

CONTENTS

RAMANA ASHTOTTARAM	2
EDITORIAL Responsibility	3
THAT IS MY FATHER'S HOUSE! Soumen Mukherjee	9
POEM: THE HOLY SELF Ana Callan	14
THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION Sadhu Om	15
SAINT VITTOBHA OF POLUR John Maynard	25
KEYWORD: SADASATVILAKSANA John Grimes	41
ULLADU NARPADU: VERSE THIRTY FOUR S. Ram Mohan	47
DEEP SLEEP AND AWARENESS Swami Siddheswarananda	51
POEM: RAMANA'S WOMEN Ana Callan	54
NON-DUALISM AND DAILY LIFE Philip Renard	55
VERSE: THE NAMES OF LALITHA Ramesh Menon	67
PADUTURAI PART ONE Tattuvaraya	69
A CONSUMER OF KNOWLEDGE Sharada Bhanu	75
THE QUEST: REMINISCENCES Lucia Osborne	85
BOOK EXCERPT: I AM THOU Ramchandra Gandhi	91
UNDERSTANDING THE 'I-I' Hans Heimer	96
MAHA BHAKTA VIJAYAM: THE ADVENT OF SANT TULASIDAS Nabaji Siddha	97
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ARUNACHALA PURANA Robert Butler	107
ARUNACHALA PURANA Saiva Ellappa Navalar	115
BOOK REVIEWS	121
ASHRAM BULLETIN	125

Ramana Ashtottaram

80. ओं आत्मारामाय नमः

Om Atmārāmāya namah

Prostration to the one who rejoices in the Self.

The *Gita* praises one whose bliss is in the Self as *atmarati* (rejoices in the Self), *atmatriptā* (gratified with the Self), *atmasantushtah* (content with the Self). Bhagavan was *nirvikara* (unchanging), *nityopasanta* (ever serene), because he rejoiced in the bliss, the contentment, the simple purity of awareness.

81. ओं महाभागाय नमः

Om Mahābhāgāya namah

Prostration to the one who is endowed with the noblest qualities.

The egoless person is the dwelling place of all goodness and greatness. It is not a question of striving one after the other for all the *sattvic* qualities of the realised soul. If we but dive deep within to the source of our 'I', and remain fixed in our attention upon it, we will spontaneously demonstrate in our lives the harmonious qualities of the noble one (*arya*).

Responsibility

Our journey is principally an internal one of removing the sense of doership from all our activities. The chief obstacle to understanding is our mind with its habitual thoughts (*vasanas*). No matter how sophisticated our mind and however well intentioned we may be, invariably we become attached to our activities and their results. The temptation to attribute to ourselves the impersonal working of destiny is normally too great to resist. Even when we deny ourselves there is a trace of doership.

Two venerable swamis were in a temple praying. Each one bowed his head and with hushed vehemence repeated. “Oh Lord I am nothing. You alone are everything.” The cleaning man for the temple who was illiterate heard their prayer and was deeply impressed. He too when he could spare a moment started to pray with all his heart, “Oh Lord I am nothing. You alone are everything.” One day the two swamis heard him at prayer and one turned to the other and sneering said, “Who is he to think he is nothing.”

Where then is the responsibility for all we do and manifest in our existence? Are we accountable for each and every one of our thoughts

and actions or are we pretenders, powerless in the face of impersonal forces beyond our comprehension? Are we mere puppets on the wind?

From an absolute point of view we have no free will and are all subject to our *prarabdha karma*. As Bhagavan said to his Mother:

“The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their *prarabdha karma* (destiny to be worked out in this life, resulting from the balance-sheet of actions in past lives). Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent.”¹

Happy are those who have surrendered in complete faith to the higher power guiding our destiny. But for those of us, who are struggling, what does it mean to surrender and where are the boundaries of our responsibility for who we are? Does Bhagavan’s admonition to his Mother imply a *carte blanche* to do as we please since we are not in control and therefore not responsible for our behaviour?

A century after its sinking in April 1912, the *Titanic* still grips our imagination. There have been greater catastrophes in terms of the loss of human life but the *Titanic* continues to engage our imagination. The White Star line which built the huge *Titanic* created the safest modern ship of its day. This was the era in Europe when people believed technology was the answer to every problem and that man’s supremacy though not complete, was assured. It was just a question of time before they would be master of all they surveyed. The *Titanic* was symbolic of that age’s zeitgeist, deluded by its own power and false dreams.

Why then did the *Titanic* sink and who ultimately was responsible for the disaster? The Captain, Edward J. Smith, was an experienced man brought out of retirement for this one voyage, to break the speed record over the Atlantic on this prestigious new boat. The primary reasons for the disaster were attributed to a failure to take heed of radio warnings from other ships about icebergs and to the fact that the ship was travelling too fast to take evasive action. J. Bruce Ismay,

¹ Osborne, Arthur, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge*, 1970. p.30.

the owner of The White Star line survived the tragedy and lived the rest of his life in denial that he had anything to do with it.² Rescued by the ocean liner *Carpathia*, he looked a desolate man whose life and career was wrecked beyond repair. In the initial enquiry he repeated over and over again: "I am not in any way responsible." A bully, rich and arrogant, he tried to wriggle out of the enquiries by evasion and bare-faced lies and spent the rest of his life avoiding all talk of the *Titanic*. One startling vignette of the actual sinking of the ship was that Ismay rowed to safety on one of the life-boats full of women and children and he claimed he never actually saw the ship sink. This is a lie, because for him to row away from the ship he would be facing backwards and would have surely seen the calamity. The level of denial is staggering.

We see then in Ismay a failure of a small man to realise and accept responsibility. There was neither nobility nor heroism. His misconduct was that of a petty man. He well illustrated Shakespeare's immortal lines, "Cowards die many times before their deaths;/The valiant never taste of death but once."³

At the other end of the scale there is the classic Indian spiritual illustration of responsibility illustrated by the dilemma Arjuna confronted on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. In his case, urged on and advised by Lord Krishna, Arjuna accepts his responsibility, however horrid the consequences may be and vigorously fought the forces of *adharma*.

We see in the modern age, another hero, Mahatma Gandhi who accepted responsibility for the riots which erupted during the freedom struggle. His response is instructive: if we identify with any object, ideal or purpose, as say Gandhiji did with the voice of the people in India, then we are affected by the actions incurred over the course of

² Wilson, Frances, *How to Survive the Titanic: The Sinking of J. Bruce Ismay*, Bloomsbury, 2011.

³ One man did stay at his station and in the time honoured tradition, Captain Edward J. Smith went down with his ship. Another, John Jacob Astor, who was one of the wealthiest men in America, allowed others ahead of him onto the lifeboats and was last seen smoking on deck with another passenger.

time. We are inevitably swept along by our decision to identify with the object of our desire, gross or subtle.

In our own attitude and behaviour we generally fall between these two extreme examples of an Ismay or a Gandhiji. Though there are crucial life-defining moments in our life when we are called to rise to a challenge, our life in general, rarely contains an obvious black or white choice. It is mostly grey and made up of tiny moments that when added up are decisive in influencing how we think and act. From small seeds huge trees grow for both good and bad.

How then do we remain silent in the wave of destiny which carries us along as either a willing, joyful participant or a frustrated recalcitrant? For the purposes of this editorial let us focus on the dangers of the negative refusal to engage with that which is before us, as those who surrender and accept responsibility for what they are, have learnt this lesson already.

Malcontent occurs when we refuse to accept the train of events and demand that they be different. We want people and actions to fulfil our expectations. We do not want to own up to our shortcomings. It is invariably someone else's mistake when things go wrong. The attitude of "Why me?" taints our behaviour when life becomes unpleasant. We find reasons to be right and just as many for another person to be mistaken.

There are many, many psychological exercises that can ameliorate our suffering but ultimately it comes down to one question: What does the experience teach me? If we unflinchingly look negativity in the eye, we will see that always we bear to some degree responsibility for its occurrence. However miniscule our participation we could have anticipated its disruption and taken remedial action. Not to do anything is an action; passivity in the face of choice is consent. We are doomed to commit the same mistake over and over again until we learn. "Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it."⁴

⁴ Attributed to Edmund Burke, the 18th Century statesman. The American philosopher George Santayana slightly modified this quote in his own writings, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." It has also been misquoted as "Those who forget their history are destined to repeat it."

So how do we reconcile Bhagavan's injunction to remain silent because fate will happen however much we try to avoid it? What then of the advice to actively change our conduct by accepting responsibility for that which happens anyway? This is a conundrum that can be answered simply by another question. How identified are we with our body and mind? The moment we realise that our quandary is based on ignorance we can see clarity is of the essence. That is why we meditate, perform devotions and act to the best of our ability without an ulterior motive. The purified mind sees all its activities clearly and accepts that which our desires and fears have obscured. To see clearly releases us from the chains of identification. It is no longer a question of responsibility for the *sattvic* mind now has developed the power of attention to realise the source of 'I'. It has no name and no form and therefore no *karma*.

The key is consciousness. Consciousness is indivisible. One is either conscious or one is not. There is no partial consciousness. It is not a quality or a quantity. It is the one constant not subject to change and as such is unaffected by the laws of cause and effect. For us to exist we cannot *not* be conscious. We cannot know it as separate from ourselves, we can only become *that*.

When we realise it, it makes no difference whether our desires are fulfilled or not, whether our minds are happy or sad, whether our body experiences pain or pleasure. Whether we are an Ismay or a Gandhiji, it makes no difference though we reap the reward with our bodies and minds for the choices we have made. The coward and the fool are part of our nature as are the hero and wise one. "Seeing his kinsmen thus all arrayed....", Arjuna's predicament on the battlefield is ours. Our thoughts are our relatives. Our enemies our negativities.

Our task is to see directly that Consciousness is peerless — it is untouched; it is That without a second (*advaita*). To do this demands we be silently alert with all our heart and let loose the arrow of intention. ▲



Somu Mukherjee is directly behind Ma's right shoulder

That is My Father's House!

“Ota Aamaar Baaper Baadi!”

SOUMEN MUKHERJEE

Soumen Mukherjee (known to the Ramana family as Somu) had, by the age of 19, accompanied his eldest paternal uncle S.P. Mukherjee twice to Tiruvannamalai. There he became aware of that divine presence, the sannidhi of Sri Bhagavan. He now found himself on another pilgrimage that was to prove momentous in his life.

One day in the winter season of the early 1960s (perhaps '64 or '65), seven members of our family, including me, left Howrah on the western bank of the Ganga in West Bengal for a pilgrimage. The group comprised my grandmother, her son and daughter-in-law and two grand children, as well as my youngest uncle, Satya Saran Mukherjee who is now aged about 90. He was a good photographer.

We rented a house at Puri in Orissa and settled in. One cool evening, we were seated on the sands, gazing at the ocean and enjoying the scenery and sound of the restless waves. My younger paternal-

Soumen Mukherjee lives in Kolkata, and by Bhagavan's Grace, comes to the ashram each year when possible.

uncle left behind the rest of the family and took me on a walk along the road that wended its way towards *Swarg Dwar*, the main burning ghat in Puri.

Nearing it I saw a crowd had gathered peacefully near a bungalow close to the beach. I drew my uncle's attention to this and curious, we sauntered over to join them. As I peered over the heads, I saw a saintly woman who I found out later was in her late 60s conversing with those gathered around her. The sound of the relentless ocean prevented me from listening to her talk. As she got up to leave, the gathering began to follow her. I asked a man next to me, "Who is this pious lady and where does she stay?"

I was informed that it was none other than Ma Ananda Mayee, of whom I had heard of over the years in Calcutta. She was staying at a bungalow nearby. As the ladies had been left behind at the beach with the child (my cousin), my uncle preferred to return as early as possible, rather than press on join the group for a further darshan at the bungalow. The sun had just set and as we retraced our steps to the beach-sands, we were treated in the sky above us, to a sunset glowing with an extravagant splash of pink and red.

The next morning we reached at around 9.30 am. the bungalow where Ma stayed. We were directed past the main entrance to an ill-lit stairway. As I came up the dark stairway, I saw coming into view an open door and as I stepped on the landing floor experienced an unmistakable sense of all-round illumination. Standing by that door I saw Ma inside seated on the floor surrounded by about ten to fifteen devotees, and a little to the side, an old lady sat on a solid wooden cot. I learnt later that she was Ma's mother.

After noticing in passing a Grundig tape-recorder by Ma's side, my attention returned to Ma's soft lilting voice. She was narrating the legends of Lord Jagannatha of Puri. After a short while she expressed a wish to visit the Lord's temple, and as she got up exhorting those present in the room to make ready to go, I anticipated her movement and stood by the window to the left of the entrance door. As she was going past me to enter a room attached to the hall, I found myself after some hesitation finally managing to say: "Ma, I wish to speak with you."

She just passed on into the side room, without any sign of having heard my appeal. My heart sank with a churning within me that cried out: "But you are mother!" After a brief while she came out draping a shawl around her shoulders. Preceding her was an elderly lady who, emerging out of the door to my right, looked around her, asked, "Who is the young man who wished to speak with Ma?"

I was raising my hand almost as a reflex action, when Ma came out of the main entrance door, and as she neared me I took the opportunity and bent low at my waist to touch her feet. As I straightened up I saw she was moving on.

I caught up with her getting down the stairs and at a suitable moment I asked: "Ma, have you been to Ramanashram?" She stopped, looked at me, and asked: "Have you been?"

My eldest *jethaa moshaai* (eldest uncle), Sri Satya Prakash Mukherjee had been to Bhagavan's abode from very early on in 1952, and because of him four generations of our family, including his own father, had been drawn into Bhagavan's net of Grace.

Considering I had come in intimate contact with most of the first generation family of Bhagavan through my uncle (my salutations to him), I replied: "Yes Ma, twice."

She gave me a faraway yet penetrating look and answered: *Ota aamaar baaper baadi* ("That is my father's home."). By then we had reached ground level and I followed her on along the very narrow lane towards a car parked at one end of the lane where it joined a larger road. As she stopped and turned to cross the lane and reach the car that was waiting for her, she turned to me and said in Bengali, "Don't stop going there. Don't stop going there."

That scene of me following Ma was the moment my uncle, an avid photographer captured into a film-roll in his large box-type down-view camera, which is now shown on page eight.

She was soon gone. As I watched unblinking, she disappeared through the door of the car held open for her. Upon settling into the rear car seat she then graciously leaned out of the window and shared her secret with me. With a captivating smile she said, "Do not stop going there!"

It naturally made a deep impression on me.

It is not out of place to mention here that my earlier visit to Puri had been in 1952, the same year my eldest uncle Sri Satya Prakash Mukherjee had visited Sri Ramanasramam for the first time. I was brought to Puri from Howrah by the rest of the family because of the sudden passing away of an aunt. My senior most uncle also joined us from Sri Ramanashram. It was during that 1952 pilgrimage that the *sangamam* (mingling) of my life took place, of three great saintly lineages of Bharat, dictating the destiny of our immediate family.

We came to know of a century old *naga baba* (naked) siddha¹ and visited where he stayed and had his *darshan*. He was getting on in years, perhaps many years over a century, and though his eyes were wholly drooping, his considerable portly frame had a tremendous silent sagely presence. It was later we came to know that he was none other than the great Totapuri Maharaj, *advaitic-sadhana* guru of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa!

Ma may have disappeared from our physical eyes, but her admonition not to stop coming to Arunachala burned bright in my heart. The injunction of Sri Bhagavan to search for the origin of the seeker was endorsed by her on this earthly plane.² She directly empowered my deep-felt faith in Sri Ramana and Arunachala and I went to my father's house too, as if it were my birthright.

Ma was born in 1896, which was the same year of our Master's Advent in Arunachala. And later that year, at the age of 56, she did indeed visit her *baap ka ghar*³ in November 1952 to pay her respects to the *samadhi lingam* of her *pitaji* (father), Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, the manifestation of Siva Dakshinamurti.

¹ Naga Baba. Cf. S.P. Mukherjee's article in *The Mountain Path*, April, 1964, p.99, 'Visit to Naga Baba'.

² *Eka Sloki*: In the interior of the heart space, *Brahman* [Supreme Self] alone shines in the form of the *Atman* [Self] with direct immediacy as 'I-I'./Enter the Heart with the mind questing the Self [and thus] diving deep within, /or by restraint of breath-movement. Be established thus in the *Atman*.

³ Literally, 'Dad's house'. It is suggestive of self-assumed ownerships; an idiom in popular parlance all over India.

SS Cohen wrote a report that was published in *Ananda Varta*, the official magazine of Ma's ashram. "She went round the Ashram to see the places sanctified by the holy presence of Shri Ramana Bhagavan in His life-time. Before His *samadhi*, She reverently stood with folded hands, and enquired about how the sacred body had been buried, and whether there was a *lingam* on the *samadhi*. The *lingam* She could not see because it was covered with flower garlands. Then She entered the *Matrubhuteswara* shrine which was built over the remains of the Master's mother and climbed to the *sanctum sanctorum* where She was shown Sri Chakra and the sacred lingam. At 5 pm. She attended the usual Veda *parayan* near Sri Maharishi's *samadhi*, and between 7 and 9 pm. the *bhajan* programme, as in Madras.

"All the ashram devotees and many members of the Managing Committee, who had come from Madras, gathered in the Ashram at 9 a.m. on the-next day, the 5th. The ceremony of laying the foundation-stone of the Meditation Hall, which is proposed to be built over Sri Bhagavan's *samadhi*, was performed, and at its end, Sri Anandamayee Ma approached and strewed flowers over the foundation stone to the joy of all present."⁴

Later that same evening after a short movie on Bhagavan in his last years was shown to Her, and then "...a member of the Managing Committee approached Mataji and with folded hands begged Her to visit our Ashram again, to which She smilingly replied; 'I am not going anywhere: I am always here. There is no going nor coming all is Atman' which very much reminded us of the very words of our Divine Guru, Sri Ramana Bhagavan."⁵


After three days in the ashram, "On the 7th, at 5 a.m., Mataji stood under the arch of Sri Ramanashram gate in clear moonlight with Sirius brilliantly twinkling overhead. She looked around, and, seeing the small circle of Ramana bhaktas gathered to see Her off, affectionately bade them farewell, then entered Her car and sped away on Her

⁴ *Ananda Varta*, Volume one, Number two, pp.61-2. 'Ma Anandamayee in Madras and Tiruvannamalai'.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.63.

journey in the direction of the Southern Cross, extremely satisfied at the reception given to Her here, and at the peaceful atmosphere of the Ashram. Sri Hari Baba [who was in charge of travelling arrangements for Ma] expressed a wish that their stay might have been a month instead of only three days.”⁶

In her divine wisdom Ma gave me the necessary encouragement and strength to continue coming all the way from Howrah to Tiruvannamalai which in those days was an arduous journey. My prayer is that I may fully realise that there is no distance between Arunachala Ramana and myself. Until then I am reminded of the awesome declaration by Nandi, the first among the vehicles of Siva, in *Arunachala Mahatmyam*: “Only those whom Siva calls can come here...”

My thanks to J. Jayaraman who helped render the narration in English. 

⁶ Ibid.

The Holy Self

Ana Callan

Pain doesn't touch Him
though He winces when
the doctor strains to remove
his tumour. The body has pain,
He says, but I am not that.
I am free of all suffering
do what you like unto Me.
Soon I will be meeting
my father and bone-skin-
blood-history, leaving
only my True Essence.

The poems by Ana Callan come from her collection, *The Boy Who Would Be Sage*. She may be contacted at ana@anacallan.com

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

Between December 1977 to February 1980, I made rough notes of some explanations about Bhagavan's teachings which Sri Sadhu Om gave either to me or to other friends. Many years later these notes were found and friends urged me to share them with others, saying that they contain a wealth of ideas that would help those who are following the path of self-enquiry.

I cannot claim that I recorded exactly what Sadhu Om said, but only the impression that it made on my mind, so my notes reflect my own

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om from 1976 to 1985 in translating Bhagavan's Tamil writings and *Guru Vacaka Kovai*, and since then he has continued to write about Bhagavan's teachings. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.

imperfect understanding of what I heard him say. Moreover, whatever he said was suited to the understanding and needs of whoever he was talking to, so he sometimes said things that, if taken out of context, would seem to conflict with the explanations that he usually gave about Bhagavan's teachings. Therefore when selecting and editing extracts from these notes for publication in this and the subsequent articles in this series, I have taken care to omit any portions that contain ideas which are irrelevant to the main thrust of Sadhu Om's talks.

I have also edited these notes, expanding and adapting them wherever necessary, in order to make the ideas suitably clear. What will be published in this series are neither the precise words of Sadhu Om nor the exact notes that I wrote, but I am confident that it conveys reasonably accurately the ideas he expressed.

The title of this series reflects the central message that Sadhu Om said or wrote, namely that practising Self-attention is of paramount importance, and that directing our attention towards Self is the sole aim of all that Bhagavan taught us. In order to experience what we really are we must attend to ourself keenly and vigilantly, to the exclusion of everything else.

Bhagavan used various Tamil and Sanskrit terms to mean 'self-attention', 'self-scrutiny' or 'self-investigation', but one that he often used is the Tamil term tannāṭṭam, which is a compound of tan (the inflexional base and oblique case form of taṇ, which means 'self') and nāṭṭam (which in this context means investigation, examination, scrutiny, observation or attention), so whenever Sadhu Om uses the term 'self-attention', it should be understood to be a translation of tannāṭṭam or any of the other terms that Bhagavan used in this sense, such as tat-gavaṇam (self-attention), ātma-vicāra (self-investigation), svarūpa-dhyāna (self-contemplation), svarūpa-smaraṇa (self-remembrance), ātma-cintana (self-meditation), ātmānusandhāna (self-contemplation), ahamukham (facing inwards, towards I) or ahanōkku (looking inwards, at I).

— Michael James

3rd December 1977

Sadhu Om: The *guru* acts through our own discrimination (*viveka*). Reflection (*manana*) on the *guru*'s teachings is itself a spiritual practice (*sadhana*), because by our reflecting and discriminating the hold of our *vasanas* (mental inclinations or propensities) is weakened and our mind is kept in quietude – that is, in the quiescent state of self-attention.

4th December 1977

Sadhu Om: The various theories taught by Bhagavan (regarding *karma*, *prarabdha*, surrender, God, *guru* and so on) will often appear to contradict each other, but will never contradict the need for self-attention. All such theories are merely clues or aids that help us cling to self-attention. They are each suited to different moods of the mind.

Self-attention is the only watertight theory. All other theories are riddled with loopholes and contradictions. Therefore if instead of quietening the mind they give rise to doubts, set them aside by investigating who thinks about them.

Self-attention is the sole aim of all Bhagavan's teachings. He taught us that self alone exists and is real, and that all else is a dream, a figment of our imagination. He said, 'Attend to that for which you came'; we came for knowing self and not for learning many theories. However, a thorough understanding of his teachings and the theories he proposed will enable us to quieten our mind in any situation.

Bhagavan has given us a simple teaching: 'Your own self-awareness is the only thing that seems to be permanent. Therefore do research on it alone: attend to it, and cling to it firmly'. Though this teaching is simple, it is the greatest of all treasures.

Grace acts by persistently reminding us of self. To forget self (that is, to attend to anything else) is misery; to remember self is peace or bliss.

Whenever any doubts, questions or new ideas arise, reflect on whether they could arise in your sleep. Obviously they could not, so they are external to you. Therefore forget them and remain as you were in sleep.

The mind is controlled effectively by knowledge alone. Root out all disturbances by keen and sharp discrimination. Do not try to rely on forcible control.

Krishna said that he will attend to the needs of those who always meditate only on him without thinking of anything else (*Bhagavad Gita* 9.22; *Bhagavad Gita Saram* verse 31). What does this mean? He is our real self, and nothing is other than him, so he can only attend to himself. If we also attend only to self, without thinking of anything else, where are any 'needs'? Other than ourself, nothing is real, so we should attend only to self.

When Ramasami Pillai asked Bhagavan which thoughts should be rejected as bad and which should be accepted as good, he replied, 'Reject all thoughts, even the thought of Bhagavan'.

Never think you are a beginner in the early stages of *sadhana*. Always act as if the dawn of self-knowledge might come any moment.

We will be standing on our own feet only when we are able to reject all disturbances – come what may – by keen discrimination. Then all books, *satsang* and other outward aids will be unnecessary.

Whatever disturbances may come, remember that they are because 'I am'. As a result of our daily practice, the thought 'I am' will immediately pull us back to self-attention.

There are no straight routes to our goal. That is, a rigid or formal approach is impossible, because self-enquiry is an art, and each situation must be dealt with in an appropriate manner as it arises. Bhagavan has given us an armoury of weapons suited to each situation, so when the shield does not work use the sword. When the mind is agitated an attitude of surrender may help, but when the mind is quiet do not think, 'I should surrender; how to do so?' but instead use that quietness to abide as self.

There is no such thing as 'partial surrender'. Surrender is only real surrender when it is complete. What is called 'partial surrender' is only a practice aiming at complete surrender, and that practice is the correct discrimination in any given situation that will lead the mind back to self-attention.

5th December 1977

Sadhu Om: To dwell upon 'I am' in whatever way is possible is good contemplation (*manana*). It is the practice that will root out all interest in other things (second and third persons) and make self-abidance easy.

Good and bad are based on the limiting concept 'I am the body'. The experience of the *jnani* is simply 'I am'. Though it may seem that the *jnani* sees differences, he never actually experiences any distinctions such as good or bad. He is ever contented with the knowledge 'I am'. 'I am' is both the way and the goal (as Bhagavan teaches us in verse 579 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai*).

Bhagavan is the greatest *siddha*. He knows well what work need be done on us and how to do it. Though we do not know it, he is doing his work all the time.

Erratic behaviour only occurs if a disciple has a profound change of outlook while still retaining some individuality. Bhagavan will always bring about the required change of outlook (the experience of true self-knowledge) together with the loss of individuality, so no outward changes will be seen in those whom he liberates, and no 'I' will rise in them to say 'I have had this change of outlook', nor will he say anything (that is, he will not say that they have been liberated).

He used to give the example of a hard-shelled fruit which an elephant swallows whole and excretes unbroken, but when the shell is broken open the contents are found to have been digested. Likewise, when Bhagavan consumes anyone's ego, they will outwardly appear unchanged. No one can say how many egos Bhagavan has thus consumed.¹

In one of his verses Muruganar sang to Bhagavan, 'You have given me *sahaja* [my natural state] without letting me experience *nirvikalpa samadhi*, close my eyes, or do any *sadhana*'. Such is Bhagavan's guruship, but if he were asked how he does it, he would say, 'I don't know; I just know that I am'.

¹ Compare verse 89 of *Sri Aruuncala Aksaramanamalai*: 'Arunachala, who, unknown to anyone, enchanted and stole my mind?'

MOUNTAIN PATH

There is only a thin line between *jnana* and *ajnana*. At the right time, a shock may enable one to cross the line and have that small change of outlook.

‘I am’ is neither inside nor outside. Dwell on the fact that ‘I am’ is devoid of limitations. Dwell on the feeling of being. That is self, and it alone exists.

The *karma* theory is riddled with loopholes, ambiguities and dubious assumptions. Firstly it presupposes that the ever non-existent ego exists as a doer, and on top of this false assumption it piles up one false assumption over another: the existence of God, *agamya*, *sañcita*, *prarabdha*, their functions and so on. Do not merely doubt the theory; doubt whether you exist as a doer.

6th December 1977

Sadhu Om: Initiation is only necessary for students in the first or second standard [in the school of *bhakti* described in *The Path of Sri Ramana*], because they need to be taught rituals or *mantras* before they can start such practices. For students in the fourth standard no initiation is necessary, because the fact that they have been drawn to the *sadguru* indicates that they have already passed beyond such preliminary practices.

The *guru* works directly through the matured mind of an aspirant, using the aspirant’s own discrimination to turn his attention towards self. If an aspirant does proper study (*sravana*) and reflection (*manana*) on the *guru*’s words, he will clearly understand that self-attention is the only practice that is necessary, and that all other practices are superfluous.

A true aspirant will understand that ‘I am’ is the *guru*. If the *guru* were merely a body, he would disappear as he appeared, and would therefore be useless. To search for a ‘living’ *guru* is absurd, because the ‘living’ *guru* will sooner or later become a dead *guru*. If an aspirant has understood the teachings of the *guru* correctly, he will no longer look for the *guru* outside, because he will have faith that the *guru* is ever present within himself as ‘I am’.

Bhagavan used to say that the body of the *guru* is a veil covering him in the view of his devotees, because it conceals from them his true form as self. What advantage do devotees who were blessed to be in his physical presence have now? All they now have is a memory, which is no better than a dream. If they think proudly, 'I have seen Bhagavan', that is just another opportunity for their ego to rise.

To have come to Bhagavan is a sign of our ignorance, but he removes that ignorance by enabling us to understand that his presence is not limited to any place here or there, because it alone exists. He does not allow us to cling to anything external, but makes us discriminate and understand that 'I am' alone is eternal, and that the *guru* therefore cannot be anything other than that.

I am now so well soaked in Bhagavan's teachings, so firmly convinced by them, that I cannot take serious interest in any other *guru* or teaching. But this is not a fault, because such a strong conviction is necessary.

When Bhagavan was ill with cancer, I composed ten verses saying, 'If you can form even a single resolution (*sankalpa*), think of this helpless creature, who can do nothing for himself' and so on. When he read those verses he smiled, and that smile showed me my foolishness. It said to me, 'If my thought, look or touch can help you, how much more so can my silence?'

Thinking, looking and touching are actions that require a body, but his silence requires no physical presence. Silence is the most effective weapon, so to ask the *guru* to use any other means is like asking a general to use a crowbar to open a fortress, even though he is already bombarding it with cannons, bombs and all the most powerful weapons. We have Bhagavan's words, which are sufficient to turn our mind selfwards, and his silence is sufficient to do whatever else is required.

We must be content with our *guru*, because even on the spiritual path chastity (fidelity to one's own *guru*) is necessary. If we chase after other *gurus*, that is a sign of a wandering mind and lack of discrimination, which will only obstruct the work being done by his grace.

If we do proper reflection (*manana*) on Bhagavan's teachings, we will find no room for discontent.

9th December 1977

Sadhu Om: We must be careful not to feed the 'I' in any way. That is an important part of spiritual practice (*sadhana*). At every twist and turn, we must be alert against the rising of this 'I'. To sit in the hall [Bhagavan's 'old hall' in Ramanasramam] is good, but it is also necessary to watch all the time that we do not feed 'I'.

We should not even think of becoming a *guru* or guiding others. Avoiding such ideas is good discipleship. We must always be humble and self-effacing. If we want fame or the good opinions of others, then we are no better than worldly people, because we are still thinking that happiness comes from things outside ourself.

How can an aspirant mix with worldly-minded people? Their thought-current is completely opposed to ours. If one feels increasingly out of place in this world, and if one has less and less liking to mix with worldly-minded people, that is a sign of progress.

True progress is not raising *kundalini* to here or there, but is just humility. To be constantly self-effacing in every way is a sure means to *samadhi*.

Bhagavan told us to be quiet, but nowadays so-called '*yogis*' and '*maharishis*' are shouting so much. Bhagavan lived as a perfect example of the state of *jnana*, but where can you see such an example among all the famous 'sages' today? Tinnai Swami² is the nearest I have seen to what Bhagavan taught us: complete non-interference. To keep quiet and not to interfere is the best way of living in the world.

When an old woman cursed Bhagavan for roaming about the hill in the heat of the sun among all the thorny plants, asking him why he did not just keep quiet, he did not reply arrogantly, 'But I am a

² Tinnai Swami was a devotee of Bhagavan, and an article that I wrote about him was published on pp. 75-83 of the Aradhana 2004 issue of *The Mountain Path*.

great *maharishi*’, but merely thought, ‘Yes, that is also good. Why not? To keep quiet is best’.

We should not want to have anything or to be anything. Great saints have prayed, ‘Send me to heaven or hell. I do not even ask for liberation (*moksa*). Only let me always cling to you alone’.

What use is the good opinion of others? At most it will last only for the lifetime of this body.

10th December 1977

Sadhu Om: In verse 273 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai* Bhagavan says that the self-awareness (*sat-bodha* or being-consciousness) that exists and shines in all, as all, is the *guru*.

To be qualified for the fourth standard [in the school of *bhakti*] one must have wholehearted love for *guru*, and one must try to put his teachings into practice, at least insofar as one understands them. Unless one sincerely wants and tries to follow the *guru*’s teachings, one does not have the true *guru-bhakti* required to be in the fourth standard.³

For example, although Devaraja Mudaliar said he had no brain for self-enquiry, Bhagavan was everything to him, so he followed the path of self-surrender as he understood it. One may be bottom of the class, but unquestioning faith in the *guru* can overcome all obstacles in a moment. Even if we do not succeed now in our attempts to abide as self, we should at least sincerely want and try to abide thus.

Progress can never be judged. Bhagavan knows exactly the right medicine required to mature each one of us, so he knows which *vasana* (propensity) to release at each moment. Someone who is getting 5% today may get 100% tomorrow, whereas someone else who is getting 90% today may not seem to improve for years. A person may be always caught up in worldly affairs, but if he is always feeling, ‘This

³ Compare the final clause of the twelfth paragraph of *Nanar?* (Who am I?): ‘... nevertheless, it is necessary to proceed [behave or act] unflinching according to the path that *guru* has shown’.

is all useless nonsense; when can I be quiet?” he may be doing better than someone who is always sitting in meditation.

A lady devotee who lived nearby complained to Bhagavan that she had not been able to come to his hall for fifteen days because she had to attend to relatives who had come to stay. He replied, ‘That is good. It is better that you were at home with your relatives and that your mind was here, than if you had been here and your mind had been thinking of them’.

Ramakrishna told the following story: A *sadhu* led a pure life and wanted to help a pious prostitute, so he counted the number of people who visited her house by placing stones in a pile, and after many years he told her that the pile of stones represented her sins, so in repentance she locked her door and starved to death. He also passed away, but she was taken to heaven because she was repentant, whereas he was taken to hell because his mind was always dwelling on her sins.

He also told a similar story of two friends, one of whom listened to the *Bhagavatam* while the other went to a brothel. The first regretted his decision and envied his friend, who he thought was enjoying himself in the brothel, while the second felt disgusted with himself and would have preferred to be listening to the holy book. The first went to hell and the second went to heaven.

The moral of these stories is that our outward actions are not as important as our inner thoughts and attitude. Likewise, intense longing for self-abidance is essential, even if we fail in our efforts to abide as self.

In order to be free, we only need to experience our being as it really is for just one moment. When an aspirant is sufficiently matured through the school of *bhakti*, the *guru* will give the final tap, and thus he will be promoted to the fifth standard, which is liberation (*moksa*). That may happen at any moment.

The love to abide as self is the real sign of *guru-bhakti*. ▲

(To be continued)

Sri Vittobha Swamigal of Polur

JOHN MAYNARD

There are three types of Siddhas or perfected souls. They are: Unmatta, Pishacha and Bala. The Unmatta is so deeply immersed in God-consciousness that he is indifferent to the world and its affairs. The Pishacha behaves like a ghoul, quite uncontrolled and wild in his behaviour. He will abuse, shout, beat people and go about like a mad man. The third type-Bala-is like a child, always playful, gentle, happy and cheerful. — God-Experience, Vol. 1, by Swami Ramdas, seventh edition-2010, p.121.

Forty kilometres north of Tiruvannamalai, on the state highway to Vellore, lies the town of Polur. Taking a left turn here, towards the forested Javadu Hills, you will find the quiet *mantapam* (pillared hall) and *samadhi* of Saint Vittobha. This low stone building is all that remains now to mark the life of this late-nineteenth and early twentieth century mystic, who bears the name of the Maharashtrian

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God of Pandharpur.¹ The monument was erected after Vittobha's passing by a devotee, in the area of Polur the saint frequented, and where he attained *mahasamadhi*. Known as Chekkady Medu, this location was once the filthiest drainage area of Polur. Having visited this shrine several times I found it to be a charming and peaceful place for solitude. His *samadhi* emits a current that is not easily discerned at first, but that creeps up on those sitting there and envelops one in its deepening silence. After a while there you will feel immobilized and yet content! Such is the aura of this saint and his place.²

There is only one photograph of Vittobha; he appears to be in his early thirties in this. It is said he was unwilling to have the image

¹ Pandharpur – known as the southern Kashi (Benares) of India – one of the most revered pilgrimage sites in Maharashtra, 65 km from Sholapur in western India. The largest and most famous temple here is dedicated to the God Vittobha (Vitthal or Panduranga) and is situated on the banks of the river Bhima. Vittobha is today regarded as an incarnation of both Shiva and Vishnu, or Krishna. The worship of Vishnu in Pandharpur is derived mainly from the *puranas* and has been augmented by the contributions of the great Vaishnava saints of Maharashtra and Karnataka from the 13th to 17th centuries: Jnaneshwar, Namdev, Eknath, Chokhamela, Janabai and others. Saint Namdev is buried under the eastern entrance to the temple.

² Within one hundred metres of Vittobha's *samadhi* in Polur is another shrine, dedicated to Swami Achutadasa, in an old building under a large banyan tree. Achutadasa is known to have visited Sri Ramana Maharshi at Gurumurtham, Tiruvannamalai, in 1897. Achutadasa's *samadhi* date was given by his mutt members as 1900. His *samadhi* is situated in Vellore, T.N.

Kunju Swami writes of this visit: 'When Sri Bhagavan was staying in *Gurumurtham*, one day someone with a shining face came to see him with his disciples. He sang devotional songs for some time. Then he sat near Sri Bhagavan, touched his feet and hands and went into ecstasies while prostrating before him. When his disciples tried to touch Bhagavan's feet, the Swami said to his disciples, "This is a big flame. You can't even come near it. Don't touch it." He sang some wonderful Vedantic songs. As Sri Bhagavan was observing silence at that time, he merely watched and listened. Finally the visitor bowed to Sri Bhagavan and left most unwillingly. After a few days, I came to know that the visitor was Achutadasa, who had composed a number of Vedantic songs in Tamil. He also sent a copy of his book to Sri Bhagavan.' From *Living with the Master*, second edition 2006 – Kunjuswami, p.22.



taken and was forcibly held more erect while the camera was fired. Biographical materials are few. I found two chapters in English, in different books: one chapter in *Seshadri Swamigal of Tiruvannamalai*, the biography started by B.V.Narasimha Swami and later completed by Sri Abhinavasugabrahman Kuzhumani Narayana Sastrigal.³ There are also some English translations of Akhilandamma's Tamil reminiscences, *Ramana Madhuranubhavam*, in the defunct magazine, *Arunachala Ramana*.⁴ Even the dates of his recent life are obscure. Seshadri Swami's *mahasamadhi* took place on 4-1-1929; Vittobha left the Earth some time before this, in 1910, as described near the end of this article. His birth date is not recorded.

I have transcribed heavily from these two out-of-print English documents to compile this short biography of Vittobha, changing the texts slightly in places only for ease of reading. I am very grateful to J.Jayaraman for translating the chapter on Vittobha from Akhilandamma's original Tamil biography.

Vittobha Swamigal was born in Tiruvallikeni (Triplicane) in Chennai to a Hindi-speaking family of tailors of the Langaar caste. He lost

³ *Seshadri Swamigal of Tiruvannamalai*, First English Edition 1998pp. 139-148. The original Tamil biography was commenced by B.V.Narasimha Swami and completed by Sri Abhinava Sugabrahman Kuzhumani Narayana Sastrigal in 1939, whereupon a draft was shown to Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. B.V.Narasimha Swami wrote the Forward from Salem in the same year. Ramana Maharshi was requested to write the Preface by Sastrigal. Instead the Maharshi wrote twelve 'golden words' or short verses added to this biography, after he completed reading the book in two days. In verse eleven Ramana Maharshi refers to the ink stain or 'spread' in the draft he received and commented, saying this appeared in the appropriate place regarding Seshadri's *mahasamadhi*. The Preface was completed by Vidwan Sri K.S. Viswanatha Sastri. In the appendices is an exhaustive list of 314 persons who contributed experiential or biographical information. This book is now out-of-print.

⁴ *Ramana Madhuranubhavam - Reminiscences of Desur Akhilandamma and Balarama Reddiar*. Tamil. Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, S. India. Principal sources on Akhilandamma are the Tamil biography written by Sadhu Om in 1960, and a Telugu life history by Nageswara Rao who interviewed her himself. This memoir is partially translated in the defunct *Arunachala Ramana* magazine, Vol. 1 1981 to July 1982, under *My Reminiscences*.

his mother, Punibhai, at four years of age and was raised by his father, Kondal Rao. His father later remarried and this second wife gave birth to two further sons and two daughters. Kondal Rao was a pious man; he constructed a shrine and sang Hindu devotional songs, accompanied by his extraordinary son.

From his youngest years Vittobha appeared to those without spiritual insight as if he was mad. He would sit for hours in a corner of his father's shrine, apparently praying. The misunderstood youngster used to chant, "Vittobha! Vittobha!", and beat a rhythm, clapping his hands. It was clear to others of deeper vision that he was in a state of beatitude. During school classes he would be frequently punished for his apparent inattention. Despite his teachers' admonitions he continued to beat time and mumble. He attended school only between the age of ten and fourteen.

In their biography B.V.Narasimha Swami and the Sastri describe how Vittobha displayed no hunger or thirst, and would roam the streets unaware of his body or senses. Kondal Rao once asked his second wife to give the boy a bath due to his dishevelled appearance; she began applying oil to his head to bathe him. As she tried to clean him up he simply continued clapping his hands. His step-mother became annoyed and gave him a sharp stinging slap on his cheek and told him to be gone! The youngster secretly left home with oil still smeared over his head and body. His father returned home later and searched for his son, calling out his pet name, "Thoti, Thoti," but the boy was not found. His parents and other neighbours started a wider search throughout the area. After three days they gave up. Vittobha had disappeared. By then he had wandered as far as Vellore, and then further to a village named Tiruchur.

Here some young ruffians found him and were determined to make him talk. He refused. In their violent frenzy they took pliers and forced his mouth open, injuring him. He shouted, "Hare Vittobha!, Hare Vittobha!" They ran off, leaving him lying in the dust with blood streaming from his cheek. Following this incident there was a cholera outbreak in Tiruchur, and twenty-one people died. Among the dead were all those who had tortured him.

From Tiruchur he wandered on to Polur and walked the streets as a mauni (silent one), unaware of good and bad. Perceiving Vittobha's quiet but elevated state, the wife of a high-ranking bureaucrat fed him daily. Her husband, the Superintendent of Polur was unaware of her devotion. Seeing Vittobha approach their house he raised a stick, threatening to beat him. The officer then returned to his office but discovered he no longer had the use of his right hand, and that this limb gave him great pain. His wife was meanwhile wondering why Vittobha had not turned up for his daily meal. She eventually heard of her husband's sad condition and learned of his act. She took him to see Vittobha and pleaded with the saint to pardon her husband. Vittobha said simply, "*Ja!*" ("Go!"). The man was instantly relieved from his anguish. He and his wife became staunch devotees and Vittobha's reputation spread in Polur and the surrounding area.

Through torrential rain, harsh wind or blazing sun Vittobha would not leave his chosen seat, however ardently his devotees tried to alleviate his conditions.⁵ Being without body-consciousness he would never take food of his own accord but was fed by passers-by. These morsels would remain in his mouth without being swallowed and various local animals: crows, goats and chickens, would eat directly from these offerings. When thirsty he gulped the gutter water with his hands. In these ways he naturally demonstrated his utter non-reliance upon material sustenance, the senses, and norms of behaviour.

Akhilandamma, the devotee who often brought food to Sri Ramana Maharshi from Desur, Tamil Nadu, sixty kilometres north of Tiruvannamalai, would sometimes visit Vittobha Swamigal on her way. She said about these visits:

Three years before his passing away I had the great fortune of having his (Vittobha's) *darshan* and receiving Grace. When I first went there he was sitting in the Chekkady Medu area. I bowed before his *sannidhi* (spiritual presence) and got up.

⁵ The Sufi saint Hazrat Babajan demonstrated this same tenacity to her chosen humble 'seat' in Poona. The Sufi verse, *Cycles change, the worlds rotate, / But Qutubs ne'er their seat vacate*, refers to this attribute and must possess a more profound meaning than first appearances suggest.



John Maynard

Samadhi of Vittobha Swamigal at Polur

I had a small packet of *vibhuti* (sacred ash) wrapped in my waistband. Of his own accord he reached out and took the packet. He touched his cheek very reverentially with this and then threw it away. With great happiness I took the fallen packet as his *prasad* (blessed food offering).

At 12.00 noon I brought some cooked food for his consumption, in very much the same way as I was doing for Sri Ramana, and I took it there. In one vessel was *rasam* (pepper soup). Those assembled near him looked at me in surprise and said, "What are you doing? Do you think he is going to eat this?" And then to show that this is Bhagavan's grace something wonderful happened there. This person, who was not even swallowing when food was put into his mouth, and who was sitting like a statue most of the time, that great person fully ate what I had given him. Not only that, he asked for the *rasam* vessel by (my) side and drank it all! After that I was sad, thinking, "Should I have not have brought more food?" I mouthed this to him and he requested more. I ran to fetch some snacks from my baggage but by the time I returned there his mood had changed. He looked very contented and took the vessel from my hand, looked into it and then said, "Ja!" and refused to take anything more.

On another occasion I travelled from Desur to Polur with two girls for the *darshan* of Vittobha Swami. We individually presented ripe mangoes; the two girls feeding him separately by hand. All the while he was spitting the fruit out to one side. The two girls thought that they will not be able to feed him at all. I also presented my mango, and, cutting it into small pieces, fed him and he ate it all. This plunged my two companions into great grief and they exclaimed, "What is this? Does a *jnani* (Self-realized sage) have such manifest partiality?" But what solace could I give them? It is the supreme grace manifesting through the bodies of such great ones, who have no concept of 'me' or 'mine'!" My companions were not in a position to understand.

At a later occasion when I was going to give *biksha* (donated food) to Sri Bhagavan I called these two friends to accompany me but they quickly remembered what had happened in Vittobha's presence. They decided to stay home, believing that the same thing would happen in the presence of Bhagavan also.

People who understood this state and who were alive to his *varishta* (high spiritual) state, were worshipping him as if he was the bodily manifestation of Shiva Himself.

On every *poornima* (full-moon day) they would perform *abhisheka* (ritualistic bathing or anointing) on Swami, with milk, ghee, curd etc., clothe him with new cloth and all the sixteen phases of iconic worship were conducted. Still, to get him to stand up and walk to a suitable place for this ritual was the work of Bhagiratha.⁶ Only one person in Polur, a devotee of Vitthoba, seemed to have the privilege of being able to persuade him to move when *abhisheka* was to be performed.

On one such day while I was standing before him, this particular devotee was finding it extremely difficult to make Swami comply. I suddenly hit upon a ruse. Leaving his presence I obtained two packets of *omap-podi* (hard noodles made from Bengal gram). I opened a packet in front of him from a distance and called out, "Please Swami, here, here, come and eat this!" At once Swami got up and approached me like a child. I walked backwards until I reached the place intended for the *abhisheka*. The Swami seated himself there.

Vittobha always wore a long single-piece tunic. The privileged devotee and I removed this cloth, prepared the hot water and all of the *abhisheka* items. We clothed him in a new fresh shirt, garlanded him, and, with the *deeparadhana* and the camphor lit, the ritual was performed.

⁶ 'Bhagiratha' – Ramayana King. The Ramayana myth relating how the Ganges was brought to the Earth by a great king doing penance in the Himalayas, named Bhagiratha. He was one of the forefathers of Lord Rama. The English equivalent is 'a Herculean task'.

The rite was no sooner over than the Swami leapt up, ripped off the garland, tore it into a hundred pieces and, running to his usual place, sat back down. The devotees gathered the scattered flowers as priceless *prasadam*.

Thus it was that Grace occasioned the joy of doing this kind of *abhisheka* to him for ten *poornimas*.

As well as naturally observing silence Vittobha possessed siddhis, though he did not exhibit these to the same extent as Seshadri Swami and Shirdi Sai Baba. Once there were such heavy rains in Polur that the gutters near him overflowed and he was swept away. The torrent later ceased but the Swami was not to be found. After six hours of searching the local people found him completely buried in deep mud, in a trench. Fearing his death after lying entombed for so long they cleared the silt around his head and body and washed him off. He opened his eyes and reassured them that he was alive.

B.V.Narasimha Swami and Narayana Sastrigal continue:

On another occasion, due to a heavy storm, a huge tree near where Vittobha was sitting fell down on him, it being totally uprooted. People came, being alarmed that he would have been killed. When they cut off the branches and debris they found him alive. There was not even a scratch on his body. He resembled Lord Krishna who was once thus entrapped by falling trees. People were very happy at his survival.

The two authors report the story of a circus leader, a Maharashtrian, who came to Polur. This man was unflinching in his demands that Vittobha should somehow perform in his show. Vittobha always refused. The determined circus leader again visited the Swami, prostrated before him, and tried to carry him away by force. To his chagrin he discovered he was unable to even lift Vittobha and succumbed to a choking sensation in his chest. Despite this mild warning he made a further attempt! He returned, bringing three tough minions from his team. These strong men repeatedly failed to lift this physically diminutive saint. Finally they submitted and apologized; they renamed him 'Iron Mountain Swami', and made an offering of fruits and milk.

One night three devotees slept near him: Thellakula Venkatram Chettiar, Eeyakkulathur Swamigal and Molava Nayagar. In the early hours of the morning one devotee woke up and found him missing. He awoke his companions. All three searched the area and found Vittobha's dismembered parts: hands, legs, head and trunk lying beside a thorn bush. Becoming afraid they called for help. About fifty locals turned up to search for the murderer but they soon found Vittobha sitting quietly on his normal seat, his face resembling the full moon.⁷

The authors continue:

One Subbaraya Mudaliar of Madras suffered from chronic stomach ache. In spite of spending a lot of money he was not cured. He had neither heard of nor seen Vittobha. One day Vittobha appeared in his dream and asked him to come to Polur. He found the real Vittobha exactly as he appeared in his dream. Subbaraya was extremely happy. Vittobha smiled at him but continued to remain in silence till 5.00 pm. Mudaliar stayed on at Vittobha's feet the whole day suffering from his chronic ache. Velu Mudaliar, who was by his side, asked Swamiji, "Is this justified that he should suffer like this?" Vittobha, who was reclining on his seat, on hearing the above, put his left foot on the patient's abdomen. After a few moments he removed his leg. That very moment Subbaraya Mudaliar was relieved of his pain. He became happy and continued to stay on there for ten days rendering service to Vittobha. Before leaving Polur he arranged with two ladies, Parvathi Ammal and Chinnapitta Ammal, that they would serve him three meals daily. This arrangement continued till Vittobha attained *samadhi*.

⁷ See also *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi* by Antonio Rigopoulos, page 47, 1st edition 1993. The ability to separate the body into different pieces and reassemble them is recognized as one of the siddhis of an advanced yogi. The Greek mythologies of Osiris and Dionysus also feature stories of the god's dismemberment and reconstitution. Sri Kunjuswami, in the chapter titled *Pranava Body*, describes how Sri Ramana Maharshi would dissolve his physical body to the *pranic* or elemental level. *Living with the Master*, 4th Ed. 2010 p. 25.

MOUNTAIN PATH

A teenage girl once came to this Saint suffering from a disease that had long marked her skin with black patches. She began to feed her Swami morning and evening, praying for her health. Vittobha however would not consume her offerings, but the same proceedings went on for forty-eight days. On the forty-ninth day he finally chewed the offered food, and then spat it out into his hands and twice threw it at her. She was completely cured after ten days.

A scholar from Polur was an ardent devotee. He would not take any decisions without consulting Vittobha. Yielding to his disciple's earnest devotion, Vittobha answered his questions using sign language. The scholar's wife had gone to her village to give birth. As there were neither doctors nor midwives near this rural district, the devotee wanted to assist his wife and sought the Swami's permission to go to her village. Vittobha did not respond and only rocked his body from side to side. The scholar felt nervous about this strange behaviour and repeated his request to leave. Finally the scholar raised his hands in obeisance and cried,

"My Saviour! I have not done any wrong. Why this revulsion at me? Please shower your grace on me!"

Vittobha was by now shedding profuse tears but wiping these away with his hand. He remained quiet and would not answer the pundit, swaying slowly from side to side. The scholar became frightened and left for his wife's village without specific permission. Reaching his wife's village home he sadly discovered that his spouse had already passed away. At the very moment when Vittobha was in tears the previous evening, she had died of complications in delivery. After some time he sought Vittobha's approval for remarriage. The Swami pointed to the north-east. Taking this cryptic advice he searched the villages in that direction, found a woman and remarried happily.

The best known chapter of Vittobha's life concerns his *mahasamadhi* and Sri Seshadri Swami's vision early that same morning. One day in 1910, at 6.00 am., Seshadri Swami was running in the streets, pointing to the sky and shouting wildly, "Ah, there he is going. There, Vittobha is going. He is going in royal style. Ah! Ah!" On that day, at the same moment, Saint Vittobha attained *mahasamadhi*, but this



was only learned later: at 11.00 am., devotees received a telegram in Tiruvannamalai saying that Vittobha had indeed passed away at 6.00 am.

The precursor to this visionary event is well described by the two authors of *Seshadri Swamigal of Tiruvannamalai*.⁸

Thus Vittobha continued at Polur for 25 years, worshipped as God by his devotees. On every full moon day and other important days they performed *abhisheka* and *aradhana* to him. Towards the end, he developed high fever with swelling of his hands and feet. He never permitted any medical treatment. For twenty days the fever used to rise and subside. His devotees wanted to know from Swamiji himself about when he would be cured and persuaded his confidant, Velu Mudaliar, to ask him about it. Velu Mudaliar addressed him in Hindi as below:⁹

“Swamiji! Your body is ailing badly. We do not know if and when it will get cured. This is causing us anxiety day and night. We do not know whether we will have the good fortune to serve you for some more time. You alone should tell us.” To this appeal Vittobha’s reply was, “I would continue in this life for only three more days. On the third day I would depart at the next day-break.” This reply evoked uncontrollable tears of sorrow from all. The specified third night arrived. They brought him to a nearby dilapidated building. With a lamp on, his devotees slept near him. There was some noise at 3.00 a.m. Some people woke up and found Vittobha was awake, seated and moving backward towards the wall. There with his eyes half-closed, he sat in *padmasan* and got absorbed in meditation. About hundred persons gathered there. Just as

⁸ Op. cit. pp.146-147.

⁹ “Swamiji! Aap ka swasth tho is tharah bigad gaya hai, malum nahi ki kab yeh sudharega. Hum raat din isi chinta mei doobe rehte hai. Hame malum nahi hotha hai ki kitne dinon tak aapki seva karneka Swabhagya hume praapth hoga. Aap hi hume yeh batayen.” Swamiji said, “Aur teen hi din mere is sansar mei rehte hai.. Teesri raat anthim ghadi mei, mei rawaana hojaoonga”.

per his prediction, *Brahma Muhoorath* (the hours of 4 am. to 5.30 am.) started and it was 5 am. Suddenly there was an illumination. Sri Vittobha started his departure. It was Tamil year *Satharana*, *Aippasi* month, 8th day, Wednesday and the star was *Thiruvathirai* when he attained *samadhi* and reached *Brahmalok*.¹⁰ That very day our Swamiji in Tiruvannamalai was seeing him between 5 am. and 8 am. in his journey to *Brahmalok* and announcing it to the public there. The usual *abhisheka*, *aradhana puja* was done by his devotees and he was taken in procession at Polur. N. Appavoo Chettiar, son of Sri Narasimha Chettiar, who was an important disciple of Vittobha, donated his land for constructing a temple at the place of his *samadhi* and continued services there at the time of writing this.

Little else is known of Vittobha's short life on Earth. He is described as an eccentric saint in some brief website descriptions, but this term is applicable if Western norms are applied; the word eccentric does not apply at all to a saint, one who cannot be away from his centre. Vittobha wore a naturally spiritual aura, possessed a child-like innocence, harmed none around him and lived in deep harmony with his surroundings; these attributes persisted despite living under a physical hardship most could not endure. Since he spoke very little but had hundreds of devotees, wrote down no teachings but is honoured to this day, his silence and presence must have been sublime and powerful. The siddhis he manifested were profound and not used lightly. Swami Ramdas' general description of a *bala siddha* is highly descriptive of Vittobha's life and demeanour. ▲

¹⁰ The *Mahasamadhi* date of Sri Vittobha by this given Tamil reckoning would be Wednesday 23rd of November 1910 in the Julian calendar. The first line in this article states the Swami was living in Polur for twenty-five years. This results in his arrival there being around 1885 as a young man.



Concert in the Ashram Old Dining Hall

KEYWORD

Sadasatvilaksana

“Maya and reality are one and the same.”¹

JOHN GRIMES

How often have you asked yourself, what is real? Bhagavan Sri Ramana said, “Even now, while you are awake, is it the world that says ‘I am real’, or is it you? . . . You want somehow or other to maintain that the world is real. What is the standard of reality? That alone is real which exists by itself, which reveals itself by itself and which is eternal and unchanging.”² Sri Ramana often quoted the well-known Advaita verse: ‘The Absolute is Real; the world is non-real; the individual human being and the Absolute are not different.’

‘That (Absolute) alone is Real’. Sri Ramana defines the Real as that which never changes. The world of duality, by contrast, is defined as non-real, as illusory, as an appearance. Everything in the universe changes, and thus it can’t be Real. Sri Ramana said, “What is the

¹ Cohen, S.S., *Guru Ramana*, 4th January 1937, 2006. p.67.

² *Maharshi’s Gospel*, Book Two, Part III, 2009. p.51.

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.

nature of the world? It is perpetual change, a continuous, interminable flux. A dependent, unself-conscious, ever-changing world cannot be real.”³ However, the world is not totally unreal, i.e. like a square-circle or a married-bachelor, because it *does* appear. Thus it has a strange status known as ‘that which is other than the real or unreal’ (*sad-asat-vilaksana*), and it is in that sense that it is called illusory. Finally, the Self is not other than the Absolute. This does not mean that the finite individual human being as comprised of name and form is the Absolute, but that the true nature of an individual is not other than the Absolute.

According to Sri Ramana, all diversity, all duality is an illusion, a mistaking of something for something it is not. Nothing in the world is eternal and thus the world cannot be Real. Neither is it unreal for the world clearly appears to human beings as no non-entity can. The totally non-existent will never appear and will never have practical efficiency. This world is thus described as other than the Real and the unreal. The snake that appears where there was only a rope is neither existent nor non-existent. It is something psychologically given, but which cannot ever be logically established. In other words, the things of the world, though not ultimately Real, are yet mysterious appearances. There never was a snake in the rope, nor ever will be, and yet a snake appears! How strange! The snake points to the existence of the rope and this dependence is one-sided, for while the disappearance of the rope necessarily means the disappearance of the snake, the reverse does not hold good.

Sri Ramana spoke of Reality as Existence (*Sat*). One should be aware that the term Existence in this context does not mean any particular existent, anything with name and form. It is not a predicate of an object. Sri Ramana regarded Existence as the essential nature of the Reality. Pure Being or ‘*Sat*’ is not one being among beings. Existence, as it is usually used in both empirical and philosophical discourse, is a determinative description, e.g., the man exists or the house exists. Sri Ramana was quick to point out that Reality is neither ‘existent’ nor ‘non-existent’ in the ordinary sense of those terms. He

³ Ibid.

said: "Reality must always be real. It is not with forms and names. Reality is that which is. It is as it is. It transcends speech and is beyond the expressions 'existence, non-existence', and so on."⁴

Sri Ramana would quote an analogy from the *Chandogya Upanisad* to explain the relation between Reality as Existence and the various appearances that are existents, appearances with names and forms. Gold appears in a variety of forms, as rings, necklaces, bracelets, and so on. In the various objects, what is real is gold and the names and forms of each object are superimposed upon the gold. Gold persists while names and forms come and go. When the superimposition of names and forms is removed, all that remains is gold and gold alone. Sri Ramana said: "The many ornaments are illusory, they come and go. Say, do they exist apart from the gold which is real?"⁵ The *Upanishad* says: "Just as . . . by one nugget of gold, all that is made of gold becomes known."⁶ In a similar way, the entire world with all its names and forms, all the existent particulars, are superimposed upon the Reality. Sri Ramana regarded the Absolute as that which is foundational to all experience. He replied when asked the question, "what is reality?": "That which underlies all names and forms is the Reality. It underlies limitations being itself limitless. It is not bound. It underlies unrealities, itself being real."⁷

The mind of a deluded person habitually flows towards the world and not towards the Self. Further, even if one is occasionally able to turn one's mind away from the world and concentrate it on the Self, it almost immediately loses its concentration and wanders back to the world. Why does this happen? Sri Ramana said it is because one believes that the world is real. "But for your belief that the world is real, it would be quite easy for you to obtain the revelation of the Self."⁸ The greatest wonder, Sri Ramana declared, is that, being always the Self, one is striving to become the Self.

⁴ Venkataramiah, M., (ed), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 19th January, 1936, §140.

⁵ *Forty Verses on Existence*, verse 13.

⁶ *Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.1.5.

⁷ *Talks*, 19th January, 1936, §140.

⁸ *Maharshi's Gospel*, Book Two, Chap. III, 'The Jnani and the World', 2009. pp.49-52.

Why is it that one's belief that the world of multiplicity is real prevent one from realizing the Self that they are? Is it not the case that whatever one believes to be real possesses a certain capacity? It is an object separate from and other than the perceiver. It can come and it can go. The believed-to-be-real has an unquestionable right of entry to the mind. So long as the mind believes something is real, no thought will deny it. As long as the snake is believed to be real, the rope is denied. Further, once the mind regards the world as real, it becomes impossible to realize the Self until that delusion is destroyed. The very thing one takes as real is the very thing that obscures the Self.

Further, the way the world is a superimposed appearance of *Reality* differs from the way an individual is a superimposed appearance of *Reality*. That is, the diversity displayed by the various objects of the universe differs from the diversity displayed by individuals and further, the way that each diversity is negated differs. Take the following two examples. A person, walking in a forest at dusk, happens to see a snake but upon closer scrutiny realizes it is really a rope. This later correcting knowledge affirms the existence of a rope while negating the prior knowledge of a snake. Now, take a person looking at a white conch shell through a sheet of yellow glass. This person is not aware of the yellow glass and thus takes the white conch shell to be yellow. Subsequently this person learns that the yellowness belongs to the glass and not the shell.

Here, as in the previous case, the later knowledge affirms the existence of some reality; unlike it however, it does not deny the object (the shell) of which it appeared. What it denies is only an aspect of it, that is, its yellowness. The shell is still seen. The illusion in the first example consisted of mistaking a given object (rope) for another (snake) that is not given. The illusion in the second example consists merely in attributing to an object (shell) that is perceived, a feature that does not really belong to it. In this second example, but for the superimposition of a sheet of glass to which the yellow actually belongs, there would be no illusion at all.

With the help of these two examples we are now in a position to see that the illusory nature of the world is not exactly like the illusory

nature of the individual, notwithstanding the fact that both are illusory. While one and the same *Brahman* appears as both the world and as the individual, it is what the individual adds to the illusion that distinguishes them. In an individual, it is the ego, the dualistic mind that needs to be negated. The shell is seen as shell though not as it is, i.e. a white shell. It is but the yellowness in the glass that is preventing one from seeing it as it is.

An individual is already *Brahman* and this is partially known and revealed by the presence of 'I' in each individual. No one says, 'I do not exist.' But, the 'I'-notion is not fully understood. Under the sway of ignorance, an individual takes the 'I' to be a 'me', my body, my mind, etc. Regarding the world, the illusion is total. The snake is seen all by itself and the rope is not seen while in regards to individuals, the shell is seen, though incorrectly, as something is being superimposed upon it to distort its reality from being seen as it truly is. *Brahman* is the sole Reality and the objective universe and the individual subject are said to be superimposed upon It.

However, while the world is an illusory manifestation of the Absolute, the individual is the Absolute Itself appearing under the limitations that form part of that illusory universe.

The entire phenomenal world is said to be neither real nor unreal. A two-valued logic is not applicable here. To say that the world is not real is not to say, by logical implication, that the world is thus real or *vice versa*. The Advaitin's conception of unreality is both a logical impossibility and an empirical impossibility, i.e. a son of a barren woman. But the world of duality is neither logically impossible nor empirically impossible - though it may be conceptually indeterminable. ▲



Temple Tank, Vaitheeswaran Koil near Chidambaram

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verse Thirty Four

S. RAM MOHAN

Verse 34: It is due to the mischief of *Maya* (nescience) that there are these 'theoreticians' engage in futile disputes, such as 'There is a Reality', 'There is none', 'Reality is a form', 'It is formless', 'It is one', 'It is two', 'It is neither'; instead of realizing and abiding in the Reality, which is ever natural to all, in the Heart (Self) where it resides. Give up [these fruitless discussions and abide in the Self.]

Commentary

The Sanskrit word for creed is *matam*. It literally means opinion. In the *Gita*, Sri Krishna uses the word "Me *matam*", that is, 'My opinion'. Opinions may differ. Hence it does not propel individuals to quarrel in the name of the opinions of their respective creeds.

S. Ram Mohan is on the editorial board of this magazine. He is also the editor of the Tamil magazine *Ramanodhayam*, dedicated to Bhagavan.

Everybody is free to follow his own opinion. This is in contrast to the idea of holding to one's own religious ideology as the only and ultimate truth. The follower is bound or tied to his own religious tenet. He is made to view the other tenets as erroneous and is prompted to quarrel in the name of his religion. Other tenets give great scope for individual opinions. One can be a believer in monism, monotheism, polytheism, even agnosticism or atheism. Saint Nammalvar has sung:

“If you say He exists, then He is /Present in all forms/If you deny the existence, then He/Assumes all formless-states.” Again, “Each one, according to his (or her) mental makeup,/Reach the God whom he has/Chosen to worship/No God is inferior to the other/Each follower reaches his/or her own/chosen God,/According to their destiny”¹

The sage wonders why, with such freedom in the oriental faiths to express their spiritual opinion, should their adherents quarrel over the relative merits of different creeds?

All the religious creeds are only thoughts. But the Self that is in the Advaita-state (non-dual) is declared in the Upanishads as ‘*amatam*’, that is, not of thought. It cannot be conceived of by the mind as ‘This’ or ‘That’. The *Kena Upanishad* says, “He who knows that that Being is beyond thought, know Him. To those whom He is something to be ‘thought of’, do not know Him.”

Further, Advaita is not a creed or belief but a state of Being, as conveyed by the great teachers, from Lord Dakshinamurthy to Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. Bhagavan replied to a questioner that Advaita is a state of experience, not a belief. It is dissolving oneself in Cosmic Consciousness. In that state, there is no mind to think, no object to be thought of.

Hence, there is no scope for the question “What is the religion or creed of a *jnani*?” Creeds pertain to the realm of mind. What is thought of by the mind is something ephemeral, which becomes absent after some time. *Jnana* is about the present, ‘the Now’, which never changes. Mere technical knowledge about Advaita as a system

¹ *Tiruvaimozhi* : Decad One.

is only *paroksha jnana*, knowledge of the ephemeral, mediate or non-perceptual.²

It can thus be seen that blindly following the creed is only for the ignorant and during ignorance. *Jnanis* transcend creeds and their limitations. But an *ajnani* (the ignorant one) has not travelled in the path of *atma-vichara* with the mind turned towards the Heart, the Self, and hence, not realized the Self. Due to this ignorance, he engages in disputes on the nature of Brahman, or God, taking hold of one or the other of the prevalent diverse creeds, according to the bent of his mind. Dispute is futile and does not help one's spiritual advancement. Bhagavan identifies the power of *Maya* or primordial ignorance as the cause that prompts them to quarrel.

Bhagavan gives a shortlist of the quarrelling creeds. All theistic systems believe in the existence of God or Self. Atheism denies this. *Saguna upasana* affirms the worship of God with form. *Nirguna upasana* affirms God without form. Advaita posits the existence of Only One; nothing else exists. Dvaita denies this and says that God and His creatures are different; they exist in duality. Vishishtadvaita talks of qualified non-duality where *jivas* (living beings) are part of God who is the Integrated Whole. Similarly the methods of worship or religions practices are also myriad. All these theories are of no avail when one experiences Divinity within oneself through the mind-turned inwards in enquiry. Sri Ramakrishna laughs at theoreticians as akin to those who try to squeeze rain from the almanac since the almanac gives prediction about the time of rain! He directs the *sadhaka* to be like a salt-doll which dissolves itself in the ocean, thus totally losing its identity in Advaitic experience.

There is a beautiful verse in *Ozhuvil Odukkam*, "What caste and religion will you/Ascribe to the *jnani*, who totally eschews/The deadly vices of desire, hatred, greed/Who consumes the food got through begging/Collected in the bowl of cupped hands,/With Mother Earth as the cosy bed,/Covering the body with mere limbs,/With no concern

² Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, 31st January 1935, §21.

or impact ever/Of caste, creed, quality or name/Or those who confine conduct/to the castes' domain/Care they not for religion/Or its reign" ³

One's natural state is that when one is established in the Self, the Absolute Consciousness. One should pursue Self-enquiry to reach that state. Without fully devoting oneself to the *vichara*, if one engages in futile analysis, is it not an utter waste of time? How can we discuss the ultimate Reality, which is beyond thought, from the level of mind? Only when we ascend to the level of pure Consciousness, are we qualified to discuss the Truth in its various facets. But when one attains to that level, he finds that there is nothing but the Self and there is nothing to discuss! All discussion can only be at the relative level. At the Absolute level, it is all pure Consciousness.

Bhagavan's criticism here of vain philosophical disputes reminds us of Buddha's admonition in the *Majjima Nikaya*. When the brahmins wanted to find out from him about life after death in paradise, the Buddha tells them, "When one is hit by an arrow, his immediate concern should be to remove the arrow and save himself; instead of that, if he starts discussing what is the material with which it is made of, what is the angle of strike, what is the force behind the hit, he is bound to perish. You are now afflicted by *samsara*. Remove the root-cause of it through enquiry instead of indulging in futile discussions about after-life!"

Further, attachment to a creed is itself a hindrance to liberation because it is a *vasana*, unless propelled by *mumukshutva*, an overwhelming urge for realization. There are three groups of *vasanas*, namely those of worldliness, those of the body and those of knowledge or philosophy or religion. All those are rooted in ego. Of all of them, the attachment to one's own religious knowledge is the deadliest. It has to be got rid of.

The absolute Truth, uninterrupted by Maya, will shine only in the state of Experience that comes by the extinction of the ego and the mind, not when these are alive and rampant. It follows from this that it is futile to claim "I have known the Truth", before the ego is extinguished.

³ *Ozhivil Odukkam*, Chapter 8, v. 25 of, *Avattai tanmai* - The Nature of the [pure] *avastha*.

Deep Sleep and Awareness

SWAMI SIDDHESWARANANDA

Swami Siddheswarananda was a monk of the Ramakrishna Order who had a close association with Bhagavan. In the late 1930s he was appointed the resident swami at the Ramakrishna Math at Gretz in France. The following is a translation of a French letter that had been preserved by Rakhal, a disciple of Swami Siddheswarananda. Before he passed away in 2009 at the age of 88, Rakhal sent it to me and said it could be shared with Sri Ramana Ashram.

— Patrick Sicard

Gretz, 1st November 1956.

Dear Mr. Gray,¹

I shall have many things to tell you with regard to deep sleep.

Your letter has revived in my memory the teachings that I received from my venerable Professor V. Subrahmanya Iyer. I shall meet your objections from the viewpoint of pure tradition one of these days. But the whole thing will become very clear when we talk about it together. The real intellectual intuition, accompanied by light in metaphysical intuition, was awakened during my conversations

¹ Presumably this is Lord Terence Gray, better known to readers as Wei Wu Wei. (Ed.)

with my Professor. We shall talk about all that when I come to the South of France.

The manner in which you have posed this question with regard to sleep is that of theological (or dialectical) Vedanta.

However, what I have learned from my Professor and also from my close contacts with Maharshi is the approach of metaphysical Vedanta. By way of summing up all that, I shall, in this letter, confine myself to what the Maharshi has told me in that regard.

During his adolescence, the Maharshi had bouts of somnambulism.

During those bouts, his friends would carry him to a meadow nearby and do all funny things at his expense.

The next day Maharshi did not have the slightest memory of what had happened!

This experience is an expression of deep sleep.

The deep sleep, or intuition in non-duality, is beyond time, hence it is called intuition.

I imagine just when an intellectual intuition or even an instinctive intuition (at the sensory level) bursts out, it occurs like a flash of lightning which it is impossible to pinpoint: We cannot look at our watch and say I had this intuition at such and such instant!

Whether it be on the instinctive plane or on the intellectual or metaphysical.

How then may the 'I' come by this intuition? As intuition is non-relational, that is, non-dual, a relation cannot be established with 'I' although, in our everyday language, we say '*my intuition*'.

Here is the contradiction! This is a pure non-analogy!

To make use of an electroencephalogram in order to know if a movement occurs in the brain while I sleep, to film, to record the sound or photograph in order to identify the state of somnambulism to prove that non-dual intuition is false, is nonsense.

Non-dual intuition is a new vision which can never be brought down to the formal plane, it being totally impersonal!

Now listen to what the Maharshi says quoting the scriptures (Yoga Vasishta) in support of what he says:

“Realisation consists in jagrat-sushupti”

Wakeful and in deep sleep at the same time which characterizes the stereoscopic function of realization. The real wakeful state is non-dual. It is ‘I-attention’ (or wakefulness) which divides the wakeful state in arbitrary, illusory segments.

Let us take the illustration of a lighthouse.

The light of the revolving lamp is *Nature* under a momentarily cut angle. The Light is equivalent to the attention giving rise to the I whether this light moves or not, *Nature as TOTALITY remains as it is!*

The lighthouse and its revolving light form an integral part of *nature*. If we now take the moving light, it produces intermittent periods of brightness and darkness. The bright sequences can be compared to wakefulness and dream and the dark ones to deep sleep.

But during the entire rotation of the lamp —

Nature remains in her own reality: THE BUDDHA NATURE.

And, while, in the *metaphysical* Vedanta (not in the *theological* Vedanta), we employ the expression ‘*intuition of the non-dual*’, our illusory boudism of verification should be satisfied with our intellectual intuition.

Which represents full flowering of the mind busy with non-contradiction as an essential criterion of Reality.

(At first I had thought that my three articles, being a commentary on verses 4 and 5 of chapter Nine of *Bhagavad Gita*, would be sufficient, but it seems to me that I should write one more dealing with non-contradiction as a criterion of truth according to Vedanta.)

With *intellectual intuition* which is comparable to the finger pointing to the moon, that is:

- *There is no succession among the different orders of Reality.*
- *Intellectual intuition* furnishes us evidence for it while the manifested and the unmanifested, (that is, when wakefulness and dream on the one hand and deep sleep on the other), *are not two separate realities.*

• There is *no state opposed to another state.*

• This reality is the TIME OF VEDANTA.

MOUNTAIN PATH

It is the WAKEFULNESS OF VEDANTA! of which an indication is given to us in verse 32 of chapter 12; whereas the time you refer to is that of Kant which he indicates as being a category of understanding in relation to the ego, or the wakefulness which I have compared to the revolving light of the lighthouse.

This time of Vedanta is TURIYA.

In DREAM what occurs is living in the unreal.

Not perceive anything at all is the condition in SLEEP.

But in WAKEFULNESS the REAL is perceived with awareness.

The analogies to the eyes, the nose, etc . in Vedanta are amusing.

These terms only show the exasperation of the mind in its struggle to express the ineffable. ▲

Ramana's Women

Ana Callan

The old lady slowly
lighting lamps in the early morning,
her back curved like a half moon,
each flame a fresh prayer for her guru.
His mother laying down her needs
and melting into the vision of His holy feet.
Keerai Patti boiling greens with love
and tender care, refusing to taste a morsel
till she had fed her Master.
And o o o dear Lakshmi,
racing from the cowshed,
nudging English ladies aside
in her haste towards her darling
Ramana's ready lap, to feel His hand
patting her devoted, lowered head.

The poems by Ana Callan come from her collection, *The Boy Who Would Be Sage*. She may be contacted at ana@anacallan.com

Non-dualism and Daily Life

Part One

PHILIP RENARD

As the term ‘non-dualism’ indicates, it describes a way of thinking and being that is not dualistic. By dualistic we mean that our day to day functioning which needs to use opposites – such as heavy and light, dark and light, male and female, open and closed – is interpreted as being based on a *real* opposition, that is also true beyond mere functioning. Of course, it is useful for our functioning in the world to be able to differentiate between certain things, but this proves nothing about the ultimate reality of ourselves and the world as it appears to us. On further enquiry into the true nature of all that happens, we notice that we can only speak about something happening because we *experience* it. This experiencing or knowing is possible due to consciousness. When experiencing stops, everything stops. Whether

Philip Renard was born in Amsterdam. In 1999 he compiled and published the *Ramana Upanishad*, the collected writings of Bhagavan in Dutch translation. He founded in 2000 the Advaya Foundation (www.advaya.nl), to facilitate non-duality in western translation. He published in *Mountain Path* a series of four articles, titled “‘I’ is a Door’.

we experience dark or light, a pleasant experience or a nasty one, it is experienced, it is perceived. By allowing all attention to go to experiencing-*in-itself*, you can notice that there is no multiplicity or separation. The impressions of multiplicity or separation occur *within* something that is 'not two'. This is non-duality. 'Non-dualism' is the term for the approaches that emphasize non-duality.

If this were to remain an abstract philosophy, just one of the many possible interpretations of life, then as far as I am concerned, it would not be necessary to make it the focus of attention. It deserves attention because due to its radical nature it is the only thing that truly exposes the *root* of all division and conflict, and because recognizing this root shows the way to bring an end to division and conflict. What I mean by non-dualism is therefore not a philosophy but actually a way of liberation. Liberation from dissatisfaction with existence, with the present moment, with the present thought.

The self-tormenting voice

Man's basic-problem, as I see it, is splitting oneself in two, into 'someone' who behaves and has thoughts, and 'someone' who provides critical commentary on this behaviour and these thoughts. No matter how you try to be one with yourself, that critical voice continues to make itself heard. You appear to identify with both aspects, and the combination of these two can be called the 'ego', or simply the 'I'. The critical voice constantly gives commands, which are usually of a considerable ill-natured sort. It seems impossible to avoid.

I believe that the whole phenomenon of spiritual seeking is an attempt to escape the wrath of these commands. People start the search because they are tormented. They are tormented by themselves. The moment the self-tormenting voice stops, happiness or peace is in fact the case. This is exactly what everyone *seeks*, even though it is already the case.¹

¹ Sri Atmananda (Krishna Menon) repeatedly said this concerns everybody, the so called non-searchers included; for instance: "We find that peace is the real goal of man's desire." *Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shri Atmananda*. Salisbury: Non-duality Press, 2009; Note No. 10. As a matter of fact Atmananda did contribute a lot by often translating *ananda* by 'peace' instead of the usual word 'bliss'.

The problem with all this seeking is that it actually works *via* the described commands. All resources at your disposal in the search appear to speak to you, advise you and impregnate you. Subsequently the part that is already so very busy giving commands is enormously strengthened; even the very best advice is internally transformed into forever more subtle new commands, demands and potential for failure. Thus, searching actually *increases* the energy that is already invested in this split-in-two life, instead of reducing it. For this reason despair and confusion are often part of the search.

Non-duality is what remains when the seeking stops. This happens when the inner struggle is realized as being not based on reality, and in this realization the whole body-mind relaxes. *I am not two.*

But it could be said in retort to this that it looks more like an 'end-state'. This sounds like wishful thinking! In other words, in this way something or other is indeed being missed.

Yes, that is indeed the danger. This is certainly an important issue within non-dualism: how can I prevent avoiding or skipping something? Precisely by coming in contact with the ultimate conclusion of being not-two it is very tempting to overlook or avoid all sorts of matters. Therefore I will attempt to clarify the relationship between on the one side the truth that man really is one and undivided, and on the other the observation of still arising and therefore apparently real doubt and dilemma, at least in most people.

The direct way

Here we come across something that in my opinion is the essence of non-dualism, which is also sometimes referred to as the 'direct way'. This essential element is the awareness that despite the above-mentioned risk that all sorts of things are ignored, denied or skipped, it simply *cannot be otherwise* than that ultimate Truth is at once transmitted in its purest form now, directly. Hence, the invitation to *first* recognize your essential nature, and then everything else. Any other approach (a more step-by-step approach, possibly through meditation, therapy or some method of 'individuation') is not only a postponement but also

MOUNTAIN PATH

an obscuration of the main point, which can then stay out of reach forever. Not until the main point is realized *as own experience*, is there a trustworthy ground present to deal with potential personal obstacles – this prevents an unnecessarily long and loveless journey lost in the labyrinth of identification with the person that you think you are.²

In non-dualism the highest or ultimate stage is available immediately, simply because Reality can never be the case *later*, after having firstly fulfilled certain conditions. Reality or Truth is not dependent on any single condition. The assumption that a long path should be travelled first, with much purification and transformation, can best be compared with the proverbial donkey and carrot. No matter how fast the donkey runs, the carrot remains at a distance.

The point is that on a gradual path you assume that you are a born entity, a mortal ego or perhaps a re-incarnated ‘soul’ or ‘higher self’, whilst the direct way confronts you with the fact that you still do not know what ‘I’ is, and you are encouraged to investigate what or who ‘I’ is before doing anything else.

If right now for instance you momentarily interrupt reading and ask yourself: ‘Who am I?’, then you may notice that there is no mental answer possible to this question; it is as though all capability to interpret disappears for a moment. And yet this disappearing contains exactly the answer, an answer not coming from the mind. The mind falls away, resolved. For a moment there is no-thing, just the absence of any shape or form. In this moment you may see that you are timeless, dimensionless *presence* (to give it a name). It is true that in this presence all sorts of opinions and feelings may arise and take your attention for a moment, but with careful observation you can see that these temporary forms are not the answer to the question asked. You are not the temporarily arising thought forms with their ‘I’-structure, you are the *permanently present* capacity to observe these thought forms.

² In a sequel to this article, ‘Is the “person” involved in Self-inquiry?’ (to be published in *Mountain Path*), this theme of sequence is elaborated.

Non-separateness

In the non-dualistic traditions it is said that this permanent presence is nothing other than the Supreme Principle. Hence, you *are* this Supreme – you might call it ‘God’, as long as this is not interpreted as an objectified Person or Creator. If someone exclaims ‘I am God’, in non-dualism this means nothing more than that there exists no Principle outside or above you, and that in fact everything is lived and thought *through* this Principle.

All of this has to do with seeing the difference between the real Subject, that this Principle is (self-luminously illuminating the current experience), and the *so-called* subject (the ‘I’ as person), that in reality is only an object recurring for very short moments *within* the timeless Subject. Twentieth-century Advaita teachers such as Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Atmananda (Krishna Menon) emphasized this real Subject in their teachings. They referred to this respectively as ‘I-I’ and ‘I-Principle’, the uninterrupted self-luminous Self.

Non-duality means not only non-separation of yourself and the Supreme Principle but also non-separation of subject and object, non-separation of yourself and the phenomena that appear to you.

How can it be that I am not separate from phenomena? They are there and I am here, isn’t it? It seems obvious that there is ‘separation’! The answer lies in the true nature of consciousness, or Consciousness, which is none other than the true Subject just mentioned. Consciousness is that which sheds light on all that appears. Then again that which you call ‘yourself’ appears, then again an object of the senses, then a mental or emotional object. All the time the substance that constitutes the subject (‘yourself’) as well as the object remains unchanged. Consciousness itself cannot be changed. The non-separateness that is indicated here means that Consciousness cannot manifest in any other way than *as* form and content (in other words, *in the form of* everything that presents itself in Consciousness, all phenomena).

The two levels of truth

Stemming from the understanding that it is not correct to talk exclusively from the position of being non-separate (because physical and emotional pain, however temporary they may be, require and deserve attention), the classical non-dualistic schools have always sought for a way to describe the coexistence of the understanding of non-separateness and the experience of being separate (and possibly feeling ‘bound’). For this they used the concept of ‘two levels of truth’: the first level, of non-separation, they called Absolute Truth (*Paramartha Satya*), and the second, of multiplicity and possibly of separation, they called relative or conventional truth (*samvriti satya*). On the first level everything is just as it is, with no relationship or comparison to anything else. Thinking can do no more here, there is nothing left to classify or separate. On the second level everything is dependent on all sorts of factors, including the way something is looked at. Nothing exists independently. Nagarjuna, the great second-century Buddhist teacher who developed the idea of the two truths, expressed the importance of the view on it as:

“Those who do not know the distinction between the two truths cannot understand the profound nature of the Buddha’s teaching. Without relying on everyday common practices (i.e. relative truths), the absolute truth cannot be expressed. Without approaching the absolute truth, *nirvana* cannot be attained.”³

The Buddhist concept of the two levels was later adopted by the teachers of Advaita Vedanta, who linked it to the concept of the two levels in the Upanishads: higher knowledge and lower knowledge.⁴ Shankara, the eighth-century founder of the Advaita school, described Reality (the first level) as that which *always* is. Something can only be called ‘real’

³ *Mula-madhyamaka Karika*, XXIV. 9 and 10. Translation by Kenneth Inada, *Nagarjuna*. Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1970; p. 146.

⁴ This occurs for instance in *Mundaka Upanishad*, I. 1. 4: *Para vidya* en *apara vidya* respectively. Shankara called the two levels *Paramartha* and *vyavahara*; the second term concerns our daily life, the actual happenings as well as the imagined ones.

when it is never absent, never ‘not real’. Something that comes and goes, that is present only occasionally (the second level), Shankara referred to as *maya*: illusion or suggestion. Through ignorance (*a-jñāna*) of the truth that you are always, uninterruptedly one with Reality, you start to suggest a separate existence whereby you continuously project with the mind all sorts of things onto the world. Things stored in memory are held in front of your eyes like a slide show whilst you are looking at some current object. In this way you shall never know an object as it really is. Shankara did not assert that the world does not *exist*, but that it is in itself not the ultimate Reality. Thanks to Shankara and his disciples as well as subsequent commentators, the term *maya* has had great influence on the whole of Indian philosophy.

The shuffle of the two levels

The problem of the coexistence of an awareness of the Absolute while encountering all kinds of difficulties is of course one of all cultures and times. In Dutch literature this is illustrated in a poem by J.C. van Schagen:

“You loved God and the world
but then your braces snapped
you opened your arms wide to embrace the All
but wasn’t there a sudden resentment on your face
whilst your neighbour’s phonograph began to wail?”⁵

This is the situation. You may wish that whatever is happening right now would go away but it just keeps on happening. So what do we do about this?

Becoming familiar with the possibility to reduce everything that happens on the relative level to ‘illusion’ (especially in the wake of the teachers of Advaita Vedanta), has tempted many seekers to use this as a method to cover their difficulties. An already present tendency to deny all sorts of inconvenient matters is now supported and strengthened with a philosophical foundation whereby the denial is

⁵ J.C. van Schagen, *Ik ga maar en ben*. Amsterdam: G.A. van Oorschot, 1972; p. 11.

given an added air of justness. Simply coming into contact with the idea of an ever-present Reality can have the effect that difficulties in life, though indeed *experienced* as difficult, are dismissed under the motto ‘oh, it’s just illusion’ – in other words, nothing to bother yourself about. In fact, this is usually the result of shuffling the two levels which happens quite often within circles of spiritual seekers. Purely on the level of Ultimate Reality personal aspects such as relational problems, diseases, tension etcetera are indeed without an independent reality of its own: on that level these become as it were ‘outshone’ whereby everything is recognized as light.⁶ However, this does not mean that on the second level, that of relative reality, these do not make up an actual part of daily life, this implies that these personal complications indeed require attention and care.

The twentieth-century teacher Sri Poonjaji once told a good example of this. During a stay with his master Sri Ramana Maharshi, during the bloody separation of India and Pakistan in 1947, the Maharshi once pointed out to him that his family, living in the western part of the Punjab that was assigned to Islamic Pakistan, was in serious danger and really needed Poonja’s help, to which Poonja answered: “Oh, that life was but a dream. I dreamed that I had a wife and a family. When I met you, my dream ended.” The Maharshi replied to this: “But if you know that your family is a dream, what difference does it make if you stay in the dream and complete your task there? Why should you be afraid to go there if it is but a dream?”⁷

The confusion or shuffle of levels comes down to projecting a quality of the Absolute onto the relative.⁸ One of the most frequently projected qualities is that of *perfection*. The ever-present Absolute is perfect, but it is not manifest and therefore is not observable. This inherently present (and intuitively felt) perfection is then desired in manifest

⁷ David Godman, *Nothing Ever Happened*. Vol. One. Boulder, CO: Avadhuta, 1998; p. 158-159.

⁸ The Absolute does not have any quality or characteristic. Here the word ‘quality’ is used because otherwise that which is being projected cannot be indicated.

form and so all sorts of misplaced interpretations occur such as 'holy' (read: cramped) behaviour, sexlessness, suppression of feelings, pretentiousness and arrogance.

Another quality that is often unconsciously transferred from the Absolute to the relative level is *amorality*. This is more or less the opposite of the projection of perfection: you could describe this amorality as strategically embracing the *imperfect*. On the highest level of non-duality every difference is resolved, hence also between good and evil. Regretfully however, the intellectual understanding of this penetrating truth sometimes leads people to misconduct, their misconduct condoned by referring to the 'non-existence' of evil. Also in much lighter forms, where you can hardly speak of 'evil', comparable confusion may ensue. For example someone with whom you have an appointment at ten o'clock, arriving after twelve could make a comment such as: 'Oh, time – that doesn't even exist!' Whatever form the confusion has, it seems very difficult to confront those who have fallen into 'the pitfall of the Absolute' on this point. I think that this aspect, this pitfall, is one of the most difficult points on the direct way of liberation.

In Dzogchen, one of the most radical forms of Tibetan Buddhism, a very helpful approach to the two levels is offered. Kennard Lipman, an American translator of Dzogchen texts, wrote the following:

"To begin with, an individual who has realized this reality must directly introduce you to your natural state. In Dzogchen the introduction to the natural state could be compared to a light being suddenly turned on to reveal our entire being – both its absolute and relative aspects. With the light on we can clearly see our natural state and how it manifests, as well as the temporary obstacles to its total manifestation. (...) But turning on the light does not automatically eliminate the obstacles inherent in our relative condition: our health; childhood development; unproductive patterns of thought, feeling, and behaviour; financial status and position in society; whatever we think we are and do. If not attended to, all these can create obstacles in any phase of the way. (...) In Dzogchen this knowledge is a means

for becoming more certain about the natural state through learning how to work with the difficulties of our relative being.”⁹

Only by truly recognizing your natural state (*sahaja*) can you become convinced that in fact all objects are empty (‘empty’ as term for absence from any own independent existence) and therefore all obstacles are empty too. So you are able to look at the obstacles one by one without being devoured by a belief that they are ultimately real. In the sequence as set out in Dzogchen the direct way is not a way of avoidance, and attention for the obstacles is not a diversion from the way itself.

In the natural state it becomes evident that ‘bondage’ does not really exist, and that the temporary appearance of the suggestion of it may well be looked at from awareness of the natural state. Only in this way can both pitfalls be overcome: denial of the lower level on the one hand, and denial of the Light that I *am*, with the conclusion that I still have a long way to go, on the other. True non-dualism, undivided *being in itself*, indeed turns out to be a way to avoid nothing and to deny nothing.

Why would not we call this ‘mysticism’, or ‘monism’?

In many western spiritual scriptures the condition in which all opposites are dissolved and in which undivided *being* remains, is referred to as ‘mysticism’. As this term is simpler and better known, isn’t it a better term than non-dualism?

Yes, to a certain extent the term ‘mysticism’ does cover what here is referred to as ‘non-dualism’. All forms of traditional mysticism contain in its nucleus some element of non-dualism. However, ‘mysticism’ is a very broad term. ‘Non-dualism’ is more precise. Mysticism is known in all cultures and times; it can be found in all religions, with wonderful examples of the expression of truth. But it is noticeable that in many schools of mysticism a *yearning* for unification is emphasized, whilst in radical non-dualism non-separation is the *basic-premise* of existence, the inherent element of it – hence the expression ‘the natural state’. The New Oxford Dictionary defines mysticism as:

⁹ Kennard Lipman, Commentary in *You Are the Eyes of the World*. Novato, CA: Lotsawa, 1987; p. 59-60.

“Belief that union with or absorption into the Deity or the absolute, or the spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect, may be attained through contemplation and self-surrender.” Non-dualism is not a belief in the achievement of something, but the immediate awareness of being not separate right now. Moreover, in mysticism there is often talk of ‘mystical experiences’. Experiences have a beginning and an end and therefore in non-dualism there is not so much importance attached to experiences. Emphasis instead is on recognition of That in which all experiences occur.

I still think the term ‘non-dualism’ is the best term for expressing this being not separate, despite its length and weightiness. The negative formulation aptly indicates that what you appear to be encumbered with is an inevitable fact of life, namely ‘dualism’,¹⁰ with the prefix ‘non’ indicating that this fact is not true. ‘Non-dualism’ is a literal translation of the Sanskrit terms *a-dvaya* and *a-dvaita*, both from *a-* ‘not-’ and *dvi*, ‘two’. The negative formulation seems to be the only way to indicate that it cannot really be defined: in any case it is not two, not a multiple, not a division, and yet it does not define what it actually is.

Often the term ‘monism’ is used for what is referred to here as ‘non-dualism’.¹¹ The New Oxford Dictionary, which does not define non-dualism, defines monism as: “The doctrine that only one supreme being exists.” Indeed, also in non-dualism it is said that there is only one supreme ‘being’: be it Consciousness or Knowledge itself. But because this ‘being’ has not any object-value it is not possible to consider this as ‘existing’, and also not as ‘one’. ‘One’ can again be assumed in a

¹⁰ Maybe it is in fact more proper to speak here of ‘duality’. Ramesh Balsekar, being influenced by Irish/English author Wei Wu Wei (Terence Gray), differentiated the terms like this: “Duality is the basis on which this manifestation takes place. So if duality is understood as duality, as merely polaric opposites, that one cannot exist without the other, that is understanding. (...) And that realization raises the dualism back to the level of duality” (*Consciousness Speaks*. Redondo Beach, CA: Advaita Press, 1992; p. 70).

¹¹ The term ‘monism’ is originating from eighteenth-century German philosopher Christian Wolff.

more subtle way as being an object, a ‘One’ – and that is, rightly so I believe, exactly the critique of the Mahayana Buddhists on the usage of the term ‘the One’ in the Hinduistic Vedanta. ‘The One’ is often perceived as ‘High’ or ‘the All Good’, through which a certain *quality* is linked to the Quality-less – and this is exactly what is ultimately dualistic. The characteristic of That which can never be objectified, which is indescribable, is exactly that it is not a definable quality.

An example of the misunderstanding about the emphasis on the term ‘monism’ is to be found in a statement from American psychologist William James: “It is hard to see how it is possible that evil is grounded in God while God is all good.”¹² Indeed he was talking here about monism (also referring to it as ‘pantheism’), though it seems more like a statement about monotheism. Reference to ‘One’ quickly seems to create associations of an objectifiable Something or Someone. The term ‘non-dualism’ reflects that it is simply impossible to describe what Reality is and therefore a positive formulation really is not appropriate. Monism indicates that all is ‘one’ – as though you know what that *is*. The awareness of having no knowledge of the Unknowable demands the use of a negative term. For this reason you could also refer to non-dualistic as ‘non-conceptual’, not to be grasped in any concept. This was expressed in the eighth century BC by a certain Yajñavalkya (speaking of the Self) with the words “*neti neti*”: “it is not this and it is not that.”¹³ Some teachers, for example Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, find the term non-dualism itself still too restrictive, saying that Reality is beyond both dualism and non-dualism. As far as I am concerned, non-dualism indicates the end of *all* -isms: you could also call this then ‘non-ism’.

The term ‘non-dualism’ was not introduced in the West until the mid-nineteenth century, and then exclusively at translating Advaita Vedanta texts. It was not known then that non-dualism also existed within Buddhism. In the 1890’s Swami Vivekananda used the term in

¹² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; 1902.

¹³ In separate words: *Na iti, na iti*. In *Bṛihad-aranyaka Upanishad*, III. 9. 26, and some other places in the same Upanishad.

his lectures to show the distinction from the dualistic Vedanta-schools, whilst before that time almost everyone else referred to Advaita with the term 'monism'. The understanding that non-dualism also exists in Mahayana Buddhism only started to filter through to the West in the course of the twentieth century, partly due to the work of D.T. Suzuki. The Anglo-American writer Alan Watts has repeatedly explained the distinction between non-dualism and monism, and probably has hereby become one of the major sources responsible for 'non-dualism' becoming the generally accepted term.¹⁴ ▲

[Translated from Dutch by Jenny Wase; from Philip Renard, *Non-dualisme – de directe bevrijdingsweg*. Cothen, 2005].

¹⁴ Alan W. Watts, *The Supreme Identity*. London: Faber and Faber, 1950; p. 69 and 95; and *The Way of Zen*. New York: Pantheon, 1957. Pelican-edition 1976; p. 59-60.

The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

The smell of the earth,
after jade spring's first shower,
pushing through petals,
you pervade, *Vyapini*,
and yowls of mating tigers.

Mahakameōea-
nayana-kumudalada-
kaumudi, like hot
moonlight to the white lily,
is the sight of you to him!

The poems are loosely based on the Japanese tanka form of 5 lines. A tanka is a haiku with two extra 7-syllabled lines. The lines have 5/7/5/7/7 syllables, in that order.



Paduturai

TATTUVARAYA

In the previous issue we published a sample of verses from Amrita Saram, one of Tattuvaraya's works on Vedanta. In this third instalment of our series on Tattuvaraya, we are publishing extracts from Paduturai, a work of his that includes poems on his teachings, praise of his Guru Sorupananda, and many expressions of his own enlightened state. The translations are by Robert Butler, T. V. Venkatasubramanian, and David Godman.

Paduturai 29: Nenjirku Amaivurai [Advice to the heart on being still]

1 Heart of mine! Hunger will be appeased even if one consumes unsalted, watery gruel. Thirst can be quenched by drinking water from wells, tanks and rivers. Supporting yourself in this way, be satisfied and be still. Even if you get up and rush around [looking for food], will the rewards be different or better than what is ordained for you?

2 Heart of mine! Even if the whole land is full of sumptuous food, consisting of rich curry, seasoned with many condiments, milk, ghee, fruits and rice – if your *prarabdha* does not permit you to eat

MOUNTAIN PATH

them, either through illness or for other reasons, will it not speedily annul all those enjoyments for you?

3 Heart of mine! The six delicious flavours exist only in the tip of the tongue. Its extent is two finger breadths and no more. When you are not able to cross slowly this two-finger breadth, you will still go forth and cross the tumultuous ocean.

Note: 'When you are not able to cross slowly' means 'when you are not able to transcend or go beyond'. It is a common image in Tamil poetry that food is only attractive and appealing when it is in contact with this narrow zone on the tongue. Once it has been swallowed, processed by the body, and ejected either as vomit or excrement, it no longer holds any attraction.

4 Heart of mine! Greatly desiring a well turned-out appearance, you suffer a great deal, running around to earn wealth for that purpose. Even if you get it, though, don't you realise the trouble that will arise from washermen, rats, the need to find a safe place where they will not get stolen, and other such matters?

5 When cold weather comes there already exist ragged clothing, white ashes, mountain caves and many desolate temples [for shelter and warmth]. And in the sweltering heat of summer, even a loincloth is a burden. This alone is the function of clothes.

Note: *Sadhus use wood ash to keep themselves warm in winter.*

6 Heart of mine! Be yourself and remain still. By running about thinking [about your food], and then being disappointed at not getting [it], you have brought a lot of trouble upon yourself. People of the lowest kind will tire their legs for the sake of [appeasing] burning hunger. But will not those who are wise remain settled in stillness?

7 Mind of mine! Instead of remaining satisfied with what you get, wherever you get it, thinking it sufficient, you get up, not giving yourself the time to blink, and run around. Realise that this is the

seed of a poverty that can never be eradicated. It is also the veiling [that will appear in or cause] the next birth.

8 A cow will seek out the apparent [lushness of the] greenery on the opposing river bank, [preferring it] to the one it is on, and do this repeatedly. My heart, in much the same way, your reward for this [kind of] activity is only running about, wandering around and getting distressed.

9 The hallmark of greatness is to stand firm where one is, and face up to whatever comes one's way, is it not? Wretched and foolish heart, even if you go to the doors of those who are sweet like nectar, they will not extend their hospitality. Know that this is the nature of things. See [if it is not]!

10 Those who have understood the world have truly declared through their understanding that for the wise the body is an affliction. Even if you renounce all of the possessions you own and are associated with, having love for the unreal body, my heart, is getting deluded again.

11 When we examine the conviction of the wise – that what is not cannot be, and that what is, cannot fail to be – what need is there for this agitation, my heart? All happens as it is ordained to happen. [The wise] recognise the things that are destined for them.

12 When in this life the embodied *jiva* is perceived without error, then all will be as it has been ordained. This being so, my heart, why do you run every which way, traversing forests and oceans, suffering for the sake of your body? Tell me!

13 If you wish to know the means for remaining at peace, my heart, seek out the company of those great Self-realised ones who have tasted the sugarcane of *jnana*, which engenders forbearance, and [remaining] at their feet, carry out their commands in a single-minded manner.

MOUNTAIN PATH

14 Even if you stand with your head on the ground and your feet in the air, nothing will happen that is not destined to happen. The best course, my heart, is to remain still, and be relaxed, viewing what comes to pass exactly as it is, without dashing about and tormenting yourself.

15 When there is good present in the virtuous, do not go to their presence and pay attention to negative things [you see] there. My heart, do everything as per the commands of the Guru and eschew evil ways. The way of truth is not other than this. Henceforth keep to it!

16 Mind of mine! It is not good for you to be distressed, imagining praise or abuse [towards yourself] in the words [of others]. Realising that these are just sounds coming from the windpipe through the medium of air, do not attach any great value [to them].

17 Those who lovingly praise the defective, unclean, fleshy body that generates filth through all its nine orifices, and which is therefore malodorous, are actually looked upon as abusers by those who are on the path to realisation. Those who revile them [those on the path] are regarded as friends.

18 Heart of mine! You neither feel love nor hatred for the effects arising from insentient causes such as air, fire, water, disease and many, many more. Therefore, regard the sentient causes also in the same way.

19 Do not exhibit friendship or animosity towards anyone. Taking the view that there is something to be learned from every situation, stand firm, taking care not to act contrary to the words of virtuous people of mature understanding. This is the path for you.

20 Contenting yourself with what you have, be not disheartened even over great calamities. Do not indulge in malicious talk about what

is good, and what is evil. Furthermore, do not speak idle words. My heart, seeing the perfect behaviour of the virtuous, conduct yourself without forgetting it.

21 Until the body, which is like an unreal dream or a mirage, comes to its end, adorn yourself with the holy feet of the Guru, holding on tightly with a melting heart. Without letting go, remain there singing his praises, my heart, in order that you may never be born again.

22 Melting through dwelling over and over again on the nature of the Guru who subjected you to his rule, entreating him intensely more and more for true love, adorn yourself solely with his feet and be still, my heart, constantly sipping the rare ambrosia of peace.

Paduturai 33: Arudi Uraittal [Definitive Declarations]

1 If this *samsara* does not end before giving up this body, we will again and again come, be born as a baby, suffer and die. See!

2 If you do not realise your true nature so that you can put an end to the evil of birth and death, this swinging on the golden swing, going back and forth, will not cease, ever! See!

3 If you do not extricate yourself from birth and death with full awareness by realising your true nature, ignorance will catch hold of you in this world and the next and torment you. See!

4 If you do not realise your true nature as it really is, giving up the idea that your body is your [true] form, the powerful birth will not end for you, even if [Lord Siva] appears before you with deer and battle axe. See!

5 If, in this birth, you do not realise the [the truth] of yourself and thereby become free of all future births, you will die, repeatedly

MOUNTAIN PATH

assume a body and stand with [baby] anklets on your feet [again and again]. See!

6 If you do not subside and abide [as the Self], knowing that consciousness is your form, thereby freeing yourself from all suffering, *maya* will plunder you, turn you into a body and make you dance as a leather marionette. See!

7 If you do not recognise your Self, without saying ‘We will know [it] later,’ the devil of desire will unbalance you and trample you down. See!

8 Do not suffer extreme misery by placing your head under binding *sankalpas*. If you wear the feet of our Lord [the Guru] on your head, then you can abide [as the Self], saying, ‘What does it matter where the sun rises!’ See!

9 If, without seeking the feet of the Guru, placing them on your head, and realising your true nature, you take the body as ‘I’, hosts of relatives will gather and place fire on your head [on the day of your cremation]. See!

10 Those who do not accept this definitive declaration of truth will be like the beast and the devil. They will, alas, never cross the ocean of birth. I swear to this, never! ▲

(To be continued)

A Consumer of Knowledge

SHARADA BHANU

Introductory Note

This is a fictional rendering of an apocryphal tale which takes as its protagonist, Mallinatha Suri a 15th century Sanskrit scholar, poet, textual and literary critic who possibly lived between 1350-1450 CE. Known for his brilliant commentaries on the five *Mahakavyas* (great poems) of Sanskrit Literature, he was also a poet and a textual critic who sifted with care often corrupted classical texts and tried to separate interpolations from the original composition, working with such scholarship that his became the authentic voice, displacing almost all earlier critics. He seems to have hailed from the village of Kolachala in Andhra Pradesh, but little appears to be known of his origins. What seems to be reasonably certain is that his sons were also scholars and scholarship continued to be the tradition of the

Sharada Bhanu taught in the English Department of Stella Maris College, Chennai. She has written a novel and some short stories for children. She has been a devotee of Bhagavan since 1977.

family. The Racakonda king Singabhupala gave Mallinatha the title of *Mahamahopadyaya* (the foremost among those who can write books on the *shastras*) and Mallinatha's son, *Mahopadyaya*. A seminar was held honouring Mallinatha in 1979 (P G Lalye, *Mallinatha*10) and in Kolachala the owners surrendered to the government the ancestral house of the poet's family, so that a *veda pathashala* could be established and memorial built to the most illustrious classical scholar that Andhra Pradesh produced. This however seems not to have taken off, according to a report in *The Hindu* on May 12, 2006.

This story uses an account published in the *Indian Express* (31.05.2011) under the title 'He Became the Son of a Pundit' by Jagadguru Shankaracharya Shri Shri Raghaveshwara Bharathi Swami and rendered into English by Sharada Jayagovind, which purports to narrate an incident in the early life of Mallinatha Suri. This, however may be a legend.

The book *Mallinatha* by Professor P G Lalye makes no mention of any such event in the poet-critic's life and it is unable to provide any useful biographical information, even the names of his parents or teacher. Professor Lalye claims that at least nine Mallinathas are known to have existed in former times. It is entirely possible that this legend, if indeed it has any basis in fact, may relate to some other individual.

A version of part of the story, relating to the bitter flavoured rice served to a student, is narrated by the renowned poet and critic A.K. Ramanujan, who however does not connect it with Mallinatha Suri, or provide any source for the tale ('Food for Thought: Towards an Anthology of Hindu Food Images' *The Collected Essays of A K Ramanujan* 91). This suggests that in all probability, this is a Kannadiga folk tale which has, in the course of its evolution, become associated at some point with the scholar poet.

It is perhaps not an accident that Mallinatha is represented as unlettered before he won his difficult way to learning; a similar, much better known legend, exists about Kalidasa and it is possible that this story was invented or else attributed to Mallinatha the scholar because he is one of the most well known critics on Kalidasa's poetry. There is however the possibility, remote though it might be, that Mallinatha

was indeed an inadequate student in his youth and was drawn to commenting on Kalidasa because (among other things) of the fellow feeling inspired by the legend that the celebrated poet was once a dunce and became learned only when the goddess Saraswati blessed him.

This version does not pretend to be anything other than fiction. It includes the events narrated in the *Indian Express* and invents details, motives, feelings and conversation. This writer was fascinated by the story of a student who had such an all consuming appetite for knowledge and the whole narrative is slanted into an Upanishadic tale of discovery and self discovery.

Lalye's monograph bears out Mallinatha's prodigious scholarship, particularly his citation of dictionaries and texts on grammar (20-50), proficiency in Telugu (91), knowledge of the Upanishads (34), Puranas (44), music (45) and his familiarity with multiple philosophical systems, including Advaita (33-37).

It is difficult to defend fiction to the literary critic who claimed in his *Sanjivani* "I do not write anything which is not supported in the original text nor do I write anything which is unwanted"(qtd. in Lalye 10). The poet, however might have understood. And the Sanskrit scholar might forgive the appropriation of his life and name in the service of *shruti*.

Lalye, P.G. *Mallinatha*. Makers of Indian Literature. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002.

Ramanujan, A. K. *The Collected Essays of A K Ramanujan*. Ed. Vinay Dharwadker. New Delhi: OUP, 1999.

Umanadh, J.B.S. "A Sorry Comment on Kolacharam's Literary Stalwart" *The Hindu*, (*Andhra Pradesh*) Mar 12, 2006.

A renowned pundit in Kashi looked dubiously at the umpteenth applicant who expressed a yearning to be his student. This young man was personable enough and his clothes, though travel-stained were of good quality, but nothing in his conversation indicated that the silk turban that graced his forehead concealed any extraordinary gifts of wisdom. Yet the youth was persistent in his entreaties and difficult to shake off.

The pundit smiled tolerantly as he thought of a way out. "I don't accept pupils unless they show marked talent, young man," he said. "Here is this book; I am the author. You will be required to do more than merely scan the contents. I want you to absorb and digest every page, every word. When you feel you have taken in the substance of the whole, come back. If you can answer my questions, I will accept you as my disciple." He reflected that it would be unlikely that the aspirant's enthusiasm would survive such an encounter with scholarship, and at the very least the task should occupy him for weeks. Should he caution the lad to be careful with the book? No, no need, he had received it with the reverence due to divine *amrita*, no less.

The teacher had no idea what kind of student Mallinatha was. He was the son of a scholar but had failed completely to profit by the advantage of his birth. He had shown neither aptitude nor application and his weary father had long given up any hope of drumming any learning into his head. When he came of age his father arranged his marriage, selecting the daughter of a fellow scholar and peer, without reflecting that this might not be a completely appropriate match from the point of view of his son, daughter-in-law or her relatives. Mallinatha could hardly conceal the profundity of his ignorance for long. Shortly after his marriage he had taken his wife to her parents' home for a visit and found his brothers-in-law, all erudite to a man, deep in discussion over some palm leaf manuscripts. This was a scholarly family, delighting in intellectual give and take. They debated over the merits of the ancient work, arguing warmly and Mallinatha was completely left out. His embarrassed wife signalled to her husband to move forward and at least pretend interest; she had already a very good idea of his intellectual poverty but could not endure the humiliation of his isolation. Mallinatha, obligingly took the hint and picked up one of the manuscripts and praised it lavishly. He was not a stranger to the enthusiastic verbiage of the scholars who haunted his own home and now dropped some terms with aplomb. "Ah, how exquisitely the *rasas* are blended! What *dhvani*!" His curious brothers-in-law immediately drew nearer, wondering what piece of writing he was admiring when one of them noticed that Mallinatha

was ‘reading’ the script upside down. The fiction of his erudition could no longer be maintained and the amused young men took to disparagingly calling the unfortunate hero ‘pandita putra!’¹ He was son of a pandit, to his shame. Mallinatha could not take such merciless mockery for long. He told his family that he would journey to Kashi and would not return till he had acquired the scholarship that was his birthright but that had eluded him so completely.

A journey to this city was a sufficiently serious matter in Ancient India; in Mallinatha’s case it would mean traversing the length of the subcontinent — moving from the village of Kolachalam in Medak District of Andhra Pradesh to the sacred city of Varanasi where the Ganga nourished a sea of learning. Those who left on such a journey were very well aware that they might die on the way, missing the liberation that the city was supposed to confer on those who breathed their last within its limits. But Mallinatha’s quest added a further dimension of hopelessness and it was with a heavy heart that his wife and parents parted from him, for no persuasion would change his mind.

Mallinatha had been lucky and determined. He had reached Kashi and sought the feet of the most eminent instructor the ancient city could boast of and now he had been entrusted with this unenviable task. The impressive tome he was carrying home, to be ingested at his leisure would have proved a daunting challenge even to a student blessed with some learning; for him it represented the impossible — Sanskrit, the language of the learned, of the court and of the fathers. He had never managed to master even the alphabet, it had been such a dead weight. Yet he was not a fool, far from it. He had an excellent grasp of his mother tongue, Telugu. He loved music, poetry and above all, stories. When the actors who presented folk theatre arrived at his village or the *kathakalakshepa* narrator came to tell his stories Mallinatha would be an infallible member of the audience. And now as he gazed despairingly

¹ This is a reference to the saying ‘*Pandita putrah shundah*’ (A scholar’s son is a dunce).

at the volume, laboriously written by hand and bound in ornamented wood, he was clueless on how to absorb any of the monumental wisdom it no doubt put forth. He reflected bitterly, as millions of students in generations to come were also to do, that it was hardly fair to expect someone who was seeking learning to exhibit learning as a precondition to acquiring any. After all, if he had that level of education, teaching would have been unnecessary. Yet he had been filled with unbounded respect for the man who had assigned this task. To feel his glance, pleasant and shrewd, had been a pleasure, to be in his presence, a boon. He had found his Master and the guru's command was sacred; this was the first he had received and it had to be obeyed.

Alone in his corner of the choultry built for homeless travellers, he pondered over his situation, late into the night, and then realised he had not eaten and was hungry. A story from the Upanishads echoed in his mind. The student had been set the task of discovering what everything arose from, was supported by and into which it returned, for that was Brahman. Mallinatha remembered the first answer the young man had brought: food is Brahman, for from food all things arise, they live by food and into food they all return. He had thought even then, when he had heard it, that the answer showed strong good sense. He stood up wearily. At this hour there was no hope of finding anything to eat but he could drink some water. As he reached for the jug, an idea shaped itself in his mind...

A day later, he prostrated before his guru and the teacher expressed his surprise at seeing Mallinatha so quickly. What of the task he had been set? Mallinatha replied that he had finished the book. "What, all of it?" Yes, said Mallinatha, he had absorbed every page and every word.

There was a pause. "Was there anything you could not take in," enquired the teacher, incredulous and struggling for patience.

Mallinatha replied that there were two things he had been unable to swallow.

"Only two? And what are they?"

"Why, these two pieces of wood between which the book was bound. They were too hard to be digested. But the rest of the book I have completely consumed!"

The teacher stared at him in disbelief. Could such a literal-minded moron really exist? Was this a practical joke?

“That was a valuable book. What have you done with it?”

Mallinatha’s glance was imploring. “Satguru, I have digested it. I had to obey your command...”

What had possessed him to trust the volume with this idiot? The teacher waited till he could control his dismay, anger and laughter. He said dryly that it was unfortunate that the book had ended up as food, rather than food for thought; Mallinatha might do well to abandon his pursuit of scholarship as this seemed to be a goal that he was completely unsuited for. The youth fell prostrate and clasped the old man’s feet and refused to let go.

“Sir, if I must be learned before I can be taught, how can I ever begin? You are my master. I have obeyed you. Do not abandon me, as you are my only hope of learning.”

The teacher knew he should dismiss this boy without loss of time. Why then was he so absurdly moved? And the boy wouldn’t give up. “In former times were there any books at all? No. The teacher’s book would be inside the disciple, or *nowhere*. Only if the teacher taught the pupil everything could he be sure that the book would reach the world in the shape in which the Master intended. Let me be your book. Only teach me!”

The master was shaken. Not a fool, after all. No, not a fool, this crazy boy at his feet. He heard himself say, “Very well, I will give you another chance. You will enter my household and start your education, provided you can give your whole self to the task. Do you understand? See, touch, taste, smell, and hear nothing but the task. No other feelings, or thoughts, or cravings. Only what I teach. Yes?”

The boy nodded. And so it started, the period that neither knew the duration of. The master took one step and only one, to fix a limit. He told himself he was incurably a teacher; he had a mania for tests. And it would do no harm to discourage the lad’s propensity for practical jokes... He spoke privately to his wife. “When you serve his food, give him a spoonful of neem oil instead of ghee.” “Neem? But

it's intolerably bitter. And he seems to have come from a well-to-do home. He will be unable to endure it. No one can. And the smell..."

The Master shrugged. "He seems to have a high tolerance for the unpalatable. If he complains, just let me know."

He didn't complain. He ate with his head bent over the food and quickly, as he did everything. The wife wondered. Was he so determined to stay that he would take it day after day? What was he thinking? Did he resent the test that went on ceaselessly? She could guess nothing. He gave no sign of disgust; he was, as ever, silent, quick and absorbed.

He had found the lessons were flavoured with honey. The master was a gifted teacher. No grammar, at first. Mallinatha had heard only stories, that first month. Even when perforce the drilling started and rudiments were communicated, he heard everyday a line, a phrase, a snatch of poetry, a matchless simile...

"That was Kalidasa, wasn't it," he had once intuitively asked.

"Who else?"

He learned slowly to respect grammar – the bones of this language – tough, exact and enduring. And dictionaries grew to fascinate him. It had begun when he had argued on the meaning of a word and his Master had impatiently tossed him one.

"Come, word-swallower! You may never progress to *para*, *pasyanti* or *madhyama*, but you can at least check on the *vaikhari*, my literalist."

So a word had multiple levels, the transcendent, beyond name and form, where the object and the word were indistinguishable; the subtle level of intellect where it was image as much as sound; the intermediate level of mental speech and the word, material and concrete, articulated. Four levels, four stages of existence, four universes. Well, the way to *para* was surely not by getting *vaikhari* wrong. He grew to care for dictionaries in their humble precision.

However, he lived for those hours when the teacher opened a play, read a poem, shared a story. How was it even the shastras were so interesting? Mallinatha had once asked, smiling, whether it was true the student was never released till he had learned what was Brahman.

“Ah, that doesn’t apply to brilliant fellows like you. You know already, don’t you?”

Startled, he had indignantly demurred. He knew nothing. “Then what was that I overheard you repeat to your companions, the other day? Food is Brahman? And so on?”

Cornered, he hung his head, dismayed. He had been caught showing off, apparently. “Come on, tell us. What is Brahman? Answer.”

“I only know what the story says it is.”

“Story? That is the sacred Taittiriya Upanishad. And what is Brahman?”

Mallinatha replied carefully, “The young man Bhrigu Varuni discovers finally it is *ananda*, joy.”

“The young man? What about you? Don’t you believe it? Or are you wiser than the Upanishad?”

He was getting into deep trouble. “I do believe it.”

“Then why don’t you say ‘I know what is Brahman?’”

Mallinatha paused. “Master, if I could not add two and two but someone told me it was four, would you say I knew the answer?”

“Why not, if it is correct and you believed it?”

“Because, I have no right to that answer. It is not mine till I can add.” He gazed, deeply troubled, at his guru. The latter smiled.

“Ah, how fast you jump. Add. What about first finding out whether it is indeed two and two that you have there?”

Years passed. Study of the *mahakavyas* had always been part of the discipline from the start. Only the level of the study kept altering. Mallinatha came to believe that they were for him the entry into *ananda* which was also Brahman. Could addition be a movement of the heart? But he learnt also the painstaking effort of making sure there was indeed something to count: patiently interrogating and eliminating the spurious, to recover texts that had descended to them from a thousand and more years ago. Always the substance, not the deceptive changes... As he handed over yet another commentary his master looked at him with a warm approval that he often showed

these days. When it was returned to him he noticed there was not a single correction.

That afternoon, he sat down to lunch and as he tasted the food he noticed something. "The rice is rather bitter today?" he said to the guru's wife who was serving him and she exclaimed, took away the food and served him with fresh rice and delicately flavoured ghee. It reminded him of the food that he used to taste at home and he thought with sudden longing of the wife that he had not seen for fourteen long years. Nothing had existed outside his lessons. No trace, no taste, no vasana. Now, suddenly a village placed above a lake was calling out to him from the distant South.

That evening the guru called him and said that he was free to leave as he had learnt all that he could teach. "Dear *gurudeva*, how can I leave till I am fit to be the book I destroyed?"

"What would be the use of mere reproduction? You will write the books I cannot compose. Your senses are restored to you and you are returned to the world."

"Are you sending me away without teaching me what is Brahman?"

The Master laughed. "Why you foolish fellow, how can you be taught what you know already? Come tell me, what is Brahman?"

"The substance, the basis of existence, the ground concealed by the grass, the rice which the flavour appears to modify, the paper without which the script cannot come into being..." Mallinatha whispered.

"My dear poet, you are forgetting your Self!"

"Very well then, Brahman is coming home..."

"Yes," said his guru, "to discover that one has never really left. Go safely my son."

Mallinatha fell at the beloved feet. "Son. Do you call me your son? Then I am indeed *pandita putra*!" The guru gently raised him. "Have you not always been that? You will be the pride of your land and its people. Poet, scholar and father of scholars; a creator, not a mere consumer of knowledge." ▲

The Quest

Chapter Eleven

Reminiscences

LUCIA OSBORNE

On the Hill above the path leading to Skandasramam I found a hideout, a flat place for a few yards among the rocks surrounded by boulders and shrubs like a screen. I would lie down there, a clump of scented grass for a pillow, meditating and watching the sun rise heralded by a rosy then crimson foreglow. One memorable dawn the sun appeared under the horizon and in a breathless moment entered the earth through me. I became the earth, a blissfully slumbering earth. Trampled upon by all sorts of creatures, all sorts of vehicles moving on the surface, cars rushing at high speed, the earth — myself and everything on it completely unaffected, at peace in a state of indescribably blissful awakened slumber which continued, though everything came to life quickened by the sun. This description is inadequate: The blissful slumber, its best remembered feature. ‘The earth meditates as it were’ I read somewhere. The earth is alive.

Lucia Osborne was married to Arthur Osborne, the founder of *The Mountain Path*. She was editor of the magazine from 1970 to 1973.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Another morning Bhagavan was perusing the mail brought from the Ashram office, scrutinising even the envelopes. I was sitting a few yards away meditating and suddenly was flooded with light in ecstasy, blissful well-being, in waves. It was not steady. Busy as Bhagavan was He at once turned His luminous eyes on me as if trying to help, letters and the rest of the mail seemingly forgotten. How did He know busy and surrounded with people from the office? How could He not know?

Bhagavan the indweller in all hearts.

Like a hawk whose wings

Darkened the sky

Thou pouncest on me

A worm in dust

To carry me off

Into limitless all-knowing radiance.

Lost in Freedom, Resplendence-Bliss

In ecstasy undreamt of

I lost myself

I found THYSELF.

In the early years, long before the books on the Maharshi were written, we were sitting one evening, as usual, in the hall after the Vedic chantings were over. It used to be a truly wonderful hour of perfect eloquent Silence 'cur cares thrown among the lilies'. The Maharshi calls such Silence the eternal flow of language, obstructed by words, more potent and vast than all the *sastras* put together. So eager were the devotees not to miss this best hour of the day that when the Ashram manager (*sarvadhikari*) gave an order sometime later for women devotees to leave the premises before dark, one of them, a French woman, sat down among the men in man's garb with a shaven head. Well, usually one would sit down and meditate with closed eyes but that evening I could not turn them away from Bhagavan's face, so movingly beautiful, so pure and radiant, it gripped the heart with its innocence and unfathomable wisdom. Could anything, anyone be nearer, dearer? Suddenly in a moment of indescribable tenderness He was in my heart. *He became my heart*; whether still seated on the couch or not I do not know but I do know that He was the very core

of my being, the I AM. And so He always is but we do not always know. Later I came across such statements with a thrill of recognition that it was so, that it was true.

In other traditions this truth is couched in different terms but it means the same. In the *Siva Puranam* Saint Manickavachakar prays for an unbroken state of experience adoring the feet of Him “who is really not apart from me in my heart, not even for a moment.”

The form of the Sad-Guru is a sort of decoy. Out of compassion He assumes a form and name. Sri Bhagavan says: “You imagine Him to be like yourself with a body. His work lies within. The Guru is God or Self incarnate who is immanent, and who out of Grace takes pity on the devotee and manifests Himself and guides him in the right path until he realises the Self within. The Guru is both within and without so He creates conditions to drive you inwards and exerts a pull from within...”

In the verses selected by Sri Bhagavan Saint Thayumanavar says: “In order to enlighten me Grace took shape. In every respect like myself, eating and sleeping, suffering and enjoying, bearing a name and born somewhere, it appeared as the silent Guru, a deer used to decoy another of its species.”

Enticement also comes in. Thayumanavar says that when overcome by Absolute Consciousness (White Expanse) all ours will prosper, nothing will suffer, all undertakings will succeed to perfection.... Naturally, the world is a shadow of our own mind. In a state of Perfection above suffering and sorrow whatever one projects will be perfect. It is like Christ’s saying: “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you” if one attains it all else will be added. ‘Attaining’ is a figure of speech. The Kingdom of Heaven is always present, there is only the Self. We do not exist apart from It. We only cease to be deluded that it is not so. It is like waking up from dream wanderings, Bhagavan says. The dream belongs to the dreamer or it is nothing.

“To the extent that the soul is progressively separated from all diversity there is revealed in it the divine realm. The soul is able to do this with the help of divine Grace. When it makes this discovery it has been helped thereby. And then it enjoys all things and has

control of them like God. Finally it has discovered that it is itself the divine realm.”¹

Bhagavan said, “The mind turned inwards is the Self; turned outwards, it becomes the ego and all the world. But the mind does not exist apart from the Self i.e. it has no independent existence. The Self exists without the mind but never the mind without the Self.”

St. Simeon speaks of a realised man as if risen from the dead and one awakened from sleep, risen above the limits of the senses and the whole world, filled with unspeakable delight.

As mentioned in my husband Arthur’s autobiography, his life ran in cycles of four years. He also spent four years in the detention camp in Bangkok after the Japanese invasion. Then the war ended and he was released. On the way to Tiruvannamalai the train halts for several hours at a junction at Katpadi so I went there to meet him. All the letters which we had written to each other and never received during those four years came in two bundles a few days later. The homecoming was not only to the family but also to his real spiritual Home, as he was to discover later.

In camp one Luis Hartz from Holland became interested in Bhagavan’s teaching through Arthur and later followed him to Tiruvannamalai. He told Bhagavan after a few days: “When I am here I am in heaven but when I leave I will be in hell.” The reply was: “Even if you are in hell Bhagavan will go after you.” He was a *bon-viveur*, one day a millionaire next day losing or gambling away his fortune, then again making a fortune and so on. He had understanding but no will power. Bhagavan made a tremendous impression on him. When Hartz wanted to be sure about his initiation Bhagavan told him: “You have it already.” Now also devotees receive it in dreams by look or touch or in silence as recorded by a few of them in my chapter on ‘Glimpses’.

A Persian professor present in the hall wanted to know whether “going to hell after you” applied only to Hartz and Bhagavan replied: “To all.”

A diplomat from Czechoslovakia stationed in China was so attracted to Bhagavan after coming to Tiruvannamalai that he straight

¹ *Theologia Germanica*.

away bought a house near the Ashram to settle there after retirement; a simple guileless man who became a seeker because he felt insecure. The atmosphere at Arunachala near Bhagavan he found helpful to stabilise his mind.

On the Hill one day he took a picture of Bhagavan with me and the children. It came out well. Then I took a picture of Bhagavan with him. It was a blank. He never settled in Tiruvannamalai. Shortly afterwards he was shot by the communists in Czechoslovakia.

Sujata Sen was a French woman doctor married to a Bengali doctor. She settled in Tiruvannamalai to follow Ramana Maharshi while practising her profession. Her mother came from France to visit her. A typical Parisian beautifully dressed and made up she was not interested in spiritual matters or religion. She used to come with her daughter to sit in the meditation hall observing people in preference to sitting alone at home. After some time she started practising her religion, going to mass and became an ardent Catholic. She said that it was due to Ramana Maharshi's silent influence.

Somerset Maugham came on a visit to Tiruvannamalai having heard of Ramana Maharshi. He first went to see Major Chadwick in his room and there he suddenly became unconscious. Bhagavan was passing that way on his daily walk so Major Chadwick asked him to see the unconscious visitor. Bhagavan complied, sat down and looked at him. After a while he regained consciousness, saluted Bhagavan and both sat facing each other in silence. Major Chadwick told Somerset Maugham that he could ask questions when the latter enquired rather nervously whether he should do so but Bhagavan said that silence is best, smiled and left the room.

A record of many of the vast number of devotees and visitors is contained in the chapters on 'Glimpses of Reality', 'Questions and Answers' and 'How Bhagavan Came to Me'. Truth is very simple so is the teaching. However, what is simple is also difficult for complicated minds thus the same Truth has to be expressed in different ways to suit the capacity of the questioner or devotee, and with inevitable repetitions.



(To be continued)



John Maynard

I Am Thou

Meditations on the Truth of India

RAMCHANDRA GANDHI

Ramchandra Gandhi was a professor of philosophy at various universities in India. I Am Thou was first published in 1984 when he was Professor of Comparative Religion at Vishwa Bharati. It was reviewed in The Mountain Path in October 1985. He stayed at Ramanasramam several times over the years. He passed away in 2007.

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Is our Heart on the Right Side?

The austere advaitin teaching of Sri Ramana Maharsi is enlivened by what looks like a quaint insistence on his part that *Atman's* seat in the human body is on the right side of the chest, corresponding almost exactly to the biological heart on the left. Of course Sri Ramana makes it clear again and again that this anatomical identification of Atman is only for the benefit of those who are unable to be rid of the false identification of themselves with their body and mind, body for

short; that in truth Atman had no physical location at all. And yet, reading through all of the Master's conversation and writings, one gets the impression that this relegation of his doctrine of the spiritual heart on the right side to secondary importance is also a concession to those who, imperfect advaitins, shun physical analogies even as they fear the world. Again and again the Master reverts to the doctrine of the heart on the right side, refers to an obscure *Ayurveda* text and also to the *Sita Upanisad* in support of it, and also sometimes impatiently dismisses requests for authoritative support of his novel doctrine on the ground that his experience confirms it and that he is not in need of any external authority for his doctrine.

Phenomenologically, it is on the right side of the centre of the chest that Sri Ramana's *Koham* (Who am I?) *sadhana* yields a powerful current of awareness as is testified by a number of *sadhakas*, and indeed the metaphor of the heart on the right side is a profound one. The biological heart on the left is the seat of all our anxieties and partial fleeting arrogant pleasures connected with *dehatmabuddhi*, the I-am-the-body orientation of a *ajnani*.

Ruthlessly accurately pictorially corrective of this delusion, this tragic investment of all worth in the biological heart, is the heart on the right side of which the Master speaks, the heart which is biologically non-existent and yet the power of which is felt in *sadhana* and even the contemplation of the very idea of which at least weakens considerably the hold of *dehatmabuddhi*.

There appears in thought and imagination the idea of an alternative centre of our being, a non-corporeal reality mysteriously lodged within our body which rivals in power and benevolence the fickle pump on the left, a very simple and secure foundation for faith. (Needless to say, in those rare cases where the biological heart is on the right, the spiritual heart will have to be and will be able to be imagined as being on the left side, although Sri Ramana has not said so; but in our reflections on his teaching we can continue to think of the spiritual heart as on the right without qualification.) But is there any other kind of support for Sri Ramana's doctrine besides the corrective role of it and the authority of his declaration?

Ramana Maharshi often used to say that everybody knew that he or she was most fundamentally centred on the right side of the chest, because whenever we wish to point to ourselves we touch the right side of our chest with our forefinger. Why do we do this? There is of course the convention of pointing to people with our forefinger when we wish to refer to them ostensively, and the ritual of pointing to oneself by touching our chest with our forefinger or pointing the forefinger in the direction of our chest is an obvious imitation of ostensive reference to others, but this cannot be the whole story.

That this cannot be the whole story is shown by the fact that when I point to myself in this way and ask you if you really mean me, which is the standard occasion of employment of this ritual, I simply do not need physically to point to myself at all. I could merely utter the words “Who, me?” and omit the pointing gesture and still be perfectly understood. It cannot even be the case that apparent ostensive pointing to oneself takes place when speaking is for some contingent reason difficult, as when you are too far away to hear me or when I have lost my voice or do not wish to be heard, etc.,

I apparently ostensively point to myself, point my forefinger towards the right side of my chest, normally when you are well within hearing distance from me, and when my vocal chords are quite unimpaired and I wish to underscore in a special way the force of my clearly uttered words “Who, me?”, i.e., by way of pointing my forefinger towards my chest.

What is then the real communicative thrust of this ritual of the inverted forefinger? It wordlessly explicates the words “Who, me?” as follows: “I am pretending that my forefinger is the forefinger of a third person who is answering a fourth person’s question about you, the second person, the question ‘Who does he mean?’ and the third person physically points to me in answer to this question, indicating that you mean me. Do you?” And this explication is put across to you not in some uncheckable irredeemably private occult way, but by means of the visible, although imaginative, employment of all the paraphernalia of multiple endorsement which the hinted third and fourth persons of the ritual represent. Thus far the ritual is a

tribute to the power of ostensive reference, the hold of *dehabhava*, the physicalist orientation of our ordinary consciousness. And yet it is precisely *dehatmavada*, the 'I am this body' illusion, which the ritual repudiates at a deeper level. For as a manifest fantasy of ostensive self-reference, the inverted forefinger dramatises the impossibility of such self-reference, something which should not be impossible if I were a body. What a pity Wittgenstein never met Ramana!

Suppose by *atmavicara*, by *sravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana* and by the grace of a guru, I reach intellectually the conclusion that I alone am real, that all else which appears to be not-I is really, I, myself, the appearance of not-I being illusion and not reality. Suppose further that this conclusion although strong is nevertheless quite definitely this side of *advaita siddhi*, so that at the most I regard the conclusion as only the intellectually and somewhat insecurely understood statement of my guru that I alone am reality. Would I not in imagination then turn to my guru and address to him the words 'Who, me?'. Would I not be driven in imagination even physically to point to myself as I utter those words?

Indeed there remains always about self-consciousness this wondering about itself, not wondering that it is this or that, but wondering just that it is, whether or not one is deliberately engaged in *atmavicara*. This self-wonder, this combination of amazement and certainty that one is, is just what is more grossly also involved in what occurs communicatively when I physically point to myself and ask you 'Who, me?' in connection with some possibly quite trivial matter relating to you and me and our world.

The foundation of all human communication is addressing, the vocative identification of one another by human beings, i.e., their identification of one another not as beings of this or that kind, possessing this or that characteristic, but as themselves, *nirguna* centres of self-consciousness. It is in consequence of vocative identification, of addressing one another, and subsequent to it, that we go on to communicate to one another a variety of things about ourselves and the world, but in vocative identification we essentially merely stir one another to a *nirguna* conception of ourselves.

We do not of course easily always or even much or at all notice this, but in a variety of situations, and not merely through philosophical analysis, this is brought home to us in the thick of our worldly communicative life as the essential truth of ourselves and as the essential message of that life when all that has to be said is said and there remains a bare *nirguna* indication of ourselves as that, that we are. Love, aloneness, joy and peace also bring this insight.

At a deep level, therefore, we may regard everyone who addresses us as a guru, like the innumerable gurus of Dattatreya, drawing our attention to our *nirguna* absolutist mode of self-consciousness. And because our wonder at our own real status remains always, we would wish to ask anyone at all who in addressing us necessarily restores us to our *Atmic* status the rhetorical question “Who, me?”, and we might cause these words to be accompanied by the magic ritual of pointing with our forefinger to our heart on the right side of our chest.

Thus the act of pointing to the right side of our chest with our forefinger to which Sri Ramana draws our attention to remind us of the fact that we do really take ourselves to be centred there, is indeed full of mystery, is the oldest ritual of human communicative *Veda*. It is the aboriginal ritual of *ascaryam* of *Atman-Brahman*, its eternal wonder at being all that is, one and only reality. Interestingly *advaitin uttara-mimamsa* teaching becomes involved in this magic *purva-mimamsa* ritual, witnessing to the unity of *Vedanta*.

Our self-wonder is never a doubting, except in a mysteriously fallen condition. It is play and it is in play that *Atman-Brahman* unfurls itself as an apparent plurality of subjects and objects, subjects pointing to one another and the world or aspects and items of the world in *ascaryam* and, as it were, deeply always to say, “He, me, you, this, that and that other, are all one, all me,” *sarvam khalu idam brahma*.

It has been recorded that in a dream or vision a devotee received *sparsa diksa* from Sri Ramana which consisted in the Master pressing with his forefinger the right side of the devotee’s chest. (Wittgenstein was struck by Luther’s remark that faith is under the right nipple.) Could it not be that in touching ourselves with our forefinger on the right side of our chest in mock ostensive reference to ourselves

we imagine ourselves to be the recipients of such *diksa*? Do we not indeed in and through that ritual proclaim, howsoever disguisedly, that we are *diksita*, even that we are self-realised *Atman-Brahman*? All are *jnanis*, and each human being who speaks to another is a secret guru initiating the other into *advaita sadhana*. But for an unshakable realisation of that we need the grace of Ramana Maharshi who not much longer than sixty years ago physically pressed upon us the truth of ourselves. May we all at least in dream receive his *sparsa diksa*, be touched on the right sides of our chest by him. ▲

Understanding the 'I-I'

Hans Heimer

In the April-June 2011 *Mountain Path* commentary on verse 30 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, the word 'I' is used to describe the ego (or false 'I'); the phrase 'I-I' is used to name the 'infinite I' which shines in response to the Quest 'Who am I?'. It is possible to expand the explanation of the phrase 'I-I'.

The conventional concept of a person existing in the world is to call the person 'I' and everything else as 'not I'. This is the path of duality. As a result of pursuing the Quest, we come to realize that it is erroneous to believe that a person can exist independently of its environment, the world. Without the background of parents, atmosphere, food etc., a person cannot exist. Conversely, without the existence of a sensory system, the world cannot exist, as the world is a construct of a person's sensations. The two aspects of our conceptions, i.e. a person and the world, are entirely interdependent and therefore non-dual. This is very well represented by the phrase 'I-I', where the first 'I' represents the person, the second 'I' the 'non-person', both being forms of consciousness. The hyphen between the two I's, represents the unbreakable bond of non-duality, which is realized when the Quest reaches the Heart. When this bond is understood, then we feel ashamed of our erroneous belief in duality, which is an error of the vast majority of mankind. ▲

Maha Bhakta Vijayam

The Advent of Sant Tulasidas

NABAJI SIDDHA

We begin a new story in the lives of the saints. Sant¹ Tulasidas was the great medieval poet-saint renowned for his absolute devotion to Lord Rama. He is best known for his epic Ramcharitmanas, which is a retelling of the Sanskrit Ramayana in the local vernacular of the time. He is regarded as one of the greatest poets in Hindi. He is said to have lived from 1497 to 1632 CE, though traditional accounts and biographers fail to agree on the exact dates.

It is interesting to note in Day by Day with Bhagavan the following excerpt:² “On or about 15-3-45 Bhagavan had asked someone in the hall to read aloud Bhakta Vijayam, to illustrate from the story of Tulasi Das, how one totally immersed in sensual life, suddenly recoils and goes to the other extreme of a highly religious life. In the story, Tulasi Das runs away from wife and home and is mad after Hari at Banaras. The wife and

¹ Sant refers to those *bhakti* poets who sing the name of God. It also means *mahatma* or great soul and is used in respect to those who have attained *moksha*.

² Mudaliar, D., *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 18.3.1945, 2006. p.2.

MOUNTAIN PATH

mother go and entreat him to come back, reminding him of his great love for them all. He takes no notice of them at all, but asks them, 'Has my Hari come? Yes. He is coming there! etc.' He was mad after Hari alone and took interest in nothing else. When this portion was being read out Bhagavan said, 'I was somewhat like this at Madura. Going to school, books in hand, I would be eagerly desiring and expecting that God would suddenly appear before me in the sky; and so I would be looking up at the sky. What sort of progress could such a one make in his studies at school!' [This was apparently shortly before he left Madura. I have never heard before, either from Bhagavan or from others, that he was so God-mad at Madura. So I record it here.]"

Invocation to the Lord

O Achyuta! Reclining on the waves of milky ocean!
Brahma the Creator issued forth from the lotus of Thy navel;
It is easier to create and destroy,
But O Lord! To sustain the worlds is indeed difficult.
Thou bearest the burden of nourishing the whole creation!
Who can sing Thy glories adequately, O Compassionate Lord?
I take refuge in Thee!

Invocation to Sant Tulasidas

He who wallowed in the mire of sensual desire,
Became possessed with madness for Lord Hari,
Roaming hither and thither thirsting for His vision!
The ascetic unrivalled exposed the disguise of Sri Hanuman,
By whose grace he beheld the Lord,
Adorned with the fragrant garland of Tulasi!
He who rejoiced having made his bosom the Lord's abode!
Bearing the name Tulasidas,
At his holy feet I make my obeisance!

Advent of Tulasidas

The venerable siddha Uddhava and other revered mystics who had awakened the seven chakras, the subtle centres of consciousness in

their being, while beholding their radiance were absorbed in the sweet melodies emanating from them. Experiencing through inner vision the supreme Light which illumines all lights, they were immersed in transcendental bliss. One day, after completing their morning rituals, they hurried to the hermitage of the exalted sage Nabhaji, the aspect of Lord Brahma, with great eagerness to listen to the life story of Sant Tulasidas who was the very incarnation of the illustrious sage Valmiki. Pleased with their enthusiasm, Nabhaji proceeded to narrate the story with great joy.

There lived a noble brahmin in the city of Hastinapuram, which later came to be known as Delhi — a city chosen by Viswarupa and ruled by Pandavas, the beloved devotees of Sri Krishna and where Lord Krishna revealed his cosmic form in the court of Dhritarashtra. The brahmin wore the religious insignia without fail, was well versed in Vedic lore, and was fond of the company of saints. He was serene, humble, scholarly, happy, content and fond of serving others. He was awake in the fourth state of Turiya. He was kind and generous to guests and sadhus, compassionate towards the poor, and was revered and praised by the people. He talked always about the glory of Atma, the Self, to all people irrespective of their religious background: 'Atma is the substratum. It is indestructible, eternal and source of all creation. It is verily Allah, Siva and Vishnu: this is not a figure of speech, but the truth. It is the mystery of all mysteries, the all-redeeming mantra, the five-syllabled as well as eight-syllabled mantra, the very law governing life, and it is Lord Rama himself.' His speech was always laced with the glory of the Atma. As a result, this brahmin came to be called Atma Ram.

Akbar, the emperor of Delhi, learnt about Atma Ram's integrity, noble character, scholarship, intelligence, acumen and the direct knowledge of the Self with which he prevailed over logicians and scholars. He invited Atma Ram to join his council as a minister in his court and guide him in the governance of the kingdom. He treated Atma Ram with reverence and sought his counsel in all matters. He listened to his teachings of wisdom with devotion and immersed himself in the nectar of his words. Treating the brahmin with great honour, Akbar paid him a monthly emolument of one thousand gold coins.

The illustrious sage Valmiki — who struggled to pronounce the word Rama and by repeating ‘Mara, Mara’ attained the highest state, who was steadfast in tapas, whose renown had spread to all quarters of all the worlds, who was an adept in the four branches of Vedas and who quelled the doubts of atheists and believers in the scriptures alike, who blessed the world with the great epic Ramayana and who was foremost among jnanis — obeyed the command of the Lord and incarnated in the womb of Atma Ram’s wife, to spread the glory of bhakti and establish dharma in the world.

The child was born with the radiance and beauty of the full moon. Moved by intense affection, the father held the child in his loving embrace and deluged it with his overflowing joy. Uttering sweet nothings to the child, Atma Ram became immersed in inexpressible joy matching the bliss of Brahman. Even high souls are enmeshed in the coils of attachment to their children! He named the child Tulasidas and gave a grand feast to relatives and friends to celebrate the occasion. In course of time, he performed the sacred thread ceremony of the boy and taught him the scriptures, grammar and logic and enabled him to become a great scholar in all branches of learning. He chose a young girl named Mamata Devi who was beautiful with long tresses, lotus-eyed, intelligent, soft and sweet-spoken and gentle-natured from a wealthy family as a bride for Tulasidas. Inviting friends and relatives, he performed his son’s marriage in a praiseworthy manner. The emperor also sent many valuable gifts for the couple and honoured the function.

Atma Ram took Tulasidas to the royal court and made him observe the proceedings, thereby training him to shoulder the ministerial responsibility. He apprised his son thus: “One should be very careful in his approach to the king and the snake. The actions of both are unpredictable. He should be neither too familiar nor too indifferent. He should keep a safe distance, just as one would in the case of fire to feel the warmth without at the same time getting burnt by the heat. When he is in the court, his attention should be focused entirely on the happenings and proceedings. He should not swerve from justice, but remain unswayed by power and wealth. His scales of judgment should not be disturbed by the prosperity or poverty of the persons

seeking justice. His advice to the king should be without fear or favour. When the king seeks his counsel, he must give the issue deep thought before tendering his advice, because an irresponsible and immature minister will ruin the nation. It is easier to bring doom than to maintain a righteous rule.

“A minister should be so sagely as to look upon others as himself and protect their interests. If the king is led to do injustice, he must render timely guidance by citing examples from scriptures and history and redirect him to the right path. This is how one should earn his respect and fame. Just as a noble man attains fame by spending the wealth he acquires in righteous ways, so should a man acquiring power use it to establish justice in the kingdom and earn his renown. While he is in power and authority, he should make use of it to bring reforms in the country, expand good works, avert unrighteousness, and encourage and support citizens to lead a virtuous, disciplined and God-centred life. His authority should be put to good use by controlling evil doings such as killing, theft, immorality and excessive indulgence in sensory pleasures etc.

“A minister should further be cordial to guests, revere and show unstinted hospitality to ascetics by attending solicitously to their comforts and ensuring smooth flow of their daily routine and please them thus with his service and earn their blessings for the king. He should be vigilant in protecting the royal family from transgressions in their conduct towards the sadhus. It is the penance and austerities of the sadhus that protect the householders. Likewise, it is the dharma of householders which supports the life of sadhus. When the sadhus and sages are displeased, it brings about harm to the country. The blessings of mahatmas cause a desolate nation to flourish and turn gloom into happiness in the kingdom. A nation derives its light, life and joy not from the luminosity of sun and moon but from the gladdened hearts of sages and saints. The spiritual guidance of sage Vasishta enabled Dasaratha to rule his kingdom as an ideal king and earn enduring fame. The assembly of sages is the holy herd of wish-fulfilling cows for a nation. A country without sadhus is like a terrible forest where wild beasts roam.

“A minister must be endowed with patience, subtle intelligence and presence of mind. Patience is vaster than the ocean. Let me illustrate it with the story of a king who was saved from the heinous sin of killing a woman, thanks to the sagacity of his minister.

“There lived a householder-sadhu who had attained *sakshatkar*, spiritual illumination, while leading the householder’s life and spent his days in the blissful state. In that condition, he could hardly attend to the material needs of the household. When he was about to shed his mortal coil, his son grumbled, ‘O Father, how will I get married and lead a life without want? You have left nothing for me or made any arrangement for my livelihood.’ He went on nagging his father.

“The saint wrote on a piece of paper ‘Patience is greater than the ocean’ and handing it to the son, said, ‘Son, keep this with you carefully. When you face any problem, take this paper to the king. Your problem will be solved.’ Soon after this, he passed away. The son performed all the rites for his father and took the paper to the king. The king put it in the sheath of his sword and rewarded the son with a lot of gifts. The sage’s son left the palace with joy.

“After a few days, the king went on a hunting expedition to the forest. The servant who made the king’s bed, arranged the silk cushions and decorated the bed with soft and fragrant blossoms had long cherished a desire to sleep on the king’s bed and enjoy its comfort and pleasure. He had been waiting for the king to be away for awhile to fulfill his dream. Taking advantage of the hunting day, he took extra care to do the bed with flowers and soft cushions. Then, he laid himself on it, covering himself with silk sheets. Enjoying the softness and fragrance, he was lulled by the sweet pleasure into a deep sleep. At that moment, the queen entered the bed chamber. She thought that the king, having returned from the forest, must have been very tired to be in bed so early. She too, feeling exhausted, laid herself on the bed next to the king.

“As destiny would have it, the king returned from the game and entered his room. He was shocked to find the queen sleeping on the bed in his absence with another man. He sweated profusely and his body trembled with anger. With uncontrolled rage, he drew the sword from the sheath to slay both. Along with the sword came out

the piece of paper given to him by the sage's son. The king did not notice the slip of paper being dragged out of the sheath along with the sword. When it fell on the floor, he mistook that the paper had been dropped on him by Providence. He picked up the piece and read the following: 'Patience is greater than the ocean.' Fearing that the slip of paper had come from the gods, he stopped in his tracks and left the room silently. He called the minister and apprised him of everything. Listening to the account of the king, the astute minister guessed what had happened.

"He said to the king, 'O Your Highness! I will find a way to clear your suspicion and set your mind at rest.'

"Making the king stand in a corner unnoticed by others but within earshot, he parked himself in the passage to the bedroom and clapped his hands. Startled by the sound, the queen awoke and noticing the minister at the door she became embarrassed. In an annoyed tone she told the minister, 'It is extremely improper for you to stand at the entrance of our bedroom without fear of rebuke when we are resting on our own.'

"She started moving towards her quarters. Walking behind her, the minister asked, 'Your Highness, do you know at what hour the king returned from his expedition?'

"She replied, 'He must have returned during the first watch of the night and gone to bed.'

" 'Did you see him enter the bedroom and if so, by which door?' pursued the minister.

" 'I didn't see him come in. He must have been very exhausted as he was already fast asleep when I joined him.'

"Getting furious at the unbecoming conduct of the minister, she said in an irate voice, 'You, though wise, must be out of your mind to enter our private chamber without any scruples and further to stalk my footsteps vexing me with all sorts of questions! Whatever the contingency, you should have sent word through a messenger and not accosted me alone.' She abruptly entered the women's quarters without encouraging any further talk.

"Convinced of the queen's innocence in the drama that was unraveling, he returned to the bedroom and woke up the servant.

The servant was shocked to see the minister at his side and stood up trembling. The minister asked him why he was sleeping on the king's bed and who was sleeping with him. The servant replied that he was alone and for a long time he had cherished a desire to sleep on the king's bed. The minister left the servant in the custody of soldiers and turned to the king: 'O King, has your suspicion left you?'

"However, the king wanted to put the queen to further test. He called her and said, 'When I entered our chamber, I found you sleeping on the bed next to a servant of the royal household. You can live with me hereafter only if you first immerse yourself in a cauldron of boiling oil to prove your purity. If you cannot go through this ordeal, you can return to your parents' home.'

"The noble woman said, 'This body is anyway polluted by sleeping in the proximity of another man in bed. It is better to end the ignominy by immolating myself in fire.' As she moved to take a leap into the boiling pot, the king became astonished at her readiness to prove her innocence.

" 'O noble woman!' said the king, 'this piece of paper has dropped from heaven on your account. So there cannot be any blame on you. Give up this attempt.'

"When the king came near to console her, she stepped away and said, 'Please do not defile yourself by coming near me, for I have been polluted by sharing the same bed with another man.'

"Once again she approached the boiling oil pot, but the king and her maid-servants restrained her with great difficulty.

"The king said, 'O my innocent queen! This paper has been dropped by the gods to protect you. Let me throw it in the oil cauldron and test its veracity.'

"Interceding, the minister said, 'This was given to you by the sadhu's son and you had put it in the sheath perhaps absent-mindedly. When you drew the sword, this must have fallen out. If it gets burnt in the hot oil, it will, once again, invite your suspicion. So, to avert such an eventuality, throw it in the oil with the prayer that the paper should remain intact if the queen is innocent.'

“When the king tossed it in the boiling oil with a prayer to his Ishta, it remained afloat without any damage. There was a murmur of amazement and praise all around. But the queen was not satisfied. She said, ‘This paper floating on the oil is no proof of my chastity or otherwise.’ Saying this, she rushed into the boiling cauldron. Lo and behold! The steaming oil turned into fragrant and cool rosewater, the raging fire in the oven went ice cold. There were shouts of joy everywhere. The celestials sounded the trumpets of victory and showered petals of scented flowers.

“Overjoyed at these, the king held the queen in fond embrace and praised her, ‘It is because of pure and noble women like you that the sun and moon shed their light and luster on the earth, the earth revolves on its axis unswervingly, and the seasons arrive in time without fail!’

“Turning to the minister, he said, ‘But for your sagacity and patient counsel, I would have incurred the heinous sin of killing an innocent woman. If you had not come to my aid, my beloved and noble queen would have become a prey to this sword.’

“They sent word to the son of the sadhu who had brought the paper with the redeeming message, “Patience is greater than the ocean” and showered him with gifts and money.

“O Tulasidas,” concluded Atma Ram, “it is not enough for a minister to be astute and shrewd. He should necessarily wear the precious jewel of peace and patience in his heart to be effective in his duty.”

After imparting many such pieces of wisdom and stories of insight and high morals, Atma Ram entrusted his responsibilities to Tulasidas and left on a pilgrimage. Tulasidas joined the court of the king as a minister. He served the king with sincerity and devotion. His ministership was so exemplary that people adored and revered him as if he were the king himself. He rendered justice to the people of the land, got shelters with arrangements for feeding sadhus built in several places, and had wells and water-tanks for both people and cattle dug in every village. He also sought the fellowship of sadhus, spending his time in serving and adoring them. His fame grew greater than that of his father.





An Introduction to the *Arunachala* *Purana*

Part One

The Tamil *Sthala Purana* of Tiruvannamalai by
Ellappa Navalar with special reference to the
Sanskrit *Arunachala Mahatmya*

ROBERT BUTLER

The following article is the first part of an edited extract from the Introduction to the full English translation of the Tamil Arunachala Puranam by Ellappa Navalar, which is scheduled for publication by Sri Ramanasramam during the course of the forthcoming year.

The *Arunachala Puranam* is the *sthala purana* of Tiruvannamalai. A *sthala purana* is a work which brings together all the legends relating to a particular holy place, or *sthala*, as they are known. It was composed in the 17th. century by Ellappa Navalar. Most *sthala puranas*, like the present one, are relatively recent in composition, but the myths and legends they contain form part of an unbroken tradition, elaborated, embroidered and transformed over several millennia, beginning with the *Vedas*, and the Vedic commentaries, the *Brahmanas*, and culminating in the Puranic period with the two great epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the eighteen major

Puranas, and the numerous minor *Puranas*, known as *Upapuranas*. Their subject matter is nothing less than the history of the universe and everything in it as seen by Hindu society. To read the *Arunachala Puranam*, modest in scope though it is, is to take a cross-section through over two thousand years of the evolving sensibility of Hindu society. In the *Arunachala Puranam*, the main story unfolds against the background of epic themes such as the creation of the universe, and the battles for supremacy between the gods themselves, and the gods and their enemies, the *asuras*.

Two major themes are interwoven: the first is the greatness of the Arunachala *sthala*, and the story of how the mountain Arunachala first manifested as an unfathomable pillar of fire, to settle a quarrel between Brahma and Vishnu; and the second is the story of how Siva's consort Parvati came to merge with Lord Siva as half of himself, as the merged deity *Ardhanariswara*. As these two strands merge, the ultimate sanction of the *sthala's* greatness is given, as Lord Siva chooses it as the place where he will reveal his non-dual nature, and merge indissolubly with his own creative energy, or *sakti*, as personified by Parvati:

"Manifesting as female and male, we have thus divided the beings of this world. I became the lingam, and you the pedestal just below it. But what you think of as 'I' and 'You' are not in reality two. Coexisting like the tree and its inner core, We dwell as one."¹

Ellappa Navalar

As is the case with many other Tamil authors, not a great deal is known about the life of Ellappa Navalar, or Saiva Ellappa Navalar, as he is also known. He is thought to have lived in the reign of the Tamil king Tirumalai Nayakar, whose dates are 1623–1659. His birthplace may possibly have been Tiruvannamalai, but whether it was or not, he is thought to have spent many years there in a *mutt* or *math* (a monastic or similar establishment). Others give his birthplace as a place called Talainakar, or Iratanallar, near Tiruvenkatu. Others think he may have been born in Jaffna (Yazhppanam) in Sri Lanka,

¹ *Arunachala Puranam*, Ch. 5, v. 397.

on account of the large number of words of Jaffna origin that are found in his works. He is said to have belonged to the Velala caste, who were powerful agricultural landlords, the aristocracy of the Tamil society of that time. It is also said that at an early age he was sent to *Dharmapura atinam*, an important Saiva *mutt* in the Tanjore district, where he received initiation into the Saivite faith, and attained great literary and linguistic skills.

In addition to the *Arunachala Puranam*, he composed a number of other *Puranas*, wrote commentaries on Sanskrit works, and composed two long poems which are both extant, the *Arunai Antati* and the *Arunai Kalampakam*. The latter of these, a long poem in mixed metre and written in the style of Tamil Akam poetry, is particularly highly regarded. The Tamil verse of Ellappa is erudite and poetic in equal measure. The descriptive passages are vivid and striking, even in translation. In terms of erudition, he displays a thorough knowledge of the classical *Akam* genre of love poetry in an extended section which describes the entry of Parvati into Tiruvannamalai.

Sources of the Arunachala Puranam

The author of the Tamil *Arunachala Puranam*, in verses 21 and 514, cites as the source for its first 7 chapters the *Rudra Samhita* (514), or the *Kodi Rudra Samhita* (21) of the *Siva Purana*. For the remainder of the work, he cites the *Linga Purana*. It may be noted that the *Rudra Samhita* is more usually described as an ‘unofficial’, non-standard section of the *Skanda Purana*, not the *Siva Purana*. It is not at all clear to which text the author is referring. Some texts divide the *Skanda Purana* into sections called *samhitas*. Ellappa could therefore be using the name *Rudra Samhita* simply to refer to a larger section of the *Purana* in which the *Mahatmya* is located. At the time of writing no text or translation of either the (*Koti*) *Rudra Samhita* or the *Linga Purana* was available to the translator, and therefore any discussion of their role as a source for the present work will have to await a later edition.

There is however one work which stands out as an obvious source for the majority of the material directly related to the mountain Arunachala and this is the *Arunachala Mahatmya* – *The Greatness*

of *Arunachala*. The *Arunachala Mahatmya* is a section of the *Maheswara Kanda* of the Sanskrit *Skanda Purana*. In actual fact there are effectively two *Mahatmyas*, not one, since it consists of two sections, called the *Purvardha* and *Uttarardha*, each of which relates the same material, but in a different order, with variations of detail and emphasis. In some places the Tamil *Arunachala Puranam* provides a near word-for-word translation for material in one or other of the *Mahatmya* sections; elsewhere there are quite wide divergences, as the author appears to embroider material that is only mentioned in a cursory manner in the *Mahatmya*, or skips over material that is treated more fully there. Whatever original text or texts the author, Saiva Ellappa Navalar, worked from, it is hard to imagine that their content differed widely from that of the work we now know as the *Arunachala Mahatmya*. The fact that the title of the work refers specifically to the greatness of Arunachala, and the fact that it consists of a collation of two accounts, different in style and clearly by different authors, might lead one to conjecture that the *Mahatmya* may well be a digest of all the relevant material relating to Arunachala, gathered together from disparate sources, either within the *Skanda Purana* itself, or other Saiva *Puranas*, such as the *Siva Purana* and the *Linga Purana*.

There is one major theme which does not form part of the *Mahatmya* but is dealt with in detail by the *Arunachala Puranam*: this is the destruction of Daksha's sacrifice, the death of Sati, and the subsequent events which lead up to Parvati's marriage to Siva, including the burning up of Kama. These events are not mentioned at all in the first part of the *Mahatmya*, and in the second part, are merely summarised in a few *slokas*, as a cursory recapitulation for the benefit of the reader, (*Uttarardha ch. 17, sl. 1-11*). This is of course one of the major stories connected to Siva, and is told in a number of *Puranas* and other texts, principally the great *Siva Purana* itself. To his credit Ellappar relates the story with great gusto and poetical artifice as his third chapter, making it an excellent launching-pad for the next two large chapters, which lead up to the merging of Parvati with Lord Siva.

Ramana Maharshi and the Arunachala Texts

Ah, there a mountain, as if insentient, stands,
its works amazing, past all human understanding.
From innocence of youth, as mighty *Arunachala*, it shone
within my thoughts, but of its meaning, knowledge had I none,
even when I learned that it and *Tiruvannamalai* both, were one.
It charmed my mind and pulled me on, near its presence,
till, drawing near, at last I saw it as *vast unmoving essence*.

Thus, in verse 1 of *Eight Verses to Arunachala*, does Sri Bhagavan describe how, from his early youth, he was captivated by the mountain Arunachala, even before he knew exactly where and what it was. From the day that he came there at the age of 16, he adopted it as his guru, recognising it as the living presence of Lord Siva. It is therefore no surprise for us to learn that he had a high regard for the literary works which tell of the glory of the mountain Arunachala, and of the legends relating to it. Written records of conversations with Sri Ramana demonstrate both his great love for the *Mahatmya* and the *Puranam*, and the pleasure he took in retelling the stories in his own words and speculating on various aspects of them. What follows are a few excerpts from these conversations, with references where applicable to the places in the *Puranam* and *Mahatmya* where their themes occur.

In the following excerpt from Devaraja Mudaliar's *Day by Day with Bhagavan*² Bhagavan refers to chapter IV of the *Puranam*, *The Masking of the Divine Eyes*, vv.320-322, where Parvati, after performing *tapas* in Kasi and Kancipuram, arrives in Tiruvannamalai and makes her way to the ashram of Gautama:

"As I was entering the hall about 2-50 p.m., Bhagavan was reading out from the Tamil *Arunachala Puranam* the verses in which it is said that Gauri, after crossing the several streets of Arunachalam, reached Gautama's Asramam. When Bhagavan came to the verses dealing with Gautama's joy at Gauri's coming to his Asramam, Bhagavan could not go on, for tears filled his eyes and emotion choked his voice. So he laid aside the book and Desai continued his reading of the manuscript. I may here record that I have noticed on more than one occasion in the past how Bhagavan could not proceed with the reading of any deeply

devotional portions of Tamil works such as *Thevaram* and devotional hymns of *Thayumanavar*. This afternoon when I took from Bhagavan the above *Arunachala Puranam* and referred to the portion which moved him so deeply and told him, in effect, that I had discovered his plight which he tried to hide from us all, he remarked, 'I don't know how those people who perform *kalakshepam* and explain such passages to audiences manage to do it without breaking down. I suppose they must first make their hearts hard like stone before starting their work.'"²

The next paragraph, as Mr Desai continues with his reading, refers to Chapter XI, *The Expiation of Sins*, vv 612-619, in which the Eight Vasus perform penance to atone for their sin of pride in boasting of their *tapas* in the assembly of Brahma. Bhagavan appears to have had access to some other account of this incident in addition to the one in the *Puranam*, since there is no mention there of the Vasus remaining there in the form of hills. The idea that each Vasu became one of the radiating spurs that surround the hill is an interesting one.

These reflections lead Bhagavan to speculate on the locations of the Guardians of the Eight Directions, and on the locations for Gautama's ashram and Parvati's *tapas*. One thing that is striking in all these conversations is the fact that Bhagavan takes these Puranic records to be the literal truth, and not some literary invention.

He added, "It is difficult now for us to locate where the *Ashta Dikpalakas* actually stood sentry, whether at the spots where the *Ashta Dik Lingams* are now found or whether the *lingams* are those which were installed and worshipped by them. We cannot be sure where exactly Gauri did penance and where Gautama had his Asramam. But it would be safe to assume that Gauri did her penance in the region covered by Pavalakunru, Durga temple and Pachiamman Koil, and that Gautama's Asramam must have also been near this region."

Chapter IX of the *Puranam*, and chapter 9 of the *Purvardha* of the *Mahatmya* speak at length of the power and efficacy of circumambulation of the holy mountain Arunachala. Suri Nagamma, in *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*³ writes about Bhagavan's intimate

² Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 12.12.45, Afternoon.

³ The Importance of *Yatra* and *Pradakshina*, Letter 251, p.599, 7th Edition.

acquaintance with the content of those two chapters. His description of the etymology of the word *pradakshina*, which does not occur in the *Puranam*, is an exact translation of *slokas* 68b & 69a of chapter 9 of *Purvardha* of the *Mahatmya*:

The letter ‘pra’ cuts off sin; the letter ‘da’ bestows that which is desired; the letter ‘kshi’ destroys karma; the letter ‘na’ bestows liberation.

The Text

The text used for the translation in the *Mountain Path* is that of the edition published in 2000 by Sri Ramanasramam. This in turn is a republication of an edition first published in the 1930s, a copy of which is still extant with corrections that appear to be in Bhagavan’s own hand. This early edition was much more than a printed edition of the Tamil text. It has nearly 850 pages, and, in addition to the text itself, accompanied by prose summaries of each chapter and a prose translation of each verse, contains just about all the known extant poetical works composed in praise of the mountain Arunachala, including works by the *Tevaram* authors, Manikkavacagar, Arunagirinathar, Guhainamasivayar, Gurunamasivayar, Sivaprakasha Swamigal and the author of the *Puranam*, Ellappa Navalar himself. The current Tamil edition comprises the text itself, the prose summaries and translations and the *Annamalai Venba* of Gurunamasivayar. There has never been a critical edition of this text, referring back to the original palm leaf MSS, assuming that at least one of these still exists, but the text appears to be quite stable, with only a few minor variants amongst the various editions.

Part Two will consist mainly of a comparison between the *Arunachala Purana* and the *Arunachala Mahatmya*, highlighting differences in the way some of the major themes are treated in the two works. ▲

Overleaf: The illustration of *Ardhanareswara* on the following page is from a handwritten edition of the *Sri Arunachala Mahatmyam* mostly in Bhagavan’s own hand. We believe Bhagavan pasted the picture, among others, in the 397 page notebook and that the book was completed circa 1935.



TRANSLATION

Arunachala Purana

Chapter Three

The Holy Avatar — Parvati Devi

SAIVA ELLAPPA NAVALAR

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

The moment [Lord Siva] reached the city of Himavan, the maidens of the Himalaya drank in with their eyes all the divine beauty of the Flawless One. They praised Parvati saying, “The *tapas* performed by Lady Uma was indeed not in vain!” and cried out, “Which is the eye that slew Kama when he came to do battle?” (246)

Some declared, “Even when Kama had a body, all the world was oblivious to him, because He (Lord Siva) was immersed in yogic trance; and now, even though Kama’s body has been destroyed, He has conceived a desire for sensual pleasure, and the world has followed

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has recently published a grammatical commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu*, and a translation of the biography of Manikkavacagar. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: <http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666>.

MOUNTAIN PATH

suit. It is indeed the Primal One, [not Kama], who is the instigator of lustful infatuation!” (247)

Some exclaimed, “The beauty of Kama, who wields his delusive [sugarcane] bow, does not amount to one thousandth part of that of His exceedingly beautiful form. Such was the true power of His *tapas* that, knowing His own worth [and despising Kama], He completely consumed His body with fire. Could any other great ones be found who are capable of achieving [such a thing]?” (248)

The father-in-law [Himavan]’s great clan, and the son-in-law [Lord Siva]’s hosts mingled with loving affection, coming forward again and again to embrace each other. He whose beginning and end are impossible to fathom, taking Brahma’s hand, dismounted from His bull mount. (249)

With numerous bright(ly adorned) young maidens performing the *nir ancanam* blessing,¹ and the Guardians of the Eight Directions marching closely on either side; with one hand resting upon the two hands of the most eminent Vishnu, He made His way to a marriage hall, set with myriad jewels. (250)

(There) He seated Himself upon the throne that had been installed in that exquisitely appointed hall. Then came [maidens], their ample breasts proclaiming their mountain birthplace, guiding with hands that were like exquisite flowers, and seating on the right of Lord Siva, the maiden whose visage possesses a divine beauty, She who is the dwelling place of holy grace itself. (251)

When the Lord of the Vedas had completed all the marriage rites, the Lord who rules over me cast puffed rice and sprinkled ghee onto the fire, and then, as prescribed in the Vedic mantras, circumambulated [the sacred fire] three times, holding the red hand of the chaste maiden who gave birth to the seven worlds. (252)

¹ For the meaning of *nirancanam* see v. 236, note 22 in *Mountain Path*, January 2012.

As the sound of a matchless white conch shell rang out, and the chanting of the Vedas arose, the gods and rishis, gathering round, poured down a rain of blossoms, and the Lord, in acquiescence, seated Himself (once more) on the throne to receive the homage of all, whilst the maiden Parvati made obeisance to her mother and father. (253)

When, seeing the Lord's joyful demeanour, not just one of them but all the gods with Brahma and Vishnu asked, "May it please you to restore to life Kama, whom you consumed in flames!" the Lord called the deceased Kama and granted him His grace. Then, with deep affection, all took their leave and departed. (254)

Subsequently the Lord and mother Gauri, uniting with melting hearts, joyfully gave birth to Vinayakar, [the son with the head of] a rutting elephant, and to Murugan, to whom the Lord gave a spear fit to inspire dread, and sent him on his way. Murugan devoured the life of the furious [*asura*] Tarakan, and rejoiced. (255)

He who burned the three fortress cities (of the *asuras*), accompanied by the Mountain's daughter, glorious as a peacock, the Elephant-headed one, powerful in battle, and the spear-wielding Murugan, left the Himalaya mountain, returning to Mount Kailash, to the delight of the gods and rishis.

Subsequently.. ' (256)

Chapter IV In which Parvati Devi masked the divine eyes

'I² have now related a small part of the story of my mother, [Parvati], who was born as an *avatar*³ to her mother, Mena through

² Nandi is still speaking as chapter four begins. The reader will remember that it is *Suta* who is recounting the story to the *rishis* of the *Naimisa* forest, and that in the main, he is quoting the dialogue between Nandi and Markandeya.

³ *avataritta* - who incarnated; literally descended. The verb *avatari* has the specific nuance of the birth of a divine being in a human incarnation.

MOUNTAIN PATH

the power of the *tapas* of the Himalaya Mountain, over which crawl clouds lit by lightning. In what follows I have undertaken to recount how with her two hands [Parvati] covered the eyes of the Lord whose matted locks (shine) like gold, and how, in southern Arunai's great city, She performed [*tapas* in] expiation of that act. (257)

Dressed in the finest jewels, [Siva and Parvati], very much in love, sulked at each other, then mended their quarrel; they hung garlands around each other's necks; they listened to [the recitation by sages of] the Vedic scriptures, and elucidated [their meaning]; they sang songs, (accompanying themselves on) the lute; they played all manner of games; they gambled with dice often, winning and then losing. (258)

During that time my mother [Parvati] bowed to Lord Siva and asked, "My Lord, who are they, whom we call the moon and the sun?" My father replied, "Maiden whose mouth is like a beautiful, ripe fruit, the bright moon and sun are my two eyes." Thereupon She who gave birth to Skanda [playfully] covered the Lord's two eyes with her hands. (259)

The moment She masked the Lord's eyes, the earth and the (eight) directions went dark, as if a vast mass of blackness had been melted and daubed over them. [All] mountains turned black, like the flawless great Nilagiri.⁴ All the pearl-strewn rivers turned dark like the Yamuna.⁵ (260)

The light faded from the eyes of the Lord of the Vedas, Narayanan (Vishnu), the rishis, the Vasus, the Four Vedas themselves and [Indra,] the king of the gods, and it was as if they had been totally blind from birth; the eyes of cows and bulls and all other beasts and birds became sightless; life was ruined, both that of the sage who has renounced

⁴ This is one of the eight mountain ranges of the terrestrial world, Jambudvipa. See v. 229 notes 11 & 12, *Mountain Path*, January 2012, p.116.

⁵ The Yamuna river is noted for the darkness of its waters.

the world, and that of people in other walks of life; all activity of whatever kind came to an end. (261)

Gods, men and *raksasas* lost their colour; in the temple Indra's white elephant turned black; the [swan] banner of insuperable Brahma turned into a crow. It wasn't long before it occurred to the three (Brahma, Vishnu and Indra) to take their complaint to Lord Siva. (262)

Raising His hand in the gesture⁶ which means, "Fear not!" the Lord opened the third eye on his forehead; it was as if twelve crores of suns rose at the same time. The darkness which affrighted the seven worlds was dissipated. Uma, [whose waist is as slender as] the *vanci* creeper, withdrew the two beautiful, lotus-like hands, with which She had masked the Lord's eyes and stood back; then all three eyes shone out, like the Vedic fires fostered by virtuous Brahmins.⁷ (263)

She who conceals the [whole] world in her divine womb paid homage to the Lord and said, "Wielder of the tall trident! You whose lotus foot struck the breast of Yama! You whose matted locks are covered in *kondrai* flowers! In order to atone for the wicked sin of covering your eyes, so that the seven worlds were hidden, as by a dark cloud, please tell me of a suitable place on the ocean-girt earth to perform my penance." (264)

At that, the Lord graciously replied, "If you wish to perform the most rare and difficult *tapas*, so that not only the effects of your own deeds will not touch you, but also the sins of all will be removed, go to Kanci and there perform puja and the most lofty *tapas*. That place

⁶This is the *abhaya mudra*. It is the position held by the lower right hand of Lord Siva in statues of *Nataraja*. The hand is raised with the palm facing outwards.

⁷ *muttala* – the three fires are the three kinds of *vedagni*-sacrificial fire: *ahavaniya*, *grahapatya*, and *daksinagni*.

MOUNTAIN PATH

is more glorious than Hardwar, Madurai, Benares, Ujjain, Dvaraka and Ayodhya.” And so, praising and worshipping the Lord, She took her leave.⁸ (265)

With Vijayalakshmi holding a parasol, Durga walking swiftly holding a golden betel pouch, and Arundati and Kamalini⁹ in close attendance on either side, waving swaying yak-tail fans inlaid with jewels, She journeyed on a palanquin set with pearls, which shone their light in the four directions like the young moon, until She reached the glorious river Ganges whose waters rise in flood, fostering virtue which all men prize. (266)

Reaching Kasi’s holy city, which is nothing less than the Lord’s glorious, divine form, where souls, if they die there, never more return to be born and die again, She worshipped Lord Siva’s holy feet and remained there for many days fostering the true *dharma*, in order that the souls who dwelt in that place, who were suffering on account of the lack of rain, might be saved. Then seeking leave to depart from the King [of that land], who wore a fragrant flower garland, She made her way to the rich Tondai¹⁰ land. (267)



(To be continued)

⁸The name of Lord Siva’s consort in *Tiruvannamalai* is *Unnamulai* – She of the unsuckled breasts. The Mahatmya gives an interesting explanation of how this name came about. It comes at the moment when Lord Siva has just granted Parvati the right of sharing his own form. He says to her:

*stanyarthinam guham hitva yatasi tapase yatah,
tad apitastani namna nivasa atra mama antike.*

Since you abandoned Guha, who yearned for your milk, and went away for the performance of tapas, dwell with me here with the name *Apitastani* (She of the unsuckled breasts).

Arunachala Mahatmya, Utt. Ch. 21, sl. 25b-26a.

⁹*Kamalini* is one of Parvati’s handmaidens, who famously incarnated as the maiden Paravai to marry Sundaramurti Nayanar, one of the poet-saints who composed the *Tevaram*.

¹⁰The *Tontai natu*, of which *Kancipuram* is the capital.

BOOK REVIEWS

Mother Reveals Herself



MOTHER REVEALS HERSELF As Recorded by Bhairji (Jyotish Chandra Roy). Shree Shree Anandamayee Archive, S-539, Greater Kailash-II, New Delhi 110048. pp332, Rs399. matrilila@gmail.com ISBN: 978-81-7769-964-7

Of the many spiritual and philosophical books that come to the magazine for review few combine an inspiring story of a great soul and spiritual insight and practical invaluable advice. This is one such book.

Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee (1896-1982) is one of the great luminaries of 20th century Hinduism. She was universally respected, and her *darshan* and advice were eagerly sought.

The book has a curious history. It was drawn from the diary written by one of Ma's earliest and closest devotees, Bhairji (Jyotish Chandra Roy). It is the source of several outstanding books on Ma: *Sad-Vani*, *Matri Darshan*, *Sri Charan* and *Dwadash Vani*. The remaining parts of the diary had a curious history.

Before Bhairji accompanied Ma and her husband Pitaji on their pilgrimage to Mount Kailash in 1937, he had handed over the manuscript to his uncle, Gangacharan Dasgupta, with a request to publish it as soon as possible. Bhairji died at Almora on the way back from Kailash. Dasgupta quickly published a selection as *Matri Darshan*. The remaining parts, still unedited, were given over a little later to Gurupriya Devi, Ma's close devotee, who kept the manuscript in her care until 1955. She read out the manuscript to Ma whose comments were then added to the manuscript. It then passed through several hands until it was eventually published in Bengali in 1985 titled *Mayer Katha*. The book contains a vivid, detailed account of Ma's early years and many extraordinary stories about Ma's spiritual unfoldment. Within its pages one finds a description of the highest manifestation of the Self, a revelation in concordance with the teaching of Bhagavan Ramana. Ma's words echo Bhagavan's declaration of "Who is the Supreme Being?" She said: "It is He who dwells in the abode of the Self where the question of gender does not arise. Who is that Blissful One? Where and how does He reveal Himself? All manifestations are possible because all are contained in Absolute Consciousness."

The publishers have done well to produce a quality volume at a reasonable price that is probably subsidised. It is printed on gloss paper with many appendixes that help the reader, including detailed maps of East Bengal and Ma's ashram at Ramna as well as a general map of India showing the places she had visited upto 1932.

— Amit Ray

A DICTIONARY/PANORAMA OF SPIRITUAL SCIENCE—ADHYATMA VIDYA by Swami Dayanand Giri Ji Maharaj. M.S. Ansari Printers, Lal Kuan, Delhi 6.2010.pp.303. VERSES OF THE DIVINE SPIRITUAL LIFE by Swami Dayanand Giri Ji Maharaj. M.S. Ansari Printers, Lal Kuan, Delhi 6. 2010. pp382. For Free Distribution of both books write to: G.C. Garg, 99 Preet Nagar, Ambala City, Harayana,134003.

Swami Dayanand Giri Ji was born in 1919 at Hoshiapur, Punjab. From childhood he was detached from his family and the world. After matriculation he left home, renouncing all worldly ties. He received *diksha* from a great saint Naga Swami who gave him his new name, Dayanand Giri. He never built an ashram and wandered leading the life of a true renunciate. He became known for his holiness and wise advice to those who sought solace and guidance. He was obviously a guru who inspired love and devotion. He attained *samadhi* in 2004. He was an eloquent speaker and prolific writer conversant in Hindi, Sanskrit and English. His major writings were in Hindi.

The two books under review are translations from the Hindi by some of his devotees. They are freely available to anyone who writes to G.C. Garg as mentioned in the book details above.

The Dictionary is a detailed explanation of some key concepts, for example: *Brahman*, *Dhyana*, *Nirvana*, *Maya*, Spiritual Fetters and Soul. These important terms have been elaborated in a simple but authoritative way. Dayanandji's underlying theme is liberation from the cycle of life and suffering. He did not acquire knowledge to become a scholar but to understand why we are enmeshed in *samsara* and how we can be liberated. There is an authentic ring to his discourses that shows a guru genuinely concerned with helping others rather than demonstrating his knowledge.

In the second book, Maharaji's verses and commentary are on the means to awaken the divine consciousness in man. He explains the laws of karma, reincarnation and life beyond death from the standpoint of his own divine inspiration and experience.

— J. Ritesh Kumar



KASHMIR SAIVISM: THE CENTRAL PHILOSOPHY OF TANTRISM by Kamalakar Mishra. Indica Books, D40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi 221001 UP. 2009. pp503, Rs795. ISBN 9789381120033 indicabooks@satyam.net.in

Kamalakar Mishra's *Kashmir Saivism: The Central Philosophy of Tantrism*, is a very well-written and extremely thought-provoking book. Either he is both a scholar and a *sadhaka* or else it is his association with *sadhakas* that greatly enhances this work. In this book, Mishra has expounded and explored the central themes found in Kashmir Saivism its history, epistemology, Siva-Sakti, Sakti, creation theories, appearance theory (*abhasavada*), the problem of evil, the concept of *pratyabhijna*, bondage and liberation, the means to *moksa*, the left-handed doctrine or *kaula sadhana* and sexual sublimation). This latest edition contains a chapter, Kashmir Saivism vis-à-vis Advaita Vedanta. In this chapter Mishra has shown how the two philosophical schools of Advaita Vedanta and Kashmir Saivism are really not so far apart and if one finds what is implicit in some of their doctrines and renders them explicit, such an endeavour will prove extremely rewarding. One thing that concerns me is that I have yet to find a book elucidating Kashmir Saivism without it continually criticizing Advaita Vedanta, with most of those criticisms taking the form of presenting inaccurate descriptions of Advaita's doctrine and then criticising them. I await someone to write a book on Kashmir Saivism that presents its doctrines and lets them stand on their own merits without attacking other philosophies. Kashmir Saivism is a beautiful philosophical system itself and need not attempt to belittle other philosophies when it presents its doctrines. — John Grimes

THE LITTLE BOOK GREEN ON AWAKENING by James George. Barrytown, Station Hill Press, Barrytown, NY, 12507. USA. 2009. pp176, \$15.95. ISBN: 978-1-58177-112-1 www.stationhill.org

The Canadian author of this small remarkable book has lead a long, rich and varied life as ambassador, naval historian, environmentalist and student of Yogaswami of Jaffna, Tibetan Buddhism and in particular, the Dzogchen tradition, and the Gurdjieff Work. He presents to us a notable collection of short essays principally about the ecological catastrophe which faces the earth today. He is concerned with the imperative need to raise the level of human consciousness to create a sustainable society. His background

MOUNTAIN PATH

in the Gurdjieff movement makes him bluntly aware of the immediate necessity to accept responsibility in whatever forms coming to us and not escape into a convenient spiritual dream-world that denies the reality of what we, as the human race, encounter today. This challenge threatens our future prospects of survival. It calls for a radical shift in our relationship with ourselves, with others, with other species and the planet as a whole. He is concerned with the underlying issues which have brought us to this modern ecological crisis. He quotes Gandhi's statement, "We must BE the change we wish to see in the world."

The essays range from scientific discussions on the levels of carbon dioxide, the urgent call to change our sources of energy, population growth, failed political states, UFOs and the power of consciousness to effect radical changes both in our perception and the way the world functions. It is an eloquent book written by an ordinary person who has thought and done extraordinary things because of the courage of his convictions.

— Christopher Quilkey

UNIVERSAL HINDUISM Towards a New Vision of Sanatana Dharma by David Frawley. Voice of India, 2/18 Ansari Road, New Delhi 110002. pp213, Rs200. ISBN: 978-81-85990-89-7 www.adityaprakashan.com

David Frawley is an able exponent among those who are redefining the meaning and role of Hinduism in the contemporary world. His audience is the educated secular but religious Hindu who is challenged by the atheistic and material trends Western economic life has brought to India. The challenge is not only in India but also with the now considerable Hindu diaspora throughout the world particularly the United States where their growing numbers are having a significant impact on the American social fabric. Frawley, an American Hindu, who has studied in depth the *sanatana dharma* is well placed to comment on the trends and offer clarifications of Hindu beliefs that have been misunderstood or deliberately maligned by bigotry and plain ignorance.

He sees the *sanatana dharma* as an active and positive force for change in the face of materialism and a vehicle for a higher consciousness to enter the world. We sorely need this in a world fraught with physical and mental conflict between cultures, continents and religions. The strength of Hinduism is not in its rituals and customs but the deep current of faith coupled with a subtle discrimination developed over thousands of years.

— TV Ramamurthy



D. Thiyagatajan

ASHRAM BULLETIN

132nd Jayanti of Sri Ramana Maharshi

Sri Bhagavan's birthday was celebrated with joy on 9th January at the Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam. Chanting, song and puja graced the morning and the day which began in the early hours with *Dhanurmasa* puja, Manikkavachakar's *Tiruvempavai*, Andal's *Tiruppavai*, Muruganar's *Ramana Tiruvempavai* and *Vishnu Sahasranamam* followed by Bhagavan's works. More devotees than usual came for the *Mahanyasa* puja and more than three thousand were fed meals provided by the ashram. The early evening brought a special *abhishekam* beginning at 3:30 pm and music in the new library auditorium.

Ramana Granthalaya

Ramana Granthalaya, the new Ashram library, was officially opened on the morning of the 8th of January. The ashram President, V.S. Ramanan and his family entered the new auditorium cum library together with devotees. There was a small ceremony to consecrate the new building with the lighting of *deepam* lamps at the new imposing statue of Lord Dakshinamurthy.

On the same evening, the library auditorium held its first public event. The noted composer and singer Ilayaraja and troupe performed before a packed audience. The concert was one of the best in recent memory, thanks in part to the spacious hall's fine acoustics.

After the morning Jayanti celebrations on the 9th January, devotees heard another concert in the Ramana Granthalaya. There was a veena concert by Bharadwaj Raman at 3pm, followed by a concert of Ramana music by Shakkubai at 4.45pm. That night, RMCL of Bangalore, presented to devotees a vibrant, new repertoire of Ramananjali songs offered to Sri Bhagavan.

Samadhi Days

On the 11th January the Ashram observed Swami Ramanananda's Samadhi Day at his shrine. The following day Sivaprakasam Pillai's Samadhi Day was observed with chanting and puja, and the 14th, Ramaswami Pillai's Samadhi Day was observed at his shrine adjacent to Muruganar's Shrine.

Pongal

Pongal normally falls on the 14th, 15th and 16th of January. It is traditionally said to coincide with the winter solstice, which marks the beginning of the Sun's northern transit. On this day according to Tamil astronomical calculations, the sun reaches the southernmost point of the ecliptic and starts its northern trajectory (*uttarayana*). From Pongal onwards, the days are said to grow longer. The harvest festival is dedicated to Lord Surya, the bringer of agricultural bounty. This transition day is bright and full of cheer as the birth of the Tamil month, Thai, is believed to pave the way for new opportunities.

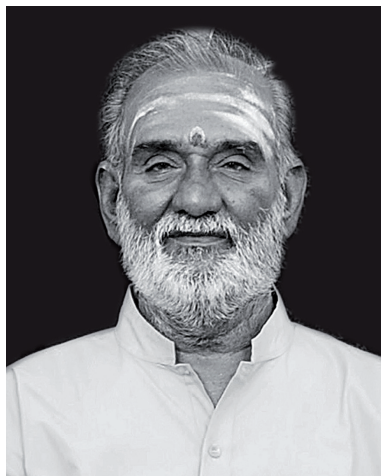
The three-day festival begins with Bhogi, the last day of Tamil Margazhi month when old things in the household are discarded. The third day of the festival is Mattu Pongal (16th January) when cows and bulls are honoured for their hard labour throughout the year. The festival ends with a procession of temple deities. Lord Arunachaleswara comes out in the early morning of Mattu Pongal, gives darshan to each of the large elaborately decorated Nandis and then starts on His way round the four streets of the great temple.

According to local lore, after three rounds Lord Siva had a lover's quarrel (*tiruvoodal*) with Parvati in the evening and this is re-enacted in Tiruvoodal Street. On the following morning, the 17th, Lord Arunachaleswara starts His circuit of the mountain, stopping in at the Ashram on the way. Devotees eagerly receive the Lord at the Ashram entrance when dhotis, sarees and garlands are offered and *arati* performed.

Obituaries

We regret to inform devotees that **Sri M. S. Chandrasekhar**, founder and president of Pudukkottai Ramana Kendram, Pondicherry, was absorbed in Arunachala, at the age of 75. Born on 15th August, 1937, and merged in Arunachala on Republic Day, 26th January 2012, Sri Chandrasekhar was a philanthropist who lived a life of service, hospitality and ascetic renunciation.

In his early years, Chandrasekhar had been a highly successful pharmaceutical industrialist but later opted to devote his life full-time



to Bhagavan. This took shape in the following ways: through *Arunachala Aksharamanamalai* chanting and the free distribution of printed verses; through regular processions in and around Puducherry with the Ramana Ratham that he had constructed; and through the endearing hospitality he offered to all who came to the Puducherry Kendram-cum-residence. Devotees time and again testified to the warmth and cordiality they received

on their visits to Puduvai Ramana Kendram, where they were allowed to leave only after a hearty breakfast or a sumptuous lunch.

He went through life with a smile which never left his face till the end. He and his gentle life partner Shanta, were as firmly united in their devotion to Bhagavan as in their service to his devotees. Chandrasekhar knew by name every inmate and worker at Sri Ramanasramam, more than a hundred and played Santa Claus to them all at *Deepavali* year after year. He will be missed by all.

Life goes on as ever for Shanta and her two bright daughters. Shanta continues to visit Bhagavan's samadhi shrine with just a trace of sadness on her smiling face for as Ramana the Master assures us all, "True, doubtless, forever stands the 'Self'."

Sri Ra. Ganapati, the great scholar, authority on Hinduism and author of highly acclaimed biographies of spiritual teachers, attained samadhi on Mahasivarathri night, 20th February at 7.30 pm. at Chennai. He came in contact with the Sage of Kanchi, and authored *Deivathin Kural (Voice of God)* in seven volumes containing the talks given by the Paramacharya from 1932 onwards. He also wrote books on Bhagavan Ramana, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Vivekananda and Satya Sai Baba. A life-long celibate, he refused medical treatment in the end and passed away in peace. A special article will appear on this savant in the Advent issue of this journal. ▲