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

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The aim of this journal will be to set forth the traditional wisdom of *sanatana dharma* with emphasis on Vedanta, as testified and taught by the great sage Sri Ramana Maharshi, and to clarify his path for seekers in the conditions of our modern world.

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Divine Names of Arunachala

33. ॐ महादेवाय नमः

Om mahādevāya namaḥ

Prostration to the Great Lord

In *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's great treatise on the nature of Reality, there is only one specific allusion to God worshiped in name and form, and it occurs in the second benedictory verse. Those who know the genesis of the treatise know that the verse was given that place of honour at the request of Ganapati Muni, a renowned Sanskrit scholar and great devotee of the Master.

*Pure-hearted people who have intense fear of death will take refuge at the feet of God (mahēśan), who is devoid of death and birth, as a fortress. By their refuge, they undergo death. Will those who are deathless be associated with the thought of death?*¹

That Great Lord, as the object of devotion, however, is in reality formless. As we progress from devotion with desire to devotion without desire and as the ego is progressively unmasked through sincere and ardent practise of self-surrender or *ātma-vicāra*, we come to understand that we and the formless Absolute are one and the same. In the first benedictory verse, Bhagavan makes clear that complete extinction of the ego is knowing God.

*If what exists were not, would existing awareness exist? Since the existing substance exists in the heart without thought, how to think of the existing substance, which is called 'heart'? Being in the heart as it is alone is thinking. Know.*²

When we turn within, then, the Great Lord is unceasing awareness of nothing but the eternal, unchanging, all-pervasive and self-effulgent 'I am'. We are That. — BKC

¹ Translation by Michael James.

² There are alternative meanings to this verse. See <https://happinessofbeing.blogspot.com/2017/10/ulladu-narpadu-tamil-text.html#unm1>.

EDITORIAL

Beacon of Light Shines on

Dear Devotees and Seekers,

It is with immense joy and reverence that we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the *Mountain Path*, a sacred beacon of spiritual wisdom and inspiration. As we embark on this momentous occasion, we also embrace a new chapter, one guided by renewed purpose, unwavering dedication, and the blessings of our beloved Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

For six remarkable decades, the *Mountain Path* has been a steadfast companion to seekers and devotees on their spiritual journey. It has been a source of solace, wisdom, and guidance, offering insights into the profound teachings of Bhagavan and the timeless truths of *Sanatana Dharma*.

As we reflect on this journey, we cannot help but marvel at the evolution of our beloved journal. From typewriters to computers, from floppy disks to emails, from printed manuscripts to digital editions, the *Mountain Path* has adapted to changing times with grace and determination. Through these changes, one thing has remained constant—the unwavering commitment to sharing the teachings of Bhagavan with the world.

Today, we stand at the threshold of a new era for the *Mountain Path*. With deep humility and a profound sense of responsibility, we, the new editorial board, step into our roles. Our collective goal is to uphold the journal's founding objective, as articulated by Arthur Osborne: to illuminate a path beyond the confusion and restlessness of modern life, to offer a glimpse of a more satisfying and enduring existence, and to facilitate the journey towards that state of inner peace and well-being.

In the spirit of this objective, the *Mountain Path* will continue to serve as a pure medium for spreading Bhagavan's teachings. Our pages

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will resonate with the wisdom of Sri Ramana Maharshi, providing a roadmap for seekers in the ever-evolving landscape of the modern world. We will explore the essence of Vedanta and the profound teachings of Bhagavan, shedding light on their relevance in today's complex and fast-paced existence.

One of our cherished endeavours is the revival of the 'Letters to the Editor' column. We invite you, our beloved readers and seekers, to share your thoughts, articles, questions, and experiences at mountainpath@gururamana.org. Your voices are an integral part of the *Mountain Path*'s legacy, and we are eager to hear from you.

In addition, we are introducing 'Nondi's Corner', a dedicated section for our younger devotees. This space will feature stories, puzzles, and interesting facts that connect with the younger generation, making Bhagavan's teachings accessible to all age groups.

We shall release the *Mountain Path* in both hard copy and electronic formats, distributing downloadable links on our official website as well as across all our social media platforms. Our objective is to provide accessibility to the journal in multiple formats, ensuring that the wisdom of Bhagavan can be embraced by a global audience.

As we embark on this sacred journey, we are acutely aware of the changes that have unfolded in the world over the past 60 years. The challenges of our time may be different, but the restlessness and spiritual hunger persist. In Bhagavan's teachings, we find the antidote — a timeless wisdom that offers solace, clarity, and purpose in an ever-changing world.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who have been part of this incredible journey — the past editorial boards, contributors, readers, and devotees who have supported the *Mountain Path* throughout the years. Your love and dedication have nurtured this sacred endeavour. We fondly recall the yeoman contributions of Mr. Christopher Quilkey during his 20 years as the most recent editor.

With Bhagavan's blessings and your unwavering support, we look forward to continuing this spiritual odyssey, lighting the path for seekers, and sharing the timeless teachings of our beloved Master.

May the *Mountain Path* remain a beacon of light, guiding us all towards the eternal truth that resides within our hearts.

In humility and devotion,

Venkat S. Ramanan

How to End Misery: Bhagavan's Prescription

S. RAM MOHAN

The Buddha, in his enunciation of the Second Noble Truth, talks about the root cause of suffering. He identifies it as 'tanha' or 'craving'. Due to sensuous attractions, desire arises. When we seek to fulfil the desire, it gets replaced by another greater desire. Then we seek the means to fulfil that and so on.

Due to this recurring process, our mind gets continuously filled with unsatisfied desires, which are ever arising out of material craving; leaving us little time to pursue spiritual development. The mind is always in a state of flux.

The power of desire is unlimited. One Sanskrit poet writes sarcastically:

*tṛṣṇe devi namas tubhyaṃ
dhairya viplava kārine!
viṣṇu trilokya nāthobhi
yatvaya vāmanikṛtaha.*

Dr. S. Ram Mohan is a highly accomplished author and editor of *Ramanodhayam*, the Tamil magazine of the Ramana Kendra in Chennai.

The poet says “Oh Goddess named desire! My prostration unto you. You are capable of destroying totally the confidence and stature of a person. Even Vishnu himself, just because he desired *bhiksha* from Mahābalī, had to dwarf himself to less than 3 feet and become Vāmana.”

Śankara picturesquely describes how a person ever gets trapped by desires:¹

*aṅgam galitaṁ palitaṁ muṅḍam
daśanavihīnaṁ jātaṁ tuṅḍam |
vṛddho yāti grhītvā daṇḍam
tadapi na muñcatyāśāpiṇḍam ||*

Even when the person gets very old, with his head ever shaking, with all teeth fallen, the body invaded by diseases, his very walk depending on a supporting staff the bundle of desires never leave him!

Krishna effectively conveys this.²

“As a man contemplates sense objects, attachment for them arises; from attachment, desire is born; from frustrated desires, anger arises; from anger arises delusion; from delusion comes loss of memory (of True Self). From loss of memory, destruction of discrimination and from destruction of discrimination, man perishes.”

How does Bhagavan deal with the rise of desires and their elimination? Bhagavan does not merely express traditional views on control of desires. His teachings are scientific and go beyond the usual psychological approach.

Bhagavan accepts Buddha’s view that desire is the root cause of misery; however, he does not confine himself to directing the *sādhaka* to eliminate desire. He advises him to follow practical steps to find out when and where the desire rises from. The solution he prescribes is ‘*Ātma vichara*’ or ‘Self-enquiry’. Then one finds that the original problem is the rise of ego.

“Desires are also the products of ego. When we search for the root of ego and understand the Reality, ego dissolves in the Self; with that, desires end,” says Bhagavan.

¹ *Bhaja Govindam*, verse 15.

² *Bhagavad Gītā*, 2.62 & 2.63.

When I think 'I have desires', there arises duality, separating the desiring person and the desire itself. When I find out through *vichara* that the person who desires and the object of desire are one and the same, there arises clarity of vision. The duality of 'seer' and the 'seen' is due to nescience, which creates the delusion that the seer and the seen are two different entities. When we reach the state of pure silence and there are no waves of thought disturbing our inner tranquillity, ego dissolves in the Self. It becomes apparent that all the objects of desire are only shadows or mental projections which will disappear at the dawn of *Jñāna*. Bhagavan tells us that this is the way to eliminate desire.

The Buddha calls this as '*dukkha nirodha gamini patipada ariya sacca*.' He declares that while the noble truth is that misery is a part of existence, it is equally an eternal Truth that there is a well-laid path to end sorrow and to reach Eternal Bliss.

The *sādhaka* may ask, 'All this process of self-enquiry appears to be difficult. Am I capable of doing it?'

Bhagavan says. "Do not worry. Dedicate all the acts you perform as offering to the Lord."

Recollect Śankara's words³ meaning "Whatever work I do, all that is Your *ārādhana* (worship), O Shambhu."

When you perform all your acts with total dedication as an offering to Him, even those acts started by you, initially propelled by desires, will gradually become selfless offerings, when done with an attitude of dedication to the lord without attachment to the result. They purify the mind and lead to liberation.⁴ Actions by themselves are not binding; it is the attitude with which we perform them. It is not the performance of actions that binds us that we fear but the fear of pain or sorrow that result from the actions. Bhagavan says that we need not give up actions. Moreover, it is not possible to give up actions altogether. Nor can we will to renounce the results of the actions through our volition.

Then, how to get out of this vicious circle? Bhagavan says that action performed without desire for the results frees us from bondage. Every reaction produces result.

³ *yad yat karma karomi tat tad akhilaṃ śambho tava ārāadhanam. — Śiva Mānasa Pūja*, verse 4.

⁴ *Upadesa Undiyār*, verse 3.

However, sorrow comes when we want a specific result and it is not forthcoming, like a student wanting to get a first class result in the examination but gets only a second class. While the proper performance of actions can be ensured by us, the results are obtained according to the universal law of *Dharma*. They are the *prasada* (gift) of *Dharma*. Cheerful acceptance of the *prasada* frees us from likes and dislikes and makes our mind pure and free. When we recognise that God is the governor of all actions (*karma-adhyaksha*) and giver of all results (*karma-phala-dhātā*), the mind is purified and becomes free of all desires.

While initially the actions are propelled by desires, later as we evolve in *sadhana*, we seek His Grace and offer all results to Him: then the results of action do not shackle us. Then *vairagya* or spiritual resolve sprouts in our hearts and gets strengthened as we progress and evolve in our spiritual efforts. Thus strengthened, the mind does not follow sensuous attractions and material desires. It gets stabilised in the pursuit of Self-enquiry. When we diligently pursue the quest, it leads us higher and higher to the ultimate goal of Self-Realisation. Then the results of karma will not torment us.

To say it in other words, in the beginning when we are propelled by desires, we may get involved in *kāmya karmas*; at the same time when we offer the results to God as *nishkāmya karmas*, determination to get liberation gets further strengthened. The mind strengthened in its resolve does not fall a prey to sensuous attractions; it evolves further in self-enquiry and finally we abide in the Absolute.

It reminds us where Bhagavan submits a powerful prayer to Arunachala.⁵

“Save me from the cruel snares of sensuous attractions and desires. With thy Grace, make me dissolve in you.” Here Bhagavan indicates that duality, propelled by material attractions, is destruction. Merging with the Absolute is the ultimate state. It is achieved when one transcends desires.

Now Bhagavan suggests one technique, albeit *ad hoc*, to facilitate renunciation of desires albeit temporarily. The technique is God making the *sadhaka*, hitherto involved in worldly desires, to fall totally

⁵ *Aruṇāchala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, verse 20.

in love with the Absolute, to the exclusion of all material desires.⁶ Lord Ramana says, “You made me fall madly in love for Thee, a ‘straight madness’, distinct from the ‘crooked madness’ of love for worldly objects; now grant me the medicine to cure this straight madness of intense love for Thee and also dissolve me in you, O Arunachala.”

You can see that this is a very competent ‘substitution therapy’, prescribed by Bhagavan. In Bhagavan’s words, “I was deeply infatuated with worldly objects and was always contemplating on them. To wean me away from the taste of sensuous desires (inferior kind of madness) you made me totally fall in love with you (superior kind of madness). I am possessed by it now. Though of superior kind, this is also madness. There is the flaw of duality here. Hence even this divine romance is to be transcended for total liberation and for my complete dissolving in you, I implore Thee to provide me with the medicine to cure me of this madness of love-in-duality with you, O Arunachala!” prays Bhagavan.

The same idea is reflected in the famous siddha text *Tirumantiram*.⁷

Sunder your desires,
Sunder your desires,
Sunder your desires even unto the Lord;
The more you desire,
The more your sorrows;
The more you give up,
The more your bliss shall be.

The devotion to God is essentially an instrument for evolution. By itself, it does not become the ultimate end. The ultimate is destruction of all attachment, even with a personal God and merger with the Absolute in the state of non-duality.

Bhagavan indicates this:⁸ “O Arunachala! You are totally beyond all external objects and you shine effulgently as Brahman alone.”

Bhagavan also indicates to the *sadhaka* an alternative way to remove all desires. It is unceasing immersion in meditation.⁹

⁶ *Aruṇāchala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, verse 66.

⁷ *Tirumantiram*, 48-26-15.

⁸ *Aruṇāchala Pañcharatnam*, verse 4.

⁹ *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu Anubandham*, verse 25.

“By unbroken meditation in the Heart; what knowledge (or consciousness) is devoid of all adjuncts (*upadhis*), that Siva is ‘I’. Destroy all attachments of the mind.”

When the consciousness, ‘I’ rises along with the limiting adjuncts ‘I am this’ or ‘I am that’, it is the ego or individual self; but when the same ‘I’ remains devoid of all limiting adjuncts as merely ‘I am’, it is Siva, the Absolute or Self.

When the mind perceives the objects before it, it desires to possess them. The way to get established in the Self is to enquire ‘Who is the one who desires to possess them?’ When the sail of a ship gets unfurled, it gets buffeted by strong winds; likewise, when the mind flows outward, it is disturbed by various thoughts and desires. When the ship is anchored, it remains stable. Likewise when the mind is anchored to the enquiry ‘Who am I?’, it remains stable and in the tranquillity and silence, all desires and thoughts are stilled. By deep and continuous meditation, all attachments and cravings are removed.

To get this idea strongly implanted in our minds, Bhagavan explains this with the powerful analogy,¹⁰ “The mind hankering after sensuous pleasures, repeatedly ruminates over them. It becomes more restless than a monkey. When the mind is prevented from running after sense objects and is turned inwards, it gets established in the state of *Sarva Shunya*.¹¹

It is the state of ‘nothingness’, the state of mind which is bereft of objects or ‘*vishayas*’. At this stage, the mind gets dissolved and merges with the Great Void.

The mind which is enjoying material desires never gets satiated with the increasing enjoyment of sense objects. The desire for more and more enjoyment, wells up in the mind, like the monkey jumping from one branch to another ceaselessly. The mind is constantly in flux. Bhagavan advises that the only way to stop the constant wavering of the mind is to turn it inward and establish it firmly in the great cosmic void or ‘*param*’.

The purpose of yoga is to completely eliminate the cravings and immerse oneself totally in the Supreme Self. The one who

¹⁰ *Jñānāchāra Vichāra Paṭalam*, verse 28.

¹¹ Void of everything except the Self.

achieves this is known as a flawless Yogi, as defined by Bhagavan¹² in *Devikālottaram*. Bhagavan delineates are the characteristics of a great Yogi who has relinquished all desires, one who never lets his mind pursue desires.

“The mahayogi, the flawless ascetic, never lets his mind pursue sensuous desires; he completely removes from his mind all *mamakara* (the feeling this is mine); his mind is fortified with spiritual practice; he never has desire or hatred towards any object; he ever revels in the Self alone.”

Hatred is the reverse-side of desire; both of them are modifications of the mind. We have to remove both of them slowly from the mind.¹³ When one becomes a slave to luxury and endless desires, he lets them accumulate; he ultimately finds it is not possible to fulfil all his desires. Then frustration and fear arise in his mind. His mind is in turmoil. Then he commits mistakes and is swallowed by fears that he may become a candidate for the inevitable retribution. To escape this chain reaction, Bhagavan advises us to eliminate the starting error of desire.

Reach the desireless state through self-enquiry or continuous focusing on spiritual heart is the prescription of Bhagavan.

While dealing with the topic of relinquishing of karmas, Bhagavan emphatically says,¹⁴ “Relinquishing all karmas, becoming totally dispassionate by renouncing all cravings, keeping aloof from the company of those who indulge in mundane conversations, one should always contemplate the Self that is always within oneself, by oneself. Know this.”

This verse *prima facie*, looks somewhat mysterious. However, when we recollect the first benedictory verse of *Ulladu Narpadu*, and read it with this, the import becomes clear. *Ulladu Narpadu* posits an eloquent question, ‘Who can meditate upon the Reality known as Heart, that exists devoid of all thoughts? To remain stable within the Heart is to truly meditate upon it.’

The statements of Bhagavan here echo the teachings in *Yoga Vasishtam*. When desires born of nescience are renounced and dispassion is developed, *avidya* gets destroyed by enquiry into the Self.

¹² *Devikālottaram*, verse 75.

¹³ *Devikālottaram*, verse 78.

¹⁴ *Ātma Sakṣātkāra Prakaraṇam*, verse 33.

Then the Self perceives Itself by its own Self. This is the certainty of Its inherent nature. The Self alone perceives Itself. It investigates itself by Its own Self. The Self alone exists here; not ignorance. Destruction of ignorance is considered realisation.¹⁵

Let us also see Bhagavan's references to the elimination of desires. In verses 14 and 25 of *Gītā Sāram*, Bhagavan succinctly presents the disaster that follows when one follows the dictates of desire, and his liberation when he overcomes the prompting of his cravings.

“Being free from ego and delusion, having conquered the defects namely attachment (as per Śaṅkara ‘*sanga eva dośah*’), being constantly engaged in contemplation of the Self, with their desires having ceased, being free from the effects of the complementary opposite pairs known as pleasure and pain etc., such wise men finally reach, undeluded, that imperishable goal.”¹⁶

“Oh Arjuna, just as a blazing fire reduces the fuel to ashes, in the same way, the fire of knowledge reduces all actions to ashes. (i.e. renders them ineffective).”¹⁷ In his *Gītā Sāram*, Bhagavan also cautions the aspirant against falling a prey to desires and attachments.

“The mind, which by nature is wavering and unsteady should again and again be drawn back from whichever objects towards which it runs and should be brought under the control of the Self alone.”¹⁸

Once this control over the desires and attachments is achieved, the *sadhaka* attains liberation, assures Bhagavan as declared by him in *Gītā Sāram*, “The contemplative sage who has controlled his senses, mind and intellect; is heart and soul engaged in striving for liberation, and who is bereft of desires, fear and anger, stands ever liberated.”¹⁹

We have seen how desires, attachments and cravings bind us to the phenomenal world and prevent us from attaining our goal of liberation. Bhagavan has shown us the direct and effective way to end misery and attain liberation. May Bhagavan's Grace guide us in our path.



¹⁵ *Yoga Vāsiṣṭham*, 1752-53.

¹⁶ *Bhagavad Gītā*, 15.5.

¹⁷ *Bhagavad Gītā*, 4.37.

¹⁸ *Bhagavad Gītā*, 6.26.

¹⁹ *Bhagavad Gītā*, 5.28.

Hemalekha: The Sainly Princess

A Story from Tripura Rahasya

V. KRITHIVASAN

*Tripura Rahasya*¹ is one of the greatest works of ancient India that expounds *Advaita Vedanta*. Sri Bhagavan would often quote from it to emphasise a point. This Sanskrit work is composed as a dialogue between sage Dattatreya and Parasurama. It begins with an exhortation from Dattatreya that *Atma Vichara* is the only way to attain the highest good. If once *Vichara* takes root, the highest good has been reached in this life for all practical purposes. He further adds that association with the wise, *Satsang*, must precede *Vichara*. To illustrate this point, he narrates the story of Hemalekha. Through association with this young lady saint, her husband Hemachuda and later, through him, all his family members and the citizens and people of all classes in his land, became realised beings. It is interesting to see Hemachuda progressing gradually through the stages of *Satsang*, *Vairagya*, Faith, Grace, Effort, *Atma Vichara*, Self-absorption and finally *Jivan Mukti*, all in a lifetime.

¹ Based on Venkataramiah, M., *Tripura Rahasya*, Sri Ramanasramam.

Mr. V. Krithivasan is highly accomplished and was the editor of *Ramana Jyothi*, the magazine of the Ramana Kendram in Hyderabad. He has been associated with the Kendram in various capacities for over forty years.

The Stage of Satsang

There was once a prince by name Hemachuda. During a hunting expedition in a forest, he met a charming maiden of extraordinary beauty by name Hemalekha. Hemachuda fell hopelessly in love with her at first sight. With the permission of her foster father, he married her and returned with her to his capital. The loving couple passed a very happy honeymoon in a number of mansions and resorts. Many days passed and the prince noticed that his young wife was not as amorous as himself. Though she was essentially happy, she was not interested in seeking pleasure or enjoying it. She seemed to live in a world of her own, quite indifferent to whatever happened around her. The prince pressed her to reveal her state of mind.

Hemalekha smiled gently and said, “O Prince! It is not that I do not love you. I am trying to find what the greatest joy in life is; a joy that never becomes distasteful. If you notice carefully, possession of any kind is not constant in its capacity to please one always. Even the king of the land is full of worries all the time, despite his power over his land and his subjects, and the riches and resources at his disposal. No one seems to possess everything that is sufficient for lasting happiness.

“That cannot be happiness which is tinged with misery. Misery is of two kinds: one caused by the body and the other by the mind. Mental suffering is far worse than physical pain. The whole world seems afflicted with suffering and distraction of the mind. If you analyse, you will see that desire is the cause for mental suffering. Respite gained by the fulfilment of one desire cannot be happiness, because there is another waiting to take its place. Desires push you into endless actions.

“You consider me beautiful and derive pleasure out of my beauty. The beauty that you perceive in me is only the reflection of the subtle concept already in your mind. The mind draws an image of something beautiful in conformity with its own repeated conceptions. The repeatedly drawn image becomes clearer and clearer till it appears solidly as an object. An attraction springs up in mind by constant mental association. The mind becomes restless and stirs up the senses and seeks fulfilment of its desires in the object. Oft- repeated mental pictures is the reason for infatuation.”

Hemalekha then makes the following extraordinary observation:

तथा च यो यो यस्यां तु रति विन्दति मानवः।
 सुन्दर्यां वापि चान्यस्यां तत्र सौष्ठवं उल्लिखेत्॥
tathā ca yo yo yasyām tu rati vindati mānavah
sundryām vāpi cānyasyām tatra sauṣṭhavam ullikhet

Whoever finds pleasure in anything, the beauty therein is only mental imagery. The idea of beauty lies in one's own desire innate in the mind. One whose mind is composed is not swayed by desires.

Hemachuda was astounded to receive this reply from his beautiful wife.

The stage of Vairagya

Hemachuda was fascinated by the logic of his wife's forceful words. As he thought more and more about Hemalekha's words, he started developing a distaste for earthly pleasures. He discussed again and again with his wife about the nature of sensory pleasures and their inability to produce lasting fulfilment. A sense of Vairagya or detachment started developing in prince Hemachuda.

Enjoyments ceased to interest him, but the force of habit still remained with him. He was therefore unable to enjoy himself or desist all of a sudden. He became repentant when he fell a prey to his old habits. His mind was swinging like a pendulum between the old habits and the wisdom gained from his wife. He became melancholic.

Hemalekha became aware of the change in him and asked him one day why he had lost his old cheer. He told his wife, "Hemalekha, what you told me on the last occasion has barred all means of pleasure for me.

राजा वितीर्णो विषयः सुखदोऽपि समन्ततः।
 वध्यं न सुखयेत् यद्वत् तथा तस्मान्न मे सुखम्॥ (V-24)
rājñā vitīrṇo viṣayah sukhado 'pi samantataḥ
vadhyam na sukhayet yadvat tathā tasmānna me sukham

I find nothing that can make me happy, just as a man who is awaiting his execution feels.

Hemalekha was pleased to hear this. She felt it was a good symptom and saw that Grace of the Supreme Lord was working in him.

The Stage of Faith, Effort and Grace

Hemalekha decided to impart further knowledge to Hemachuda. She told him that developing faith in the words of the wise, was a very important factor in achieving the Supreme goal. She told him, “People will not gain anything, either during their lifetime or after death, by endless discussions or blind acceptance. Of the two however, there is hope for the latter but none for the former. Beware of intellectual gymnastics parading as logic.” Hemachuda asked his wife, “My dear! You say that faith bestows the highest good. But on what should I place my faith?”

Hemalekha answered, “O Prince! That is best which does not yoke you again to suffering. Whatever has the impress of misery cannot be good. Discriminating zeal is what is needed in assessing the right path. You will be quickly benefitted if you turn away from dry, ruinous logic and engage in purposeful discussions. Be guided by the experience of the wise, accompanied by zeal and constant efforts. More than anything else, Grace is needed. Without it, one cannot overcome the delusion caused by the mind. Therefore worship the Primal Cause of the universe as the starting point. Be devoted to Him. He will soon enable you to succeed in your attempts to destroy the illusion.

तमेव सर्वं भावेन भक्त्याशु शरणी कुरु।
श्रेयसि त्वां याजयेत् स त्वं न तत्परतां व्रज॥ (VII-50)
tameva sarva bhāvena bhaktyāśu śaraṇī kuru
śreyasi tvāṁ yājayet sa tvāṁ na tatparatām vraja

Surrender yourself directly and unhesitatingly to Him. He will ordain the best for you and you need not ask for it.

“Of all methods of approach to God, loving dedication to Him is the best and surest in its results. He is the Transcendent Being, formless, and out of Grace to His devotees, He assumes a form. Therefore, be wise and worship the one pure, unblemished Transcendence. If unable to comprehend this state, one may worship Him with a concrete form.”

Hemachuda, on hearing the truth about the need for God’s Grace in his quest for supreme knowledge, took to worshipping Him with intense devotion. By and by, the Supreme Being’s Grace descended on him. He became totally indifferent to pleasure because his mind was entirely absorbed in the practical investigation of the Truth. Once

more Hemachuda sought his wife for further guidance to reach the state she was enjoying. Hemalekha was pleased to see the prince in a calm frame of mind. She decided to take him to the next level in his quest. She started instructing him about the greatest path to *Moksha*, namely *Atma Vichara*.

The Stage of *Atma Vichara*

Continuing her instructions to her husband Hemachuda, Hemalekha said to him, “O Prince! Investigate the nature of the Self with a keen intellect. The Self is not an object to be perceived or described. The Self does not admit of specification and so no teacher can teach it. However, you can realise it within you as it resides in an unblemished intellect. It pervades all, from personal God to amoeba, but it is not cognizable by the mind or senses. No external agency can illumine it, but it illumines all, everywhere and always. I can only explain to you the means to Self-realisation.”

Prince Hemachuda was all eagerness to receive further instructions from his wife. Hemalekha continued, “As long as you are contaminated with notions of *me* or *mine*, the Self cannot be found, for it lies beyond cognition and *cannot be realised as my Self!*

ममार्थं अखिलं त्यक्त्वा यत्त्यक्तुं नैव शक्यते।

तदात्मानं समालक्ष्य परं श्रेयः समाप्नुहि॥ (IX-16)

mamārtham akhilaṁ tyaktvā yattiyaktuṁ naiva śakyate|

tadātmānaṁ samālakṣya paraṁ śreyaḥ samāpnuhi||

Analyse all those things that are cognized as mine and discard them all. What remains, transcending all - know that to be the Self.

After receiving these clear instructions, Hemachuda retired to a lonely resort and locked himself in, ordering his servants not to allow anyone inside. He started contemplating on what his wife had told him. He thought, “When the Self is not known, all else is in vain, as if done in a dream. I will now investigate the matter. My home, wealth, kingdom, treasure, women, cattle – none of these is me, they are mine. I certainly take my body to be myself but it is only a tool. This body is mine, built up of blood, flesh and bones and is constantly changing every moment. How can it be the changeless Self? I have one body in the wakeful state but take on others during dream. I am always aware,

but I do not realise that pure state of awareness. The reason for this inability is not clear to me. It seems to be obstructed by many factors pertaining to the non-Self butting in. They cannot appear without my mental imagery of them to obstruct the Self.” Thinking thus, Hemachuda forcibly arrested his thoughts. Immediately, a blankness superseded. He continued his meditation and with a mind in a restful state, saw a blazing light, without any circumference. He regained his normal consciousness after some time. He began to think that the experience lacked constancy and decided to repeat it and dived within himself. This time he fell into a long sleep and dreamt wonderful dreams. He woke up and felt frustrated. He wondered how he could have lapsed into a dream state. He felt that the blankness and light experienced earlier must also have been in the nature of dream. He checked his mind once again and remained in a thought-free state for some duration. He felt blissful in that state. It was like sleep in so far as he was not externally aware. The reason for the peculiar state of bliss was not clear to him. There was nothing in that state to be a cause for imparting bliss. He asked himself whether these experiences indicated there were stages of development in the realisation of the Self. He decided to ask his wife and sent for her.

The Stage of Self-Absorption

Hemalekha came to the resort, having been summoned. She saw the prince in a peaceful frame of mind. The prince asked his wife, “My dear, as advised by you, I engaged myself in the investigation of the Self. I had diverse visions and experiences. Thinking that the constant Self-awareness is dimmed by mental activities, I forcibly suppressed my thoughts and remained calm. After many experiences, eventually a unique bliss overpowered me briefly. Is this the Self or something else? Please analyse my experiences and advise me.” Hemalekha listened to him carefully and started speaking to him sweetly. She said, “Listen to me, my dear! Your efforts in turning the mind inward is a good beginning. However, this will not produce Self-realisation, for the simple reason that *the Self remains realised at all times*. If it is a product of something, it cannot be the Self. How can the Self be got anew? Is there any moment when the Self is not the Self? Control of mind alone cannot produce it.

“Though the Self is always there, it is not recognised by you even with a controlled mind, because you are not conversant with it. Attend carefully! In the short interval before blankness appeared and after the control of the mind, there remains a state free from the effort to control and the perception of blankness. Always remember that state as one of perfect and transcendental happiness. All are deceived in that state because their minds are accustomed to be turned outward. Even scholars and yogis do not realise the Self because *it is not realisable but already realised*.

गत्वा दूरं न तत् प्राप्यं स्थित्वा प्राप्तं हि सर्वदा।
 न तद्विचार्य विज्ञेयं अविचाराद्विभासते॥ (IX-82)
gatvā dūram na tat prāpyam sthitvā prāptam hi sarvadā
na tadvicārya vijñeyam avicārādvibhāsate

Realisation is not attained by going far but only by staying still; not by thought processes but by cessation of thought.

“Effort towards realisation is like attempting to stamp with one’s foot on the shadow cast by one’s head! Effort will always make it recede. Although people understand space, they are not aware of it because they are taken in by the objects in the space. They understand the universe in space but have no regard for space itself. Similar is the case with regard to the Self; they pay attention to the mental forms but not the consciousness underlying the mind.”

Hemachuda was keenly listening to his wife, absorbing her words. Hemalekha continued, “The world consists of knowledge and objects known. The objects are non-Self and perceived by the senses. Knowledge is dependent on the knower for its existence. The knower does not require any tests for knowing his own existence. The knower therefore is the only reality behind knowledge and objects. That which is self-evident without the necessity to be proved alone is real; not so other things. Objects and their knowledge are only reflections in the eternal, self-luminous supreme consciousness which is the same as the knower and which alone is real. Therefore prince, realise with a still mind your own true nature, which is one pure, undivided consciousness, underlying the restless mind.

“Realise with a still mind the state between sleep and wakefulness, the interval between the recognition of one object after another, or the gap between two perceptions. This is the Real Self, inhering in which, one is no longer deluded. Let not your mind be outgoing. Turn it inward; control it just a little and watch for the Self, always remembering that the investigator himself is the essence of the being, the Self of the Self. Be also free from the thought, ‘I see’. Remain still like a blind man seeing. What transcends seeing and not-seeing is what you are. Be quick!” Hemachuda did accordingly and having gained that state referred to by his wife, he remained peaceful and absorbed for a long time unaware of anything beside the Self.

Hemachuda was soon to learn that this exalted state was also not the final state!

Jivanmukti

Hemalekha noticed that her husband had attained supreme peace and so did not disturb him. He opened his eyes after a while and saw his wife nearby. Eager to fall into that state once more, he closed his eyes. Immediately, Hemalekha took hold of his hands and asked him sweetly, “My Lord, tell me what makes you feel that you gain something by closing your eyes. What is it that happens, on the eyes being closed or left open?”

On being pressed for an answer, Hemachuda looked as if he were drunk and replied reluctantly and haltingly. “My dear! I have found pure, untainted happiness. I cannot find the least satisfaction in the activities of the world now. They are tasteless to me like a sucked-out orange. What a pity that people are unaware of the bliss of their own Self! They run after pleasures like cattle chewing the cud incessantly. Earlier, I used to run after sensual pleasures, unaware of the boundless ocean of bliss within me. I was so infatuated, I mistook them for lasting happiness. Enough of these activities that make us pursue pleasures, but which only end in sorrow! Hemalekha, my dear! I appeal to you to let me fall into that peaceful state of the bliss of the Self. I pity you that though knowing this state, you are not in it but are ever engaged in activities!”

Hemalekha smiled on hearing this and said to him, “You do not yet know the highest state of sanctity, a state which is not besmirched by duality. Reaching this, the wise transcend duality and are never

perplexed. That state is yet very, very far from you! Your small measure of wisdom is as good as no wisdom because it is not unconditional but remains conditioned by closing the eyes.”

Hemachuda was astonished to hear this. His wife continued, “Perfection cannot depend on activity or otherwise, on effort or no effort. How can that state be a perfect one, if mental or physical activity can influence it? Can displacement of the eyelid by the width of a barley grain make all the difference to it? Again, how can it be perfect if located only in the interior? It is ridiculous to think that an eyelid one inch long, can shut out the expanse in which millions of worlds revolve in one corner alone!

“You must be careful to see the knots created by the bonds of illusion that come in the way of perennial bliss. These knots give rise to mistaken ideas, the chief of which is the thought ‘I-am-the-body’. This in turn gives rise to the endless cycle of births and deaths. The second knot is the differentiation of the world from the Self. The truth is, the being-consciousness of the Self is the mirror in which the phenomena are simply reflected. The other knots include differentiation of beings among themselves and from the Universal Self. These knots have originated from time immemorial and recur with unbroken ignorance. The man is not finally redeemed unless he extricates himself from the countless knots of ignorance.

“The state which resulted in the closing of your eyes cannot be enough. Your conviction ‘I shall lose it by opening my eyes’ or ‘I know it’ is the knot waiting to be cut. It is not an attainment though, as whatever can be attained is not the perfect state. Be strong and root out your thoughts and the deep-rooted knots like ‘I will see’, ‘I am not this’, ‘This is non-Self’ and such.

पश्य सर्वत्र चात्मानं अखण्डानन्दबृंहितम्।

पश्यात्मन्यखिलं लोकं दर्पणप्रतिबिम्बवत्॥ (X-37)

paśya sarvatra cātmānaṁ akhaṇḍānandabṛṁhitam

paśyātmanyakhilam lokam darpaṇapratibimbavāt

Find wherever you turn, the one undivided, eternal, blissful Self. Watch the whole Universe reflected as it rises and subsides in the Self. See the Self both within and without. Abide in the peace of your true Self, devoid of phenomena.

At the end of her speech, Hemachuda's confusion was cleared up. He gradually became well established in the perfect Self bereft of any distinction of within or without. Being always equable, he led a very happy life with Hemalekha, his wife and Guru. He reigned over his kingdom, engaged in all activities of governance, and lived the life of a *Jivan Mukta* (liberated while yet alive).

His father, the king, heard about the change in Hemachuda. He was amazed to see that his son was a different person altogether. Hemachuda was no longer affected by the sway of pleasures or sorrows. He treated friends and foes alike; he was indifferent to loss or gain. He engaged in royal activities like an actor in a play. He seemed like a person always intoxicated with wine; yet he performed all his duties perfectly. The king also wanted to be instructed to reach the same state as his son. Eventually, he too became a realised soul. So too all his ministers, citizens, all classes of people in his land, including children and the pet animals! The whole land was populated with sages and philosophers. It came to be known as the land of Wisdom and praised by all the *rishis*. The land owed its reputation to the wise princess Hemalekha, a teacher of extraordinary merit.

This remarkable story sees the progression of the prince Hemachuda from *Satsang*, *Vairagya*, Faith, Effort, Grace, *Atma Vichara*, *Atma Nishtha* and finally to *Jivan Mukti*. ▲

The Sacred Ash of Peace

Suresh Kailash

Throwing into the sacred fire,
the mother of all desires,
to change what is to what should be,
I wear the sacred ash of peace.
Throwing into the sacred fire,
the false notion, 'I am the doer,'
when it is not I who even breathe,
I wear the sacred ash of peace.

When You Cry Out to Arunachala- Ramana, He Responds

SANJEEV KUMAR NATH

Arunachala and Sri Bhagavan are one and the same entity; hence I am using the singular pronoun ‘He’ for Arunachala-Ramana. One may use ‘She’ too, for He is the Mother principle, Matrubhuteshwara as well. If one is too fussy about gender and language, one may use ‘They’, although ordinary gender discourse is quite inappropriate for this subject, and language itself falls silent in trying to gesture towards the Truth that is Arunachala-Ramana.

Many of Sri Bhagavan’s devotees have written about how they first came to Him, or how He caught them in his net of grace. I too, have done it. It is always exhilarating to read these first-hand accounts of people’s contact with Sri Bhagavan. But do these stories end there? They are only the beginnings, for Sri Bhagavan’s grace works on and on, never failing to respond to the devotees’ prayers. Numerous first-hand accounts of the blessed devotees tell us about how Sri Bhagavan’s grace is ever available. What is going to be recounted here is only

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the experience of an insignificant devotee of Sri Bhagavan, but the very fact that He is so compassionate to ‘me, poor me’ should provide encouragement to other devotees, particularly those who are gradually finding their way through various difficulties. The purport of this piece is to tell them, with the knowledge gathered from personal experience, that if you call, Sri Bhagavan responds. He never fails to respond. The surrendered devotee is never forsaken by Arunachala-Ramana, and perhaps even before one achieves true, total surrender, the ocean of compassion that is Arunachala-Ramana, owns you. You take one step towards Him, and He takes ten, may be a hundred steps towards you.

One of the difficulties of writing what I am going to recount here is that I would have to refer to some people who have been of immense help to me, but if I took their names, it could be an embarrassment for them for I know that what they did was not at all propelled by any desire for praise. In fact, I know so many of them because of my years of visits to the Ashram, although they wouldn’t know me. And even if I know them, I would not try to strike a conversation with any of them when I see them. I just offer my silent pranams at their feet. In this article, too, I remember them with gratitude, but choose not to take their names.

After this rather lengthy prelude, now the story. From the onset of the COVID pandemic, my wife and I were extremely apprehensive about our usual visits to the Ashram during Sri Bhagavan’s Jayanti. Usually, I would take leave from work and be in Tiruvannamalai a day or two before Sri Bhagavan’s Jayanti and stay on at least until the end of the Aksharamanamalai talks. We would write to the Ashram well in advance to find accommodation. Occasionally, particularly in the early years of our contact with Sri Bhagavan, we have had to stay elsewhere too. After every visit to the Ashram, we would be yearning to be back, and generally we had to wait for a year. This is mostly because of the difficulty of getting leave from work. I do not dislike my work, and try to do it with a spirit of detachment and also as an offering to Sri Bhagavan, but in a way, I am also hoping for the day—which should come in about three years’ time—I will retire and will be free to be in Tiruvannamalai whenever I want. Ah, for the day when Arunachala decides to keep us captive!

WHEN YOU CRY OUT TO ARUNACHALA-RAMANA, HE RESPONDS

So not being able to visit our beloved Ashram was a great agony although I tried to pacify myself by reminding me how hopeful waiting could itself be a great sadhana: the way Sabari waited for Lord Ram, “Today the Lord will surely come with his brother. Let me keep the house clean, let me clean the path He will tread. Let me pick fresh fruits for Him for today He will come...” Thus, the pandemic itself became an opportunity for sadhana: “This will pass. These times will pass, for nothing in this relative world is real, nothing everlasting. The grace of Arunachala-Ramana who is in my heart as in Tiruvannamalai, alone is everlasting...”

I confess that despite all such consolations that I gave myself, I felt the innermost core of my being cry out loudly “Arunachala-Ramana!” I felt that my cry was so loud, so desperate, that it did not only reach the Lord in my Heart, but also the physical Arunachala, the Mountain of Grace 3000 km away from where I was staying.

And then I found myself in Arunachala! When things started happening in a certain way, I did not know that in the end I would actually find myself in our beloved Ashram, in Arunachala! That is the miracle. I mean to recount how these things happened, none of which were planned by us.

I was experiencing some health problems, and when I saw a doctor, he had some tests done. I was diagnosed with something that was not too serious now, but had the potential of turning dangerous. The diagnosis made me think of what Sri Bhagavan had diagnosed long ago—that when a disease comes to the body, it is as if a disease has come to disease. After all, the body itself is a disease. Of course, I would follow medical advice, but with the full conviction that the ultimate panacea for all ills is Arunachala-Ramana. Meanwhile, the doctor said that if I wished, I could go for consultation in a higher institute, and when I asked him if he would recommend any specific institute, he mentioned Christian Medical College, Vellore. The name Vellore immediately reminded me how once, some years ago, I was invited to a seminar in Vellore and how I had made use of that opportunity to first visit Tiruvannamalai. Now also, the name Vellore sounded like Tiruvannamalai to me, and I prayed to Bhagavan that He grant us one more visit to Arunachala. Thus, in a way the medical check-up was just a pretext. All I was interested in was to somehow

be in the physical sannidhi of Arunachala-Ramana once again! In fact, I was even wondering if we could make our long-cherished visits to Tiruchuzhi and Madurai too, along with Tiruvannamalai. We had visited Ramana Mandiram, Madurai earlier one year, and were instantly captivated by this place where the young Venkataraman had become one with the Self, for ever. We were also drawn to the people who take care of the place (I am not taking any names, as explained earlier), and were thinking of visiting Tiruchuzhi along with Madurai, whenever possible.

On December 20, 2021 we reached Chennai, and after seeing a doctor there, and quickly visiting the Kapaleeshwarar Temple and the Ramakrishna Mutt at Mylapore, we travelled to Vellore. Getting a doctor's appointment proved difficult at CMC, and first they gave us a date in late February. Of course, in my mind I was praying to Arunachala-Ramana to make our pilgrimage possible, whatever happens in CMC. Then, quite without any effort on my part, the people in charge of allotting dates saw my papers, consulted among themselves, and asked me to come again the next day, promising me to help get an earlier appointment. Next day, they fixed December 30 as my date of appointment with the doctor so that we had a few days at hand to run away to Tiruvannamalai. We went to the hotel and checked out, although they did not refund the amount I had already paid for another day. No regrets...after all, we are going to Tiruvannamalai, at last!

We knew that the deepam was still there on the top of holy Arunachala, and if we saw it, it would be a first-time experience for us. But when our bus entered Tiruvannamalai, it was raining so heavily that I wonder if I was not in my native place, Assam in the monsoons! There was water everywhere. The bus driver took us to a relatively safe place and let us get down. Even to go to an autorickshaw by the side of the road, we had to take off our shoes and plod our way through water! This was a totally new Tiruvannamalai for us. We had been here in many Decembers and Januarys, but never did it rain like this! In a strange way, even the trouble of having to plod through water with all our luggage, was exhilarating. The great sage Jnanasambandhar of yore was robbed of all pomp and wealth as he entered Arunachala. As I took off my shoes, I remembered the Jnanasambandhar story and

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a stray thought teased me, “Is Arunachala demanding that I at least take off my shoes when touching the sacred soil of Tiruvannamalai?”

We were aware that because of the pandemic, the Ashram was not providing accommodation, and so we had not even tried writing for accommodation. Of course, we had no complaints because what the Ashram administration was doing in these times of the pandemic was quite justified. So, we checked in at a hotel, although rather reluctantly, and then quickly changed and came to the Ashram. We made some enquiries at the Ashram office, and then, Sri Bhagavan’s infinite compassion took over. That’s a wrong way of putting it, actually. Sri Bhagavan’s compassion is always at work; it does not manifest suddenly and at particular moments only. It is we who mostly remain unaware of it, and then suddenly notice it. In this case, it took us some moments to realise how Sri Bhagavan finally kept us even physically near Arunachala! Four blessed nights and days!

We were doing giripradakshina one evening when someone by the roadside just came straight to us and gestured towards the peak of Arunachala, “Look!” he said, “Today is the eighth day...” We were spellbound by the beauty of the deepam high up on the peak. It was very cloudy, but the deepam shone through all the gloom. Then next evening – if I am not wrong – we were singing Aksharamanamalai along with other devotees on the verandah of Sri Bhagavan’s shrine. It was again cloudy and wet, so that it was quite impossible to hope for a sight of the deepam. But just as we finished singing, lo and behold! The deepam suddenly appeared and shone with immense brilliance. It was so cloudy and rainy that it just struck us all as a miracle, particularly because of the timing!

On our giripradakshina round we looked into Adi Annamalai temple, and on another day, we visited Pachaiamman temple, both places associated with Sri Bhagavan in some ways. One of Sri Bhagavan’s many stops on the giripradakshina route would be Adi Annamalai, and it is said that a tunnel leading from Adi Annamalai temple was closed on Sri Bhagavan’s advice. Sri Bhagavan had stayed near Pachaiamman temple more than once, and particularly during the outbreak of plague in and around Tiruvannamalai. Right in the beginning of the Covid 19 epidemic, I had made a resolve to visit the Pachaiamman temple when we were in Tiruvannamalai, and now

the Mother had made it possible for us to pay our respects to Her in the temple.

In much of the literature concerning Sri Bhagavan and his devotees, we get to know about Palakkothu, but I wasn't sure where Palakkothu was. This time I asked one of the office people about its location, and was told that it was roughly where we were staying and also included the areas of the Annamalai Swami Ashram and the Agastya Vinayaka temple. We looked around these places, too. Nestled at the foot of Arunachala, Palakkothu has been an important place of sadhana.

Every morning we would attend the puja at Sri Bhagavan's shrine, and from then on would be at various locations of the Ashram, imbibing the sacred atmosphere. At the end of the four days came the difficult moment of parting, but as Sri Bhagavan assures us of Arunachala-Ramana being our Self, we say a reverential goodbye to the beloved Ashram, and travel to Vellore. After meeting the doctor there, we quickly decide to travel to Madurai. We took a night bus to Madurai, without knowing that a very pleasant surprise was awaiting us. We were dozing off in the night bus when suddenly the conductor shouted "Tiruvannamalai!" Of course, this surprise was simply because we did not know the bus route properly. We did not know that we were going to Madurai via Tiruvannamalai. We got down to have some food in a restaurant, and as we ate, Arunachala was watching us, looming large in the darkness beyond. And I thought about the situation...I could not see Arunachala in the dark, but Arunachala was watching us! Is this not what it is like, always? I am not able to see Arunachala at all times, but Arunachala is watching me! And the important thing is that the darkness of disease or weakness is not the reality; the reality is Arunachala-Ramana, ever watching us!

We reached Madurai very early in the dawn, so that it was still dark, and we took an auto-rickshaw to a hotel very near the Meenakshi temple. I had booked a room there, and we took a nap in our room before getting ready to visit the temple and Ramana Mandiram.

As in our previous visit to the great temple, all kinds of people approached with offers to be our guides. Some said they knew Hindi, some said they had been working as Hindi teachers, and so on. Looking at me, they knew I wasn't from South India, so they tried Hindi on me, but most of them would be confused when they looked

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at my wife, and would ask her whether she was from Tamil Nadu! Anyway, we gently shrugged these ‘guides’ off, and went into the temple on our own. We had a wonderful time, easily having darshan of both Mother Meenakshi and her Consort Lord Sundareswarar. As we moved around, we remembered how young Venkataraman would come there, steeped in devotion, and weep before the images of the Goddess, God and the sages.

Then we walked towards the south gopuram of the great temple, and moved into the little lane to reach Ramana Mandiram. Again, we felt at home immediately. The abiding peace of the place is contagious, and the warmth of the people taking care of Ramana Mandiram is so inviting. When we told them about our desire to visit Tiruchuzhi the next day, one of them arranged a car for us and another went with us, showing us all things we wanted to see. Although I am not taking their names, I mention them with the deepest sense of respect and gratitude. How wonderful these devotees are! So caring, so selfless!

Something that has always struck me as peculiar to Sri Bhagavan’s devotees is their complete indifference to material benefits. Every year, by the grace of Sri Bhagavan, we offer some humble donation at the Ashram, but never have we encountered the slightest solicitation for funds. In contrast, there are mammoth religious organisations, recruiting millions of devotees and always asking for donations! How wonderfully different Sri Ramanasramam is! At Madurai, too, before we left, we tried to make our humble contribution, and we actually had to face opposition! The venerable, dear devotees were so concerned about our expenses, that they wouldn’t easily be persuaded to accept a donation.

At Tiruchuzhi, we paid our respects to Lord Bhoominatha and His Consort Goddess Sahayavalli in the temple about which we had read so much. We saw the temple tank about which Sri Bhagavan has spoken. Then we went to Sundara Mandiram, pleasantly surprised at its being so near the temple! I had seen many old photographs of the place, and noticed that it has been beautifully transformed by Sri Ramanasramam. We sat in the shrine and sang *Upadesa Saram* and *Prapatti Ashtakam*. (Again, it was one of our dear Ramana Mandiram devotees that had first kindled my interest in *Prapatti Ashtakam*, and now, by Sri Bhagavan’s grace, we were chanting it at Sri Bhagavan’s place of birth.)

MOUNTAIN PATH

On our way back to Madurai, we saw the school where Sri Bhagavan had studied, and which the Madurai devotees continue to serve by way of encouraging the students with prizes, etc. We also saw the library renovated/rebuilt by Sri Ramanasramam.

We thoroughly enjoyed singing with the devotees at Ramana Mandiram in the evening, although we had to look into our phones for scripts of prayers like Akshramanamalai. Finally, when it was time for us to return, the Ramana Mandiram people again blessed us with Sri Bhagavan's prasada. Closing off our blessed days of pilgrimage, we started our return journey, first taking a train to Chennai from where we had our flight. And since then, every day, every night, my heart now and again calls out, "Arunachala-Ramana!" That will be its plight until, perhaps, the Lord decides some fine day to just keep us trapped for good in Arunachala! I understand that the journey within is more important than the physical journey, I understand that Tiruvannamalai is already getting over-crowded, but still, I long for the physical proximity of Arunachala. As said by the poet T S Eliot in 'The Journey of the Magi'.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death. ▲

The Maharshi: The One as All

Part Two

KAYS

In Hindu Dharma, Mother Earth is hailed as the Symbol of Supreme Forbearance and Love, supporting and sustaining equally the good and bad including the ones who harm her. While sage Valmiki hails Rama as equal only to Mother Earth in patience¹ so is Bhagavan hailed as being ‘greater than Earth in Patience’² and ‘surpassing the Earth in Patience who holds and sustains everything’³ when there are none as others and there is no body sense, and forbearance is at its zenith.

After reaching the feet of his Father in Tiruvannamalai when he sat immersed in Samadhi, the pinpricks, thorns nay even the tortures inflicted on him by mischievous urchins failed to stir any pangs of anger in his breast. The marvel of his sitting motionless like a ‘glowing Buddha’⁴ after taking knowingly and without resistance the poison administered to him by a jealous *sadhu*, just to test him inspires Pillai to ‘Hail the Feet of the Lord who takes even poison as nectar.’⁵ The application of burning chilli-paste, over every inch of his body by another was met with his invariable response of silence bereft of reaction and resistance. Later he reminisced that it became quite cool and pleasant.

¹ *kṣamayā pṛthvī samah* – 1-1-18.

² *Porumaiyil bhuviyil periyai nī, Ramana Devamalai*, v. 17.

³ Ganapati Muni, *Sri Ramana Gita*, Ch. 18, v. 12.

⁴ Godman, D. *Power of the Presence*, Part I, p. 58.

⁵ Godman, D. *Ramana Padamalai*, v. 6.

It may be worthwhile to remember a verse quoted by Bhagavan from Ponnambala Swami's commentary on *Gita* and it goes thus: 'Men of total renunciation won't be afraid even if guileful enemies stab their chest or they are surrounded by fire or bitten by cobra, all will be Bliss for them.'⁶

Yet another *sadhu* tried to scare him away by his 'stone-rolling device'. Bhagavan caught him red-handed, but bore him no ill-will. In an attempt to acquire lordship over Bhagavan another *sadhu* ordered Bhagavan to send Palaniswami away. When Bhagavan did not, he spat on Bhagavan but he reacted not. Later he said, "After all this is only a body that has been spat out many times."⁷

His monumental forbearance is best revealed by the incident of an accidental brush of his thigh against a hornets, nest while wending his way up the hill.

While the disturbed hornets attacked him furiously, he did not resist in the least, maintained the same calm position and putting up with the unbearable pain. It was a revelation of perfect justice that knows no fear or favour. When Muruganar wondered whether pain unintentionally caused should warrant such forbearance. Bhagavan – born to relieve the suffering of mankind by redeeming them – replied, "The springing up of spontaneous regret and compassion at the pain though caused accidentally, is but human nature and the leg deserved the just punishment meted out by the angry hornets." Palaniswami later found each sting as long as a wire nail. The valour of *jnana* indeed manifests as the triumph of compassion and grace.

An occurrence that demonstrated the spirit of 'The Sermon on the Mount' is worth recalling. During the early stages of Ashram, a band of robbers lured by the visits of increasing number of devotees suddenly broke into the Ashram in the dead of night. On their breaking the windows to gain entry into the room, Bhagavan had the door opened telling them to take whatever they wanted. Further he asked the disciples to provide them with the only light they had. When all the inmates trooped out one by one the thieves freely used the sticks on everyone including Bhagavan. He, just like Christ, offered the other leg also to be struck if they were not satisfied.

⁶ Mudaliar, D., *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 9-10-45.

⁷ Godman, D., *Power of the Presence*, Part I, p. 62.

When some devotees wanted to retaliate Bhagavan calmly prevented them saying, “*Sahanam* (forbearance) is the *dharma* of *Sanyasa*” and posed the question, “Do we knock out our teeth if they bite the tongue?” The thieves contrary to their expectations found nothing much. But Bhagavan suggested to them mercifully that they should take the food available in the Kitchen. Later when the thieves were caught and presented before Bhagavan to be identified, Bhagavan declined to identify them saying, “I do not myself know whom I beat. So, how can I find out and tell you the one who beat me?”⁸ thereby revealing the eternal Truth, “We receive but what we give.”

The positive aspect of this is stated by Bhagavan in *Nāṇ Yār* as follows:

“Who would refrain from giving away if one knows that one gives to oneself whatever one gives to other.” Muruganar celebrates this event as “showing compassion even to the robbers who void of love beat him fiercely.”⁹

He was the highest tribunal of our conscience – Father Confessor whose very presence washes away all our sins even before one compasses.

Perumal Swami, an ideal and devoted attendant of Bhagavan was almost a shadow of Bhagavan and rendered unflinching service to the Master. Later due to an inflated ego and greed he went to court against the Ashram claiming ownership of Skandashram and management of Ramana Ashram and even had Bhagavan questioned by court. But towards the evening of his life, sick, penniless and in peril yet truly remorseful and repentant he came back to Bhagavan like a prodigal son saying he would only go to hell. Bhagavan at once said “I will be present there also,” reminiscent of “I am with you always even unto the end of the world.”¹⁰

“He indeed is the spring of Grace who provides succour to those who think of him even forbearing all their faults.”¹¹

In an unguarded moment this quality of him became an open declaration from him. While reciting a song from *Tiruvachakam* when Devaraja Mudaliar came to the line, “None who has grown a

⁸ Swami Natanananda, *Ramana Darsanam*.

⁹ *Kīrtit Tiruvagaval*, lines 291-92.

¹⁰ Matthew 28-2.

¹¹ Muruganar V.I, Decad on Grace.

tree will have the heart to fell it even if it should be a poisonous one,” Bhagavan pre-empting Mudaliar uttered the next line “I am also of that same quality, oh Lord,”¹² which is but an echo of “Know you not that I will never Leave Thee nor forsake Thee.”

He indeed was the universal Mother. Bestowing greater grace than one’s begotten mother he was ‘the spring of Bliss that claiming the surrendered ones forbears all the faults.’¹³

Some children do prove naughty but Bhagavan took care that others did not wound their feelings. When an attendant for some misdemeanour in town, was hounded and given a chase by those people, he rushed to Bhagavan seeking his protection. Bhagavan took him under his wings. Some wanted him to be sent away to save the reputation of the Ashram. The utterance of Bhagavan “that many in their midst were guilty of the same or even greater offence but non-discovery had helped them” was a reminder “to look at the beam in one’s own eye before one looks at the mote in another’s.”

“He maketh His Sun to rise on the evil and the good and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.”¹⁴

Humility, a virtue that is endless was practised by Bhagavan to its perfection. Even as Bhagavan extols the “Wonder of Arunachala gaining greatness by uniting Himself with the meek and the soft who are even more and more humble”¹⁵ he in turn inspires Sivaprakasam Pillai to laud him as ‘Blessed be the Feet of the exemplar of humility who says the more one humbles oneself, the more one benefits.’¹⁶ His humility and submissiveness lent beauty and exaltation to *jnana*.

The face of God for him was everywhere. Blessed is the man who looks upon everyone as God. When someone questioned how he felt when so many prostrated before him, Bhagavan replied “Even before they enter the room I pay my obeisance to them.”

When Seshagiri Iyer on meeting Bhagavan on the Hill said he had had Bhagavan’s *darshan*, Bhagavan said, “Why don’t you say you gave me your *darshan*?”

¹² *nāṇum aṇṇaṇē uḍaiya nādaṇē.*

¹³ Muruganar, v. I. Decad on Grace.

¹⁴ Matthew v. 5:45.

¹⁵ *Aruṇāchala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, v. 83.

¹⁶ *Ramana Pādamālai*, v. 33.

Holy poverty was the ideal and the food was procured by *bhiksha* and what was provided by Providence was enough. ‘Share everything and share alike amongst all be they ordinary items or rarities without saving for the morrow’ was the unwritten rule followed. Any special treatment meted out was not tolerated. He insisted on others being served first and he the last to ensure equal sharing. If all ate it was tantamount to his eating. Thus he prove that Great souls eat just to live and serve the world.

The life of this king of kings was indeed a lesson in submission.

When the kitchen fire started roaring high by the side of Him, the *Jnanagni*, he calling himself as ‘*Paṇilenivādu*’ – jobless one – and daily worked in the kitchen from 3 a.m. Any unjust behaviour on the part of any in the dining hall would make him inflict self-punishment and deny himself some dishes or courses without expressing it to anybody. The offenders craving pardon would prostrate and vow to mend their ways.

After taking on the kitchen work, the constant grinding left both his hands blistered. When Viswanatha Swami’s request to let him do it went unheeded, he forestalling Bhagavan went early to the kitchen and did all the work that Bhagavan used to do. Bhagavan said, “In the early days I used to go for *bhiksha*. Now I am getting free food in the Ashram. Hence I do some work. Since you’ve done my work please give me your *dhoti*. I’ll wash it for you.”¹⁷ Perfection, humility, and fairness were natural to him were natural to him.

Once it occurred that no one who walked through a dirty and dusty room near the kitchen had the idea to tidy it, and Bhagavan started to sweep and clean it himself. Many then volunteered but he refused to accept their services.¹⁸

Muruganar thus hails this quality: “While devotees were ready to carry out his commands he works as the lowliest among them.”¹⁹ To bear and forbear was indeed his *dharma*. And this is hailed as ‘Not accepting service’. He, on his own, with zeal and love, performed many works.²⁰

¹⁷ Viswanatha Swami to Prof. K. Swaminathan, *Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 68.

¹⁸ Annamalai Swami in *Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 207.

¹⁹ Tiruāṇḍappagudi, 335-6.

²⁰ *Kīrtitī Thiruvagaval*, 245-6.

Great was the bounty of Guru Ramana. Truly speaking, he belongs to none, yet he belongs to the whole world for he belongs only to the ONE and that ONE becomes All.

Death has been called the 'Leveller' for only in the final resting place equality prevails like nowhere else. Bhagavan's presence, where ego dies, was one such for access to him was easy and equal for all and in the words of Ganapati Muni, 'In a boy, a dull cowherd, a monkey or a dog, a knave, a scholar or a devotee everywhere he beholds the same Being without partiality.'²¹ 'Even to those ignorant of letters and numbers Venkata was a whirlwind of compassion.'²²

The lustre of his grace shone on all devotees impartially inspiring them to manifest the best and divine in them.

He was the friend of the lowly and meek. The milk of human kindness was so overflowing in him that Ganapati Muni declares, 'Compassion was not a quality of him but, *Hridaya Tejas*, the effulgence of Heart' and Jagadeeswara Sastri hails, 'O Mother Compassion, Thy Form Ramana.'

The slaking of the thirst of weary women with heavy loads of grass on their heads on the hilly slopes in the hot sun was observed by Bhagavan as a vow. He would even wait for them with cool water and rice gruel.²³

Once unmindful of everything he descended into a cleft in a rock 15 feet deep to relieve a little shepherdess of her sorrow when a sheep of hers had slipped into it. Carrying it on his shoulders he climbed up and restored it to the ecstatic joy of the little girl.

An incident that proved, 'They also serve who only stand and wait' is that of Chinnappaiyan – a village milkman, who used to give Bhagavan gruel when he was on the Hill. One day, later at Ramana Ashram, after the sound of the lunch gong everybody assembled in the dining hall. On his way to the hall spying Chinnappaiyan who had brought gruel with great devotion and respect Bhagavan stopped, and cupped his hands while the milkman, shy but elated, poured a thin stream of porridge into them. Bhagavan enjoyed it as nectar while the old man beamed with joy.²⁴ Similarly, when the socially marginalised

²¹ *Ramana Gita*, Chapter 18, v. 22.

²² Muruganar, *Thiruvindiya Mālai*, v. 7.

²³ Swaminathan, K., *The Maharshi*, p. 30.

²⁴ Swaminathan, K., *The Maharshi*, p. 31.

people full of devotion were hesitant to approach him, he went near them to bestow a rich bounty of grace was bestowed on them.

While in Skandashram, rain or shine, cold air or heavy dew, despite all dissuasions, he would sit on a flat stone on the eastern side and brush his teeth in the morning. It later transpired that it was for the benefit of Sowbhagyathammal who too old and feeble to climb up the Hill, could fulfil her vow of having food only after a *darshan* of Bhagavan. Now she could see him from her house down the hill itself while he brushed his teeth.²⁵

One reason for his coming down from the Hill to the present Ashram is out of compassion for the aged devotees. He who had enjoyed total freedom in the Mansion of Father's House, now for the sake of devotees put up with the bondage or jail (in words of Bhagavan) of a seat on a sofa behind railings.

Another touching expression of compassion and Grace was the labour of love in transliterating his works which he alone could do for the benefit of devotees regardless of the immense labour involved. He often used his thigh as a table under a single light during night and wrote with a pen that needed to be dipped in ink often.

Some devotees who ardently desired to compose verses but could not do so, would be graced by Bhagavan who would write lovely verses and put their name under it. Yet another act of grace was the labour of patient corrections of mistakes from the copied versions of Bhagavan's and other works from the notebooks submitted to him for perusal by devotees.

He was one who ruthlessly sacrificed his little comforts for the sake of devotees who brought many food items not all of them well cooked at all times of the day with no thought of their effect on his digestion. Bhagavan would take just a wee bit with the cap of his finger.

He loved as a Mother, protected like a father and guided as a teacher and often moved with devotees like a friend proving the *Gītā* dictum v. 17&18, Chap. IX 'I am the Father of the world, the Mother, the supporter and the grandsire'.

'I am the goal, the upholder, the witness, abode, refuge and friend.'

Be it burning sun or pouring rain he always walked barefooted and used to visit Palākkothu between twelve and one. The bare sandy

²⁵ Kunju Swami, *The Silent Power*:

path would make walking impossible. While advising his attendants to run for shelter under a tree he himself would walk with steady and unchanged pace. Bhagavan took care to remove a thorn that Rangan had stepped on but when he himself did step on one, Rangan to his dismay found there innumerable ones old and new for he would simply walk on crushing the thorn with his feet.

A *sadhu* who desired Bhagavan's *darshan* during his last days was turned away by the guards. He walked sadly from the office towards the gate but when the *sadhu* passed Bhagavan's room he was astonished to find Bhagavan standing outside waiting for him. They gazed at each other. The spiritual communication in Bhagavan's look having fulfilled his need and desire the *sadhu* went away with his candle lit bright and shining.

He indeed is the Lord of solicitous love who sunders our karma. A moneylender from the North whose activities were disliked by all was a staunch devotee of Bhagavan. He lost all his wealth and his only daughter became mad. During the last days of Bhagavan, he stood outside in the long queue for *darshan*. None was allowed to talk with Bhagavan or hand over any item. He dropped a piece of paper at his feet and moved away. Bhagavan read it and sent for him. He looked at him with intense grace and nodded his head in approval. He had written, 'Bhagavan, save me.'²⁶

Muruganar extols this quality of Bhagavan as 'One who averts birth of those who seek him afraid of the bondage of their old Karma.'²⁷

'He watched everyone with great solicitude and proved to be a mother who takes medicine to cure the illness of her child.'²⁸

When everyone was being administered castor oil Muruganar declined to have his dose. Bhagavan on hearing it asked for Muruganar's dose as well as his one. While the extra dose had no effect on Bhagavan, Muruganar had the effect of the purgative.²⁹

A devotee Padma sent palm fruits through Raja Iyer to Bhagavan in the Old Hall but kept herself away as she was unwell from a particular type of indigestion. Bhagavan on learning the reason for her absence

²⁶ *Moments Remembered*, p. 8.

²⁷ *pandittu niṅṅa pazhaviṅṅaikkū aṅṅit taṅṅāl aḍaindu candittu niṅṅavar jaṅṅmam tavirppavaṅ - Tiruvindiya Mālai*, v.10.

²⁸ *Kīrtit Thiruvagaval*, lines 7&8.

²⁹ Godman, D., *Power of the Presence*, p. 207.

ate the fruits and she was relieved of her disease. From then on she began taking food like a normal person.³⁰

An ardent devotee, Mahadeva Iyer of Madurai once suffered from a seizure of constant hiccups for a month. Bhagavan on perusing a letter from his daughter beseeching him to cure her father of this disease at once bade T.K. Sundaresa Iyer to write to him asking him to have dry ginger powder with jaggery. In addition, asking Madhavan to bring some of the same powder they had in the kitchen, Bhagavan ate some and distributed the rest to all in the Hall.

The next day brought a letter from Mahadeva Iyer's daughter that her father was cured of his disease from one o'clock the previous day itself — exactly the time Bhagavan had the powder himself.

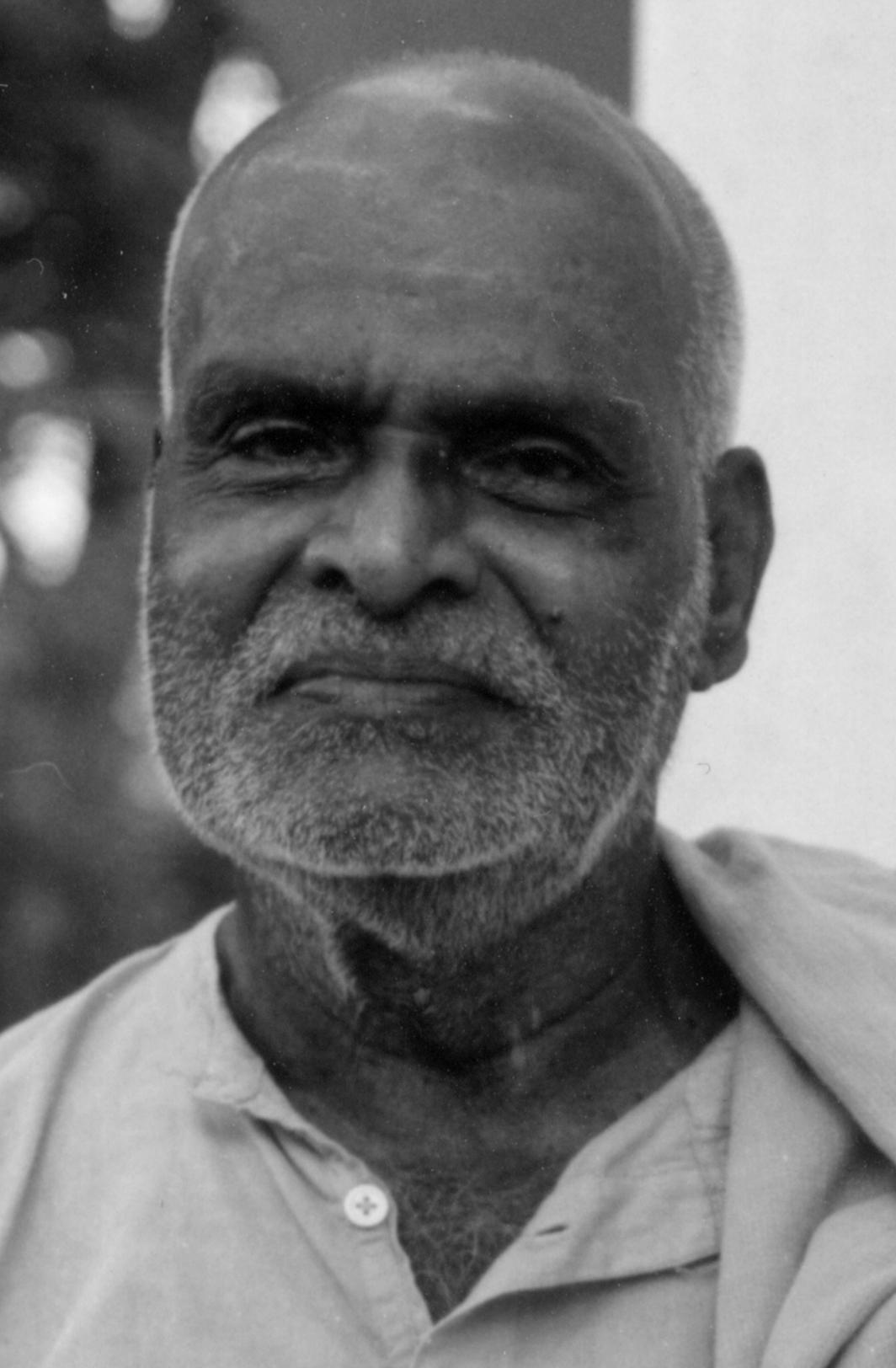
Counter to the normal run in the entire annals of *guru-sishya parampara* (tradition) of a disciple rendering service to guru, Bhagavan remains the classic example of a guru rendering service to a devotee. Swami Pranavananda an old and fervent devotee while on his way to the Ashram on a hot summer day could not proceed beyond the steps due to heat and exhaustion and sat on them. Bhagavan immediately hurried to him, washed his feet with water from his *kamandalu*, provided soothing comfort by massaging his weary legs, all to the extreme consternation of the devotee.

Nagasundaram the gentleman in charge of bringing cooks during Jayanti and Mahapuja would also toil tirelessly in the kitchen along with cooks. On one such occasion after working late into the night, he, out of sheer exhaustion was sleeping near the kitchen clad in a mere towel under the open sky and exposed to heavy dew. Bhagavan who as usual got up early, saw him, brought his own shawl and covered him.³¹ Muruganar sings in praise of this quality in *Kīrttit Thiruvagaval* as 'The Master not regarding the surrendered ones as servitors, cared for them as Masters.'³² ▲

³⁰ *Ramana Smṛti*, p. 174.

³¹ *Moments Remembered*, p. 10.

³² *taṇadu aḍiyōrāt tāṅ karudādē tam 'māl uḍaiyōṅāttāṅ tozhap perṟum*. v. 243-244.



Kunju Swami

ALAN TAIT

I first met Kunju Swami in the early 1980s. It was my regular practice to go up the hill each day during midmorning to either Skandashram or Virupaksha, as the mood took me. One day I was alone in Skandashram and meditation was exceptionally still and clear. When I eventually emerged, Kunju Swami was standing over by the small balcony which overlooks the town. He saw me come out and smiled and nodded, seemingly with approval as if he knew my condition. I smiled back and made my way down to the town as it was well past time for a meal at the ashram.

I chose to have only a light snack and instead of walking back to my room at the ashram, I decided to go back up the hill, cool off with the running water at Skandashram and sit up there again. While cooling off with the water, a young man came out from the side verandah door, saw me, then went to look over the edge to look down the hill as if looking for someone. He then went to the gate and walked down to the path. Finally, he returned and said to me, “Kunju Swami would like you to have lunch with us.” I saw this as prasadam, so I happily accepted.

I walked up past the old kitchen room to the platform under the big tree. Kunju Swami indicated for me to sit next to him and I had lunch with a large family group. After some time I took my leave and proceeded back to the ashram and quickly ascertained that it was quite impossible to physically have been aware of my presence outside. How did Kunju Swami know I was there?

A few years later I was again at the ashram and particularly enjoyed the singing of a small group of devotees who would sit around Kunju Swami in the corner of the main hall a few nights a week. I had never heard it before. This was the beginning of the regular Tamil Parayana that continues to this day.

I again returned in 1991 and arrived around 4 pm. As I was being sent to my room it was graciously suggested I call by the rear of the old dining hall (the new one had not been built then) and refresh with the afternoon coffee. An old friend, a sannyasini called Om, recognised me and called out loudly, “Kunju Swami is allowing people to meditate with him every afternoon at 4.30 outside his room”. Well, I knew who she was talking about, so I quickly finished my coffee, went to my room, took a bath and changed my clothes, and went straight around to Major Chadwick’s old room. It had a thatched verandah added to the front, and I anticipated a bit of a crowd to take advantage of such a rare opportunity. Years before I had similarly been able to sit with the remarkably shining Viswanatha Swami. When I arrived, Kunju Swami had a small chair he insisted I use, and Om and myself were the only people there.

Sometimes Om would ask him a question, and invariably he began the answer with the same words, “Bhagavan said ...”

Every afternoon we sat there, and when the mosquitoes started biting as dusk settled, he invited us to come into his room with him. The dinner gong came and went as we sat in the depths of silence. Every evening as I took my leave and returned to my room he would say “Narayana”.

One evening was quite different. Mental stillness was almost total. On the rare moment that a thought might arise, Kunju Swami would quietly cough and that would return me to Silence. That would repeat several times over the hours. Each time a thought arose, he would cough and bring me back to the silence. Eventually I got up to leave

and this time he said “Santosham”. There was far more to Kunju Swami than met the eye.

The following year I received a letter from friends who were visiting the ashram, and they were present when Kunju Swami left the body. In many ways it was the end of an era. Truly absorbed in Arunachala. ▲

Who is Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi?

Carlos Grasso

- For many, many, many people Bhagavan simply doesn't mean anything. They never heard that name, or seen any image of him.

- For many, many people Bhagavan is just a person born in India, usually related with an old photograph of a kind old man, a middle aged half-naked man or an intense gazing young boy staring at the camera.

- For many people He is a saint to be revered with daily pujas, repeating his name and/or worshiping his image.

- For some people He is a teacher of Vedanta, and for others is a teacher of Advaita Vedanta, who taught by example through the means of compassionate actions, talks, writings, poems, songs but most important, silence.

- For a few, Bhagavan is the dream figure that embodying the Self, gives us dreamers the opportunity to wake up. The lion that wakes up the elephant from his dream.

- For 'I' He is 'I'. Oneself. Brahman.

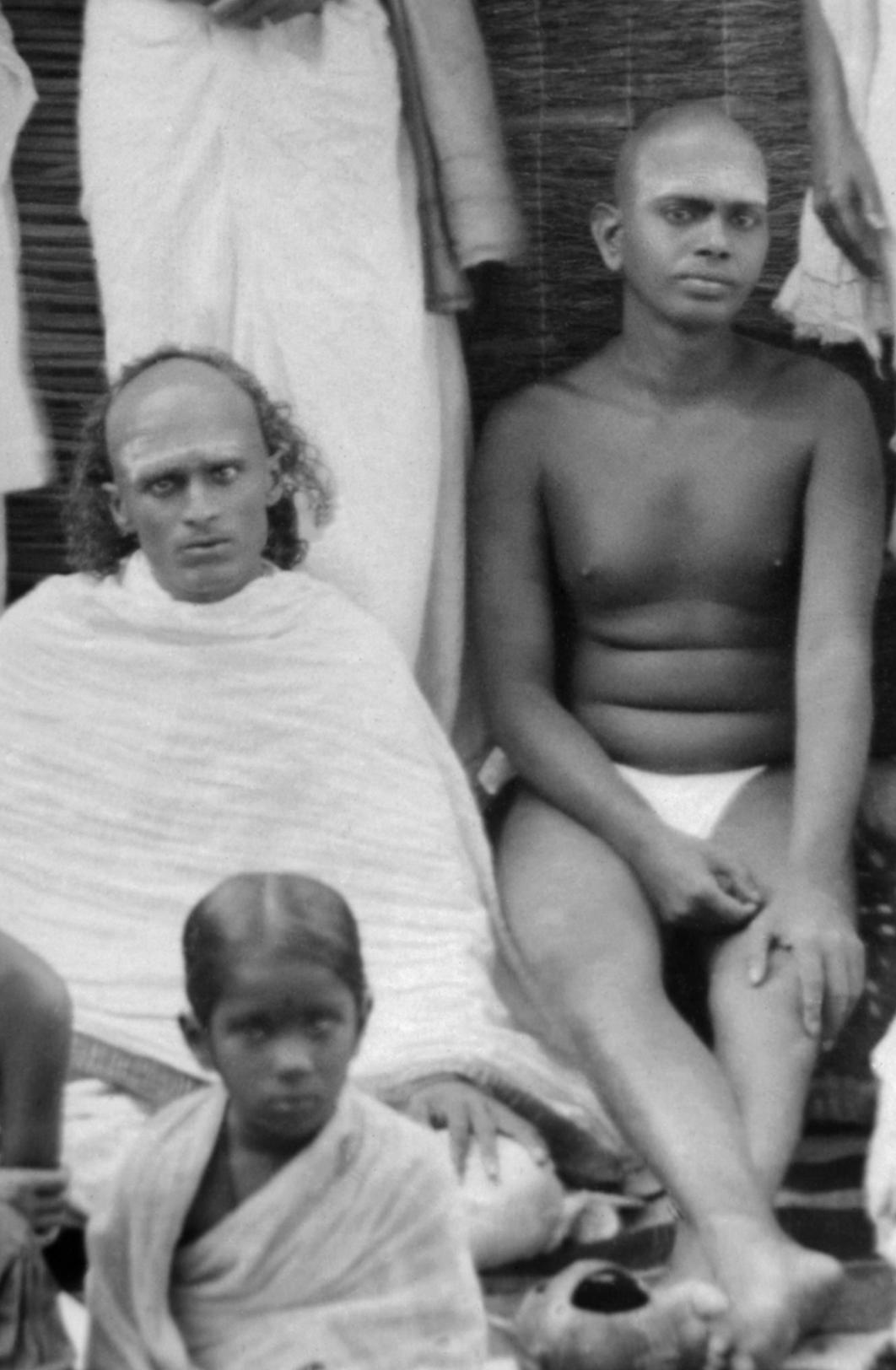
The different 'Bhagavans' relate to us in the same way we see and experience ourselves in relation to our own body, mind and self.

A body sees only bodies, worlds, objects of different kind.

A mind feels emotions, sees thoughts and concepts, day-dreams and dream-thoughts of different kinds.

Self only knows Self.

Which Bhagavan do I relate to most?...



The Grandeur of Kāvyaikantha's Poetry

V. KRITHIVASAN

What makes good poetry? Eminent Sanskrit linguists of yore answer this question thus:

“Good poetry does not command like a master, as do the scriptures. It does not give advice like a friend as do the *puranas*. Good poetry accomplishes its object by an intimate appeal, as the beloved wins the heart of her lover; by her charm of address and pleasing tact of expression laden with suggestions, finding her way straight to the soul of her lover”.¹ Such is the poetry of Kāvyaikantha. He is at his poetic best in his description of Bhagavan's extraordinary qualities in the last chapter of Ramana Gita. All the verses flow majestically with the most pleasing usage of epithets. A few select verses from this chapter are presented here.

Skanda-Ramana

It is well-known that Kāvyaikantha once had an extraordinary experience when he was sitting in the presence of Bhagavan Ramana in the Pachaiamman temple. He saw a divine spark coming from above and touching Bhagavan's forehead six times. He felt that this signified that Bhagavan was none other than Lord Skanda (Subrahmanya).

¹ Spotha and the Spoken Word – an article by Kapali Sastry.

From then on, Kāvyaantha described Bhagavan Ramana as an *avatar* or manifestation of Skanda, the son of Siva, whenever he had an opportunity. In the last chapter of Ramana Gita, he refers to this firm conviction of his, several times. He says that Bhagavan Ramana is the third manifestation of Skanda, the other two being Kumarila Bhatta (famous as the greatest interpreter of Mimamsa, which expounds Vedic rituals) and Jnana Sambandha (the child poet who sang thousands of devotional songs on Siva after drinking the Divine milk of Goddess Parvati).

What is interesting is, Kāvyaantha goes to the extent of projecting the other aspects of the legend of Skanda on to Bhagavan Ramana. In the southern parts of India, Skanda is depicted as having two consorts – Valli and Devasena. According to the legend, Devasena is the daughter of Indra, the king of Devas, while the earthy Valli is the adopted daughter of a tribal Chief. Kāvyaantha says that Bhagavan Ramana also has Valli and Devasena as his consorts! Who are they?

परिणताम्रफलप्रभ विग्रहं चलतरेन्द्रियनिग्रहसग्रहम्।
अमृतचिद्धनवल्लिपरिग्रहं मितवचोरचितागमसङ्ग्रहम्॥ (18-4)

pariṇatāmraphalaprabha vighrahaṁ calatarendriyanigrahasagraham
amṛtacidghanavalliparigrahaṁ mitavacoracitāgamasaṅgraham

Bhagavan’s form (*Vighrahaṁ*) has the golden lustre of a ripe mango; His firm grip (*sagraham*) on the control (*nigrahaṁ*) of the senses is legendary; he is perennially enveloped or embraced (*parigrahaṁ*) by the Valli (creeper) known as Pure Consciousness (*cid-ghana*); the entire collective (*sangrahaṁ*) Wisdom of the scriptures can be explained by him in pithy, terse, simple words (*mita-vaco*).

There is a play on the word Valli, which is the word for creeper in Sanskrit and also the name of Skanda’s consort. Just as a creeper goes around a support and tightly embraces it, this Valli, Pure Consciousness, always embraces Bhagavan in a tight grip. The great poet that he is, Kāvyaantha uses the word *graham* five times and each time it gives a different meaning when combined with different prefixes. What an exquisite verse! The first consort Valli is Pure Consciousness, who holds Bhagavan Ramana in an endless embrace!

The 14th verse is about Devasena :

यस्याधुनापि रमणी रमणीयभावा गीर्वाणलोकपृतना शुभवृत्तिरूपा।
 संशोभते शिरसि नापि मनोजगन्ध-स्तत्तादृशं गृहिणमप्यधिपं यतीनाम्॥ (18-14)
yasyādhunāpi ramaṇī ramaṇīyabhāvā gūrvāṇalokaṣṛtanā
śubhavr̥ttirūpā
samśobhate śirasi nāpi manojagandha-stattādr̥śam
gr̥hiṇamapyadhīpam yatīnām

Here, the word *gūrvāṇalokaṣṛtanā* (daughter of the Heavens), refers to Devasena. Full of endearing qualities (*ramaṇīyabhāvā*), this charming damsel (*ramaṇī*) shines in the face of Bhagavan Ramana (*śirasi samśobhate*) as Auspicious emanations (*śubhavr̥ttirūpā*). Even so, Bhagavan Ramana is the Lord of Ascetics (*adhīpam yatīnām*). Thus, the other consort Devasena is the **perennial emanation of auspiciousness** that surrounds Bhagavan.

Harmony of incompatibles

KāvyaKantha describes how qualities that generally do not go together, get blended and harmonised in Bhagavan in the verse below:

शक्तिमन्तमपि शान्तिसंयुतं भक्तिमन्तमपि भेदवर्जितम्।
 वीतरागमपि लोकवत्सलं देवतांशमपि नम्रचेष्टितम्॥ (18-23)
śaktimantamapi śāntisaṃyutaṃ bhaktimantamapi bhedavarjitaṃ
vītarāgamapi lokavatsalaṃ devatāṃśamapi namraceṣṭitaṃ

Bhagavan is very powerful (*śaktimantam*) but exceedingly peaceful (*śāntisaṃyutaṃ*). In general power and peace do not go together in this world. The so called “powerful” people of the world are generally anxious and can’t rest peacefully, as they unfailingly collect enemies. Not so in the case of Bhagavan; his extraordinary peace itself makes him powerful, in the spiritual sense.

Bhagavan is a great *bhakta* – but an unusual one, as he does not see any separation between himself and Easwara (*bheda varjitaṃ*). *Bhakti* generally implies duality – a *bhakta* is one who considers himself distinct from God. Not the case here, as Bhagavan’s *bhakti* is *Ananya Bhakti*; there is God alone, the individual ego is absent.

He is totally detached from everything (*vītarāgam*); but shows boundless compassion to every creature around him (*lokavatsalaṃ*).

Bhagavan's engagement with the world, in spite of his total detachment, is solely motivated by his compassion.

He is truly Divine (*devatāmśam*) but has matchless humility (*namraceṣṭitam*). His humility is to be seen to be believed. Volumes have been written about these two characteristics of Bhagavan – Divinity and humility.

The word 'api' in Sanskrit which means even though / in spite of, is employed beautifully by Kāvyaikantha in joyous celebration of the qualities of one of the greatest sages the world has seen.

Dhyana Sloka

While performing ritualistic *puja* for a deity, it is customary to invoke the presence of the deity by chanting a *Dhyana Sloka*, a verse that brings out the form and characteristics of the deity. This is also used before beginning meditation on the deity. These *dhyana slokas* are inspired creations of saints of great repute, who were immersed in devotion to their chosen god or *guru*.

In the last chapter of Ramana Gita, Kāvyaikantha has presented to us such a *dhyana sloka* which can be used to invoke the presence of Bhagavan Ramana. In fact, Bhagavan himself had suggested that it is fit to be chosen as a *dhyana sloka*. We will first see what this verse is and later, the circumstances leading to Bhagavan's suggestion.

नीलारविन्द सुहृदा सदृशं प्रसादे तुल्यं तथा महसि तोयजबान्धवेन ।
ब्राह्म्यां स्थितौ तु पितरं वटमूलवासं संस्मारयन्तमचलं तमनुस्मरामः ॥ (18-13)

*nīlāravinda suhṛdā sadṛśam prasāde tulyam tathā mahasi
toyajabāndhavana
brāhmyām sthitau tu pitaram vaṭamūlavāsam saṁsmāra
yantamacalam tamanusmarāmaḥ*

“In showering grace, he is like the moon, the friend of the blue waterlily. In the same way, in lustre he is like the sun, the kinsman of the lotus. In his Brahmic state, he reminds us of his Father abiding under the Banyan tree. Him, the motionless one we lovingly remember.”

Bhagavan's grace in the form of his uplifting presence is available to everyone, like the moon's soothing rays. When dispelling the darkness of the heart, he shines like the resplendent sun. He is always

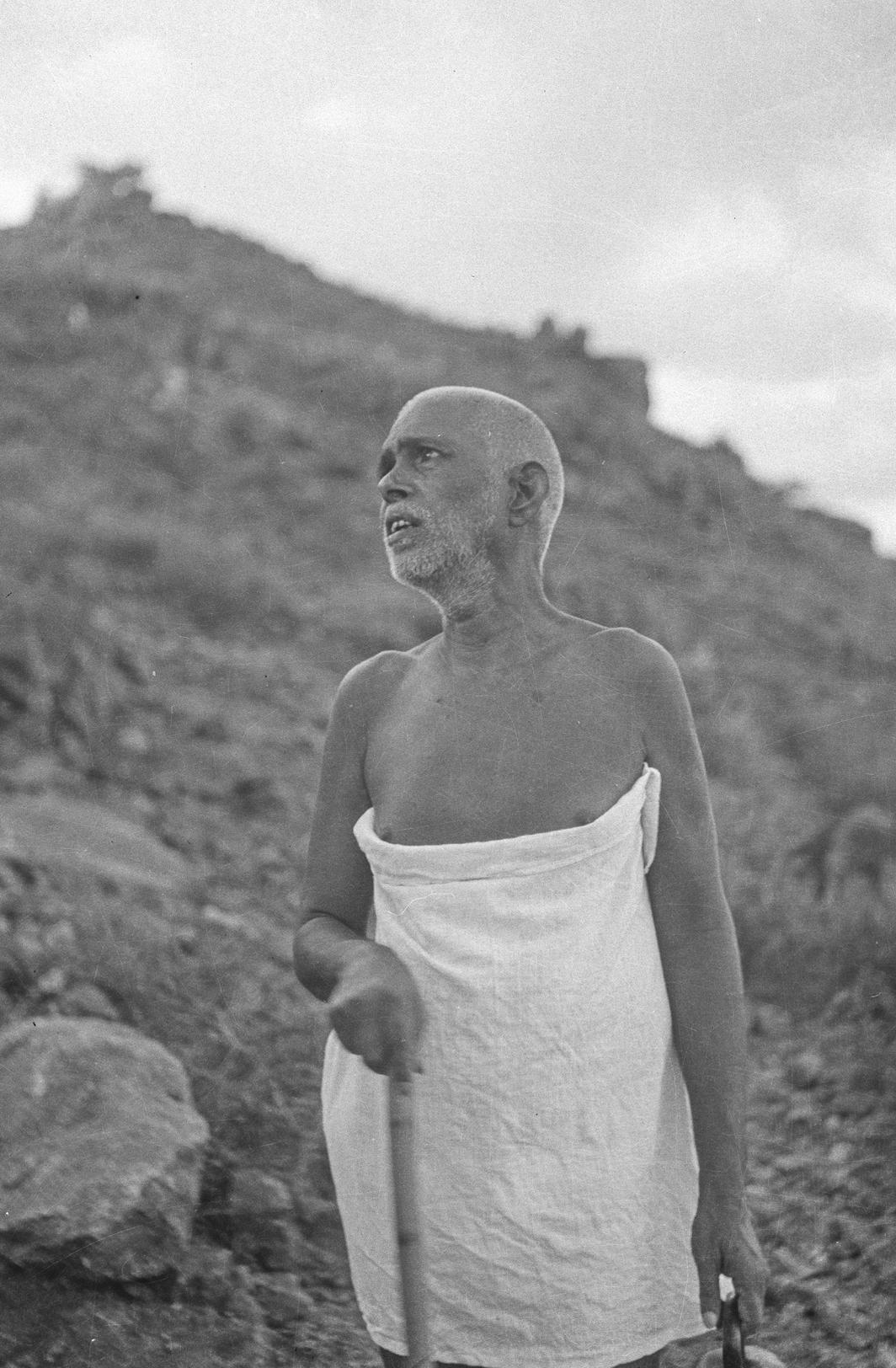
in the Brahmic state, reminding one of his Father Dakshinamurti seated under the Banyan tree, expounding in silence the principle of the Supreme Truth. He is described as *achala*, unmoving, symbolised by the mountain Arunachala. Moon is the symbol of Bliss or Ananda, the sustaining essence in all creatures. Sun represents knowledge as Consciousness, Chit. The Brahmic state denotes Sat or Pure Existence. Thus, the Maharshi is the divine manifestation of Sat-Chit-Ananda, Brahman in human form.

Kapali Sastry, Kāvayakantha's scholarly disciple wrote a commentary on Ramana Gita (which he called as Ramana Gita Prakasha). He came to meet Bhagavan in 1941 to present his commentary. He read out the slokas in each chapter and the detailed explanation from the *Prakasha*. When he finished explaining this particular verse, he was delighted to hear Bhagavan himself giving a lengthy commentary on this verse.

To quote Kapali Sastry, "When I came to the verse *nilaravinda* the Maharshi made a remark. Speaking for five to ten minutes, he stated, naming a gentleman, 'He said that the verse is quite fit to be the Dhyana Sloka of the whole Gita'. It is very significant that Sri Maharshi, who had been silent so far, quoted here approvingly the opinion of another that this should be considered a verse appropriate to describe the Maharshi himself. There are two elements in the verse which I may note in passing: one is the blooming of the eyes. The other is the Silence by which Shiva as Dakshinamurti teaches his disciples²."

Kapali Sastry made a slight change at the end of the original verse of Kāvayakantha to make it general so that all can use it as a *dhyana sloka*. (In the original verse, Kāvayakantha says, *achalam tam anuditam me*, meaning 'He is *achala*, my brother, born after me.' The modified sloka presented here ends as *achalam tam anusmaramah* which means, 'He is *achala*, whom we lovingly remember'. ▲

² Sastry, Kapali. *Dedication of Ramana Gita: Prakasha*.



HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

Diving into the Deep Ocean

VIRUPAKSHA

‘How I came to Bhagavan’ is the experience of love at first sight with Guru Ramana, which is always an interesting and dear topic of discussion for fresh seekers. ‘Ramana’, the word means a sole lover, husband, or the one eternally established in the mind. The Guru or god plays the role of a husband or Master of the devotee who can love him like a chaste wife. There is a saying in Kannada, ‘Sharana sathi, Linga pathi’ which means, Sharana – a realised pure devotee; sathi – means wife. Linga is god and pathi means husband, a cordial true relation of souls is like that between a Guru and disciple, the Lord and a devotee.

I recorded my experiences after arriving and settling with Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. Every seeker who once visits Arunachala or Bhagavan impromptu wishes to settle here for good due to its soaring spiritual magnetism. On the poornima full moon day, lakhs of devotees from all over the country visit Arunachala. Lord Shiva himself has manifested as Arunachala hill and Guru Ramana is the beacon of

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Arunachala. My heart says that Guru Ramana is himself Lord Shiva. Since my childhood, I had an intense desire to see Lord Shiva in a form and hence visited many holy places, met sadhus, gurus, sanyasins, and siddhas in quest of Shiva. I also had planned to visit mount Kailāsh in the Himalayas, the abode of Lord Shiva. Surprisingly one day I saw a video clip of Sri Ramana descending from Arunachala hill towards the ashram. My gaze stopped at his renunciant bare body with a walking stick in his hands. I found Lord Shiva himself in the form of Ramana with a *trishul* in his hand. My whole being was bathed in nectar and my search for Lord Shiva had met its endpoint! As Ramana says, “Kailash is the abode of Lord Shiva while Arunachala is Lord Shiva himself.” Hence, the desire of visiting mount Kailash was satisfied! All that is found in Kailash are also present in Arunachala! The inner and outer *pradakshina* paths, Parvathi kunda, Nandi mukha, Yamadwar etc. I do feel that an ordinary *sādhak* like me will be unable to withstand the biting cold temperatures of the Himalayas at that high altitude and is unconducive for a comfortable, peaceful life required for spiritual *sādhana*. Though the very hot temperatures of Arunachala in summer (from March to June) possess a challenge for one like me from a fairly cool place, a seeker loves to be here for one’s spiritual upliftment. Many foreign seekers settle in Arunachala to do Self-enquiry and achieve liberation. They abandon everything to fulfil their spiritual ambition. Such is their love for Arunachala and Ramana.

An experience of visiting places like Ramanasramam or Arunachala differs with that of settling forever. For instance, in a rice shop, the seller gives a sample of rice for free to assure its quality to the customers. While if the customer wants a bag of rice for daily use, he has to pay and carry himself the load. Likewise visiting Ramanasramam as a visitor with free accommodation and food for three days and its experience is like the free sample of rice. But settling there permanently calls for great inner strength and one-pointedness. It is human nature to get attracted to unreal, temporary objects. To engage in the quest of Reality, which is one’s own Self, is definitely a difficult task. Waves of ocean catch our attention but not the depth of the ocean. Whereas a deep diver only would focus on the ocean rather than on the waves. Some of the devotees suffer from loneliness, boredom, intolerance to heat, ill health etc. But once

caught in the jaws of a human tiger i.e., Guru Ramana, nobody can escape from his clutches.

As my memory goes, probably, my first visit to Ramanasramam was in the year 1990. I came with a saintly lady who was a staunch devotee of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. This was my first meeting with Guru Ramana. My spiritual state at that time was like that of a man already wet by the rains and now diving into a lake with water overflowing with the torrent of rains. The exalted ecstasy I experienced in Arunachala with Ramana was akin to the joy of a *gopika* dancing with Lord Krishna while holding his soft hands on the banks of Yamuna on a full moon night.

Later from 1991, I became a regular visitor every year with a group. After a long span of 25 to 30 years, I then realised that spirituality is not an easy nut to crack as projected by many of the modern spiritual Gurus. It demands total surrender of one's life and more for realising the unknown truth. Blessed are they who have settled in Arunachala, who are but ordinary human beings chosen for final liberation. Ramana's teachings, "You are not in the world. The world is within you," made me see in a new light. His statements like, "See whether you are born? One has to make efforts to be effortless. At last one has to drop all that one knows for the sake of realisation. Self need not be realised, it is self-evident. Only the ignorance needs to be removed. God, Self, Guru are one and the same. God is not an object to be seen. It is the subject, the seer! Mind is not true, it does not exist. It is only a huge bundle of thoughts. Mind vanishes when the Self is realised. Mind-free state is *mukti*."

This and many more pearls of wisdom made me more inquisitive and yearn for the ultimate realisation. So far, I had come across many masters who posed as pearls but they were only seashells thrown onto the shore. They cannot give you the real pearl but can only give colourful verbal explanations of the pearl. In recent times, many modern Gurus with their eloquent, attractive speech captivate the attention of many and claim for themselves authority as *jagadgurus*. Leaves, flowers, branches, fruits attract people but not the unseen root. Only a farmer who has planted the seedling can recognise the root with its growth. Spirituality is not a bed of roses. People are influenced by the outward looks of modern gurus and their slippery,

evasive preaching that quickly fades like dry grass to fire. Actual spirituality is like the burning of a log of wood, slow and steady. One cannot cook in the fire of burning dry grass.

Introspection

Spiritual attainment is not just the result of days, months, years or decades. It is the tapas of innumerable lives. Choosing, surrendering to a master depends on our ripeness, karma, *vāsana* and *samskāra*. The transformation of Valmiki from a hunter to a rishi; Vemana yogi from a lecher to a siddha; Buddha from a prince to an awakened one, are all examples of previous spiritual practice which transformed their present lives in an instant. These are examples of the externally visible fruits and flowers of a plant while the root hidden represents the unknown actual subjective being.

Guru Ramana attained Self-realisation at the age of sixteen through an act of death play. That turned the lad into a Maharshi. But for 54 years thereafter, he lived like the humblest of the humble. Such a sacrifice is required in one's present lifetime to attain Him. The Self manifests through the body, sense organs, intellect, mind, *chitta* and soul energy. A strong, beautiful, healthy young body attracts the world. But does it last forever? No! It is a well-known bitter reality of mortal life. Intellectuals, artists, scientists, athletes, achievers are adored and respected by the society. But do they last forever? Happiness, joy, pleasure, satisfaction gained from these external modes of life do not last long.

Yes, there is a way out. Eternal happiness, bliss, ultimate everlasting joyousness can be attained through eradication of the ego or by Self-realisation. A modern guru declared saying, "Look Sri Ramakrishna took 30 years to give *samadhi* experience to Vivekananda. But we will give you *samadhi* in this short course made available to you and create many more Vivekanandas. The present world moves at jet speed and we too have to act fast, you know." These were the words of a self-proclaimed guru whom I had met in my early days of spiritual search. On hearing his talk, I said to myself "No, this is not the pearl that I searched for." The many failures in the search intensified my quest and inspired me to dive deep into the ocean for the real pearl. I thank the masters who planted in me the spirit of quest for the eternal truth.

Sadguru Shishunāla Sherief, Jagajyōthi Basavēshwara, Akka Mahādēvi, Sri Ramakrishna, Buddha, Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi etc. are my gurus who taught *bhakti* (devotion) and the passion for truth and God. I was contented and joyous in their *satsang*. Then Lord Shiva connected me to Sadguru Ramana for *advaitic jnana*. Through his divine play, he initially cut off the roots of *karma* by withdrawing me from my professional commitments, which had been picked up from the existing bondages, and He cut off the roots of my deluded passion for fake relationships. By his grace, I settled permanently at Arunachala from the first of January, 2017. I got a small rented house at Thamarai Nagar at first.

As I settled here at Arunachala for Ramana, my life changed with new commitments and disciplines. I had read that Sri Ramana used to wake up at 3 am and start his routine. I too soon learnt adhere to the same routine. In those days the whole Arunachala appeared as a real Kailash, since everyone including foreigners had the glittering lustre of *bhasma* (ash) on their forehead. Every devotee had a glow of divinity. Shiva devotees circumambulate Arunachala on barefoot in all seasons, at all times throughout the year and around the clock. I have been to many sacred places, visited *gyothirlingams*, Chardham, Amarnath, Vaishnodevi etc. and also the annual car festivals of various mystics. I have undeniably experienced the divine vibrations at all these sacred places. Despite this, after settling in Arunachala, I have cherished the same serenity of all the temples in totality, including the Kailash! Arunachala has the unique feature of stilling the mind and annihilating the ego of living beings. Self-realisation is nothing but the egoless state. The first verse in *Aksharamanamalai* is ‘*Aruṇāchalameṇa agamē niṇaippavar agattaivē raruppāy Aruṇāchala*’ which means “Thou dost root out the ego of those who meditate on thee in the heart, O Arunachala.” Sri Ramana Maharshi assures that just a thought of Arunachala in the depth of one’s Heart can grant *moksha*.

People usually have pride on their native places. I initially thought these were the admiring words alone of Sri Ramana on Arunachala which came out of his deep devotion. But gradually I could experience its vibrations and realised the divine serenity of Arunachala and of Sri Ramana. I felt as if I was amidst the 63 Shaivite Nayanmars whose lives were like roaring devotional waterfalls sprinkling drops of Shiva

bhakti all around. Bhagavan Ramana was also drenched in the floods of their devotion and his being was swept away in their devotional ecstasy. In the same way in twelfth century, Bhakti Bhandāri Basavēshwara formed an amazing spiritual gathering at Kalyana in Karnataka which was a novel revolution of devotion. At that point of time, the whole of Kalyana was filled with Shiva devotees who were called Shiva Sharanas, Annadāsōha bhavans, Shiva temples, Anubhāva mantapa. The Shiva Sharanas had the *tripundra* on their forehead, a *lingam* tied to their necks, *rudraksha* covered as wreaths around shoulders, earrings, bracelets and shoulder girdles etc. The whole city was drenched in the devotional rain of Sri Basavanna and Sri Allama Prabhu.

The divinity of Arunachala reminds me of those times as the same divine vibrations and impulses are hovering in and around us dissolving the present deluded materialistic world. I am astonished to see the ocean of devotees flooding around Arunachala on and around each full moon day. An aerial drone view shows a huge river of devotees flowing around Arunachala and simulates a garland of divine flowers placed at the feet of Shiva standing, uniting the earth of devotion with the sky of knowledge. How and who can explain this glory of Arunachala and Sri Ramana?

Nobody starves without food here. Sadhus, sanyasis get their food at their places in time. The Lord provides everything that is needed by inspiring the minds of his staunch devotees. Hence, sanyasis are called maharajas in North India and indeed at Arunachala, they live like maharajas of the kingdom of renunciation.

My daily routine is, I wake up at or before 3:30 am, complete my ablutions, finish my regular simple *pūjā*, read for a while and leave the house by 4:45 am and enter Ramanasramam. In the early morning, at the shrine of Sri Bhagavan, when there are but very few devotees, I move around the divine king with a loincloth, which gives me an inexplicable, divine dense feeling. As I circumambulate him, an engrossing stillness releases me from the clutches of mind. Meditation happens by itself. The Guru speaks in silence and answers the inner queries inducing a steady tempo in the mind that flows with freshness throughout the day. At times, emotions pour out and I burst out into tears. Each morning is new and afresh. My realisation of

Bhagavan has changed overtime and I feel he is beyond my perception and projections. Day by day he is getting closer to my heart. I have stopped circumambulating Arunachala due to physical reasons. So, I circumambulate Bhagavan's shrine. The inner *samadhi prakaram* and around the whole of the Matrubhuteshwar shrine, meditation hall, well etc. are the outer path of Arunachala *girivalam* for me. Once Lord Ganesh circumambulated Lord Shiva and mother Parvathi considering them as the whole universe. The same holds good for me.

Each dawn unveils a fresh feeling of beatitude in me while circumambulating him. My being sails into meditation. When I prostrate at the lotus feet of the master's portrait in the Old Hall, I feel a touch of warmth is reminded of a saying, "One can procure everything in the world but not *gurupādam*". Grace and whole energy of the master is hidden in his feet as Trimurtis, Lord Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva dwell at his lotus feet! Hence, our ancient scriptures say, '*Gurur Brahmā Gurur Viṣṇuḥ Gurur devo Maheśvaraḥ, Guruh Śākṣāt Parabrahma Tasmai Śrī Gurave Namaḥ.*' Yes, the guru has the power to create, sustain and dissolve like the Trimurthis. And worshipping the feet of the master is considered as a sacred act of divinity in our Indian culture. If a pure devotee performs *guru pāda pūjā* wholeheartedly, soon the *kuṇḍalinī* energy gets evoked and it is said that nectar flows down from *sahasrāra* towards his feet. Hence *gurupādodaka* (sanctified water collected bathing the guru's feet) is served as '*tīrtha*' to devotees. It has a medicative power for the illness of body and mind!

When devotees grieved at the illness of Sri Ramana, he assured them in his last days, "You say, I am going away. Where can I go? I am here forever". His words prove true even today. He left his mortal body in 1950. But even after seven decades, the routine of the ashram is ever the same as earlier without any impediment. And even now, devotees visit the Maharshi's shrine as earlier and in more numbers. All prayers and questions are answered even more intensively. The same divine silence and solemnity at the Samadhi, the same routine of daily *pārāyaṇam*, *nārāyaṇa seva*, *pūjā* etc. goes on unaltered. When I watch an earnest devotee prostrating, it is as though I am prostrating in front of living Ramana, with the same humbleness, submission and feeling of benevolence. I have never once felt that Ramana is dead

or he is a stone or a photograph. He is always here as he was and as he assured his devotees. It is my belief that the ashram is running as per his divine wish and he is the Sarvādhikari in reality. Every act is designed and executed as per his wish. All are puppets in his divine play. Every individual devotee's ego is tempered in one or other way through various incidents and turns their minds inward. Scriptures say '*yad bhāvam tad bhavati*' i.e, as the projection of self, so is the creation. That is, the external creation is the manifestation of our inner being or what we feel within, and we see the same outside.

Bhagavan at first, did not accept me at his feet. He sent me back twice, once creating an illness which made me go back and yet another time during the COVID pandemic. I went back to Karnataka as per the orders. I thought that Ramana is everywhere and that I need not come back until he calls me. I settled in my place and resumed my karmic job. But within nine months, he called me and this is how he did it. It was a summons from Ramana! One night, my breath choked and a fear of death took over me. I anticipated death every now and then, and thought probably this is the final day. Then I had to undergo hospital treatment and a procedure. But even after that '*marana bhayam*' (fear of death) was ruling over me and then I realised that it is the call from the Guru, hence I returned back to Arunachala.

Many more wonderful miracles took place to hold me to Arunachala Ramana yet again I had come back to my native during the pandemic whence again he called me back with the same intense feeling of '*marana bhayam*'. In January 2022, I returned once for all to die at Arunachala or live with Guru Ramana as long as 'HE' wishes. My decision of never quitting Arunachala gave me a sense of deep relief from the fear and pains of the body that disappeared gradually. I wished to settle in many holy places but he at last brought me here to my last destination. Ramana is guiding me at every step and he says "Focus only on me i.e. Self." Do not wander here and there. He also has given assurance that my ego will wither. He is unveiling the unexplained, the unrealised essence of his teachings through experiences, thus proving that one can lead a good life even in the absence of the normal mind that throws up innumerable thoughts and perform routine works in the world.

Gradually I am feeling comfortable with Sadguru Ramana who is holding my hands protecting me from the delusion of *Māyā*. He surely can grant salvation to devotees like he did to his mother Azhagammal by dissolving the mind in her spiritual heart. For if mind or ego is not submerged in the source i.e., the Heart, it will certainly return again and again to take birth.

At times while circumambulating the shrine, a sudden wave of shock or dragging pain appears in the lower spine. I recall words of a yoga master about *kuṇḍalinī śakti* and that it indicates the rise of the *kuṇḍalinī*. But then, an inner voice awakens me, “To whom is *kuṇḍalinī* rising?” and suddenly the thought process stops. Thus the Guru is guiding me in the ultimate journey eradicating all deviations.

I have had experiences of the divine silence in meditation and of the power of God through miracles. Innumerable miracles, prodigious events occurred before me and through me as a proof for the existence of God. But none existed for long. I feared that the impermanence of these experiences would divert me as I knew truth is everlasting. I was in turmoil due to the limitations of my experiences. I yearned for the everlasting, eternal truth. In the teachings of Ramana, I traced the ultimate truth which lies beyond the mind and its perceptions. His life illustrated the efforts and *tapas* needed to attain the ultimate reality and retain it unperturbed.

‘*Aiyē ati sulabham, Ātma viddai aiyē ati sulabham*’¹ says Ramana. I do believe it though it is an apt elucidation of his being and holds good for Ramana and higher souls like him, but a mirage for me. Yes, it may happen if I live like him, purely established in the Self state. Thus, the universal Guru Ramana is playing the role of Moksha Guru in my life. He has shown me the true purpose and goal of life and the way of attaining that. I feel like a river flowing unceasingly with its sound of turbulence reaching its abode in the ocean of silence.

In my earlier days, I took Ramana to be a human being who attained divinity. I also believed that Advaita cannot be my way of life. It can be but only a part of my life. I thought that Ramana, an Advaitic Guru cannot descend and reach the common men just as Sri Ramakrishna, Guru Basaveshwara and Mahatma Gandhi did.

¹ Ah, extremely easy, *ātma-vidyā* [*ānma viddai*, knowing oneself], extremely easy.

They all lived as *samsaris* and could understand the difficulties of a common man. While Ramana is a flower in the sky and me just a bee on the ground. How can we ever meet? A shiva sharana of the 12th century Devara Dāsimaiah expresses in a verse, ‘*Odalugondava Hasiva, Odalugondava husiva..odalugondavanendu neenomme jaridu nudiyadirā.. nee ennanthomme odalugondu nodā Rāmanātha*’ which means ‘One who has a body feels hunger, one who has a body tells lies. Do not comment by underestimating my being in the body, O Lord, for you too descend down like me with a perishable body and see O! Ramanatha.’ But Ramana insists on, ”No existence of body, mind, ego, pain. Everyone is realised but ignorant of it.” Look at the disparity in the comments! The solidity of Ramana and fluidity of a Sharana. Spiritual fluidity attracts the common man as it has the ability to flow down into the reach of a devotee.

Then at last, I realised the spiritual impact of a yogi or *mahatma* indicates the depth of his being rather than words or a lifestyle. To get rid of the miseries, sufferings, fear and to attain everlasting joy or peace, advaita is the only recourse. We cry for god, but for how long, for what length of time can one cry for him? We worship, do *bhajans*, praise him with all external modalities of devotion but these are short lived. But one’s Self in pure beingness, like the breath which is in us, remains eternal. Being the Self is of prime importance not the path followed to reach it. Paramahansa Sri Ramakrishna ever was in the Self even while acting as a devotee of goddess Kali, the divine mother!

I pray Lord Ramana to kill my mind without it reviving, even up to its last breath. ‘Keep me thoughtless’ is my sincere heartfelt prayers to Him. My last act of surrender is ‘Grace me to visit ashram regularly for your darshan. For I believe He fulfills my prayer.’ ▲

The author of the article *Moksopaya: Kashmir's Treasure of Non-Duality* beginning on page 71 of the October 2023 edition of the *Mountain Path* is Timothy Conway and not Tim Conway as stated. Timothy’s richly layered spiritual website may be located at <https://www.enlightened-spirituality.org/>

KEYWORD

Śūnyam: the Void

Part Four

B.K. CROISSANT

Sometimes playful jokes can carry uncanny meaning. This one, for instance. The Buddha received a gift lovingly tied with a bow. When unwrapped, the box in which the present would have been found, was perfectly empty, to which the Awakened one exclaimed, “Aha! Just what I wanted. Nothing!”

That ‘nothing’ can go a long way including the exact opposite of its literal meaning. In other words, ‘nothing’ is really ‘everything’, meaning the infinite expanse of Brahman, fullness, the whole as beautifully expressed in the well-known verse 5.1.1 of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* dated around the Seventh or Sixth Century B.C.E.

Om. Infinite is That [Brahman], infinite is this [manifested universe]. From the Infinite [Brahman] proceeds the infinite. [After the realisation of the Great Identity or after the cosmic dissolution], when the infinity of the infinite [universe] merges [in the Infinite Brahman], there remains the Infinite [Brahman] alone.¹

¹ Swami Nikhilananda, *The Principal Upanishads*, Advaita Ashrama.

B.K. Croissant first encountered Bhagavan in 1993. She retired in 2006 after serving as a senior administrator in the arts and humanities at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Since then *sādhana* has been her highest priority and greatest joy.

Nothingness can be expressed by different words in Sanskrit, one of which, *śūnyam*, occurs repeatedly in *Śri Devikālottara Jñānācāra Vicāra Pāṭalaḥ*, a chapter devoted to the means for obtaining *jñāna* or liberation as taught by Lord Siva to his consort. This is the fourth and final article on a keyword inspired by it. The first and second articles focused on *ālamba*, meaning attachments or adjuncts of any kind, and the third on *cal* or *cañc*, meaning to move, be unsteady, which is the nature of the mind.²

The chapter is a rare example of the teachings of *advaita* in one of the twenty-eight *Āgama Sāstras* and is directed to devotees who are at the final stage of maturity, in other words, to those who have already acquired considerable purity of mind through various spiritual disciplines and who are ripe for the highest knowledge. Contrary to his usual habit of composing verses only in response to specific requests from ardent devotees, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi translated all eighty-five verses of this chapter at Virupaksha Cave without any external prompting whatsoever. His translation is a gem all the more so in that comparing it to the quite beautiful but often ambiguous original Sanskrit verses gives us the opportunity to appreciate the light he compassionately sheds on them, which was done entirely for the benefit of sincere seekers.

Śūnyam is a neuter noun from the verbal root *śvi* meaning to swell. It denotes a void, vacuum, empty or deserted place. In philosophical terms, it means non-entity or absolute non-existence and can refer to a Buddhist doctrine that disclaims all realities of any sort. On the other hand, it also signifies space, heaven, atmosphere and is a name of Brahman. *Śūnya* as an adjective in a compound meaning ‘without’ occurs several times in *Devikālottaram* but is not the focus of this article nor is an exploration of *śūnyam* in a Buddhist context.

Śūnyam appears for the first time in verse 14, but before it occurs, Lord Siva has already expounded important elements of his teaching in verses 3-9. The ultimate path of *jñāna* must be followed steadfastly, with no doubts or desires, and cannot be obtained by

² For more context about the text, see the first article in the April-June 2023 issue of the *Mountain Path*. Another keyword, *na kiñcit*, meaning ‘nothing at all’, was the subject of an article inspired by the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā* (see the July-September issue of the *Mountain Path*).

endless studying of scriptures. Control of the restless mind is the only means to liberation and transcends all other spiritual practices. He who accomplishes that has attained the purpose of all human birth. When the mind moves even a little, that is *samsāra*, and when it is motionless, that is liberation, the highest happiness devoid of the world and sense objects, attachments, action and thoughts of any kind.

*That immaterial and indivisible void (śūnyam), which is nothing other than awareness with the aspect 'I am', is declared the seed of liberation that produces supreme knowledge.*³

Lord Siva then asserts in no uncertain terms, in verses 15-22, that the highest truth in the Vedas can only be known through *jñāna*, which is the Direct Path. Turn the outward-wandering mind inward and cling to the reality that is all-pervasive, formless, indivisible and self-luminous. Turn away from action tainted by desire and attend only to that which cannot be seen. In fact, the world and the individual soul are non-existent. Merge and become one with the unchanging, eternal whole which exists without any support whatsoever. Next we are given a powerful analogy in verse 23. Here it is both in Sanskrit and in Tamil.⁴

व्योमाकारं महाशून्यं व्यापकं यो न भावयेत् ।
संसारी स भवेल्लोके बीजकोशक्रिमिर्यथा ॥

vyomākāraṁ mahā-śūnyaṁ vyāpakam yo na bhāvayet |
saṁsārī sa bhavelloke bīja-kośa-krimir yathā ||

Whoever does not attend to the all-pervading great void, the form of space, he will become a samsāri in the world like the silkworm in its cocoon.

³ All the Sanskrit verses in this article have been translated by the author who takes full responsibility for any errors therein. This translation and all others by the author in this article do not include additions made by Bhagavan.

⁴ This article, and all the others in the series examining verses from *Devikālottara*, would not be possible without the extremely generous assistance of Michael James. Throughout he has provided word by word translations of Bhagavan's Tamil version, transliterations, explanatory paraphrases and more. His extraordinary depth of knowledge and understanding of Bhagavan's teaching benefits all sincere devotees on the Direct Path.

MOUNTAIN PATH

வியோமவடி வாகும் வியாபகமா சூன்ய
மியாதொருவன் பாவித் திடானே — வியாண்டுமவன்
பீசகோ சக்கிருமி போலப் பிரபஞ்ச
பாசசமு சாரியாம் பார்.

viyōmavaḍi vāhum viyāpakamā śūnya
miyādoruvan bhāvit tiḍāṇē — liyāṇḍumavan
bījakō śakkirumi pōlap pirapañca
pāśasamu sārīyām pār.

In the *kaliveṇbā* extension of this verse, before the first word Bhagavan added *uruvatṛēka*, which is a compound of three words (*uru atru ēka*), ‘one devoid of form’, so with these words the extended version means:

If anyone whosoever does not contemplate the all-pervading great void, which is the form of one space devoid of form, he will always be a world-ensnared saṃsāri, like a cocoon worm. See.

In addition to *uru atru* and *ēka*, Bhagavan adds other words in his Tamil translation, namely, *yāṇḍum* (always), *pāśa* (noose) and *pār* (see), that each shed light on the meaning of the original verse in Sanskrit.

Why *ēka* (one)? Because in *advaita* there is no two, no second or third person, no other. Pure consciousness ‘I am’ knows only itself. The ego, the ‘I am the body’ thought, the superimposed snake on the rope, exists only in its own view. When examined, it merges back into its source having no reality of its own. There is only one Reality.

Why *uru atru* (devoid of form)? Because God and guru are not limited by form. Our true nature is formless. In order to see that truth, which Bhagavan states over and over again in his teachings, the ego, which thrives on grasping form, must be completely destroyed. Knowing God is being devoured by God, and contemplating or attending to God without form, thought or ego, is simply being. *Summā iru* (just be).

Why *yāṇḍum* (always)? Because unless the mind is brought under control, the cycle of birth and death can never, ever be broken. Unless the ego is rooted out, misery will never, ever be ended. It’s as simple as that!

Why *pāśa* (noose)? Because the world, which is nothing but thoughts, is like a noose. Here Bhagavan is making concrete, with a simple noun, what is implied in the original Sanskrit verse. We are ensnared by a noose of our own making. Like the insect that weaves a cocoon, we weave our own misery by attending to our thoughts, which spring from seeds or *vāsanās* within that are projected outside as the world before us, believing all of that to be real. Note that the word for cocoon, *bīja-kośa*, literally means a case full of seeds.

Why *pār* (see)? Because Bhagavan wants us to dig deeply into the very simple truth of this verse and its powerful simile. He wants us to dwell on its importance and is encouraging us to experience its implications. If we practice turning inward to seek the source of ‘I’, we will indeed see for ourselves our own true nature.

Verse 24 is a continuation of verse 23 and gives the means for attaining salvation.

This is the great affliction of all beings in all forms of birth experienced over and over again. To abandon all suffering, earnestly contemplate the great void (mahā-śūnyam).

According to verse 25, spiritual practices involving the body, speech and mind are necessary in the beginning so that we may cultivate desire-less devotion but must eventually be transcended so that all paths based on external supports of any kind, even a name of God, are abandoned. Once the ego is destroyed, all of our attention is on what remains, *śūnyam*, the great void. In other words, we go from attending to objects, adjuncts and thoughts to unwavering attention on pure being.

Verse 26 contains an arresting metaphor in which pure awareness ‘I am’ is the missile, arrow or sword of those who abide permanently as *ātma svarūpa*. It takes us back to the beginning when, in verses 6-9, Lord Siva gave the highest honour to the one who can tame the mind.

पातालाच्छक्तिपर्यन्तं सर्वमेतदभीप्सितम् ।
भग्नं यैः शून्यमस्त्रेण ते स्मृताः शून्यवेदिनः ॥

pātālācchakti-paryantam sarvam etad abhīpsitam |
bhagnaṁ yaiḥ śūnyam-astreṇa te smṛtāḥ śūnya-vedināḥ ||

They are remembered as knowers of the void by whom all this which is desired, from the degenerate world extending as far as śakti, is destroyed with the weapon of void (śūnyam-astreṇa).

MOUNTAIN PATH

பாதலமுன் பாகப் பகர்சத்தி யந்தமா
யாதரப் பட்டவிவை யத்தனையும் — வீதலுறுஞ்
சூனியமா மத்திரங்கொண் டாராலே சூரரவர்
சூனிய ஞானியராச் சுட்டு.

pātaḷamuṇ bāhap paharśatti yantamā
yādarap paṭṭavivai yattaṇaiyum — vīḍaluruṅ
cūṇiyamā mattiraṅkoṇ ḍārālē sūraravar
śūṇiya ṇāṇiyarāc cuṭṭu.

In the *kalivenbā* extension of this verse, before the first word Bhagavan added *tiṭpamām*, an adjective that means ‘powerful’, ‘firm’ or ‘certain’ and implies ‘unfailing’. Though in the verse this adjective comes immediately before *pātaḷam*, ‘the lowest world’, when the words of the verse are rearranged in natural prose order, it would come before *attiram*, ‘astra’ or ‘missile’. He also changed the final word, *suṭṭu*, ‘consider’ or ‘honour’ to *suṭṭuru*, which intensifies it without changing its meaning. So with these additions the extended verse means:

By whomsoever all these that are desired, [everything from] the lowest world [up to] śakti as the limit, are destroyed by means of the powerful [certain or unfailing] missile that is the aforesaid void, consider him, the hero, to be the knower of the void.

Since *Devikālottaram* is part of a Saiva *upa-āgama*, it uses many terms and concepts from Saiva Siddhanta philosophy which admits dualism. So *pātala*, ‘the lowest world’, and *śakti*, ‘as the limit’, refer to *tattvas* or realities in that philosophy, of which there are thirty-six. In this verse, however, even those *tattvas* are destroyed. According to Michael James, Bhagavan translated *Devikālottaram* in order to make prominent that in its ancient roots even that philosophy has strains of *advaita*. Bhagavan states over and over again in this teaching that there is only one *tattva*, namely ourself as we actually are, the adjunct-less pure awareness ‘I am’.

In verse 264 of *Guru Vācaka Kovai*, Muruganar compares celestial pleasures to the Heart.

The Heart, where the Supreme Silence of God’s Grace is shining, is the only state of Kaivalyam, in the Presence of which the rare pleasures of all the heavens are revealed to be nothing.

According to Sadhu Om, “Sri Bhagavan used to compare all the pleasures available in the celestial worlds, including even Brahma Loka, to the tiny specks of moonlight which fall on the ground through the dense foliage of a large tree, whereas the *Jnani*’s experience of Bliss is like the full moon-shine in an open space.”⁵

Bhagavan emphasised the meaning of the original verse by adding *tiṭṭamām* (powerful, firm, certain, unfailing) as a strong modifier of ‘the missile of the void’. It recalls Rama and all the great champions of justice and virtue in the hoary past but also establishes *jñāna* as supreme.

He also strengthened the meaning of the Sanskrit words ‘they are remembered as knowers of the void’ (*te smṛtāḥ śūnya-vedinaḥ*) by translating them as ‘consider him, the hero, to be the knower of the void’ (*śūraravar śūṇiya ṅāṇiyarāc cuṭṭu*). Note that ‘hero’ has been added, and the ‘knower’ is translated by ‘*jñāni*’ (*ṅāṇiyar*, an honourific form of *ṅāṇi*), which is more specific and stronger than ‘*vedinaḥ*’.

‘*Suṭṭu*’ (consider or honour) is in the imperative, directly implicating us, and is later changed to ‘*suṭṭuru*’, an intensified form that is meant to give us pause. In other words, think on this. What is the true battle and where is it waged? Who is the greatest hero and what is the most powerful weapon? How can we also become heroes? In verse 1063 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*, Muruganar gives emphasis to honour.

*Through not knowing the rare worth of the jewel that is the knowledge of the ātman, people in their laziness abandon the attempt to attain it and suffer [in their ignorance]. But those who have known the means of attaining that jewel of the ātman, [that is, self-investigation] which belongs to everyone by right, are the great ones. They alone will experience supreme bliss. Therefore they are the ones you should honour.*⁶

⁵ *Guru Vācaka Kōvai (The Collection of Guru’s Sayings)* by Sri Muruganar, Translation and Commentary by Sri Sadhu Om, Sri Arunachala Ramana Nilayam, Tiruvannamalai, 2005, p. 74.

⁶ *The Light of Supreme Truth: Guru Vācaka Kōvai*, Composed by Sri Muruganar, Prose paraphrase by Sri Sadhu Om, Translated from the Tamil by Robert Butler, Sri Ramana Center of Houston, 2023, p. 247.

We all know that Bhagavan's infallible weapon or *brahmāstra* was 'who am I?'.⁷ He wielded it for over fifty years at the foot of Arunachala, and it was his message and his mission. In *Arunachala Ashtakam*, verse 5, he shows how it works, this time as a grinding stone, the mind turned within itself to remove all impurities. Here is Sadhu Om's paraphrase and commentary on that verse.

"When a gem is first dug out of a mine it will be full of flaws, which can be removed only when it is polished on a special grinding stone, and only when all the flaws are thus removed will the gem shine with its natural lustre. Thereafter, the colour of no other object will be able to affect the lustrous colour of that gem; instead the gem will cast its own light around it and make other objects shine with its lustre. Similarly, when the mind always attends to second and third person objects, it will be full of flaws (adjuncts such as 'this' or 'that', which are superimposed on the pure light of consciousness 'I am'), and these flaws can be removed only when the mind is polished on the special grinding stone called mind (that is, only when the mind turns away from second and third persons and attends to itself, the first person, by enquiring 'who am I, the mind?'); only when all the flaws are thus removed, will the mind shine with its natural lustre as the mere consciousness 'I am'. Thereafter, such an adjunct-free mind (a mind which has thus been transformed into Self) will not be affected by anything in this world; instead, It will cast its own light on the whole world and will thus see the world as nothing but itself."⁸

Śūnyam appears for the last time in verse 42.

Those who meditate on the highest empty space of awareness (śūnyam) become established in it through practice. They will reach the supreme abode which is beyond birth and death.

What else can one hope for? What greater goal?

So what makes Bhagavan's translations so special? He is no longer in the body but when we look closely at his translations, comparing

⁷ Suri Nagamma, a respected and long-time devotee, was fascinated by Bhagavan's stock reply and devoted one of her letters, dated 22 January 1946, to it. It was especially effective to silence petulant or insincere questioners. Bhagavan told her that if Ganapati Muni and Kapali wanted to ask him anything they would first fold their hands and say, "Swami, Swami, if you will promise not to brandish your *brahmasthram*, I will ask a question."

⁸ *Sri Arunachala Stuti Panchakam*, Meaning by Sadhu Om and Translation by Michael James, Sri Ramana Kshetra, Tiruvannamalai, 2007, pp. 157-161.

them word by word with the original and attending to them without slipping from a state devoid of distractions, we are in his presence. It is Bhagavan, the pure awareness 'I am', sometimes as Lord Siva, sometimes as Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, sometimes as some other sage or *avatār*, speaking the truth in Tamil or in some other language.

Lakshmana Sarma, who laboured so hard and so productively with translations, beautifully summarises the purpose of Bhagavan's teachings.

“The teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana are centred around the Direct Path, the Quest of the Self. That is to say the Master did not teach the metaphysical truths of the Vedanta as having an intrinsic value of their own, but only as aids to the understanding and the practice of the Quest. The latter alone has an intrinsic value, as the means of solving all our life's problems at one stroke. The Quest is the Direct Path to the Natural State, wherein these problems do not exist. The Master even taught that if only one can take to the Quest and persist in it with the whole power of his mind, then for him the metaphysical teachings would be unnecessary. This He expressly sets forth in two verses of his *Ulladu Naarpadu*. In the first, He states the metaphysical question whether the three, the world, God and the soul, are separate entities, as is maintained by the dualists, or appearances of the one, as the Non-Dualists say. In the next verse, He mentions the controversy about the reality of the world. Neither of these questions need to detain the earnest seeker of the Self, who is able to pursue the Quest without caring to come to a conclusion on these questions, because the Goal of the Quest, the Natural State, which is also the Egoless State, is also the one in which doubts do not arise. Metaphysical teachings are necessary only for those whose minds are not yet ripe for the Quest. To become aware of the Real Self is the means of solving all of the problems of life.”⁹

Take heart! Discover and, with increasing love, hold onto *śūnyam*, the pure awareness 'I am' that lies within each and every one of us. Practise, practise, practise!

Śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ

End of series on Devikālottaram. ▲

⁹ This excerpt is from an article that appeared in the 1st June 1954 issue of *The Call Divine*.







Guy Gonyea

Remain Where You Are

SURI NAGAMMA

Every issue, we will select one article from the issue of Mountain Path that began publication in 1964 i.e., 60 years ago. This is an article by Suri Nagamma¹ that appeared in January 1964.

At a quarter to ten this morning, just as Bhagavan was getting up to go for his usual short mid-morning walk, an Andhra young man approached the couch and said: “Swami, I have come here because I want to perform tapas (austerities) and don’t know what would be a good place for it. I will go for the purpose wherever you tell me.”

Bhagavan did not answer. He was stooping down rubbing his legs and knees, as he often does before beginning to walk, on account of the rheumatism in them, and was smiling quietly to himself. We, of course, were waiting eagerly for what he would say. A moment later he took the staff that he uses to steady himself in walking and, looking at the young man, said: “How can I tell you where to stay? It is best to stay where you are.” And with a smile he went out.

The young man was bewildered. “What is the meaning of this?”

¹ Suri Nagamma was an Andhra lady who was living in the lifetime of Bhagavan. Her brother also was a great devotee but could pay only occasional visits here, as he was the Manager of a Bank in Madras. Therefore Nagamma formed the habit of writing him reports of the doings and sayings of Bhagavan. These letters have been put together as a book and published by the Ashram. However, this letter does not appear in the book. It was dated 10th September 1947.

he exclaimed. "Being an elderly person I thought he would tell me some holy place where I could stay, but instead of that he tells me to stay where I am. I am now near this couch. Does that mean that I should stay here? Was it to receive such a reply that I approached him? Is this a matter for joking?"

One of the devotees took him out of the hall and explained: "Even when Bhagavan says something in a light vein there is always some deep meaning in it. Where the feeling 'I' arises is one's Self. *Tapas* means knowing where the Self is and abiding there. For that one has to know who one is; and what then does it matter where one stays? That is what he meant." He thus pacified the young man and sent him away. Similarly, some one asked yesterday: "Swami, how can we find the Atma?"

"You are in the Atma, so how can there be any difficulty in finding it?" Bhagavan replied.

"You say that I am in the Atma, but where exactly is that Atma," the questioner persisted.

"If you abide in the heart and search patiently you will find it."

The questioner still seemed unsatisfied and made the rather curious objection that there was no room in his heart for him to stay in it.

Bhagavan turned to one of the devotees sitting there and said, smiling: "Look how he worries about where Atma is! What can I tell him? What is Atma? It is all-pervading. When I tell him that it is called 'Heart' he says there is no room in it for him to stay. What can I do? To say that there is no room in the Heart after filling it full of *vasanas* (inherent tendencies and cravings) is like grumbling that there is no room to sit down in a house as big as Ceylon. If all the junk is thrown out won't there be room? The body itself is junk. These people are like someone who fill all the rooms of his house chock full of junk which is not necessary for his body and then complains that there is no room for his body in it. In the same way they fill the mind with all sorts of *vasanas* and then say there is no room for the Self in it. If all the *vasanas* are swept away and thrown out there will be plenty of room and it will all be Atma. Then there will be no such thing as a separate 'I' so what need then for room, or who would occupy the room? Instead of seeking the Self they say 'no room! no room!', just like shutting your eyes and saying there is no sun. What can be done?"



Advaita Primer

Part Seven

Equipoise

M. GIRIDHAR

In the first article of this series, we examined why we should study Advaita Vedanta. In the subsequent articles, we examined the concept of *jagat* (world) as *mithyā* arising due to ignorance (*avidyā*), resulting in wrong superimposition (*adhyāsa*). We also explored the relationship between the triad, namely *jīva*, *nirguṇa* (without attributes) Brahman and *jagat*, and the relationship between each of the above entities with *saguna* Brahman (*īśvara*). In the previous article, we examined how Advaita and modern science view consciousness and how the former proposes a solution to the difficult and that of seemingly intractable issue called the hard problem of consciousness, of connecting consciousness with matter. However, the purpose of Advaita is *not only* to explain the nature of reality and of what really exists (ontology), the relationship between the knower and what is known (epistemology), and what we value (axiology), but inherently takes the seeker towards Self-realisation.

In Advaita, Self-realisation is already attained as the Self is ever-present. It is the knowledge (*jñāna*) that results in the destruction of ignorance (*avidyā*). This knowledge of one's true identity as Ātman-Brahman¹ and witness-consciousness² allows us to recognise the illusoriness of the phenomenal world and the notion of doership.

¹ *ayam ātmā brahma* (अयम् आत्मा ब्रह्म) — 'Ātman is Brahman', *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, 1.2.

² *Sākṣī*— The Awareful Witness; see Swami Tadatmananda, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5o_AJRxVp0.

The only purpose of Advaita is to make us realise that we are and always have been Brahman. The *nirguṇa* Brahman is consciousness (*prajñānam brahma*),³ which is pure awareness. Brahman is described as *sat* (Reality), *cit* (knowledge), *ananta* (infinity)⁴ and *ānanda* (bliss)⁵. The words ‘sin’ and ‘virtue’ are somewhat alien to the spirit of Vedanta philosophy, because they necessarily foster a sense of possessiveness with regard to thought and action. If we say, “I am good,” or “I am bad,” we are only talking in the language of *māyā*. “I am Brahman” is the only *true* statement any of us can or should make.

Bhagavan said, “That which is, is only *Sat*, Being or Reality. That is called Brahman or Pure Self. The lustre of *Sat*-Reality is *Cit*-Consciousness and its nature is *Ānanda*-Bliss. These are not different from *Sat*-Reality. All the three together are known as *Sat-Cit-Ānanda*.”⁵ Bhagavan further clarifies, “*Satcidānanda* is said to indicate that the Supreme is not *asat* (unreal), not *acit* (insentient) and not *anānanda* (unhappiness). Because we are in the phenomenal world, we speak of the Self as *Satcidānanda*.”⁶ He continues, “There is no use seeking for a temporary state of affairs. The fact is that *Satcidānanda* is the state of effortless, ever alert peace. Effortlessness while remaining aware, is the state of Bliss. And that is Realisation.”⁷

We should differentiate between happiness, pleasure and bliss and the western view of meditative practices as a neurological process that only occurs at the physical level of the brain. Pleasure is derived from dopamines and happiness by serotonins. These are entirely two different neurotransmitters occurring in different areas of the brain with contrasting regulatory pathways. Dopamine is an excitatory neurotransmitter. Chronic stimulation of these neurons lead to neuronal cell death. As the receptors decrease, we need higher and higher stimulation to obtain pleasure at a continually decreasing rate, leading to tolerance and eventually resulting in addiction. Serotonin is an inhibitory neurotransmitter essentially slowing the neurons down and producing happiness. There is no overdosing of serotonin but dopamine down-regulates serotonin. Thus the more pleasure we

³ *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, 3.1.3.

⁴ *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.1.3.

⁵ Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Letter 117.

⁶ Venkataramiah, M. (ed.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §433.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Talk §295.

seek, the more unhappy we get. However, this is not the happiness that is mentioned in *Advaita* or Vedanta literature, which actually refers to *ānanda*, that is rightly translated as bliss and is independent of chemicals in the brain or even the body, mind and world complex. The truth is that pleasure and joy actually come from the mind, not from external phenomena and bliss is inherent in all of us because that is our true nature.

How does one *obtain* this *ānanda*? We cannot obtain it. As Bhagavan Ramana says, “The wrong knowledge of ‘I am the body’ is the cause of all the mischief. This wrong knowledge must go. That is realisation. Realisation is not acquisition of anything new nor is it a new faculty. It is only removal of all camouflage [*avidyā*].” In the state of ignorance (*ajñāna*), consciousness (Brahman) reflected in the mind and identified with it constitutes the empirical self or transactional self, the *jīva*. Self-realisation is the recognition by the *jīva* that ‘I am the illuminating consciousness’, rather than the reflected qualified or attributive conscious entity ‘I am this [or that]’.⁸

Subbaramayya reports Bhagavan saying, “‘What is Self-Realisation?’ A mere phrase. People expect some miracle to happen, something to drop from Heaven in a flash. It is nothing of the sort. Only the notion that you are the body, that you are this or that, will go, and you remain as you are.”⁹

Arjuna asks Krishna, “O Keshava, what is the description of a person of steady wisdom who is established in equanimity?”¹⁰ Krishna gives a long reply in verses from 2.55 to 2.72 to describe the characteristics of the Self-realised person (*jñānī*). However, the answer is in the question itself, which is equanimity. It is here appropriate to recall an incident with Kanchi Mahaperiyava.¹¹

A family went to have the *darśan* of Mahaperiyava. Along with them, they took one of their family friends who had lived in the USA for some decades. The friend did not have any great faith in our religion, system and especially the monks wearing saffron clothes; he went along with him with utterly no interest to meet

⁸ Vidyananya, Swami, *Anubhutiprakāśa*, Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2009.

⁹ Subbaramayya, G.V., *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, p.138.

¹⁰ *sthitaprajñāsya kā bhāṣā samādhisthasya keśava. BG 2.54.*

¹¹ <https://truemasters.wordpress.com/27destroying-your-ego/>.

Mahaperiyava. He was under the impression that Mahaperiyava was a fundamentalist and an uneducated monk. This NRI had no great respect at all for Him. Not only that, he uttered such inauspicious things about Him, ‘What does He know? Does He know English?’.

There was a big throng of devotees at the Mutt and the family was standing at a decent distance from Him. As usual, Mahaperiyava looked at this family with His graceful eyes, and called all of them including the friend to come near Him. After all the usual courteous enquiry about the family, the Master looked at the NRI friend and asked about his details, including his name, whereabouts, his predecessors, where he was working etc. Then He asked, ‘You were born in India, and you know Tamil; your wife was also born in India and should know the mother tongue. When you two converse will it be in Tamil or English?’ The friend replied ‘We never use Tamil at home, we use only English. The same goes for the kids also.’ Then Mahaperiyava asked, ‘Before speaking, you may have to think and conceive the sentence. Is the thought process in Tamil or English?’ The friend [proudly] replied, ‘That too in English only’. Some minutes later, an old lady came to have Mahaperiyava’s *darśan*.

Mahaperiyava looked at the NRI person and said, ‘This old lady is now very poor, but once upon a time she was very rich. But even after she lost all the materialistic wealth, her devotion towards the Mutt, Acharya and me has never changed even a bit. Could you please tell me what is the English word which will describe this unflinching devotion, which can’t be changed by external situations? I would like to know [After all, I am an uneducated monk who does not know English].’¹²

The man was flummoxed. He thought and thought for a while but did not know that word. Mahaperiyava smiled and told him, ‘Please take your time and let me know’. Even after some time, he could not come up with the required word. Then Swamiji said, ‘Can I suggest one word? Could you please confirm

¹² He could converse in approximately 17 languages including English, French, Swedish and a dozen Indian languages.

whether the same can convey this meaning? EQUIPOISED’.

The man was spellbound and fell on Mahaperiyava’s feet to pardon him for his ego.

Equanimity refers to a state of calmness and composure, especially in difficult situations. It involves maintaining a sense of inner peace. Equipose refers to a state of balance or equilibrium. Both of these terms imply a calm state of mind irrespective of the external circumstances. Krishna defines Yoga as “Do your karma equiposed (*samaḥ*) in success or failure; such equanimity (*samatvam*) of mind is called Yoga.”¹³

The problem is we always try to seek happiness wrongly. The way we live, the way we think — everything is dedicated to material pleasures. We consider sense objects to be of utmost importance and materialistically devote ourselves to whatever makes us happy, rich, famous or popular. Even though all this comes from our mind, we are so totally preoccupied by external objects that we never look within or even enquire into the mind. We often feel miserable and our world seems upside-down because we believe that external things will work exactly as we plan and expect them to do so. We expect things that are changeable by nature not to change, impermanent things to last forever. Nothing material lasts; it is impossible. We make futile efforts to change outer circumstances, and search for happiness in the world, experiencing the inevitable duality of pleasure and pain. As pain is more intense than pleasure, we encounter suffering repeatedly. If we hear ten positive compliments and one negative criticism, the mind clings on to the criticism. Negativity is the innate nature of the mind. It leads you to a state where you get so disgusted with yourself and your own mind. The main problem is our uncontrolled, dissatisfied mind, whose nature is suffering. You feel like running away from your own mind. Running away is not going to help, because wherever you go, your mind will also go along with you. It is like trying to run away from your shadow. That’s why Bhagavan says, “Whether you continue in the household or renounce it and go to the forest, your mind haunts you. The ego is the source of thought. It creates the body and the world and it makes you think of being the *grhastha*. If you renounce, it will

¹³ *siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvam yoga uchyate. Bhagavad Gita, 2.48.*

only substitute the thought of *sannyāsa* for that of *grhastha* and the environment of the forest for that of the household. But the mental obstacles are always there for you. They even increase greatly in the new surroundings. It is no help to change the environment. The one obstacle is the mind and it must be overcome whether in the home or in the forest. If you can do it in the forest, why not in the home? Therefore, why change the environment? Your efforts can be made even now, whatever the environment.”¹⁴

We get hurt easily but it takes forever to get healed. Healing is always harder. If we could, we would forgive and forget but it is easier said than done and healing is much harder than feeling pain. When someone hurts you emotionally, they alter you. We are no longer the same old person. When healing occurs, we become a newer you. Just like new skin grows when a wound heals, a new person emerges when we heal. Every event in life changes you a little but some can completely break you. But we do not have the option to remain broken. We rebuild ourselves constantly and strive to get out of suffering. There will always be people around you who will have an opinion about you. They may say things to you that you may not like, they may take you or your offerings for granted or they may criticise you. It is unlikely that they will change but are we going to let them keep on hurting us? Because every time they do, we get hurt and a little bit of us is lost in trying to rebuild ourselves. As we repeatedly get hurt, life becomes a burden and we grieve. Sorrow destroys courage and the mind filled with hurt destroys knowledge.¹⁵ Eventually, we say enough is enough but it is usually after a bout of adverse circumstances when life becomes unbearable.

When a sad person approached a wise Buddhist teacher, he said, “The sky is cloudy. It will rain but the crop will grow and ripen. But finally all the clouds will disperse.” This means that the current cloudiness refers to the current gloom and suffering of the person. The rain is the hardship that the person will undergo but the person matures and Grace will ripen the seeds of spirituality. The dispersal of the clouds is the attainment of equanimity resulting in bliss. Clouds come and go, but the blue sky is always there; clouds do not alter the

¹⁴ Op. cit., Talk §54.

¹⁵ *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (Canto 2, Chapter 62, Verse 15).

fundamental nature of the sky.¹⁶ Similarly, Brahman is unaffected by our thoughts or the happenings of the world.

Sometimes the bad things that happen in our lives put us directly on the path to the best things that will ever happen to us because difficult roads usually lead to beautiful destinations. At this stage, the Guru, who is the embodiment of Grace, out of supreme compassion, explains that all the emotional hurt, healing and suffering has resulted from the apparent ego. The ego gives one a false sense of separation that expects one to gain lasting satisfaction, peace and happiness outside in the world. The Guru then points out that our innate nature is beyond the mind and we are [and have always been] Brahman. This knowledge gradually helps one to get rid of all the cravings and aversions of the mind. Then one understands that this pursuit and lasting contentment can never be found outside and, therefore, one begins to turn within oneself.

It is here appropriate to recall an incident with Bhagavan. When a cat ate the mother of some baby squirrels, Ramana took on the task of caring for the young. As he used often daily events to teach his devotees, he said to them, “These little ones do not know that wisdom lies in remaining in their nest. They keep attempting to come out. All trouble lies outside but they cannot remain within. Similarly if the mind is not externalised, but remains sunk in the Heart then there would only be happiness. But the mind keeps moving out.” When Rangaswami asked, “What is the path for keeping it inward?”, Bhagavan said, “It is exactly the same as what I am doing now. Each time a young squirrel comes out, I keep putting it back into its nest. When I go on doing it, it learns the happiness of staying in the nest.”¹⁷

Indrajāla is mentioned in the Vedas¹⁸ and is a subtle metaphor for the structure of reality. Imagine a vast *jāla* (net); at each crossing point there is a jewel; each jewel is perfectly clear and reflects all the other jewels in the net. The jewel in this metaphor stands for an individual being and is intimately connected with all other jewels in the universe, and a change in one jewel means a change, however slight, in every other jewel. The central premise to Vedic philosophy

¹⁶ Yeshe, Lama, *Becoming Your Own Therapist and Make Your Mind an Ocean*, Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive; Smashwords Edition, 2010.

¹⁷ Ebert, Gabriele, *Ramana Maharshi: His Life*, p.32.

¹⁸ *Atharva Veda*, 8.8.5-8.

is that the perceived separation between ourselves and the external world is an illusion. In truth, we are interconnected with all beings and the entire universe. As Rumi¹⁹ said, “You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop.” But the illusion of separation is so strong that it feels real. Though we are interconnected, we see ourselves as separate individuals. But the sage established in the highest consciousness sees one undivided imperishable reality coursing through all living entities.²⁰ This reality is indivisible and yet appears to be divided amongst living beings.²¹

The concept of an embodied consciousness (Ātman) with respect to supreme consciousness (Brahman) can be described in three different ways. In one analogy, consciousness is compared to space, and consciousness in the embodiment is compared to the space inside a pot.²² When there is a pot, the all-pervading space appears to be confined to the pot though space is all-pervading. The second method of explaining this situation is through the example of a reflecting medium like a mirror. Consciousness is the source, and consciousness available in the embodiment is the reflected consciousness. The truth is the original. The original consciousness is called *bimba* and the reflected consciousness is called *pratibimba*. If we mistake the reflection for the original, it will appear to be limited to the embodiment.²³ The third method of explanation is that consciousness available in the embodiment is the semblance or *ābhāsa* of consciousness, i.e., *cidābhāsa*. The *ābhāsa* is what appears to be the original even when it is different from it. It is like the appearance of the sun appearing to be present in the surface of the water contained in a pot.²⁴ We can liken the sun to the Supreme Being, its several images to different living beings, and the water to the mind or intellect. In

¹⁹ 13th-century Persian poet and Sufi mystic.

²⁰ *sarva-bhūteṣu yenaikaṁ bhāvam avyayam īkṣate*

avibhaktam vibhakteṣu taj jñānam viddhi sātṭvikam. Bhagavad Gītā, 18.20.

²¹ *avibhaktam ca bhūteṣu vibhaktam iva ca sthitam. Bhagavad Gītā, 13.17.*

²² This method of explaining is adopted by Vācaspati Misra in *Bhāmāti* and is called *avaccheda-vāda*.

²³ This explanation is called *pratibimba-vāda* given by Padmapāda, a direct disciple of Śaṅkarācārya.

²⁴ This intellection called *ābhāsa-vāda* is given by Sureshvara, a direct disciple of Śaṅkarācārya.

this analogy, the existence of the sun is entirely independent of the existence of any particular image or water. The various reflections may appear clean or murky, in motion or still, depending on the nature of their hosting water bodies. Nevertheless, these variations do not affect the sun itself.

Similarly, the consciousness available in the embodiment (*jīva*, body mind) does not affect the source (or original) consciousness (Brahman). The apparent delimitation of space by the pot does not affect the space; the image of the person appearing in the mirror does not affect the person; and the reflection of the illumination does not affect the source of illumination. In the limitation explanation, we recognise the original by knowing that the limitation is only apparent, like the limitless space appearing as limited inside the pot. In the reflection explanation, we recognise the source, through the knowledge that what is seen is only the reflection, and in the semblance explanation that it is only the semblance of the original.

Sureshvara, the direct disciple of Śaṅkarācārya and the author of one of the biggest books²⁵ in Advaita literature writes in his famous work²⁶ about how lack of knowledge (*ajñāna* or *avidyā*) leads to suffering in eight stages as follows. Because of ignorance (*advaita ajñāna*), there is perception of duality (*dvaita darśanam*). Because of this perception, there is *śobhana-aśbhana-adhyāsaḥ* i.e. division into favourable and unfavourable parts. This leads to *rāga-dveṣa* i.e., likes and dislikes of the favourable and unfavourable circumstances, respectively. This leads to *dharma* and *adharma karmāni* (right and wrong actions) that results in *puṇya* and *pāpa* (virtue and sin). These lead to superior and inferior physical bodies, *deha-prāptiḥ*, respectively. The embodiment itself leads to suffering and *samsāra*. Due to this 8-fold chain, it can be concluded that *samsara* is actually due to *ajñāna*. Duality or separation implies that you can lose something or someone. Painful emotions and feelings are generated and sustained by the sense of being a separate self. When the perceived

²⁵ *Bṛhadāranyakopaniṣad bhāṣyavārtikam*, encompassing 12,000 verses.

<https://archive.org/details/BrihadaranyakaBhashyaVartikam2/Brihadaranyaka%20Bhashya%20Vartikam%201/>

²⁶ Balasubramanian, R., *Naiṣkarmya Siddhi: An Elucidation of Advaita* by Suresvara, Chinmaya International Foundation, Kerala.

duality is seen as false by the removal of *ajñāna*, the mind will be completely absent from all emotions resulting from duality and will remain equipoised and rest in the inherent bliss of Self. When the mind becomes equipoised... it verily becomes one with Brahman.²⁷

In *Tattva Bodha*,²⁸ Śaṅkara defines उपरमः (*uparamah*) as mental equipoise during the observance of one's own *dharma*. As mentioned earlier, the state of performing actions with equanimity of the mind, abandoning attachment towards success and failure itself is a yoga¹¹. All actions become worship when the work is performed in an equipoised manner with a spirit of surrender to Bhagavan. The highest form of *uparama* is when one remains in the highest state of *satcitananda* (सत् चित् आनन्द) while discharging the *dharma* without brooding over a dead past or fancying about the unborn future. Ultimately, it is not possible to attain the perfect equipoise of the mind continuously unless one is established in the Self.²⁹

In the next verse, Śaṅkara explains another important characteristic of the mind i.e., तितिक्षा (*titikṣā*). This means forbearance, which is basically patient endurance of the opposites encountered in our life. Life is a continuous stream of experiences at the physical level (heat, cold), emotional level (joy, sorrow) and intellectual level (praise, censure) that may give us a feeling of being at the top of the world or at a bottomless pit. In such cases, since we are not able to take things in our stride, we blame outside agencies like the stars, society, and others. Some external thing changes, and we get completely upset. We all need control, be it psychologically, emotionally and financially as we are too attached to the external world. Swami Paramarthananda³⁰ compares an equanimous mind to a good set of shock absorbers on the vehicle. An equanimous person says, "This too shall pass" and counters all events with "Is that so?" An incident³¹ can be given to illustrate the above.

²⁷ *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā Bhāṣya*, 3.46, *tika* by Anandagiri.

²⁸ Chaturvedi, Shraddhesh, *Tattva Bodha by Shankaracharya: Knowledge of Reality*, 2019, verse 8. Independently published.

²⁹ *yadā sthāsyati niścalā samādhāv... Bhagavad Gītā*, 2.53.

³⁰ Introduction to *Tattvabodha*, in https://www.vedanta.gr/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/SwParam_IntroVedanta-Tattvabodha_ENA4.pdf

³¹ <https://kannondo.org/is-that-so/>.

Hakuin³² was greatly respected and had many disciples. At one time in his life, he lived in a village hermitage, close to a food shop run by a couple and their beautiful young daughter. One day the parents discovered that their daughter was pregnant. Angry and distraught, they demanded to know the name of the father. At first, the girl would not confess but after much harassment, she named Hakuin. The furious parents confronted Hakuin, berating him in front of all of his students. He simply replied, “Is that so?”

When the baby was born, the family gave it to Hakuin. By this time, he had lost his reputation and his disciples. But Hakuin was not disturbed. He took delight in caring for the infant child. A year later, the young mother of the child was troubled by great remorse. She confessed the truth to her parents — the real father was not Hakuin but rather a young man who worked at the local fish market. The mortified parents went to Hakuin, apologising, asking forgiveness for the wrong they did to him. They asked Hakuin to return the baby. Although he loved the child as his own, Hakuin gave him up without complaint. All he said was: “Is that so?”

The acceptance depends on the degree our life is impacted. For example, we may not be unduly affected if our car is stuck in a traffic (a daily occurrence in Indian cities) but become more concerned if the computer fails to start. What if we have the unfortunate experience of being wrongly accused and being laid off from work? What if we get diagnosed with a terminal illness with a few days of excruciating pain left before dying? What if all the above events happen on the same day? Will we remain equipoised and say “Is that so?”.

An untrained mind suffers when it experiences unexpected, life-changing events, particularly if it is aimed at us personally. But the above incident indicates that the mind can be capable of equanimity in all situations. It is a story of acceptance without judgment. It shows that equanimity and wisdom are possible in the midst of the surprises and difficulties of ordinary life, possible because it is our inherent state: it already exists, we have no need to strive for it. Bhagavan says,

³² Zen Master Hakuin lived in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. He is said to have created the now-famous question: “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”

“Happiness is inherent in man and is not due to external causes. One must realise his Self in order to open the store of unalloyed happiness.”³³

The quest to find peace of mind is doomed because everybody, without exception, has a restless mind. Arjuna complains that the mind is restless, turbulent, obstinate and says it is more difficult to control than the wind.³⁴ Freedom has nothing to do with your thoughts and everything to do with whether you identify with them or not. When we begin to meditate,³⁵ we see there are two separate entities at play — the thoughts that come and go and the one who is aware of them — the witness. Clouds come and go, the sun remains unaffected. Just as the sun cannot be seen in a densely clouded sky, so one’s own Self cannot be seen in a mind-sky which is darkened by a dense cloud of thoughts.³⁶ Pleasant thoughts come and go, unpleasant thoughts come and go³⁷ but the silent witness, the one who is aware, never changes. Peace is its nature. Advaita asks us to be that witness, Brahman.

Brahman supports the entire creation as though it were a play, but is independent of it, as pointed out by Śaṅkarācārya in his *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*.³⁸ Though the world appears real to the *sadhaka*, it has no relationship with Brahman, just like a movie screen has no relationship to the happenings in the movie. A fire in the movie does not burn the screen, nor does a flood wet the screen. When the *jīva* recognises that he is the *sākṣī* (witness) and not associate himself with the conditioned (*upādhis*) reflected consciousness, he is self-realised.³⁹ Brahman is said to be *sākṣī*, the witness consciousness, but this is just to differentiate it from the witnessed world (that includes the body and mind). In reality, Brahman is infinite and is even beyond the duality of the witness and witnessed.

³³ Op.cit., Talk §4.

³⁴ *cañcalam hi manaḥ kṛṣṇa pramāthi balavad dṛḍham tasyāham nigrāham manye vāyor iva su-duṣkaram. Bhagavad Gita, 6.34.*

³⁵ Sarvapriyananda, Swami, *Dṛg Dṛśya Viveka*, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLAF_c2xr3i8C6LjcbiQSZkp0EUfd2XX8t.

³⁶ Muruganar, Sri, *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*, verses 916-917.

³⁷ “Leave your front door and your back door open. Let thoughts come and go. Just don’t serve them tea.” Quoted in *Crooked Cucumber*; a biography of Shunryu Suzuki.

³⁸ यद्यप्यस्माकमियं जगद्विम्बविरचना गुरुतरसंरम्भेवाभाति, तथापि परमेश्वरस्य लीलैव केवलेयम् ... *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, 2.1.33.

³⁹ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 3.1:1-3.

As spiritual unfoldment proceeds, one naturally cherishes solitude and silence. Solitude does not mean being isolated and neither does silence mean absence of sound. What is meant is a natural state of inner detachment as one realises the unreality of the world and the futility to gain any lasting satisfaction or happiness outwardly in the world. Bhagavan says, “Solitude is in the mind of man. One might be in the thick of the world and maintain serenity of mind; such a one is in solitude. Another may stay in a forest, but still be unable to control his mind. He cannot be said to be in solitude. Solitude is a function of the mind. A man attached to desire cannot get solitude wherever he may be; a detached man is always in solitude.”⁴⁰

Though Bhagavan’s teachings construe the direct path, it is not a shortcut to Self-realisation.⁴¹ Realisation is the opposite of ignorance. To consider the temporal and transient world to be real and the supreme Self as unreal is ignorance. This is the cause of sorrow and suffering. Awakening is when our mind chatter quiets and the supreme consciousness shines through the equipoised mind. However, this does not happen at once. Can we see our face with clarity in a dirty mirror? No. First we have to wipe it clean. The thought ‘I am’ and self-enquiry of tracing the ‘I’ thought to its source is the polishing cloth. The clearer the mirror, the clearer the perception of the face. The same happens with the mind and consciousness. The mind is like a mirror that reflects consciousness. The purer the mind, the more clearly it will reflect the peace and bliss of consciousness. But the dust does not disappear all at once. It happens gradually. Little by little.

The same is true for spiritual growth. We meditate, we let go, we do all kinds of things as part of our *sāadhanā*, over a period of several births. As we grow gradually, finally the dust is completely removed and the reflection is perfect. Advaita Vedanta emphasises three stages, spiritual practice (*sādhana catuṣṭaya*), realisation of the true nature as limitless consciousness (*ātma sāṅśātkāra*) followed by *nididhyāsana* which is to contemplate and reflect on our real nature for the sake of removing the habitual identification with our body and mind (*deha vāsanā*).

⁴⁰ Op cit., Talk §20 and Talk §54.

⁴¹ Tadatmananda, Swami, Shortcut to Enlightenment, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRg6AFx-6WQ>.

Yajnavalkya says, “The Self should be realised through hearing (*śravaṇa*), reflection (*manana*) and meditation (*nididhyāsana*).”⁴² Bhagavan says, “*Śravaṇa* is only *parokṣa jñāna*. By *manana* (reflection) it becomes *aparokṣa* spasmodically. The obstruction to its continuity is the *vasanas*: they rise up with reinforced vigour after *manana*. They must be held in check. Such vigilance consists in remembering — ‘I am not the body’ and adhering to the *aparokṣa anubhava* (direct experience) which has been had in course of *manana* (reflection). Such practice is called *nididhyāsana* and eradicates the *vāsanās*. Then dawns the *sahaja* state. That is *jñāna*.”⁴³ As said in *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, “Desires arising from latent tendencies (*vāsanās*) connected with external objects constitute bondage and ignorance. One who has got rid of his latent tendencies along with their root cause (of ego) and attained *equanimity*, O Raghava, know him to be a person liberated. The wise say that the best thing is to give up all affinities for objects which cause the mind to fluctuate, remain equipoised in opposite situations, namely, pleasure or pain, happiness or sorrow, gain and loss, honour and dishonour, and that such abdication leads to *mokṣa*.”⁴⁴

In the state of realisation that shines as pure consciousness, where there is neither birth nor death, separation nor union, thinking nor forgetting, joy nor sorrow, all other associations become meaningless and disappear.⁴⁵ We become equipoised as we realise all happens only in the body-mind, not to the Self! Self is always blissful and eternal! When the recognition of what we are is seen, *nothing* happens. We simply find our Self as we already are. We are already the consciousness that we strive to attain. All we need is an equanimous mind and the knowledge of who we really are.

As we stand before the Samādhi of Bhagavan, uncontrollable tears start to roll down, an inexplicable bliss is felt and something paradoxical happens that cannot be described in words. Words fail but we know the quest is over and we definitely know we have reached home — the home of Arunachala Ramana where we feel safe, protected and enjoy an equanimous mind with complete freedom from the thoughts of the external world. ▲

⁴² *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, II.iv.5.

⁴³ Op cit., Talk §57.

⁴⁴ *Laghu Yoga Vāsiṣṭha, vairagya prakaraṇa*.

⁴⁵ Muruganar, *Sri Guru Ramana Prasadam*, verse 522, translated by Robert Butler.

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Forty Eight

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

24th February 1979 (continued)

Sadhu Om: There are two principal types of cause, namely the material or substantial cause, which is called *upādāna-kāraṇa* in Sanskrit and *mudal-kāraṇam* (primary cause) in Tamil, and the active or efficient cause, which is called *nimitta-kāraṇa* in both Sanskrit and Tamil. In some cases there is also a third type of cause, namely the instrumental cause, which in Tamil is called *tuṇai-k-kāraṇam*, the accompanying, supporting or auxiliary cause. To illustrate the meaning of these terms, the material cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*) of a table is wood, its efficient cause (*nimitta-kāraṇa*) is a carpenter, whose tools are the supporting or instrumental cause (*tuṇai-k-kāraṇam*).

Many interpretations of *vēdānta* say that *brahman* is the efficient cause (*nimitta-kāraṇa*) of the world, but Bhagavan has made it clear that though *brahman* is the substantial cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*) of the

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.

world, because it is the only thing that actually exists and therefore the only real substance, it is not the efficient cause (*nimitta-kāraṇa*) of the world, as he says in verse 85 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*:

Even though oneself alone is what is made as the world with diverse kinds of names and forms, oneself is not one who as a *nimitta* [an efficient cause] does [any actions such as] creating, sustaining and destroying that [the world].

In this verse *tān* [oneself] means *ātma-svarūpa* [the real nature of oneself], which is *brahman*, and *ulahā samaivadu* [what is made (or formed) as the world] implies ‘what is seen (or perceived) as the world’, because though *ātma-svarūpa* alone is what we see as the world, it is never affected in any way by being seen as such, just as a rope is not affected in any way by being seen as a snake. What sees the world is only ego, so it seems to exist only in the view of ego, and hence ego alone is the efficient cause (*nimitta-kāraṇa*) of its seeming existence, as Bhagavan implies in verse 26 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

If ego comes into existence, everything comes into existence; if ego does not exist, everything does not exist. Ego itself is everything. Therefore, know that investigating what this is alone is giving up everything.

This entire world is just a dream, and the dreamer of this dream is ego, so what ego sees as all this multiplicity is just itself, as Bhagavan implies by saying ‘Ego itself is everything’. Therefore ego is not only the efficient cause (*nimitta-kāraṇa*) but also the substantial cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*) of everything else. However, if ego investigates itself keenly enough, it will see that it is actually nothing other than *ātma-svarūpa*, so though ego is the immediate substantial cause of everything, the substantial cause of ego is *ātma-svarūpa*, so *ātma-svarūpa* alone is the ultimate substantial cause of everything.

What then is the efficient cause (*nimitta-kāraṇa*) of ego? As Bhagavan explained, there is no efficient cause of ego, because if we investigate ego keenly enough, we will find that there is no such thing at all, as he implies in verse 17 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

When one investigates the form of the mind without forgetting, there is not anything called ‘mind’. This is the direct path for everyone whomsoever.

THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

Ego is therefore the first efficient cause, and the efficient cause of all other efficient causes, because all efficient causes and their effects seem to exist only the view of ego. Without ego, there is neither cause nor effect, and since there is neither ego nor anything else in the clear view of *ātma-svarūpa*, for *ātma-svarūpa* there is neither any cause nor any effect, because it alone is what exists. Cause and effect are therefore just an illusory appearance.

However, so long as we rise as ego, cause and effect seem to us to be real, so in order to put an end to their seeming existence, we need to investigate ourself, the one to whom alone they appear. If we investigate ourself keenly enough, we will see that we are always nothing other than *ātma-svarūpa* and have therefore never risen as ego, so there has never been any such thing as cause or effect. This is the ultimate truth (*pāramārthika satya*), as will be clear to us only when ego is eradicated by the sharp sword of self-investigation (*ātma-vicāra*).

27th February 1979

Sadhu Om: If we feel disheartened by our repeated failure to cling firmly to self-attentiveness, we should remember that the doer and the one who experiences failure is ourself as ego, and that as ego we cannot be self-attentive merely by our own effort but only by the grace of *guru*. However, this does not mean that we should ever give up trying to be self-attentive, because Bhagavan's grace works through us, giving us the love to be self-attentive, so whatever effort we make in this path is the working of his grace. His grace is always working to pull us within, so by trying to turn within we are yielding ourself to his grace.

Repeatedly making effort to be self-attentive is therefore essential, because it is a key part of the process of his grace gently but firmly pulling us inwards. No matter how many times we seem to fail in our efforts, we should keep on trying, because every attempt we make to be self-attentive is a step forward on this path. As Bhagavan often said, it is only by perseverance that we can progress on this path, so whether we seem to succeed or fail, we should keep on trying.

To the extent that we truly love to know and to be what we actually are, we will persevere in trying to be self-attentive at every moment, so

our perseverance is the measure of our love, which is why Bhagavan said that perseverance is the only reliable sign of progress. When he said that *bhakti* is the mother of *jñāna*, what he meant by ‘*bhakti*’ is wholehearted and all-consuming love to know and to be what we actually are, and this love is what impels us to cling firmly to self-attentiveness.

This love is *svātma-bhakti* [love for our own self, meaning love for ourself as we actually are], which is what is also called *sat-vāsanā* [the inclination to attend to our being and thereby to be as we actually are]. The reason we often fail in our attempts to hold fast to self-attentiveness is that we allow our mind to be drawn outwards under the sway of our *viśaya-vāsanās* [inclinations to attend to and seek happiness in things other than ourself]. The stronger our *viśaya-vāsanās*, the more we will be swayed by them, but by patient and persistent attempts to turn back within and cling fast to self-attentiveness we will gradually strengthen our *sat-vāsanā* and correspondingly weaken our *viśaya-vāsanās*, as Bhagavan implies in the sixth paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?*:

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 one’s own being, 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.

The ‘power to stand firmly established in its birthplace’ is the strength of *svātma-bhakti*, which increases to the extent to which we persevere in trying to turn our attention back and keep it fixed firmly on our own being, ‘I am’. There are therefore two powers that are pulling our mind in two opposite directions, namely the power of *sat-vāsanā* and the power of *viśaya-vāsanās*. The power of *sat-vāsanā* is pulling our mind back within to face ourself alone, whereas the power of *viśaya-vāsanās* is pulling it outwards to face the world

of *viṣayas* [objects or phenomena]. However, since *vāsanās* are just inclinations, we are always free to choose which *vāsanā* or *vāsanās* we allow ourself to be swayed by at any given moment, so even if our *viṣaya-vāsanās* are stronger than our *sat-vāsanā*, we can always use our *icchā-kriyā-svatantra* [freedom of will and action] to yield ourself to the inward pull of *sat-vāsanā* rather than the outward pull of any *viṣaya-vāsanās*.

The practice of *ātma-vicāra* [self-investigation] is therefore a battle being fought within our own will between our *sat-vāsanā* and our *viṣaya-vāsanās*, and our willingness to be swayed by one or the other of them, as Bhagavan says in verse 396 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*:

The work [doing, process or operation] of making oneself [namely ego], who is *parāmukha* [facing away, towards things other than oneself] because of the sway [dominion, power or force] of practice [training, habit or familiarity], *ahamukha* [facing inside, towards I] by *ātma-vicāra* [self-investigation], which is the effort of untiringly investigating who am I, alone is the *dēvāsura-yuddha* [the war between gods and demons] that one fights.

Since *sat-vāsanā* is a seed that has been planted, cultivated and nurtured in our heart by Bhagavan's grace, this battle between our liking to be facing inwards (*ahamukha*) and our liking to be facing elsewhere (*parāmukha*) is actually a battle being fought by his grace, which is why he describes it as '*aruḷ-pōrāṭṭam*' (the warfare of grace) in verse 74 of *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*:

Arunachala, in the common [natural and all-pervading] space devoid of going and coming [namely the heart, the infinite and eternally immutable space of pure awareness, which never goes (ceases to exist) or comes (begins to exist), and in which, having known it as one's own real nature, one will know that one could never have gone out anywhere or come back] show [me] the warfare of grace [in which you do not cease fighting to save me until you achieve victory, destroying in me the vast army of demons, namely ego and all its *viṣaya-vāsanās*].

Though this warfare is always being fought by grace in our heart, it will end in victory only when we cooperate with grace by yielding ourself entirely to it, and since we can yield ourself to it only to the

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extent to which we untiringly make effort to investigate who am I by looking deep within myself, our persevering in making this effort is essential. However, though patient and persistent effort is necessary on our part, we need to recognise clearly that it is only by his grace that we are making such effort, because to the extent that we recognise this, our love to be keenly and steadily self-attentive will increase.

If we do not recognise this, we will easily be disheartened seeing the inadequacy of our own efforts, whereas if we do recognise this, we will gain the courage to persevere no matter how many times we seem to fail in our efforts. His grace is always playing its part in ways and to an extent that our mind can never adequately comprehend, but we will be willing to yield ourself to it only to the extent that we appreciate that it is doing so.

Through countless lives his grace has been working in our heart, preparing us to follow this ultimate path of self-investigation and self-surrender, and it will not cease doing its work until we are finally willing to surrender ourself entirely by sinking back within and dissolving forever in the heart. All our effort to turn back within and surrender ourself to him is being made by us only under the sway of his grace, so our effort is part of the process of his grace, preparing us unflinching for the final moment when it will swallow us entirely in its infinite light of pure awareness.

This is why Bhagavan often used to say that grace is the beginning, the middle and the end. It is grace alone that has brought us to this path, it is grace alone that is leading us unflinching along it, and it is grace alone that will finally swallow us entirely. ▲

(To be continued)

Tamil Siddhas

Part Eleven

Agapei: The Siddha Who Called the Mind a Devil

P. RAJA

Saints, mystics, siddhas and eminent thinkers the world over invariably compare the mind to a monkey. The mind behaves in a silly and playful way, always interfering with what we are doing. In a way, it annoys us. Some call it a mad monkey. Some even call it a drunken, mad monkey. We know what a monkey is capable of, jumping from branch to branch and not staying in the same place, except while sleeping. If it is a mad monkey, then we should be very careful, lest something adverse would happen. If it is a drunken, mad monkey, we should be extra careful and safeguard ourselves from its onslaught.

Nevertheless, one Siddha differed from the idea of comparing the mind to monkey. He replaced ‘monkey’ with ‘Devil’. If we ask, “Who the devil, why the devil, what the devil, where the devil, etc.,” we are emphasising how angry, surprised, annoyed, we are. The Devil is the most powerful and important evil spirit.

No wonder that Siddha Agapei compared the mind to the Devil (*pei*). He had valid reasons for that.

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Nayanar. That was his name. Like the poets Thiruvalluvar and Kabir, he was a weaver by profession. His business was to sell saris and dhotis that he wove in his handloom. He loved to carry his finished products on his head, call his customers out from their houses, and sell the goods at a very reasonable price, avoiding agents and intermediaries. That gave him the chance to meet people belonging to different lifestyles. He soon found out that men and women were an unhappy lot, but pretending to be happy. He understood that people wear different masks, depending on the situation. It took a little or no time for him to realise that everyone suffered with his/her problem, always struggling to find a solution, be it ephemeral or permanent.

Not much is known of Siddha Agapei's life and whatever we know of him comes from the verses of Siddha Bhogar.¹ The cloth vendor who saw life in all its varied forms, mostly the tragic form of it, very much wished to probe into the matter and find a solution to all problems, and pass it on to the common folk. For a long time, he struggled to locate the stuff that triggered a problem only to find that, it was the devilish mind that was responsible for all the havocs in life. The devilish mind asks for more and more. Because of this, the world is crowded with cheats. They cheat others, and in turn, get cheated.

The life that Nayanar saw was fake and robot-like. He realised that the only way to save people from the problems and distress was to find a way to exorcise the devil in the mind once and for all, so that peace would prevail. How to do away with the devil that possesses the human mind became the one trillion-dollar question. He meditated upon the problem and found a solution. The only way is to control the mind. But how to control it, when it has its own unruly ways.

Hence, he began lecturing people on worldly-wise thoughts. He preached uprightness, fidelity, virtue, trustworthiness, justness, piety, and the like to a packed audience. In the beginning, the listeners paid close attention to what Nayanar said, for he was an excellent orator. But as days passed, they began to boo and jeer at him. They spoke ill of him and his words of wisdom. They seemed to say, "We have had enough of you preaching at us all the time – just leave us alone."

¹ Ramachandran, S.P., *Siddhargal Varalaru*. Thamarai Noolagam, Chennai, 2002. p.147.

Defeated and disillusioned, Nayanar sought the forests and mountains. His aim was to find a sadhu or saint who could throw more light on the soul and Self. Only disappointment awaited him. He didn't lose hope. He found a tree, and like the Buddha, sat under it and meditated upon Muni Vyasa, the giver of the Vedas and the great epic *Mahabharata*. The wait was long. But it was fruitful. One fine day, Vyasa made Nayanar feel his presence. He advised him, "You are a realised soul now. Your experience with the lifestyles of people has given you wisdom. You don't have to waste it on people who refuse to listen. But put it in writing and let the future generations speak of your wisdom.

Nayanar thought that that was a good suggestion. Instead of sermonising to an inattentive audience, he chose to address his own agapei, meaning the devilish mind. The written word is more powerful than the spoken word.

The moment you know yourself, agapei,
You will never connive with the others.
And to know yourself, agapei!
Listen only to my words of wisdom.²

Since his verses were all addressed to his agapei, Nayanar came to be known as Agapei siddha. In due course, his name underwent a dramatic change and Agapei came to be known as Agappai, meaning ladle.

Agapei is credited with 90 songs, all in quatrain form, with the refrain 'agapei'. Written in easy-to-read and understandable words, every verse is a piece of advice. He took it as a mission to tell his agapei what best could be done, all with the noble purpose of controlling the mind.

Don't have to take deadly poison or the like,
To become one with the Divine, agapei!
Don't have to waver, agapei!
Your silence alone will take you to Him.³

² *Agapei Siddhar Paadalgal*, verse 24.

³ *Agapei Siddhar Paadalgal*, verse 1.

Thus, Agapei addresses his mind and gives good guidance to it. He believes that the mind dances to the tune of greed, one of the seven deadly sins. Affection and love are also responsible. High-mindedness, a negative mental complex that crops up out of inferiority, living in an aura of glamour and prestige, false hopes and beliefs fatten the Devil. To get rid of the Devil, he suggests:

Life is meant to know ourselves, agapei!
 Let us live in a non-committal way.
 All other ways, agapei!
 Are the ways of the Devil.⁴

While we study the verses of Agapei, and not just read them, we are given to understand that we should never become slaves to worldly things and never get drowned in the sea of ignorance.

Apart from the ‘90 songs’ addressed to his devilish mind, he had also authored ‘*Poorana Gnanam 15*’, meaning ‘15 songs of Perfect Wisdom’.

To put Agapei Siddha’s message concisely: “Joy and sorrow are of ephemeral value. Our present favourites would sooner or later become a thing for the bin. What we once threw into the bin, could become our favourite in future. These changes are bound to repeat themselves. The only thing that never changes is change itself. Our mind is responsible for everything that happens to us, for our mind is the Devil’s workshop. It is a conglomeration of all sorts of evil thoughts. When some of them fizzle out, the Devilish mind does not fail in creating something new. Our duty is to bring such a mind under the control of the Soul, so that the mind can’t act on its own accord, then peace is bound to hold sway.”

Siddha Bhogar, in his song number 309 of *Janana Sagaram* (Ocean of Births) confirmed that Siddha Agapei was buried in Thiruvaiyaru, Thanjavur District.

(All references to verse numbers are to A. Arivoli’s edition of Siddhar Paadalgal. Vol.2. Varthamanan Pathippagam, Chennai, 2006. All the translations from the songs of Agapei quoted in this essay are free renderings done by the author.) ▲

⁴ Agapei Siddhar Paadalgal, verse 78.



MAHA BHAKTA VIJAYAM

The Blessed Life of Sant Jayadeva

Chapter Nine

Padmavathy's Life Restored

NABAJI SIDDHA

Unaware of the tragic turn of events, in the forest, the king was praising the Sant and expressing his wonder and gratitude at the vision he had of Lord Shiva, “Such great fortune was bestowed on me! Is it because I rendered service to an exalted person like you, or because of merits earned in my previous births? What a blessing for the kingdom to cherish and serve you, the personification of forgiveness, forbearance and peace, and mother Padmavathy, the epitome of one-pointed devotion and service to her husband, the maha-pativrata! I never even dreamt of such wonderful events in my life! My good fortune and that of my people in the kingdom in serving you both has no parallel!” The king’s heart was flooded with joy and gratitude. He was euphoric at the Lord’s assurance about the restoration of limbs of Jayadeva Swami. His eyes were eager to feast on the full form of his beloved Guru.

When they entered the city, they found people gathered in groups here and there, whispering in low tones. The king noticed an air of gloom and desolation. The streets wore the appearance of being deserted. There was no sound of Vedic chants. People were looking

sad and anxious. There were lamentations echoing in some directions. When some folks happened to look at the king's chariot, they turned their faces away hastily and entered their houses, shutting the doors behind them.

The king looking at the Sant with a worried look said, "What could be the reason for these ominous signs? What calamity might have descended on the city? Is it on account of any unrighteousness in my rule? Have any office-bearers inflicted sufferings on the citizens? My heart is agitated and I have a sense of foreboding."

Jayadeva Swami replied, "O king! I too have a feeling of impending disaster. Have any Sants come to harm? Be quick and find out from the people here."

The king addressed the people gathered thus, "O pure-minded people! Please be kind and apprise me of the calamity that has taken place. What is behind this depressing atmosphere here?"

But none of them came forward to enlighten the king. They bowed their heads to him silently and left the place.

The king was thoroughly alarmed now. He hastened to the palace court and summoned the ministers. The courtiers said, "Some tragedy has befallen the kingdom. We don't have the full information. The queen alone can apprise you of the event."

The king hurried to the inner chamber. He heard loud cries and lamentations. With great effort, he managed to draw out the information from the maids. He couldn't believe what he heard. He screamed in horror and anguish. He was at a loss as how to set right the heinous crime.

Jayadeva Swami also entered the chamber to find out the cause of the commotion. Seeing the state of affairs, he asked, "Why all this confusion and noise?"

As soon as he heard the whole story from the lips of the maids, he let out a loud cry, "Alas! My Padmavathy is no more. She dropped dead on hearing about my death! Did you really see light leave her body? What great love she cherished for me! That very love became the cause of her death. Has such a thing ever happened in human history? What terrible anguish she must have felt in those few moments on hearing about my death? In what agony life must have left her body? O dear one! For my sake, you

gave up your life. How incredible is your devotion to me?” He wailed in great sorrow.

Waves of anger rose in the king. Sparks of fury shot forth from his eyes. With his body shuddering in rage, he drew his sword from its sheath and advanced towards the queen. The frightened queen prostrating to the Sant sought refuge in him, “O lord! Please revive your noble consort and also redeem me from this terrible sin. I have lost all honour. Please be compassionate and give life to the holy lady, Padmavathy.”

The king dragging the queen by her hair said, “There is no redemption either for you or for me. This minute I am going to kill you and all the maids who assisted you in this diabolic act and then put an end to my life as well.”

The queen pleaded with the Swami, “O Mahatma! I deserve to be killed. But, the king and the maids have no part in this crime. Please spare them who are innocent. Take pity on them and bring back our lady.”

Approaching the king, Jayadeva Swami said, “O king! please restrain your anger. Don’t you know that anger blinds the intellect? O queen, please do not weep. No harm will befall any of you. You are not to be blamed for whatever has happened to Padmavathy. Everyone dies at the appointed hour. None can stop death, not even the gods in heaven. The lord of death always needs an excuse to pluck out one’s life. In this case, you happened to furnish it. Now O king! Giving up your anger, please make the necessary arrangements for cremating the body.”

The Sant’s words fell on deaf ears. Mad with uncontrollable fury, glaring at the queen kneeling before the Sant, the king said, “After cutting these women to pieces, I am going to end my own life. O Mahatma! Then you can cremate all of us together.” He rushed towards the queen.

The queen shrieked loudly, “I take refuge in Jayadeva Swami!”

“Don’t kill her! Don’t kill her!” Uttering these words, Jayadeva Swami tried to rush to her aid. Lo! his hands and legs reappeared on his body. But the Sant was oblivious of the miracle.

He addressed the king, “Don’t act in haste. O Lord! Why one tragedy after another..?” In great distress, he started praying to the Lord.

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Eulogising the Lord's ten incarnations, he said, "Lord, the treasure-house of compassion! Won't You come to our rescue soon? The king is bent upon murdering the queen and the maids. He is ready to deal death to himself also. Didn't you come in a trice to Prahlada's aid? Didn't you rush to the demi-gods' rescue on several occasions?"

Dasavatara Stuti

O primordial Being! God of gods! You are formless,
Yet You become the beloved of Your devotees,
In the form of Undivided bliss;
O all-pervading effulgence!
O compassion-incarnate Jagannath!
Hasten to my rescue!

You assumed the form of a fish;
Diving into the ocean,
You rescued the scriptures stolen by the demon,
Love-laden lotus-eyed One! O black-hued Lord!
O compassion-incarnate Jagannath!
Hasten to my rescue!

For the churning of the milky ocean,
You deigned to become a tortoise;
With Your back as a prop, O merciful One!
You held the huge Mandara mountain,
O compassion-incarnate Jagannath!
Hasten to my rescue!

You assumed the form of a boar,
Redeemed the earth hidden by the demon-king,
In the depths of the ocean;
O transcendental Light!
O Compassion-incarnate Jagannath!
Hasten to my rescue!

You appeared as man-lion in a pillar,
And killing the demon,
You protected the child-devotee Prahlada;
I stand helpless before You,
O compassion-incarnate Jagannath!
Hasten to my rescue!

Appearing as a dwarf, You measured,
Earth and heaven with majestic paces,
Humbling the pride of Maha-Bali!
O Lord adorned by tulsi garland, the Abode of Lakshmi,
O Compassion-incarnate Jagannath!
Hasten to my rescue!

O Supreme Lord! appearing as mighty Parasurama,
Subduing wicked Kshatriyas,
You protected Brahmins!
Ruler of the earth, ungrasped by the scriptures!
O compassion-incarnate Jagannath!
Hasten to my rescue!

O Eternal One! You incarnated as Rama on earth,
To exemplify the righteous way of living,
And to destroy the evil Ravana;
Lord of Jayadeva! Hearken to my plea!
O compassion-incarnate Jagannath!
Hasten to my rescue!

Slaying the demon Pralamba,
O mighty Balarama!
A terror to evil-doers,
Glorified in heaven and earth;
O Compassion-incarnate Jagannath!
Hasten to my rescue!

You descended on earth as Krishna,
By destroying evil,
And protecting good,
You established the Dharma!
O Compassion-incarnate Jagannath!
Hasten to my rescue!

You have vowed to appear, O mighty One!
As Kalki carrying a sword,
And riding on a white horse,
To annihilate the wicked;
O Compassion-incarnate Jagannath!
Hasten to my rescue!

“O Lord! On my account, this kingdom is going to be destroyed. Don’t you have any pity on me? What a vile sinner am I? I have been wailing for long, yet I have not been able to invoke even a faint indication of Your compassion. What disgrace I have brought upon the kingdom?” Jayadeva Swami was drowned in tears of grief.

Beholding the miracle of restoration of the Sant’s limbs, the maids gathered courage that Padmavathy also would come back to life. They brought her body and laid it before the Sant. As soon as he laid his eyes on the motionless body of Padmavathy, his heart melted in the fire of anguish.

With love dripping in his voice, he said, “O lamp of my lineage! Your purity is like blazing fire. You are indeed the true soul-mate who breathed your last to join me in the other world at the very instant that you heard of my passing. The purity and intensity of your love defies human imagination. Life of my life, you are dear to me like my own eyes. Won’t you cast your loving glance on me just as Radha looked at Krishna and eased His pangs of separation? Won’t you assuage the grief in my heart? It is said that even when her body is placed on the bier, a devoted wife would open her eyes to take a last look at her husband. Won’t you show me such a favour? I never left anything wanting in your life. Don’t you know that I cherish great love for you in my bosom? Behold! I have regained my limbs. Don’t you want to see me now and rejoice in my recovery? Oh..! I am not able to contain my sorrow.

“O Lord! I have been appealing piteously to you for long. Will you not rescue me from this predicament? Alas! Any moment, the king is going to murder the queen! Am I going to be responsible for a series of murders, plunging the kingdom in despair and darkness?”

Distressed at the lack of response from the Lord, Jayadeva Swami appealed to Radha Devi narrating how in His incarnation as Rama, the Lord released the all-powerful Brahmastra against the evil-minded Jayant who came disguised as a crow and vexed Sita Devi. “Why doesn’t He heed my distress now and provide succour to me?” He cried.

“O Lord! You are verily the ocean of nectar of love to Your devotees. O Effulgence, beyond the grasp of the Vedas! Assuming an enchanting form as Mohini, You distributed nectar to the Devas and gladdened their hearts. How can a mediocre person like me do justice to Your unsurpassing excellences with hymns?”

Lo! suddenly, the space was lit with the brilliance of a divine vision. The melodious music of stringed instruments played by Tumburu and Narada reverberated in all corners of the earth. Celestial women danced enchantingly. The siddhas, gandarvas, kinnaras and rishis filled the sky. In the midst of this jubilation, Lord Krishna and His consort Radha Devi appeared. The king dropped his sword on the ground and stood in a reverential attitude with joined palms.

Jayadeva Swami's state of bliss was beyond description. He placed his head on the ground again and again before the divine assembly. The Lord embraced him lovingly and asked, "O holy one! Why did you cry out to Me in such pain? What do you wish to ask of Me?"

The Sant prayed, "O lotus-eyed Lord! Supreme Person, the embodiment of countless auspicious virtues! Refuge of the helpless! Friend of the unfortunate! I am indeed unfortunate; for, even when You have been gracious enough to appear before me, I am forced to seek a worldly boon from You. You know why I cried out in agony to You. Please redress the situation and then take me unto You." Thus, did the Sant render a heartrending plea before the Lord.

The Lord said, "O noble devotee! Is there anything that you cannot do, but I can do? By your mere will, you can make Padmavathy open her eyes. It is only because you have eschewed the sense of 'I' and 'mine' and wish to remain inconspicuous, and you don't want to display your powers that you beseeched Me to come to your rescue. You are most superior among men and bear no malice even towards those who harm you. Abiding in equanimity, you revel in supreme bliss. Do you want Me to restore Padmavathy to you? Do you want Me to confer immortality on the king? What is your bidding, tell Me?"

At this moment, the king fell at the feet of the Lord and pleaded, "O Lord! Please revive our holy mother Padmavathy. There is no auspiciousness equal to this on earth."

The Lord of Maya smilingly spoke to the lifeless form laid at His feet, "O dear Padmavathy! Is it proper for you to sleep when I am standing before you?"

A divine light emanated from the lotus like mouth of the Lord and entered Padmavathy's body and she got up immediately as if rising from sleep. Overjoyed to see her husband alive, she hurried forward to prostrate before him. When she saw his lost limbs restored back to him,

unspeakable joy swept her entire being! She bowed before her husband with exceeding affection again and again. Her eyes were flooded with torrential tears of bliss at the marvel. She, the glory of womankind, paid her obeisance to Sri Krishna and Radha Devi and all those assembled there and then stood behind her husband with a shy smile.

The Lord blessed the couple and also the king with Self-knowledge and well-being. Then he said to Jayadeva Swami, “My beloved Jayadeva! It is not fair that you should keep your knowledge and erudition concealed. You must spread it among people to uplift them and free them from bondage.”

The Lord disappeared with His retinue. Shouts of victory rent the air. The king went round Padmavathy and prostrated to her and said, “O mother, by your grace I became blessed today. How else is it possible to attain the vision of the Lord? O mother of the world! Please tell me, what kind of punishment should be meted out to my wife whose devious act caused your death?”

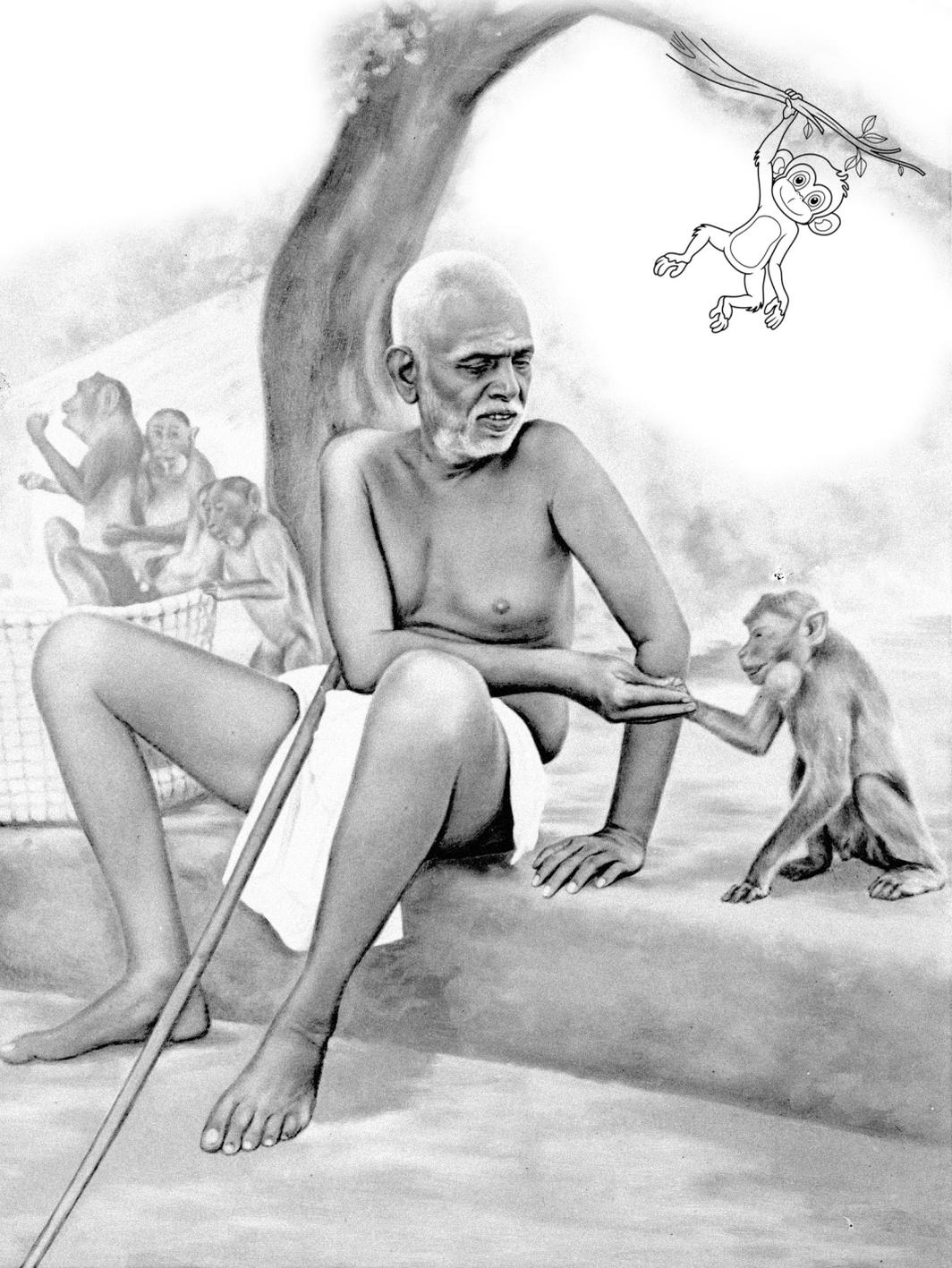
In a voice choked with compassion, the noble lady said, “O great king! It is your wife who was the cause of the restoration of my husband’s limbs and for you all to be blessed with the Lord’s vision.” She went forward eagerly and embraced the queen. She spoke to her the most loving words and bathed the queen in her affection.

The king held the holy feet of the Sant and asked, “O Mahatma, where had you hidden your precious lotus feet all this time? You are verily the Lord!” With tears flooding his eyes, the king kissed the sacred feet of the Swami again and again and became ecstatic.

The Sant held the king in his loving embrace and looked at the queen with compassionate eyes and spoke words of solace and affection to both. He told the queen to look after the king with greater love and care.

Jayadeva Swami relapsed into samadhi as if whatever had happened before him was a dream-play. The king ruled his country under the wise and loving guidance of the Sant. Jayadeva Swami recalled the Lord’s parting advice to him to write about the glories of His devotees and to expound on devotion and Self-knowledge. As Bhagavatam contained these aspects, as also the glories and exploits of the Lord, he composed a novel work extensively in Sanskrit along the lines of the *Bhagavatam*. ▲

Nondi's Corner



Introducing Nondi's Corner

Hello young adults and children!

This is Nondi, a monkey devotee of Bhagavan. I managed to convince the editorial board to dedicate a few pages of each issue of the *Mountain Path* to young adults and children. I am glad to report that my persuasion worked and we now have our own special corner!

Bhagavan loved children and young adults. We animals were also very dear to him. Monkeys have this reputation of being restless and intractable. But Bhagavan would always praise our intelligence, organisational capacity and agility. One of his favourite monkeys, 'Mottaipaiyan', even earned admiration for his tapas.

I wish to offer you spiritual nourishment from Bhagavan in the form of stories, articles and puzzles. The goal is to inspire you and help you blossom into kind, brave and decisive adults. There is a misconception that Bhagavan's teachings are too abstract and unfit for children and animals. That is far from the truth. In fact, he had unique ways to reach our hearts and transform us. His teachings are practical and relevant as we navigate the world into adulthood.

I look forward to engaging with all of you, all over the world, in the years to come. Please share your queries, feedback and articles with me at mountainpath@gururamana.org

Sincerely,
Your friend,
Nondi

In this first edition of Nondi's Corner, let me share my own story with you.

My story with Bhagavan began around 1920, in the days just prior to Bhagavan moving from Virupaksha Cave to Skandasramam. I was a young monkey at the time and had started gaining popularity within my tribe. My troop's leader grew jealous of me and one day, he attacked me, making me fall from a tall tree, badly injuring my leg. The leader and the other monkeys in the group abandoned me and left me to my fate near Virupaksha cave.

I was barely conscious but managed to limp into the cave. The all-compassionate Bhagavan bandaged my leg and nursed me back to health. My injuries were healed but I was left permanently crippled. Bhagavan named me 'Nondipaiyan', the little Hobbler. From then, I came to be called 'Nondi', my pet name.

I would always sit on Bhagavan's lap or next to him while he ate his food. I recall he would never waste food and was a scrupulously clean eater. I followed Bhagavan wherever he went, limping along. I grew devoted to him and looked up to him as my master. Under Bhagavan's loving care, my leg regained its strength. I grew to love all the ashramites and they in turn reciprocated with affection.

But one day, members from my group returned to Virupaksha Cave. I grew scared and the ashramites also got fearful. But Bhagavan assured everyone that nothing would happen. I climbed on to Bhagavan's lap. Bhagavan explained to the monkeys that he had applied medicine and bandages to fix my injured leg. One of them pulled me, ordering me to rejoin the troop. I looked at Bhagavan imploringly and he said to me, "Your troop has come to reclaim you. Go with them like a good boy. Do not forget us when you become king." So saying, he patted me and sent me back with my relatives.

As a rule, monkeys banish members of their group who have had contact with human beings. But in my case, they did not outlaw me. They made an exception in the case of Bhagavan and were very happy to take me back.

When Bhagavan shifted his abode to Skandasramam, I visited him often with my troop. He would always make sure we were fed well. While the other monkeys climbed trees and enjoyed themselves, I would always stay near Bhagavan. Mother Azhagammal would prepare a separate plate for me whenever I visited but I preferred to eat from Bhagavan's plate. I thus had the rare privilege of being fed by Bhagavan's own hand and felt blessed to have this divine relationship. I learned his ways and always made sure I never spilled or wasted even a single grain of food offered to me.

I remember this incident with Desur Akhilandammal, Bhagavan's staunch devotee. She once served food to Bhagavan but ignored me. I growled at her and the pious lady got frightened. Bhagavan told me, "Adei, Adei (hey, hey) she is our own, do not threaten her." Akhilandammal felt blessed to hear the words "our own" from Bhagavan's lips.

I also remember this incident with Venkitoo, Bhagavan's nephew. He was a young child then, about four and a half years old. One day, some devotees brought an offering of snacks for everyone at Skandasramam. After distributing the prasada, mother Azhagammal set aside a special plate for me since I had gone out. Venkitoo ate his share with relish and when no one was looking, he started eating my share. I caught him red-handed when I returned. I growled at him, snatched the food from his hand and slapped him on the cheek. Venkitoo started howling. Bhagavan returned from his walk just then. He learned what had happened and smilingly said to Venkitoo, "So you got the blow Venkitoo?"

It serves you right. That is Nondi's portion of snacks. We should not take what belongs to others, should we? Because you took his share of food, he was upset and slapped you on the cheek."

I gradually became very powerful within my group. The leader of our clan had grown old and turned into a bully. He would abuse all of us, including his queens and offspring. The group eventually overthrew him and crowned me king. I wanted the coronation to happen in Bhagavan's presence. We marched as a group to Skandasramam and waited for Bhagavan to return from his walk. When I saw him, I climbed up to the highest branch of the tallest tree, shook the branch and cried out loudly. Bhagavan recognised that this was a privilege enjoyed only by the monkey chieftain. I came down and hopped onto Bhagavan's lap and embraced him. Bhagavan stroked my head. I introduced my queens to him - I had three now, for the deposed king's queens were now mine.

I continued to visit him with my queens and children. Bhagavan was always very gracious to all of us and recognised us easily. Years ago, I had been banished, rejected and left for dead by my own clan, unable to even walk. But with Bhagavan's grace, I grew up to be a great warrior and eventually king of my clan.

Youth Corner

Here's a personal account from our young friend Jordan Feri about how he came to Bhagavan and what Bhagavan means to him. Jordan grew up in California and graduated from Harvard University. He now lives in Tiruvannamalai and has dedicated his life to sadhana.

When I was a small child, I used to lay in bed and obsess over three different questions. The first was how to be selfless, since it was logical to me that anything we do comes from a place of self-interest only. The second was what happens to us when we die: the very concept of complete “nothingness” in an atheistic sense seemed not only illogical, but unbearable. The third was more of an exercise than a pondering: I could never understand why I couldn't stop thinking, especially if the thoughts belonged to “me”.

I didn't see any tangible outlet for satisfying this fear and curiosity, so I turned all of my attention towards succeeding in school, which was, at that time, the only thing that came fairly easily to me. My hard work was eventually rewarded, and I was accepted to Harvard University with a full ride. By that time, I had pulled together a nice group of friends. My family was immensely proud of me. Everyone thought that I had won the lottery and, basically, so did I.

Yet, when I arrived in Boston, my life began to fall apart. I had always struggled with sadness, but suddenly, my thoughts began to take monstrous shapes. I found that I had become so socially awkward that I couldn't connect with anyone in my grade. My thoughts spiralled deeper and deeper into darkness and seemed to take on a life of their own: I would tell myself things that you would never say to your worst enemy. It seemed like my new favourite hobby was to hate myself.

When I walked down the street, I would fantasise about one of the cars ending my life. My skin broke out in hives, and some nights I couldn't sleep because they itched so badly. I was overtaken by a visceral feeling of shame, and what's worse, it seemed to come from a bottomless pit of evil that I hadn't realised was there. At the time, it truly felt that I was trapped in Hell on Earth.

After several months, the severity of my physical symptoms decreased, but a pall had been cast over my life. I was still very much obsessed with dying, and I saw no way out.

Throughout that time, I became acquainted with a knot in the left side of my back. All of my anxiety and stress seemed to collect itself there. I sometimes felt that if I were to focus on that spot with enough concentration or even stab it correctly with a knife, the knot would untie itself, and I would be untied with it; somehow, I would stop existing. One day, while with some friends, I began to ponder in a very real way what that would mean: to not exist. The word Oblivion presented itself, and I began to turn it over and over in my mind. It seemed beautiful. I got up and walked away from my friends and focused on the knot. Suddenly, my thoughts began to speed up, until they were running at a speed I didn't know was possible. All at once, the realisation came that every single worry, disappointment, and expectation I had for myself and for life was based on nothing. If my mind was a house of cards, suddenly, someone had pulled one from the bottom, and the entire thing collapsed. I found that tears were rolling down my face in such a torrent that I couldn't stop them. I felt the ground beneath my feet in a way that I had never felt anything before. I realised that, not only was I happy, but that I was in a state of happiness which I had never left, which would never leave me, and which was my true nature. Anything I had thought was happiness before was

less than a pale imitation. When I opened my eyes, I was surprised to find that the plant at which I was staring was myself. Then I saw that everything around me was God, insofar as there was only one Thing, pulsating through the entire field of my vision. I called it “The Face of God”.

After that experience faded, it was clear to me that there was no other goal in life worth pursuing than to reclaim that happiness and make it permanent, though I knew that it couldn't really leave me. After I graduated, I moved back home to California and decided I would devote myself to “meditation”, though at the time I had no idea what meditation meant. I knew that I needed some kind of master to truly take me inwards, but as far as I was aware, there was no Jesus or Buddha walking around. So I contented myself with what I could find on YouTube. After about a year of listening to various teachers around the Bay Area, knowing that none of them really possessed what I was looking for, I heard one of them say the name Ramana Maharishi. Somehow it felt familiar, and I knew that I should look into this man. Yet, I put it off for some time. There was the feeling that I wasn't ready for wherever the name led.

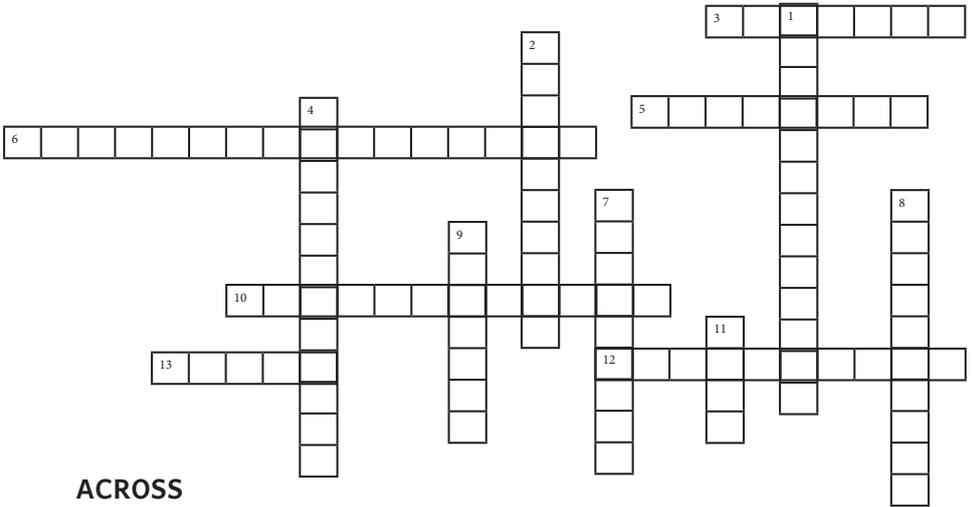
One day, however, my curiosity got the better of me. I found some of the archival footage of Bhagavan on YouTube. Immediately, it was clear to me that this old man wreathed in effervescence was God himself walking on the face of the Earth. He seemed to make his surroundings and the people with him look fake. He was everything I had been looking for and wanting, and I was almost angry that no one knew, as far as I was aware, that the Buddha had been alive less than 100 years before.

That same day, I read ‘Who Am I?’ and felt that someone had understood and penned my innermost suspicions about the fabric of the universe. Aksharamanamalai had a similar

effect. I had spent my last two years of college studying poetry, and I felt that it was not only the apotheosis of devotional hymns, but the poem that I had been longing to read for years. I watched David Godman’s video series on Bhagavan and made up my mind that I needed to go to Tiruvannamalai immediately. It felt like my life had finally started, and that everything else had been a prelude. Truly, I am most blessed, as are all of us who are lucky enough to even know Sri Ramana’s name.

HERE’S THIS ISSUE’S FUN CORNER

Crossword, Anagrams, Interesting Fact and Shloka



ACROSS

3. Bhagavan’s father’s profession (7)
5. City where Bhagavan attended middle school (8)
6. First biography on Bhagavan in Tamil (3, 6,7)
10. Bhagavan’s boyhood name (12)
12. One of the caves in which Bhagavan lived (10)
13. Village where Bhagavan pledged his earrings before arriving at Arunachala (5)

MOUNTAIN PATH

DOWN

1. First scripture read by Bhagavan (6,7)
2. Bhagavan's mother (10)
4. One of Bhagavan's brothers (12)
7. Bhagavan's birth star/nakshatra (9)
8. Bhagavan's birthplace (10)
9. Bhagavan's sister's name (7)
11. Month in which Bhagavan had the death experience in 1896 (4)

An anagram is a word or phrase formed by rearranging the letters of a different word or phrase, typically using all the original letters exactly once. Following are some anagrams related to the life of Ramana Maharshi. Rearrange the letters to get a word related to Ramana's life.

HAUSRAPIUK

TIZUCHIUHR

TRGUHRMMUAU

DGNDUIIL

AUIDMAR

NGAOM ERTE EACV

UVALNMAARINAIT

LATPAA ALGNIM

LDO ALLH

PDKHAUANURAVZ

HUGAI IVNASAMHYAA

CMIAAAPHANM LKIO

MSRNKSDHAAA

EELJUIB LLHA

Answers will be provided in the next issue of Mountain Path.

Interesting fact

When Venkataraman was about 6 years old, he was reprimanded mildly for making kites and paper boats from a case-bundle of law-suits. The boy took it to heart and disappeared, and the search for him was fruitless. At the time of puja at the Mother Sri Sahayavalli shrine, the priest saw a figure silently seated behind the idol. It was the child Venkataraman.

Introducing Sri Ramana Ashtottaram

Let's memorise this wonderful composition by Sri Viswanatha Swami, one shloka at a time. These are 108 names of Bhagavan used to worship him. As each name is uttered by way of invocation, a flower is offered in worship.

ॐ महासेनमहोशेनजाताय नमः ।

Om mahāsenamahomśenajātāya namaḥ ।

Meaning: One sprung from the resplendence of Mahasena (Skanda). Skanda, commander of the divine forces, destroys the vasanas, the asuric desires and memories, that turn the mind away from the Self within.

Introducing Poems of Ramana

One day in 1912 a potter came to the Virupaksha Cave with a small clay idol of Sri Ganesa that he had made and presented it to Sri Bhagavan. This is what Sri Bhagavan wrote on Sri Ganesa:

Him who begot you as a child you made
 Into a beggar; as a child yourself
 You then lived everywhere just to support
 Your own huge belly; I too am a child.
 Oh Child God in that niche! Encountering one
 Born after you, is your heart made of stone?
 I pray you look at me!

QUESTION & ANSWER

Effective this issue, the editor will answer questions from devotees.

Namaskaram, Sir. I am a devotee of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and have been practicing, to the best of my ability and more importantly his grace, his teaching of ātma-vichāra for the past several years. I happened to watch some of your recent talks that were a part of the ashram's centenary celebrations. You have attempted to briefly touch upon the practice of ātma-vichāra in these talks. I, in all humility and with the deepest respects to Bhagavan and to you who represent his sacred ashram, would like to point out that the references you have repeatedly made in your talks, citing Ramana Gītā, to Bhagavan's teaching about the heart being on the right side of the chest, are erroneous pointers for practice and may actually be misleading to those who are new (in fact, even to many older ones) to his teaching. Many sādhakas may actually start wrongly and detrimentally concentrating on the right side of their chests while meditating, after hearing your talks, assuming that this was the teaching of Bhagavan on how to practice ātma-vichāra. The actual import of this statement by Bhagavan will be understood only after one carries out deep self-study, reflection, internalisation, and nididhyāsanam (constant practice) of his teaching.

Thank you very much for your query. Though I mention that the Heart is on the right side, as mentioned in the *Ramana Gītā*, I never mention that one should meditate on this Heart. The Heart on the right is true relative only to the *dēhātma-buddhi*. When we mistake ourself to be a body, the *dēhātma-buddhi* (the false awareness 'I am this body') is experienced by us as centred on the right side of the chest.

I mention that "The moment we wake up, the first thought that springs up is the "I" thought. From there we identify ourselves as

“I am Dr. Ramanan” and a flood of thoughts take over us. “I am in Delhi”, “I have to give a speech this afternoon” and so on. What’s common to all these thoughts that flood our mind when we are awake, is the “I” thought. Bhagavan teaches us to get to that core thought by stripping it off association with all other adjuncts. Once that is done, he asks us to trace the pure “I” thought to its source.”

The heart is where the quest of ‘whence am I’ ends. Bhagavan has never asked us to focus on the center. However, it is important to talk about hridayam as the final resting ‘place’ of the quest, a ‘place’ of unalloyed, neutral happiness. Although many Vedanta texts like Yoga Vasishtha and the Bhagavad Gita reference hridayam, they do not highlight its importance the way Bhagavan did when it comes to practice. The emphasis is, therefore, unique to Bhagavan and offers an important clue to his devotees. My personal view is that devotees of Bhagavan who have had at least some taste of the hridayam are the ones who truly grasp the beauty and power of his teaching.

This practice of concentrating on the right side of the chest has been a hotly debated one. There are votaries for this even among advanced devotees of Bhagavan. People who started with *Yoga Mārgam*, on transiting to Bhagavan’s *vichara margam*, generally advocated this. However, it may be safely concluded that while the experience of the Self contains an awareness of this centre, concentration on this centre will not result in the experience of the Self.¹ A gentleman asked where the Heart is and what Realisation is. Bhagavan explains this.²

M.: The Heart is not physical; it is spiritual. *Hṛdayam* = *hṛt* + *ayam* — (Heart) This is the centre. It is that from which thoughts arise, on which they subsist and where they are resolved. The thoughts are the content of the mind and, they shape the universe. The Heart is the centre of all. *yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante* (that from which these beings come into existence) etc. is said to be Brahman in the *Upanishads*. That is the Heart. Brahman is the Heart.

¹ Godman, D., ‘Self-enquiry – Misconceptions’ Chapter in *Be As You Are*, Penguin Books Ltd,

² Venkataramiah, M (ed). *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §97

Bhagavan clarifies³

D.: Is it the physical heart?

M.: No. It is the seat wherefrom 'I-I' arises.

This is further clarified⁴,

"I ask you to see where the 'I' arises in your body, but it is really not quite correct to say that the 'I' rises from and merges in the Heart in the right side of the chest. The heart is another name for the Reality and it is neither inside nor outside the body; there can be no in or out for it, since it alone is. I do not mean by 'heart' any physiological organ or any plexus of nerves or anything like that, but so long as one identifies oneself with the body and thinks he is in the body he is advised to see where in the body the 'I'-thought rises and merges again. It must be the Heart at the right side of the chest since every man, of whatever race and religion and in whatever language he may be saying 'I', points to the right side of the chest to indicate himself. This is so all over the world, so that must be the place. And by keenly watching the daily emergence of the 'I'-thought on waking and its subsiding in sleep, one can see that it is in the Heart on the right side."

In Talk 273, Bhagavan explicitly addresses this issue.⁵

D.: Should I meditate on the right chest in order to meditate on the Heart?

M.: The Heart is not physical. Meditation should not be on the right or the left. Meditation should be on the Self. Everyone knows 'I am'. Who is the 'I'? It will be neither within nor without, neither on the right nor on the left. 'I am' - that is all. The Heart is the centre from which everything springs. Because you see the world, the body and so on, it is said that there is a centre for these, which is called the Heart. When you are in the Heart, the Heart is known to be neither the centre nor the circumference. There is nothing else. Whose centre could it be?

Thus it is clear that Bhagavan has clearly stated that one should not meditate on the physical heart but on the Self. ▲

³ *Ibid.*, Talk §52

⁴ Mudaliar, D., *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 23-5-46.

⁵ Venkataramiah, M (ed). *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §273

BOOK REVIEW



MAHABHARATA: THE GREAT WAR OF THE BHARATA CLAN. Text, Drawings and Colour by Gol. Indica Books, Varanasi, 2023. HB Rs.2,450. pp.196.

ISBN-13 : 978-93-81120-37-8.

<https://www.indicabooks.in/product/the-mahabharata-in-comic>

email: indicabooks@gmail.com

The *Mahabharata* – the largest epic of India and the entire world — is a fascinating story brimming with action, drama, passion, and wisdom. It speaks to us about *dharma*, the correct way to live. Its 100,000 *ślokas* (or 200,000 single-line verses) contain the *Bhagavad Gītā*, one of humanity’s greatest and most profound spiritual teachings. It is roughly ten times the length of the Iliad and the Odyssey combined. The *Mahabharata* is believed to have been written between 400 BCE and 400 CE, although the events it describes are said to have taken place much earlier, around 3000 BC. The *Mahabharata* tells the story of a dynastic struggle between two branches of the same royal family for the throne of the ancient Indian kingdom of Hastinapur, involving the Pandavas and Kauravas.

Millennia have passed since the *dharma yuddha* of the cousins shook the land of Bharata. But this history of our ancestors continues to fascinate us. It is revered both as a text about *dharma* and a history (*itihāsa*, literally “that’s what happened”). The plot of this ancient Indian epic centers around corrupt politics, ill-behaved men and warfare. These events of the struggles of men over their own emotions continue to the present day.

The *Mahabharata* contains profound philosophical and spiritual teachings that reflect on the multitude of dilemmas and crises that beset any family. We realise that human psychology has not changed over several millennia. Innate desires, gratitude, jealousy, betrayal, and many other psychological attributes remain the same. Thus, through the characters, we see ourselves — our own strengths and failures. Irrespective of our faults, we strive to maintain our *dharma* because that brings us not joy or happiness, but peace. That is the essence of the *Mahabharata* — and of life.

It is often referred to as the ‘fifth Veda’ and is considered, along with the *Ramayana*, to be one of the most important works of Hinduism. It is important to realise that the events described are not completely mythological, as there is enough archaeological evidence to support many incidents described, such as the flood in Dwarka and the battle in Kurukshetra.

In India, it is said that whatever is found in the *Mahabharata* may be found in other texts, but whatever is not found in the *Mahabharata* cannot be found elsewhere. Whatever one needs to learn in life can be learned in the *Mahabharata*. Though the main theme is the war, many smaller stories, incidents within these stories, and even the *Bhagavad Gītā* itself are all interwoven together in an extraordinary chronicle by an exceptional narrator we come to know as Veda Vyasa. It is a great read for anyone who likes heroism, treachery, crime, suspense, humour, romance, politics, loyalty — you name it, and this book has it. All human emotions like love, joy, bravery, courage, and respect are expressed in the book.

However, the primary purpose of the epic is its emphasis on *dharma*. Vidura, in the *Mahabharata*, recommends the prioritisation of the greater good. ‘Sacrifice your son to protect the village and sacrifice the village to protect your nation. But to protect your own *ātma*, be ready to give up everything,’ he says. One’s conscience is supreme. A guiltless conscience is what brings peace within. Only upholding *dharma* can lead to a faultless conscience.

In the *Karna Parva* 69.46–53, Krishna explained to Arjuna the nuances of *dharma* and truth by reciting many stories, including that of Rishi Kaushika. He defines truth as *dharma* and *dharma* as truth. He made Arjuna see the context-sensitive nature of truth and the need for discretion in all decision-making and actions. ‘No doubt, truth is paramount. But understanding the nature of truth in practice, as lived by noblemen, is a difficult endeavour. An apparent lie that saves an innocent life is more virtuous than an apparent truth that harms those who deserve to be protected. One should know what matters and when.’ But why uphold *dharma*? Krishna says, ‘Because it upholds and protects, it is called *dharma*. *Dharma* sustains society. Hence, only that action which protects and upholds is said to be aligned with *dharma*.’

Vyasa says multiple times throughout the *Mahabharata*: “*dharma eva hato hanti dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ*” — *Dharma* destroys those who destroy it and protects those who protect it. However, upholding *dharma* does not always bring joy or pleasure. Duryodhana had smirked just before dying, ‘I have lived a luxurious life; you can live and mourn over all that is lost.’ Yudhishtira was indeed going to be the monarch of a kingdom full of widows — most of the men had died in the war. Winning the war did not bring him joy. But he had upheld *dharma*, and that brought him peace. That’s why Yudhishtira repeatedly says, “Strive to understand the nuances of *dharma*. Strive to uphold *dharma*. Through *dharma*, uplift yourself and live peacefully.”

In *Vana Parva* 32, Draupadi says, “Every person must work hard. However, enterprise and hard work alone do not determine the outcome. That depends on two additional factors — fate and the grace of God. Hence,

one should strive to do his *dharma* but not become dejected if the outcome is not as per one's choice. What matters is the effort that was put in. Therefore, irrespective of the result, one must follow *dharma*."

It is exactly this concept that Krishna elaborates in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. In 2.47, Krishna explains, "You have a right to perform your *dharma*, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction." This is precisely because the results of your actions are not in your hands — they are based on your past karma and the grace of Krishna.

Krishna is not saying here that the results should be ignored or that duties be carelessly performed without concern for the results. What He is saying is simply that we are not entitled to be the enjoyer of the fruits of our *dharma* because we cannot control them. If you are cultivating a garden, for example, you should make every effort to get the best yield; however, the actual yield of that garden is up to forces that are beyond our control. All we can do is to plant the seeds and be equanimous about the result — whether favorable or not.

Kunti says, "It is likely that the outcome may not always be as we desire. But that can be known only after the action is done. That is why, results notwithstanding, wise men continue to engage in their work. Success and failures are, in any case, ephemeral. Hence, believing firmly that success will come, one must engage in work. However, one should remain equipoised irrespective of the results."

Some time ago another comic version of the *Mahabharata* was published by Amar Chitra Katha (Immortal Picture Stories), an Indian comic book publisher, that has done tremendous service publishing some 350 different titles across a range of categories in various Indian languages. The comics released are on various aspects of Indian history, personalities, mythological stories of gods and goddesses, and folk tales. These comic books are well-known to many children who were fortunate that their parents bought them. Amar Chitra Katha published many stories from the *Mahabharata* as well as an abridged version but this is the first time that we know of a complete rendering that is now available in comic form in one volume. The first complete English prose translation of the *Mahabharata* was done directly from the original Sanskrit text by Kisari Mohan Ganguli. His translation was published as *The Mahabharata* of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa between 1883 and 1896. Each of the 12 volumes of the Victorian prose version is about 500 pages. For many years it was the only English translation available and the volumes were hard to get. Subsequently, the definitive Critical Edition of the *Mahabharata* was released by Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in 1966. Of the recent complete translations, the best is the one edited by Ramesh Menon in 12 volumes, published by Rupa Publications in 2017.

There are many compressed versions of the complete epic that have been published in English along with abridgments and novelistic prose retellings by authors such as R.K. Narayan, C. Rajagopalachari, and Kamala Subramaniam. However, unfortunately, recent books like *Mahabharata: Relevance and Application in Contemporary Thought* by Bharat Thakker propagate myths and falsehoods not present in the original version while books like *Mahabharata Unravalled: Lesser-Known Facets of a Well-Known History* by Ami Ganatra adhere to the original version and debunk false myths and offers insights not commonly known. The number of works on the *Mahabharata* and the adaptations that still get written is a testimony to its enduring relevance.

Indica Books presents a wonderful comic version of the *Mahabharata*, which retells the epic in a comprehensive and accessible way, maintaining the main plotline intact. With beautiful artwork and well-written dialogues, it is mainly directed towards young people and adults. Almost every child in India is taught about Indian heritage through the stories of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* by their grandparents. However, with the growth of nuclear families, no one has the time to read and understand the morals and *dharma* in these books. This book covers that gap. This fine work could be considered by parents who feel that their children should understand, learn, and value the heritage of India. The narration is simple and descriptive. The language is easy to understand for children to follow smoothly and enjoy the storyline without being puzzled by difficult words. Due to the increasingly visual nature of acquiring knowledge by the young, this new 'complete' story fills a gap. It is not only entertaining but also informative and thought-provoking. The art and detailing are praiseworthy. The drawings have brought the story to life in our imagination much more than words alone would have done. It is also a great resource book for non-resident Indians.

The book is the creation of 'Gol' aka Miguel Gomez Andrea. The author of this comic has succeeded in recreating the environment and characters that lived in India five thousand years ago when gods walked on earth. He has authored over 40 historical comic titles including two on Indian themes: *Pilgrimage to Kashi* and *Taj Mahal. Love and Tragedy in the Mughal Emperor's Court*.

The book is available in Sanskrit (which can be very useful for Sanskrit students) and Hindi as well as English. Indica Books is to be commended for its courage to publish such a major project considering its artistic and financial challenges. The only drawback is the high cost of the book. But this is due to the excellent quality of the book. So, in short, yes, go ahead and buy this book, and enjoy hours of satisfying reading.

— Christopher Quilkey and M. Giridhar ▲

ASHRAM BULLETIN

Navaratri

The *Navaratri* celebrations at the shrine of Sri Matrubhuteswara were held from October 15–October 24. At the beginning of the *Navaratri* festival (14/10/2023) around 5 pm, Mother Yogambikai was taken out of the Sanctorum, brought to the Sannidhi and consecrated in the *Navaratri Kolu Mandapam*. At 5.45 pm *Arati* was held for Mother Yogambikai at *Kolu Mandapam*.

The Goddess was decorated in various names and forms during the nine nights. All devotees attended and received the immense grace of the Goddesses.

Karthikai Deepam Festival

This year, the *Karthikai Deepam* Festival began with the flag hoisting ceremony at Sri Arunachaleswara Temple on 17th November. On Sunday, the 26th November, the sacred *Maha Deepam* was lit at 6 PM at the Mountain peak. A special *abhishekam*, decoration and Vedic recitation were held at Bhagavan's Shrine. When the lamp was seen at the top of the hill, with the slogan 'Annamalaikku Arohara', a lamp was lit in front of Bhagavan's Shrine and *Aksharamanamalai Parayanam* was conducted every day for eleven days.

Earlier, *Bharani Deepam* was lit in the Arunachaleswara temple at 4 am followed by the processions of Vinayakar, Murugar, Arunachaleswarar, Unnamulai Amman and Chandikeswarar around the temple. The festival concluded with the 3-day *Theppam Utsavam* and the Chandikeswarar *Utsavam*.

Obituaries



Smt. Pattammal, aged 98, mother of Sri T.V. Chandramouli, who serves in the Ashram, was absorbed at the feet of Arunachala Ramana in Ramana Nagar on 10th November during the auspicious *Pradosha Kaalam*. She is survived by two sons and a daughter.

Smt. Uma Devi, aged 84, mother of Dr. Giridhar, who serves in the Ashram's publication department, collapsed while witnessing the Ashram's live telecast of Deepam lit on Arunachala on 26th November and was absorbed at the feet of Arunachala Ramana on Punarvasu Day, 1st December 2023.



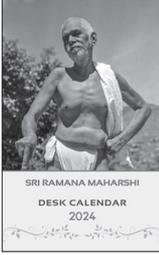


SRI RAMANASRAMAM SPECIAL DAYS 2024

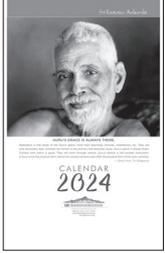
Festival/Function	English Date	
Pongal	15-01-2024	Monday
Chinnaswamigal Aradhana	25-01-2024	Thursday
Sundaram Iyer Day	29-02-2024	Thursday
Maha Sivaratri	08-03-2024	Friday
Sri Vidya Havan	15-03-2024	Friday
Telugu New Year	09-04-2024	Tuesday
Tamil New Year	14-04-2024	Sunday
Sri Rama Navami	17-04-2024	Wednesday
Bhagavan's 74th Aradhana	06-05-2024	Monday
Maha Puja	31-05-2024	Friday
Cow Lakshmi Day	18-06-2024	Tuesday
Guru Poornima	21-07-2024	Sunday
Bhagavan's Advent Day	01-09-2024	Sunday
Navaratri Festival commences	03-10-2024	Thursday
Saraswati Puja	12-10-2024	Saturday
Vijayadasami	12-10-2024	Saturday
Deepavali	31-10-2024	Thursday
Karthigai Festival commences	04-12-2024	Wednesday
Deepam	13-12-2024	Friday
Bhagavan's 145th Jayanti	17-12-2024	Tuesday

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DIARY AND CALENDARS - 2024



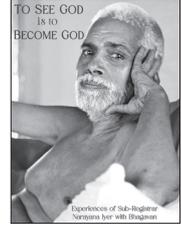
The wall calendar has six sheets (12 pages) of the photographs of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. The special days of Ashram are mentioned in the calendar. The calendar is approximately 16 inches in width and 23 inches in height. Price: ₹150.



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

Sri Ramanasramam Diary 2024 — The diary consists of 365 pages with quotations both in English and Tamil based on the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and 12 full page photographs of Bhagavan. Price: ₹250.

To See God is to Become God (English) — A small pocket size book titled *To See God is to become God* has been published. This book chronicles the experiences of Narayana Iyer with Sri Bhagavan. R. Narayana Iyer, a retired Sub-registrar, is one of the senior-most devotees of Bhagavan. Initially, he was an out-and-out skeptic but very soon he became a staunch follower and devotee of Sri Bhagavan. pp. x+101; ISBN: 978-81-8288-308-6; Price: ₹80.



The following Gujarati books have been released.



1. હું કોણ છું? (નાન યાર?). Gujarati translation of the English book 'Who Am I?' Price: ₹35.
2. શ્રી રમણ વાણી. Gujarati translation of the English book 'Maharshi's Gospel?' Price: ₹110.

Sri Ramanasramam Book Depot, Sri Ramanasramam & PO
Tiruvannamalai 606603, Tamil Nadu, INDIA.
Also available online: <http://bookstore.sriramanamaharshi.org>
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Never mind the mind. If its source is sought,
it will vanish leaving the Self.

— Talks, Sri Ramana Maharshi

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