets were distributed at the end of the function. ▲

NOW AVAILABLE...

Mountain Path App (iOS and Android)

Sri Ramanasramam is pleased to announce a new App called Mountain Path. The Mountain Path iOS App provides an opportunity to read all the *Mountain Path* issues published from the year 1964 to the year 2022.

The app has the option to search for all the issues of the *Mountain Path* magazine from any specific year and also read them online. There is also a feature to download several issues to your iPhone for offline reading.

If you are looking for specific keywords in any article of the issues of the magazine, you could search for the same using the “Keyword Search” feature. As the search results appear, you could select a specific article from the list of magazine issues that contain the searched keyword. The pdf version of the magazine shows up with the searched keyword highlighted for further reading.

The “Other Journals” section provides an opportunity to read other journals and newsletters from Sri Ramanasramam and some of its centres. Currently, there are four newsletters, namely *Saranagati* (eNewsletter from Sri Ramanasramam), *The Maharshi* (eNewsletter from Arunachala Ashrama, New York), the *Direct Path* magazine from Sri Ramana Kendra (Delhi), and *Sri Ramana Jyothi* magazine from Sri Ramana Kendram (Hyderabad).

A similar app for Android phones is already available on the Google Play store.

We hope the devotees will benefit from the above apps. The links are given below.

<https://apps.apple.com/in/app/mountain-path/id1630751732>

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ramana.mountainpath>

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).

D: If the entire universe is of the form of mind, then does it not follow that the universe is an illusion? If that be the case, why is the creation of the universe mentioned in the Vedas?

M: There is no doubt whatsoever that the universe is the merest illusion. The principal purport of the Vedas is to make known the true Brahman, after showing the apparent universe to be false. It is for this purpose that the Vedas admit the creation of the world and not for any other reason. Moreover, for the less qualified persons creation is taught, that is the phased evolution of *prakriti* (primal nature), *mahat tattva* (the great intellect), *tanmatras* (the subtle essences), *bhutas* (the gross elements), the world, the body, etc., from Brahman; while for the more qualified simultaneous creation is taught, that is, that this world arose like a dream on account of one's own thoughts induced by the defect of not knowing oneself as the Self. Thus, from the fact that the creation of the world has been described in different ways it is clear that the purport of the Vedas rests only in teaching the true nature of Brahman, after showing somehow or other the illusory nature of the universe. That the world is illusory, everyone can directly know in the state of realisation, which is in the form of experience of one's bliss-nature.

— Sri Ramana Maharshi, *Self-Enquiry*, Section 10
