

Rs.30/-



Mountain Path



Vol. 49, No.4

October-December 2012



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

Mountain Path

FOUNDED 1964 BY ARTHUR OSBORNE

VOLUME 49, No. 4, DEEPAM 2012

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Annual Subscription (4 issues):

Rs. 120 (India)
Rs. 30 (single copy)
US\$ 15 (or equivalent for all other
countries. Minimum 3 years)

Life Subscription:

Rs. 1,500 (India)
US\$ 250 (Foreign)

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Ramana Ashtottaram

83. ओं विनताय नमः

Om Vinatāya namah.

Prostration to the meek and humble one.

Bhagavan taught and practised the utmost humility. Muruganar says, “Meeker than the meekest, through meekness the Supreme reveals his true supremacy.”

Humility should not be mistaken for weakness or the lack of courage. Humility is the respect given to all life; it is the recognition that *Brahman* exists in all manifestation.

84. ओं विनुताय नमः

Om Vinutāya namah.

Prostration to the adored one.

Proving thus through meekness his supremacy, he was adored by all. In the last line of ‘Siva Puranam’ in *Tiruvachakam*, those who bow in worship at the Feet of Siva are exalted by all. By negating oneself it becomes possible to be fully aware of all that surrounds oneself. In that awareness is the recognition of the all-pervasiveness nature of *Brahman* and the realisation of one’s complete identification with it. By adoring the *jnani* we partake of that divine union.

Fullness and Stillness

When we look at Arunachala what exactly do we see? We notice an imposing hill that takes on a distinctive character with each new angle of observation. When we gaze at a photo of Bhagavan or sit at his *samadhi* what is it that we observe? We may see a benign or majestic image or observe a shrine that has a calm presence and seems to throw off a subtle light. In all of these moments we think of ourselves as different from what we see and experience. There is an apparent sense of separation maintained by space and time. We know we are in the presence of something significant but it is unmanifest. However we scrutinise it, it eludes our understanding. We cannot put our finger on it. It is mysterious, frustrating and yet, ultimately reassuring.

There is a celebrated *mantra* in the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*:

*Om purnamadah purnamidam purnat purnam udacyate
Purnasya purnamadaya purnam evavasisyate.*

Translated literally it says: “That (the unmanifest) is whole and perfect; This (the manifest) is whole and perfect, because this whole has come out of that whole. Even on taking out the whole from that whole what remains is still whole.”¹

The word *purna* is repeated in almost every compound. *Purna* has a wide range of meanings in English: whole, complete, perfect. It sums up in one word the nature of reality which is both unmanifest as well as manifest. We can neither add nor subtract from it. In the presence of Arunachala or Bhagavan we experience *purna*. Even when we appear to be separate we experience *purna*. Neither the unmanifest nor the manifest affects the sense of wholeness.

This is all very well but how do we make sense of it in our lives when we witness discord and a sense of incompleteness? How do we reconcile the value of physical proximity to Arunachala and the ashram and the fact that many of us cannot be there, due to family or work commitments? It appears we are leading a double life. Are we fooling ourselves? Is the statement Arunachala and Bhagavan are everywhere a placebo with which we deceive ourselves?

First we need to understand what exactly Arunachala and Bhagavan are. Let us leave aside the physical differences which make each an individual entity. At the most basic level, we are not a bunch of rocks whose geographical co-ordinates are in south India. We are not Sri Ramana Maharshi, a south Indian sage who lived at such and such a time. We are investigating what we have in common with both. Our conclusion is that our identification with them is on an unmanifest level where there is no sense of difference. In brief, we could say that we are modifications of the same consciousness. What we seek in them is a continuation of our own wholeness. By gazing at them we are looking into a pure mirror that reflects wholeness. No wonder we cannot get enough.

¹ *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*, verse v.i.i. Translators sometimes prefer *Brahman* or the ‘infinite’ instead of ‘unmanifest’. Infinite can imply unlimited space or time while ‘unmanifest’ indicates the transcendental and eternal principle of which the human being is but a transient variation. This translation is taken from *Man, God and the Universe* by I.K. Taimni, published by the Theosophical Society, Adyar, 2005. p.147.

Though we experience fullness in their presence it seems never enough because we move away either in mind or body. We also miss the point. We mistakenly want to take on the attributes of Arunachala or Bhagavan. We sing in praise of them, we identify with them and we are assuaged temporarily but it will never be sufficient. In the background it seems there is always that sense of incompleteness. Whatever is manifest, changes and when nothing apparently remains the same, how do we secure it so that we can remain whole, *purna*? The answer is obvious, we can't. There is no instrument of our mind which can stick it down till it can't move. And if we do it is inert. There is no fool-proof certificate declaring we have got it. In this world we are continually in a state of flux. When we mistake the manifest for that which is unmanifest we are ignorant and suffer. Instead of living in the moment we accumulate, be it experiences, facts, places, people, money, power, fame, stamps. The list is potentially endless.

Maya is the concept used in Advaita to explain the inexplicable and subtle change in the changeless which brings about the appearance of the world. Advaita says the manifest appearance is an illusory form of *Brahman*; that there is no difference, there is no change, it is merely a fantasy. In other words, we are deluded if we think we can own or contain that which is so subtle it is beyond any conception.²

In our world of manifestation is there any form which approximates that *purna*? Is there a lifeline which can remove us from our limited vision or are we doomed to be casual recipients of our fate due to blind chance? Stillness is the closest approximation or attribute we can conceive of that *purna*. The serene stillness (*achala*) of that red hill of *tejas* (fire, light, heat) we call Arunachala. The motionless *bindu*, point, from which radiates the perpetual movement of Lord Nataraja's cosmic dance. The still empty centre of the wheel as it turns. But we

² *Kena Upanishad*, 1-3. The eye does not reach there, nor speech, nor mind, nor do we know (Its nature). Therefore we don't know how to impart instruction (about It). Distinct indeed is That from the known and distinct from the unknown. Thus have we heard from the ancients who expounded It to us. Translated by Vidyavachaspati V. Panoli.

should remember these are all analogies and not the thing in itself. For if we can conceive of something as rigid it means it is limited.

We come to realise that we are not looking for the target to aim our thoughts, we are the target. Our mind and body are an effect not a cause. We are not doing, rather something is being done to us. By identification with our mind, which is a factory of thought we are already frozen in time and space. Knowing the co-ordinates of our location and shape does not mean we know who we are. In the same way it does not matter how much we accumulate knowledge, the information is already lifeless unless it is used to point to something beyond itself. We are like the thief in Bhagavan's analogy who turns into a policeman to catch himself.³

How *do* we turn round and catch ourselves?

We can do so by stillness. Not by reaching for some panacea, not by possessing an idea or a mood but by waiting. When Bhagavan says *summa iru*, 'just be' as *upadesa* (instruction) it means not only *be* but can also mean *wait*. Wait and see. It implies a pause. The sign of maturity in a *sadhaka* is the ability to wait and not just grab whatever is in front of him for instant gratification. Do we desperately need that new gadget, car, clothes? Are we so frantic we cannot pause for the last person to join the dinner table? Are we so insecure we cannot wait until the other person has completed his sentence before speaking? Is that book so important we want it just because of an impulse? Can we not wait that one extra minute?

This ability to wait gives us the space to allow possibilities to arise. Instead of forcing the issue we wait and see what turns up. We

³ "Can the phenomenal mind be reasonably conceived as transcending the phenomenal plane of existence and ascending to the transcendental plane? The phenomenal mind, according to Buddhist philosophy, is not one permanent identical reality, but a temporary continuity of momentary units. How can it transcend time? How can it possibly exist by being free from its essential transient nature? If that which sustains its continuity is destroyed, it must as a matter of course cease to exist, and there would be no entity to attain *Nirvana* and enjoy its peace and tranquility." *Philosophy of Gorakhnath* by Akshay Kumar Bannerjea. Coombe Springs Press, 1983. p.230.

are attentive, curious and calm. It is a perfect posture of the mind. Arthur Osborne said it perfectly in his poem, “Be still, it is the wind that sings.”

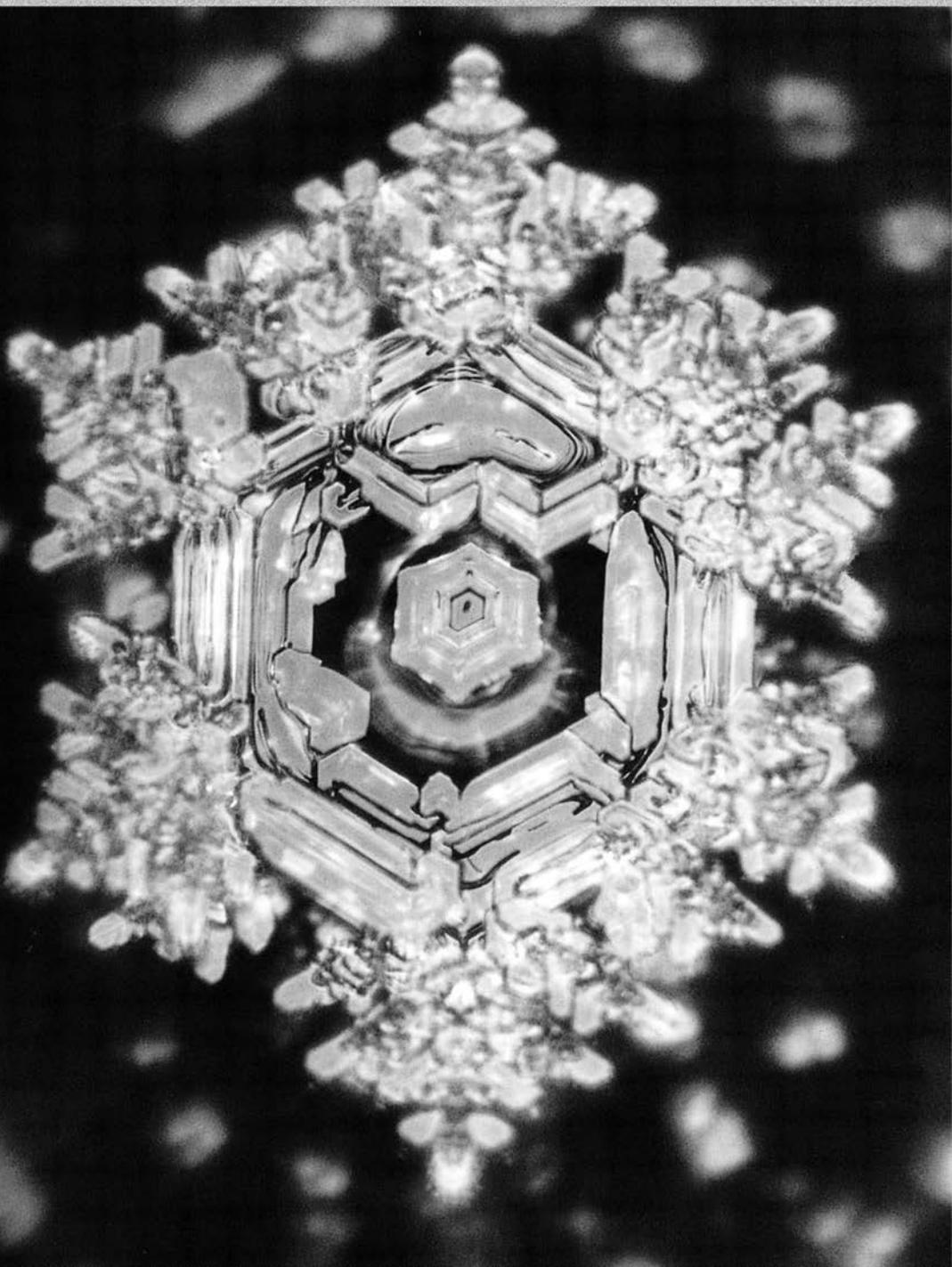
Though a particular time and place can help us to be still there is no monopoly. Although Arunachala and Bhagavan are associated with Tiruvannamalai, it would be a mistake to think that you can ‘find’ it nowhere else. By the mysteries of the universe it so happens it is easier there geographically but not absolutely essential, for what Arunachala is and who Bhagavan is, are not dependent on a certain place and time. To do so would limit them. If we hold onto the thread of their image or follow Bhagavan’s instruction to find out who we are by asking ‘Who am I?’ we will be automatically pulled back inside into the *hridayam*, the heart. They are portals, they invite you and then, by that inscrutable power we call grace, they create the space for us to see. What we need to do in stillness is to be absorbed in that silence. To receive not to take. To be used not to use.

We are like the scientists who in the depths of an abandoned mine create sophisticated laboratories free from as much interference as possible to catch, with the most sensitive instruments, particles of dark energy that pass through the earth. They can detect them in a complete vacuum shorn of all noise, visual and aural. In the same way we patiently wait in the clean silence of the Heart.

Bhagavan wrote: “... Since that Reality abides without thought, in the Heart (*Hridayam*), how and by whom can it, called the Heart, be thought of? Know that the only way to meditate on that absolute Reality is to abide thought-free and continuously in the Heart.”⁴

With all our efforts in developing right ethics, right food, right livelihood, right companions, right thoughts, right emotions it so happens it is easier to ‘catch’ that thread, the sense of ‘I’ which leads us back to the *hridayam*, the point where we feel no sense of difference, *purna*. All we do is a means to that end. ▲

⁴ *Ulladu Narpadu*, ‘Benedictory Verse One’.



Photograph of a water crystal from a bowl of water that was blessed

The Miracle of Water

CHRISTOPHER QUILKEY

The following article is inspired and based on a book by the Japanese scientist Dr. Masaru Emoto. The book is The Hidden Message of Water, ISBN 1-41652219-0. The book was originally published by Beyond Words Publishing, Inc, Oregon, 2004. The first UK edition was published by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, in 2005.

Think of water. Water not only gives life, it is life. Water makes up about seventy per cent of the beautiful planet we live on. Water also makes up about seventy per cent of the human body. Perhaps this is a coincidence, or perhaps not. Perhaps we are more closely related to the earth we live on than we are aware.

The Earth is a beautiful planet. We can see that from the photographs taken from outer space. It appears like a blue gem gracefully hovering in the colourless, silent dark. We can make out that the oceans are huge. In statistical terms about seventy percent of the planet's surface is filled with the seven oceans while their average depth is three thousand

Christopher Quilkey is a member of the Editorial Board of the magazine.

feet or about one thousand metres. These oceanic waters take up some ninety-eight percent of the water on the planet, which is undrinkable. Therefore only about two percent of Earth's water is fresh but of that 1.6 percent is frozen in ice caps and glaciers. Another 0.36 percent is found underground in aquifers and wells. What we depend on is about 0.036 percent of the planet's total water supply which is found in lakes and rivers. Though it is a small amount comparatively speaking, it is still in mathematical terms, thousands of trillions of litres, which are available for us to drink and use.

The blue of the planet gives the impression of peace. It is not for nothing that the largest ocean of all, the Pacific Ocean, means ocean of peace. And yet, there are visible and invisible fires on the Earth that devastate its harmony. What is the cause of this chaos? How does it originate? Though we all are members of the one species it seems because we live in separate places and have different colour skins, our diverse ways of thinking and acting create conflict. Is there a single solution that applies to all the inhabitants of this Earth which can resolve the clashes? A single solution that can apply to all people on the globe that everyone is convinced of, but which is so simple that we all can understand?

If we return to the human body we find that the average human body is seventy per cent water. We are born with ninety per cent water and by the time we become adults we average seventy per cent water. By the time we die normally in ripe old age we would generally average some fifty per cent. It is clear that we live and breathe in a body mostly composed of water.

That being so, what does the composition of our bodies have to do with living happy and healthy lives? The answer according to the Japanese scientist and researcher Dr. Masaru Emoto lies in the purity of the water that makes up 70 per cent of our body.

We can observe that rivers which flow consistently contain pure water. When the water is blocked, it stagnates. Therefore, if water is to be healthy it must continually circulate. In human bodies we have rivers and streams of blood which flow. In healthy bodies the blood travels unimpeded while in the sick it languishes. If the blood does

stop flowing, the body begins to decay, and if the blood to the brain ceases death intervenes.

The question then is why does blood become sluggish? Dr Emoto suggests that the condition is a result of the pollution of the emotions. The mind has direct impact on the metabolism of the body. When we live a rich and enjoyable life, we feel physically alert but when we experience unremitting setback and sorrow, our bodies under the stress fall ill. It is when our emotions flow smoothly throughout our body, that we feel joy and good health.

Life from this point of view seems to be a question of flow and change in concord.

From what we have seen so far we can better understand the human body by a clear knowledge of the properties of water. We can see now that water is a life force and serves as a vehicle to carry energy throughout our body.

Let us consider the application of homoeopathic principles. The pioneers of this branch of medicine taught ‘treat like with like, fight poison with poison’. Say that someone is suffering from poisoning. According to homoeopathy, the symptoms can be alleviated by drinking the minutest amount of that substance. At this level, the poisoned matter no longer remains in the water, but the *characteristics* of it do and this is the basis for treatment.

“Homoeopathy proposes that the greater the dilution, the greater the effectiveness. The logical conclusion is that the denser the poison in the body, the higher should be the dilution ratio. That is, instead of the *effect* of matter being used to get rid of the symptoms, the information *copied* to the water is being used to cancel out the information of the symptoms from the poison. So water has the ability to *copy* and *memorize* information.”¹

It was a revelation to Dr Emoto that water had the ability to copy information and it radically altered his life and paved the way for his research into the structure of water crystals.

¹ Emoto, Masaru, *The Hidden Message of Water*. Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2005. ISBN 1-41652219-0. p.xviii.

He then began to consider how it may be possible to locate verifiable physical evidence about how water can memorise information. Aside from analytical deduction based on experiments would it be possible to see this process with the physical eye?

He casually opened a book one day and the words ‘No two snow crystals are exactly alike’ sprang to his attention. Next moment he thought that if he froze water and looked at the crystals, each one would be totally unique. It was at this moment his research began in earnest to freeze water and if possible, take pictures.

He never doubted that they would. “I knew with certainty that my hypothesis was correct and that the experiments would go well — I *just* knew it. I usually suffer from a critical shortage of perseverance, but this time I refused to give up.”²

Finally after two months of frustrating trial and error experiments with methods he later realised were inadequate he succeeded in getting one photograph with the help of an assistant. What Dr Emoto learnt from this initial work was that if we really feel in our heart that it is possible we can make it happen with our will. What we imagine can become a reality.

The crystal photographs he began to take were extremely moving. He discovered in them a deep insight in to the nature of the world and of human beings.

“Crystals emerge for only twenty or thirty seconds as the temperature rises and the ice starts to melt. The truths of the cosmos take shape and become visible, if only for a few moments. This short window of time gives us a glimpse into the world that is magical indeed.”³

The scientists put fifty different types of water in fifty different Petri dishes. They were then frozen at -20C for three hours. This caused drops of ice about one millimetre across on the surface in the dishes. By shining a light on the crown of the drop of ice a crystal appears.

He found that there are never fifty similar crystals, and that crystals did not always form.

² Ibid., p.xxi.

³ Ibid., p.xxii.

Crucially he discovered that when they graphed the construction of the crystals, they realised that water from separate sources formed different crystals. Some crystals were clearly alike, some were malformed, and in some water, no crystals were formed at all.

In their research they experimented with tap water from diverse locations. The results from the water supplied to Tokyo were awful as they could not form one complete crystal in the laboratory. They surmised that in tap water, because it includes a dose of chlorine, the natural structure of water was destroyed. This was confirmed when they took natural water, from whatever source, be it natural springs, subterranean rivers, pure glaciers, and the springs of unpolluted rivers, all of which resulted in complete crystals being formed.

After this initial research his research assistant suggested another line of approach using music to observe how water is affected. After extensive effort and time they concluded that perhaps the simplest method may be the best by placing a bottle of water between two loudspeakers and exposing the water to a volume level most comfortable for a human being. They also decided to use the same water used in their previous experiments. They began with distilled water and used Western music.

The results were remarkable. Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony with its glorious depictions of nature resulted in attractive, clearly-formed crystals. Mozart's 40th Symphony, which is a hymn to beauty, caused crystals that were delicate and graceful.

According to the classical music employed the water formed shapely crystals with their own characteristics. However the water which was subjected to violent heavy-metal music caused disjointed and abnormal crystals.

The next step was the use of positive or negative words or phrases on pieces of paper, which were wrapped round the bottles of water with the words facing it.

"It didn't seem logical for water to 'read' the writing, understand the meaning, and change its form accordingly. But I know from the experiment with music that strange things could happen. We felt as if we were explorers setting out on a journey through an unmapped jungle.

“The results of the experiments didn’t disappoint us. Water exposed to ‘Thank you’ formed beautiful hexagonal crystals, but water exposed to the word ‘Fool’ produced crystals similar to the water exposed to heavy-metal music, malformed and fragmented.

“Further experimenting showed that water exposed to positive expressions like ‘Let’s do it!’ created attractive, well-formed crystals, but that water exposed to negative expressions like a peremptory ‘Do it!’ barely formed any crystals at all.”⁴

Dr. Emoto now understood the power of words. The vibration created by the use of good words had a positive effect but the indiscriminate use of the negative vibration of words could destroy.

“I particularly remember one photograph. It was the most beautiful and delicate crystal that I had so far seen—formed by being exposed to the words ‘love and gratitude’. It was as if the water had rejoiced and celebrated by creating a flower in bloom. It was so beautiful that I can say that it actually changed my life from that moment on.

“In Japan, it is said that words of the soul reside in a spirit called *kotodama* or the *spirit of words*, and the act of speaking words has the power to change the world. We all know that words have an enormous influence on the way we think and feel, and that things generally go more smoothly when positive words are used. However, up to now we have never been able to physically see the effect of positive words.”⁵

From the experiment Dr. Emoto saw that words are an expression of the soul. What we think we become just as what we eat we become. He saw that our soul has a tremendous influence on the water that makes up the seventy percent or more of our body, and this impact has deep ramifications on the way we think, feel and behave. We have all noticed that those who expressed a positive and seemingly inexhaustible vitality are in excellent health and are pleasurable to be around because of their good spirits.

The power of ‘Love and gratitude’ are said to be what all the legitimate and venerable world religions are based on. There would be

⁴ Ibid., p.xxiv-xxv.

⁵ Ibid., p.xxvi.

no need for strict heavy laws if that was the case. This simple sentiment is not only the elixir for all in the world to thrive upon with joy and vivacity, it is the antidote for the negative vibrations that pollute our hearts and minds. These words 'Love and gratitude' could serve as our guide in this complex and often hazardous world.

The way in which water functions shows us how we should conduct our lives for water is present in every individual cell of our body. We cannot exist without it. By understanding the principles of water we delve into the secrets of the cosmos.

"Water is the mirror of the soul. It has many faces, formed by aligning itself with the consciousness of human beings. What gives water its ability to reflect what is in people's souls? In order to answer that question, I would first like to make sure that you understand this fact: existence is vibration.

"The entire universe is in a state of vibration, and each thing generates its own frequency, which is unique. My years of research into water have taught me that this is the fundamental principle of the universe."⁶

Dr. Emoto then asks us to imagine our bodies being reduced to microscopic size so we can explore and discover the secrets of the universe we identify as me. As we have understood from physics we quickly discover that everything consists of atoms and each atom has a nucleus with rotating electrons amongst other particles. Physics has identified the number and shape of these electrons with their orbits. These atoms combine in an infinite variety and give each unique substance a specific set of frequencies which vibrate. Science has also taught us that in each substance there is nothing solid. Instead there is only a whirling mass or nucleus encompassed by a continuously rotating wave of energy.

All that we see and experience is eternally moving and vibrating at an indescribable velocity. It is vibrating on and off as a speed we can barely glimpse with the most sophisticated scientific instruments.

We also as human beings are vibrating, and each of us vibrates at a unique frequency. Some people have a natural gift of empathy, while

⁶ Ibid., p.39.

MOUNTAIN PATH

for the rest of us by purifying our minds and bodies through say, yoga and meditation, we develop the skill to feel the vibrations of others.

From his research Dr Emoto concluded that a person who experiences a tragedy will emit a specific signal and someone who is joyful, will discharge a corresponding frequency of elation. We know from our own experience that we desire to be near a person who loves others because their presence or aura is filled with the frequency known as love, while a person whose behaviour is pernicious however subtle and well camouflaged will throw out a dark and evil frequency.⁷

Further to this observation that every object whether animate or otherwise is in a state of vibration, it therefore means that everything in existence is creating a sound. The fact we cannot hear many sounds does not mean they do not exist as we know from observing the way a dog reacts to the sounds we cannot hear.

We can deduce that water truly mirrors all the myriad vibrations created in the cosmos, and that it has the capacity to turn these vibrations into a crystal form that can be seen with the human eye. That is, water can express an intention or message in a specific structure.

Now we can now understand that through experiment and observation, a complete geometric crystal is formed, the medium of water is in alignment with the nature of existence and its expression.

On the reverse side, Dr Emoto made a significant observation that the crystals do not form in water that has been polluted by the results

⁷ Ibid., p.46-7. "In an article in the March-April 1989 issue of the American journal *21st Century Science and Technology*, Warren J. Hamerman wrote that the organic matter that forms human beings generates a frequency that can be represented by sound at approximately forty-two octaves above middle C. The modern standard for middle C is approximately 262Hz, so this means that the sound reaches roughly 570Hz. Since Hz means vibrations per second, this indicates that human beings vibrate 570 trillion times a second, a number that exceeds the imagination and indicates incredible and wonderful human potential.

"It is difficult to conceive forty-two octaves, but just realise that the frequency of the human being is immensely diverse and unparalleled. The human being holds a universe within, filled with overlapping frequencies, and the result is a symphony of cosmic proportions."

of our failure to respect the laws of nature. When we pollute the world with our actions which are clothed in greed and hatred, this negativity throws out of alignment the natural rhythms of harmony and beauty.

However, “If you fill your heart with love and gratitude, you will find yourself surrounded by so much that you can love and that you can feel grateful for, and you can even get closer to enjoying the life of health and happiness that you seek. But what will happen if you emit signals of hate, dissatisfaction and sadness? Then you will probably find yourself in a situation that makes you hateful, dissatisfied and sad.

“The life you live and the world you live in are up to you.”⁸ ▲

⁸ op.cit., *The Hidden Message of Water*, p.52.

Who Am I

D. Samarender Reddy

Am I just
A modification of earth.
Am I just
A lump of flesh and blood.
Am I just
One impaled on the arrow of time.
Am I just
One caught in the vortex of relationships.
Am I just
One hostage to the exigency of circumstances.
Am I just
One poised on the horns of thoughts and emotions.
Am I just
One condemned to reap the fruits of unknown deeds.
Am I just
A random collocation of inert matter and consciousness.
Am I just
One destined to not know answers to any of these questions.



John Maynard

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Three

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

23rd December 1977

Sadhu Om: Once a PWD inspector asked Bhagavan, ‘How can we live a pure life in this world?’ and he replied, ‘You know the *nattan-kal* [a standing stone fixed at a road junction] we have in our villages [in the Madurai district]. See how many uses it has: villagers place their head-loads on it when they take rest, cows use it as a scratching-post, betel-chewers wipe their surplus *chunnambu* [lime-paste] on it, and others spit on it. We must live in this world like those *nattan-kals*.’

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

It is only in our view that Bhagavan appears to be compassionate. He actually has no compassion, because compassion entails the existence of others, and in his view there are no others. However, it is also true to say that he has perfect compassion, because he loves us all as himself, so he truly suffers with each of our sufferings. See the paradoxical nature of self-knowledge. It reconciles irreconcilable opposites. It makes having no compassion the same as having perfect compassion. Who can understand the state of self-knowledge?

‘Love is our being, desire is our rising’. Love wants oneness, desire wants manyness. The movement of love is towards oneness, and of desire is towards manyness. Love is ever self-contented, desire is ever discontented. The fulfilment and perfect state of love is self-love (*svatma-bhakti*), which is the experience of absolute oneness, but desire can never be fulfilled.

Therefore all yogas or sadhanas aim towards oneness (which is sometimes called ‘union’ with God or the reality), and one-pointedness of mind is their vehicle. Sadhana is a growth from desire to love, and self-love is the driving force behind this growth. The development of this growth towards love leads the aspirant to love just one God or one guru, which is the highest form of dualistic love, and the most effective aid to develop perfect self-love.

The guru shows the aspirant that the only means to achieve perfect self-love is self-attention. The aspirant therefore eagerly practises self-attention, but until his practice blossoms into true self-love, he continues clinging to his guru as the object of his love. His *guru-bhakti* is the stay and support that steadies and strengthens his growth towards self-love. This is the state that Bhagavan describes in verse 72 of *Aksaramanamalai*:

Arunachala, protect [me] as a support to cling to so that I may not droop down like a tender creeper without support.

The aspirant’s love for and faith in his guru constantly drives him back to self-attention, which is the path taught by the guru, and as a result he comes to be increasingly convinced that his own self is the true form of his guru. Thus his dualistic *guru-bhakti* dissolves naturally

and smoothly into non-dualistic *svatma-bhakti* (love for self alone), which is his true nature. One-pointed fidelity to the guru and his teachings is therefore an essential ingredient in sadhana, and it alone will yield the much longed for fruit of self-knowledge.

In *Sri Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* Bhagavan teaches us the true nature of *guru-bhakti*. For example:

Arunachala, when I took refuge in you as [my only] God, you completely annihilated me. (*Aksaramanamalai* verse 48)

... Is there any deficiency [or grievance] for me? . . . Do whatever you wish, my beloved, only give me ever-increasing love for your two feet. (*Navamanimalai* verse 7)

... What to say? Your will is my will, [and] that [alone] is happiness for me, lord of my life. (*Patikam* verse 2)

It is necessary to attempt to practise self-attention before one can possibly write commentaries on or translate Bhagavan's works. Only by repeatedly trying and failing can one begin to understand his teachings.

Take for instance the first sentence of *Ulladu Narpadu*: 'Except what is, does consciousness that is exist?' To a mind that is unaccustomed to the practice of self-attention this will seem a very abstract idea, because the first word *ulladu* ('what is' or existence) will immediately suggest the existence of things, so such a mind will understand this sentence to mean, 'Unless things exist, can they be known?' But Bhagavan is always pointing to self, so by the word *ulladu* he means nothing other than 'I', which is the sole reality, that which alone actually exists.

However this will be immediately understood only by those who are well-soaked in the practice of self-attention. Such a person will understand this sentence to mean, 'Other than what is (namely 'I'), can there be any consciousness of being (any awareness 'am')?' which they will understand as implying, 'My self-awareness (*cit*) is not other than my being (*sat*)'. It is so simple, but to ordinary people it seems abstract.

All scriptures and gurus aim at drawing our attention to ourselves, but as I said in the first part of *The Path of Sri Ramana*, up till now they have all started by conceding to our ignorant outlook of taking the ego

to be real, and so they start their teaching from that perspective. But why not start from the source — from what is actually real? Bhagavan was a revolutionary, so he never conceded that our viewpoint was correct, but instead always pointed directly to the one self-evident reality, ‘I am’.

Nowadays people have so many strange ideas about yoga, but in *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan has given us a clear idea of what real yoga actually is.

It is to Muruganar that we owe the composition of *Ulladu Narpadu*. If it were not for him those twenty-one verses would have been ignored [a reference to the twenty-one stray verses composed by Bhagavan that Muruganar gathered together and asked him on 21st July 1928 to enlarge upon to form a work revealing the nature of reality and the means by which we can experience it, which prompted him to compose during the next three weeks *Ulladu Narpadu*, in which eventually only three of the original twenty-one verses were included (namely verses 16, 37 and 40), leaving the other eighteen to be relegated to the supplement (*anubandham*)]. Bhagavan was so confident of the power of his silence that he took no initiative to write or record his teachings, so it is to Muruganar that we owe the composition and compilation of the three principal *sastras* [scriptural texts] containing Bhagavan’s philosophy, namely *Upadesa Undiyar*, *Ulladu Narpadu* and *Guruvachaka Kovai*.

24th December 1977

Sadhu Om (when asked why Bhagavan when he rewrote *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?) as an essay omitted the first sentence of his reply to question 19 in the earlier thirty question-and-answer version: ‘God and guru will only show the way to attain *moksha* [liberation], but cannot’ by

¹ In the more recent twenty-eight question-and-answer version, which was compiled and first published in 1932, about five years after Bhagavan had written his essay version, the editor (whose identity is not now known) changed the final verb in this sentence (the first sentence of the reply to question 20 in that version) from *serkka mudiyaadu*, which means ‘cannot join [or establish]’, to *serkkaar*, which means ‘will not join [or establish]’.

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themselves [or of their own accord] establish individuals in *moksha*): What he said there is true, because unless we want *moksha*, God or guru will never give it to us. Wanting or desiring is love or *priya*, which is one of the three aspects of the reality, *sat-cit-ananda* (being-consciousness-happiness), which is also known as *asti-bhati-priya* (being-shining-love), so it is the nature of self, and hence a prerequisite for *moksha*. Perhaps he omitted this sentence so that people would not misunderstand it and be discouraged, because the grace of God or guru works in us by sowing the seed of desire for *moksha* and then cultivating it into its fully blossomed state of *svatma-bhakti* (love for self), which is itself the state of *moksha*.

26th December 1977

Sadhu Om: Thought, word and deed should always be in harmony, each consistent with the other two, because then only can grace flow in our heart. Grace will only flow freely when it has a clear and open passage. If thought, word, and deed contradict each other, each one following its own course, the flow of grace will be obstructed.

I don't know how people can live like that [referring to the behaviour of a confidence trickster], because their mind could never be at rest. For such people grace can never flow until they reform their deceitful attitude and behaviour.

28th December 1977

Sadhu Om: Wanting is *priya* (love, affection or joy), the *ananda* aspect of ourself. Unless we want *moksha*, guru can never give it to us. Now we want manyness, so using our original freedom to will and act [which is a reflection of the infinite freedom of *brahman*, our real nature] we see manyness. Guru teaches us to want and love only oneness. He wins us over by love, and we love him so much that we believe that what he teaches us is correct, so in accordance with his teachings we want to remain as we really are. He says, 'Just be', so we try to remain as self, and our love eventually drowns us (the ego) in self.

Who wants manyness? The Vedas say, 'You are that'. It must always come back to this 'I', so what is it? Guru's work is only to make us interested in investigating and knowing this 'I' — to make us want

to remain as self. People think that other factors such as meditation, *tapas* and so on are involved, but all that is actually required is to want just to be.

And who is guru? Truly God and guru are nowhere. You alone exist. When you wake up from this dream, you will find there is no God or guru, nor any ego striving for *mukti*.

Ramakrishna once said that God's *anugraha* (grace) is ready, and guru's *anugraha* is ready, but that one more person's *anugraha* is required. That is, your own *anugraha* is what is now essential.

Once we have come to guru, there is no need to worry. Everything else follows in its own time. Once, during the Golden Jubilee celebrations in 1948, I was so confident of his grace that I composed ten enthusiastic verses saying, 'Who can die? Can death ever touch me again? Let Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva all turn their backs on me! Brahma has now truly lost one of his creatures', and so on. Bhagavan merely read it and put it aside. A few months later, however, I was again in a praying mood. I was depressed and felt helpless without his grace. I came before him in that mood, and found him reading my Jubilee verses. I felt ashamed of my mood. He didn't have to say anything. That was his way of teaching me that there is no need for dejection.

People want a 'living guru'. I suppose they expect him to show them the way to a 'living God'. Guru wants us to see ourself as *brahman*, but we want to see *brahman* as a human form. Bhagavan always said that self alone is guru, and that his body is unnecessary. He proved this by giving the flash of true knowledge only after he had left his body. Muruganar said that Bhagavan always said that his body was a veil over the reality, and so the light only became clear when his body passed away.

People say to me, 'It's alright for you to say a living guru is unnecessary, but you had a living guru'. To them I say that what I learnt from my living guru is that a living guru is unnecessary, and everyone else can learn the same if they study Bhagavan's works and do a little *manana* (reflection) on their import.

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Unless you understand that self is guru, even a living guru cannot help you. Most people who were with Bhagavan didn't get *moksha* because they didn't want it. Bhagavan teaches us that sooner or later we must be satisfied with self, so why not be satisfied with it now?

People think that the guru must be a person, but guru is only the first person, the real 'I' within us. Not satisfied with this first person, they go seeking a second person to be their guru. Our aim, however, should only be to get rid of even the first person (our ego) — to drown our false personhood in self.

When our guru says that he cannot give us *moksha* unless we want it, we should think, 'What, am I really such an important factor?' and thus our attention should be drawn back to ourself. In fact, guru gives us *moksha* by making us want it, and therefore he always stresses the need for us to wish for it and to make effort for it.

Indeed, guru is all in all, so he is essential and he alone can give us *moksha*. He is however our own self, *sat-cit-ananda*, so he gives us *moksha*, which is our natural state of being (*sat*), by means of knowledge (*cit*) and love (*ananda*). He makes us know and love him as our own self.

29th December 1977

Sadhu Om (in reply to my question whether he was doing any sadhana in the years before he came to Bhagavan): I was longing for grace and always thinking of God. That is sadhana enough!

Some people say that the light seen at the time of Bhagavan's passing was him returning to *Skandaloka* [the world of Skanda, the younger son of Lord Siva]. First they try to limit him as a body, and then they try to limit him as a light. Their minds are so bound up in limitations that they have to limit even the illimitable. Bhagavan always said: 'Do not think this body is me. I am shining in each one of you as 'I'. Attend only to that'.

How often and for how many lives have we fooled ourselves thinking that our social service is selfless? We did it only for our own self-satisfaction or glory. It is natural for each one of us to love ourself. We are all naturally selfish, so we should first find out what

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is self. When we know ourself as we really are, we will experience everything as not other than ourself, and thus our selfishness will then be the highest virtue. Only a jnani knows how to be truly selfish, because without knowing self we cannot know what real (unlimited) selfishness is.

In the path of surrender saints sing, ‘Send me to heaven or hell, but never let me forget you’, as if heaven and hell really exist. Their prayer only shows their total love for God alone. They teach us the right attitude, but they know that heaven and hell have no real existence. All these dualities — heaven and hell, good and bad, God and individual — exist only in the mind. So ultimately we must learn to make this mind subside.

When I first came to Bhagavan and heard him repeating constantly that everyone must eventually come to the path of self-enquiry, I wondered whether he was being partial to his own teaching, but I soon understood why he insisted that this is so. The final goal is only oneness, and to experience oneness our mind must subside, which will happen entirely only when we attend to nothing other than ourself.

So long as we attend to anything other than ourself, our mind cannot subside, because attention to other things sustains it, since that which experiences otherness is only this mind. When the mind subsides completely, only self-attention remains, and self-attention alone is the state of absolute oneness. Bhagavan used to repeat this teaching every day, maybe ten or twenty times, but still we didn’t change. He didn’t change his teaching either, because to him this truth was so clear.

The basic mistake we all make is to take a body to be ‘I’. This deeply entrenched feeling ‘I am this body called so-and-so’ is the root of all our trouble. If this tape-recorder is not working, we must attend to it and not to other things, because then only will we be able to repair it. Likewise, to rectify this mistaken identity, ‘I am so-and-so’, we must attend to it in order to know what it really is: what or who am I?

Only when we thus investigate ourself will the false adjunct ‘so-and-so’ drop off, and what will then remain is only the reality, ‘I am’. ‘I am so-and-so’ is the *naivedyam* [the food to be offered to

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God], and when Bhagavan has consumed the adjunct 'so-and-so', what remains is only 'I am', which is his *prasadam* [the purified remnant of God's food, which is shared among devotees as a token of his grace].

'I am' alone really exists, so it is the true form of God and guru. To treat and cherish this filthy body as 'I' is therefore the worst kind of idol-worship. If we give up this idol-worship by knowing the truth of ourself, then we can worship anything as God, because we will know that nothing is other than him, our real self. ▲

(To be continued)

The Names of Lalitha

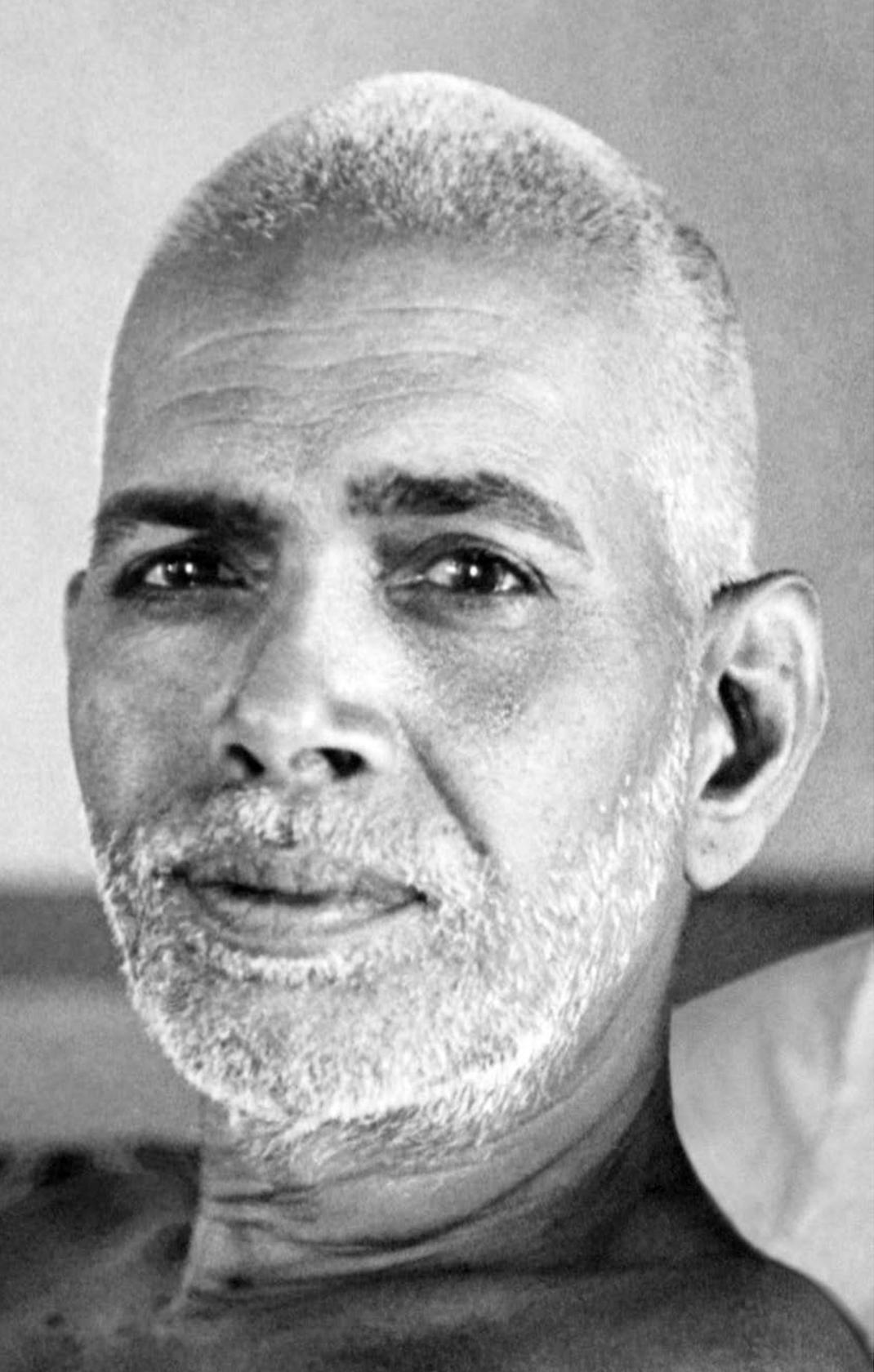
Ramesh Menon

Kadambavana-
vasini; where redolence
of immortal blooms
is wafted on a lustrous breeze,
which blows before time began.

Tadillata sa-
maruchih, like streak lightning
among the chakras,
dazzling all the sadhana
along the sacred journey.

Komalakaraa,
delicate one, perfect one,
who can describe you?
Or the flame of your satin form,
when he bares you to the moon.

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.



The Power Of Silence

BERJIS DESAI

As I step out of the car, the peacock unfurls its feathers and dances on the porch of the temple. It shudders occasionally in its attempts to desperately impress the silent female. A good omen, I think, as I enter Sri Ramana Ashram for the first time. I feel instantly refreshed by the peacock welcome, after our three hour journey from Chennai airport. The driver, who has driven rather slowly on the clear and straight National Highway, is instantly electrified as soon as he swirls the car onto the road to Tiruvannamalai. Strange hillocks, as if man-made, line the road, — Suddenly, our travel companion, who is a longtime devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi, exclaims — that's it Arunachala! At first sight, the holy mountain does not impress and looks rather small. Just like the congested little township in which

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the Ashram is situated. Little does one know what grandeur is held by the deceptive modesty of these humble surroundings.

As a child, I have a dim memory of my aunts speaking reverentially of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Many years later, as a junior lawyer, I await a Senior Counsel in his office and my attention is transfixed by a picture of the saint. I have never seen kinder eyes. The ocean of compassion which flows from those lovely eyes brings tears of joy. I get up and read the name on the picture — Sri Ramana Maharshi. It was, of course, the most famous picture of the saint, known as the Welling Bust. An instant connection is made. After more than three decades, I am at his Ashram, at last.

I am a firm believer in the dictum that you can visit a holy shrine only when you are beckoned. During those intervening three decades, through the peaks and troughs of life, I have hungrily devoured many books on spirituality and the occult and visited many shrines. The journey has been long and interesting. Shirdi Saibaba, our family's Paramguru and his disciple, Shri Kamubaba, our Guru, resulted in annual pilgrimages to Shirdi, Vaishno Devi on foot; the resplendence of Lord Balaji amidst cries of 'Govinda, Govinda'; Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at Pondicherry; the indestructible spirit of Somanath, unbroken by a million Mahmud Ghaznavis; Dakshineshwara of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the serene Golden Temple at Amritsar. Who will not savour the joy of these places when the Lord permits you to visit him there? The command to visit Sri Ramana Ashram took rather long to materialise and perhaps that is why the experience was so moving. I was about to learn the Power of Silence.

I set the alarm for three in the morning, empty a few buckets of cold water to beat the sweltering early June heat and head for the Silence Room, the Old Hall. Apart from a mildly curious dog and a few lizards, not a soul stirs. A gentle breeze wafts through the air. I place my chappals alongside another pair, very slowly open the door which is thoughtfully designed to make absolutely no noise, and step into the room, where a solitary devotee sits cross-legged in a corner. This is the room where Bhagavan gave darshan to all — however mighty

or low, creatures large or small, human or animal — at all times of the day or night. This is the place where unconditional love poured out for decades and much grace was bestowed on those fortunate enough to receive it. I sit across from the large couch, on which the saint used to recline, and which now holds his portrait. A ceiling fan meekly whirls. Within minutes, and without any effort, the thoughts start receding, one by one. Mind, the chattering monkey, is momentarily stilled. No worries, no fears, no wants, no wishes. There are no likes and dislikes, no bias and prejudice, no superiors and inferiors. The mind just floats softly in a pond of peace — empty and vacant. Inner prolonged silence banishes thoughts and permits something else to take over one's consciousness and this greatly helps in realising who you really are. Sri Ramana's central question for enquiry — who am I — enters the consciousness. I am not this body. I am not this mind. I am not this personality and this name. I am the same material as the gently whirring ceiling fan and that mildly curious dog outside and those lizards stuck on the window sill. A miniscule, infinitesimal, nameless drop in the vast ocean of Cosmic Consciousness. I require no conviction to believe this, it just comes from somewhere within. Is it the collective consciousness, the seed atom which stores memory, across millions of incarnations in different bodies and indifferent minds, in different places and in different times? Or is it simply my thought process? I do not know.

As it so often happens, the answer comes within minutes. In the room next to the large Samadhi Hall, hangs a large, white plaque, narrating the near-death experience of Bhagavan when he was just 16. I have read it before in Arthur Osborne's unputdownable book on Sri Ramana, but I read it again. In his own words, Sri Ramana says that this realisation about who am I came to me — 'without any thought process' — the precise words I had mulled over in the Silent Room. Can one say with confidence that my innermost belief has come 'without any thought process'? I do not think so. The path, as we well know, is long and hard and fraught with many a pitfall.

It is five o'clock now; the security guard devotedly does parikrama around Bhagavan's Samadhi and then unlocks the door to the temple

which was constructed under Bhagavan's direct supervision. The black stones of this temple are not foreboding but soothing. I do the parikrama and joy fills my heart. I sit on a bench just outside the temple and softly say 'Om!'. It resonates throughout my being. Last night, my travelling companion's husband had suggested that I do this. I bless him as I sit for a while in the temple, as dawn breaks. In unison, the peacocks give out plaintive cries. I associate these cries with the catharsis which comes after the death of a loved one. This may sound strange but let me tell you how.

Being a Parsi Zoroastrian, we offer our dead bodies to be disposed of by the rays of the Sun, the vultures (which no longer exist) and other birds of prey, in a final act of charity, as dust is mingled unto dust. At the sprawling green acres of the Parsi Towers of Silence, when dawn breaks and you perform the final after death prayers for the soul, the peacocks give out the same plaintive cries. Mingled with joy and pathos, they emphasize the transience of our body which we so dearly love, in the illusion that the body is us. Bhagavan's central enquiry – who am I – shatters this illusion and liberates instantly. Even if we realise this, through the process of thought, we have made some progress. A tiny step towards Self-realisation.

The breakfast gong sounds at seven sharp. Hundreds quietly troop into the dining hall, without any distinction of caste or creed or rank, the ruler and the tramp — all equal, as they eat hot idlis and sambhar served on plantain leaves, washed down with buttermilk or rather milky sweet coffee in sparkling stainless steel glasses. Complete equality is the outstanding feature of this Ashram. There are no VIPs and no special darshans and no exclusive dining halls. The sweeper of the Ashram has lunch with you, sitting side by side, just as Bhagavan himself did, strongly refusing any special treatment that might be meted out to him. Someone served him extra coffee one day and he refused to drink any, from then on. Little acts which help in the annihilation of the ego.

This is in stark contrast to other places. Some have an impressive driveway, sprawling acres, a reception where they give you computerised keys, a spanking spa with an extensive massage menu,

D. Thiyagarajan



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air-conditioned rooms with a tea maker thrown in, grand prayer halls which can hold thousands (Bhagavan, I am told, was not too appreciative of his 'large' prayer hall, where, I did not feel the same sublime vibes which pervade the Silent Room and the Shiva temple), shops selling artefacts and trinkets and clothes and jewellery. Smart and sleek and sophisticated.

Sri Ramana Ashram is just quietly functional, without any fanfare. Just as in the time of Bhagavan, there are no lectures or courses or packaged breathing exercises. The process of self enquiry is to be conducted on your own. There is no instruction software available. There is a tiny Pathasala which trains young boys in the Vedas which they recite every evening in the Prayer Hall. Even their chanting was playful, spontaneous and unrehearsed. Better than a hundred trained priests chanting in unison, in an amazing display of firepower. Pyrotechnics impress only while they last. In the evening, the adults chant the hymn of 108 verses composed by the Maharshi in praise of Arunachala, for the *bhiksha* seekers. At dusk, when the peacocks fall silent, you can mindlessly enjoy this lilting recitation, even though you may not understand all its meaning.

The next morning, I haul my unfit body, over the holy Arunachala hill, to visit the two caves — Virupaksha and Skandasramam — where Sri Ramana dwelled from 1899 to 1922. If in the Silent Room, thoughts reduce by 90%, in Skandasramam, they disappear almost totally. The *Mahasadhana* of Bhagavan having visibly sanctified the interiors of these caves, for eternity. The simple looking hill now suddenly looks transformed as the manifestation of Shiva, the legend coming alive. When Bhagavan attained transition on 14th April, 1950, many beheld a blue meteor blazing over the holy mountain of his enlightenment and glowing red lights were seen in its uninhabited portions, emanating from the *Siddhas* who are said to reside there in their subtle bodies. Bhagavan did say that they visited him at night, in human form or say, the animal form of a dog, leopard or iguana, for some divine confabulations, beyond our mortal understanding.

Serenity pervades this entire journey. Not a trace of commercialisation is visible. We descend just in time for the sumptuous lunch at 11:30 –

spartan but substantial, dollops of hot rice, tasty dal, boiled vegetable and channa. Foreign devotees sit comfortably cross-legged, eat with their fingers, fold the empty plantain leaf and look wonderfully at ease.

Post-lunch, we visit the cottage housing the archives, the only air-conditioned structure in the Ashram, containing priceless manuscripts and photos of the saint. A tall Englishman, with peace written all over his kind face, in charge of the photographs for the last eight years, lovingly displays the albums. A few rooms are climate-controlled to prevent humidity. The approach of this Ashram is soft, non-obtrusive, matter of fact and self-effacing. One detects neither any sign of superiority nor any lofty claim to spirituality. Simplicity is a recurring theme.

This Ashram grew spontaneously around Sri Ramana and that is precisely the reason why it is thriving 62 years after the saint's demise. No controversy has ever touched it. Ashrams, which make a cult figure out of its founder and are consciously built and organised like a business enterprise, fall apart within months of its founder's death. Bhagavan never preached and seldom propagated or expounded any complex philosophy. His love and grace for all beings was unconditional. In the last century, India has had the fortune of having six outstanding saints — Shirdi Saibaba, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Paramhansa Yogananda and Ma Anandamayi — all of whom continue to capture national and international imagination, several decades after leaving their mortal bodies. Pretenders, of course, are many, who hold centrestage for a brief while and are soon confined by the Cosmic to the dustbin of history.

Near the Skandasramam, one enjoys the panoramic view of the town of Tiruvannamalai below and the conspicuous quadrangle of one of India's largest, oldest and most powerful Shiva temples — Arunachaleswara. Early next morning, we are at the temple complex. We are told that on purnima, full moon, millions throng the complex. Today, however, is amavasya, the dark of the moon, and quiet. In the sanctum sanctorum is a mahalingam based on the fire principle. It exudes such heat and radiates such power that you instantly feel your

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spiritual battery recharged. We prostrate before the temple of Parvati, the Lord's consort, the Eternal Mother. A rotund priest removes large garlands from the deity and places it on my neck. Suddenly, someone exclaims — that is the temple of Kal Bhairava. I stop with amazement. In my daily morning prayers, I salute Kal Bhairava and have asked everyone I know in Mumbai where I can find a Kal Bhairava temple. I am satiated with His sudden darshan and make my way to the Patalalingam where the young Ramana once sought refuge to meditate, a safe haven from those harassing the youthful saint and pelting stones at him. As Bernard Shaw, in his play, *Saint Joan*, exclaims, 'O God, that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to accept thy Saints? How long, O Lord, how long?'

Arunachaleswara has stolen my heart. Begging the Lord for a re-invitation soon, I return to the Ashram. As dawn breaks, the breeze is cooler and it drizzles. We have to get back to Mumbai and to the world of thoughts and matter. The Power of Silence has cleansed and I experience a strange lightness of being. I shall miss the Silence Room the most, with its magic of stilling the most active mind. What better prasadam than carrying tiny bits of that silence and His Grace with us.

As I am about to sit in the car, the peacock tiptoes to the same perch on the temple as his welcome dance. Will he dance again, I wonder, as light rain begins to fall. He shudders suggestively and seems to be telling us — come back soon to this abode of Silence and I promise to dance again for you. ▲

KEYWORD

Ashrama

JOHN GRIMES

In December, 1922, Bhagavan Ramana went down the Arunachala Hill to where there was a single thatched shed with bamboo uprights and a roof of palm leaves built for the Mother's *samadhi*. This was the beginning of the Sri Ramana *ashrama*. Through the years the hall where he sat, an office, a kitchen, a dining room, a bookstore, a cowshed, a dispensary, a library, guest rooms sprang up. Wherever a great Sage dwells, he endows that place with the character of his profound inner state.

An *ashrama* manifests divine glory. It may appear to be an ordinary place to our physical eyes, but its every leaf, flower, fruit, tree, and creeper is pervaded by the Self. Therefore, one should live in the *ashrama* with vigilance in thought, speech, and action.

The proper way to approach an *ashrama*, to understand its deeper meaning, is to approach it with respect and reverence. Enter it with

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an attitude of expectancy. Come near it, dwell in its presence, not as a physical place, but as revealed, radiating wisdom. Have “sight of”, have “*darshan*” of its purport. Seek a glimpse of the Consciousness appearing there.

An *ashrama* is a gift from the Sadguru, the true teacher, to seekers of sacred wisdom. An *ashrama* provides a place where one may learn, as the *Upanisad* says, “that which once is known, all this is known.” It provides a place where one learns how to discover what one should know. It provides a place that encourages one to imbibe these teachings and to put them into practice. It provides a pure environment that is conducive to the practice of spiritual disciplines.

It matters not whether one is a seeker of divine wisdom, a casual first-time visitor, or a long-time ashramite; in the final analysis the arena is ultimately the same, i.e., one’s Self. For, it is the individual, him or herself, who must eventually make the inner journey. The gift of an *ashrama* is that it not only informs the seeker why and how to make this inner journey, but it also embodies it and provides a support for it. The *ashrama* is a gift of the Sadguru, the true teacher. The *Rg Veda* proclaims that seeking is a means to sacred wisdom, to the goal of life. By seeking, immortality is gained; an individual becomes peaceful in mind, the best physician for oneself. Seeking, in this context, means ‘Self-seeking.’

There are some who say that the word *ashrama* means “a place in which to overcome weariness.” The implication here is that an *ashrama* is a sacred place permeated by a divine power that envelops and enters all who enter therein and which helps an individual to overcome the weariness of egoism. There are others who say that an *ashrama* connotes, “a place where one exerts oneself.” That is, an *ashrama* is a place where one ardently practises spiritual disciplines. In either case, the implication is that an *ashrama* is an abode of peace, a place that exists only to enable an earnest seeker of sacred wisdom to experience the unending bliss of the inner Self. It is a place of purity made manifest.

The *Chandogya Upanisad* informs us that the Sage Uddalaka said to his son, Svetaketu, “Now it is time for you to go to an *ashrama*

and live the life of a religious student.” We learn that Svetaketu went to an *ashrama* and with his superior intellect easily memorized all the texts and subsequently returned home proud and pompous, declaring that there was no one equal to him in learning. In order to prick his pride, Uddalaka asked Svetaketu, “Well, since you are now so greatly conceited and think yourself so learned, did you seek from your teacher that instruction by which the unheard becomes heard, the unperceivable becomes perceived, the unknowable becomes known?” This awakened humility and reverence in Svetaketu and rendered him capable of receiving and digesting the sacred wisdom of the Self. Only after approaching his father ‘with fuel in hand,’ that is, with a humble aspiration to learn, did he hear and experience the liberating wisdom, “You are the Self (*tat tvam asi*).”

In the same *Upanisad* we hear of the young boy, Satyakama, who desired to live the life of a student of sacred knowledge. He approached the great sage, Gautama, and he said to the sage, “I wish to become a student of sacred knowledge. May I become your disciple?” The great sage, Gautama, looked at him and he said, “Who are you? Where do you come from?” And the young boy looked at him and said, “Well, my mother is a servant-maid and she doesn’t know who my father is, but they call me Satyakama, the one with a true desire.” The sage Gautama looked at the boy and with an overflowing heart he said, “Because you approached with humility and devotion, because you spoke the truth and have a true aspiration, you may enter the *ashrama*.”

As a seeker of sacred wisdom, having found your way to Sri Ramana’s *ashrama*, follow his instructions that are conducive to discovering the indwelling Self. He embodied that place where fatigue is destroyed.

May the faith with which you have started to scan these pages grow from day to day. May you be drawn by the ever-widening vista of wisdom. May we too, declare, “My delusion is dissolved; I have become aware of my indwelling Self.”

Shortly before his *mahasamadhi* Sri Ramana said, “They say that I am going away, but where could I go? I am here.” On the one

hand, this was a purely metaphysical statement. For the Sage who has realized his identity with the universal Self there is no coming or going, no change or becoming, no here or there, only the changeless Here and Now. And yet, his words had physical implications as well. They applied to his *ashram* as well. During his lifetime, Sri Ramana had often said that only the body travels; the Self remains unmoving; that it was and is a great blessing to be able to go to Sri Ramanasramam at the foot of the sacred Arunachala Mountain, and that powerful spiritual help will be found there for those who come. While Sri Ramana is universal and ever present in the hearts of those devotees who dedicate their lives to him, there is, at the same time, no denying that his power and guidance are concentrated at his *ashram* at Tiruvannamalai.

There is an oft-quoted saying, “The *ashrama* is the body of the Guru.” Arunachala hill is the body of Shiva, of the Self. When Sri Ramana was asked what he saw when he looked at the hill, he replied, “My Self.” Bhagavan Ramana, Arunachala, the Self, the *ashrama*, do not think they are different. Sri Ramana wrote,

“In the recesses of the lotus-shaped heart of all, from Vishnu downwards, there shines as Absolute Consciousness the *Paramatman* (Supreme Spirit) who is the same as Arunachala or Ramana. When the mind melts with love of him and reaches the inmost recess of the heart wherein he abides as the Beloved, the subtle eye of Absolute Consciousness opens and he reveals himself as pure Knowledge.”¹

In the innermost recess of the Heart, (of Ramana, of Arunachala, of the *ashrama*), abides the Beloved. Seek there, reside there, and the secret of the Self will be revealed. ▲

¹ Arunachala Ramana, *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verse Thirty Six

S. RAM MOHAN

Bhagavan raises in the thirty-sixth verse the question does not the *jivan-mukta* (liberated soul) practise *nididhyasana* (meditation) which was first dealt with in the thirty-second verse. The same question is answered in a slightly different way, stressing the fundamental difference between the *jivan-mukta* and the *sadhaka* (practioner).

Verse 36: If we have the conviction that we are the bodies, then meditating 'No, we are That,' will be an excellent means for ultimately reaching the state where we are That. (But) why should one go on meditating 'I am that' without end? Does a man meditate 'I am a man?'

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Commentary:

The belief 'I am the body' is ignorance, and those that are in earnest to get rid of it must either take to the pursuit of the quest 'Who am I' or if being weak-minded and are unable to do so, they may then practise the meditation, 'I am not the body, I am that *Brahman*'. This meditation is practised by the mind. The mind will persist only so long as the ego lives; if the ego dies, the mind also will cease to be. That is, how can this meditation be done by one whose ego has ceased to be? The need and the usefulness of this meditation is only for those who are subject to the primary *avidya* (ignorance).

An apt simile for the absurdity of the *jivan-mukta* practising this meditation is shown by the question: "Does any man meditate 'I am a man?'" The conviction 'I am a man' is already present as a result of worldly experience, and does not need to be aided by meditating on it. In the same way the jnani has the awareness, 'I am the Self, which is Pure *Sat-Chit*,' by direct experience in the Supreme State. Just as no person engages in the meditation 'I am a man' so also the *jivan-mukta* does not engage in the meditation 'I am *Brahman*'.

Even though Advaitic teachers recommend the meditation on *Soham* ('I am He') as an aid to realise the Self; this is only helpful as long as one is still under the notion that of being the psycho-physical entity of body-mind-intellect. Once he or she attains the realisation that he or she is nothing other than the Self which is the all pervading Reality, it is irrelevant to suggest to him that he is *Soham* or to engage in the meditation that 'I am the *Atman*'. Bhagavan says it is as ridiculous to constantly suggest that 'I am a man, I am a man'.

In the initial stages the *sadhaka* has the idea that he or she is the body-mind complex and automatically becomes attached to that. Bhagavan says that the *adhimana* (the original thought or identification) has to be removed, either by studying philosophical texts or by listening to discourses. The *sadhaka* now understands, at least in theory, that he is not the body-mind-intellect complex but the Self. But this idea remains at the intellectual level, therefore

the practioner feels he needs a constant reminder that he is Self. This is achieved either by *anusandhana* (profound contemplation) or *nididhyasana* (continuous meditation).

The term *anusandhana*, refers to the fact that practice of continuously asking ourself the question whenever you are engaged in any activity, 'Who is the person working the body not I? Who is experiencing the sorrow and joy? It is the mind not I'. This constant reminder makes one objective about the emotions and thoughts that are related with the body, and helps us to disassociate from their limiting characteristics. We can dynamically remember that the Self is the substratum of all the things. This disassociation of the Self from the apparent personality will help get rid of the *vasanas* or the memory traces.

The term *nididhyasana* refers to the practice of choosing a particular time of the day which is set apart for internalising the idea that you are the Self and not the body-mind complex. All the thoughts are to be kept at bay and only the idea that 'I am the Self' will flow uninterruptedly. The *sadhaka* should mature in the process which Bhagavan compares "to the process of flowing of the ghee from one vessel to other without interruption."

The practices of *anusandhana* and *nididhyasana* do help in achieving mental strength and tranquility. Bhagavan asserts that these practices are excellent aids for realising the Ultimate where we are That. But he also says that an advanced *mumuksu* (a mature seeker) should not get caught in the web of mechanically performing *soham bhavana* (the feeling 'I am He') and as a result, not progress to live fully the Reality. He also said that mere repetition of mediation on 'I Am That' often leads to *laya* (sleep). When we intensely practice *atma vichara*, there is a purificatory process which cleanses the mind and ultimately leads to *anubhava* (realisation). Here the *sadhaka* is not trying to remember or deceive himself as to what is his true 'I' is by auto-suggestion. Rather, the *sadhaka* is drawn back into that Consciousness which is the source. Ultimately the *sadhaka* reaches the state that when it becomes *sahaja* (permanent). He knows that Self alone is real and Self alone is manifested as the entire Cosmos and there is nothing but the Self. Hereafter suggestions such as 'I am

MOUNTAIN PATH

That, I am This' loses their relevance. There is no need for a reminder as the identification with the Self is complete and absolute.

Before realisation, we should realise it is the ego which was chanting *Soham* but when the ego has been erased, who is there to say *Soham*? This repetition will be as meaningless as a person going on declaring that 'I am a man, I am a man' as if he would ever mistake himself to be anything other than a man.

In a famous Tamil Advaitic text *Ozhivil Odukkam*, verse four, Kannudaiya Vallalar explains this with the help of an example: A doctor advises a patient to take the prescribed medicine without thinking of a monkey. Thinking constantly that he should not think of a monkey makes the patient think of the monkey all the time so that it became his constant *dhyana*. In the same way, though the *sadhaka* is instructed to 'Be still as Siva' and not identify with any objective awareness, instead of annihilating the ego-sense by remaining purely as That, the *sadhaka* mistakenly repeats 'I am He, I am He' which is but the play of ego.



Chidambaram or Tillai

PADMA SESHADRI AND
PADMA MALINI SUNDARARAGHAVAN

The authors have written a book, It Happened Along the Kaveri, which crosses genres, combining travel, history, art, architecture and myth to trace the path of the river and provide a composite picture of the culture that evolved along the Kaveri basin. Both taught at Stella Maris College, Chennai and are longtime Bhagavan devotees. Interested readers may contact the authors at padmamalini@yahoo.com

The book has been published by Niyogi Books and priced at Rs.795. ISBN: 978-81-89738-79-2. It is not a coffee table work but a serious piece of research though written in a style readily accessible to the general reader. The following is an abridged and edited version of the chapter on Chidambaram.

“In the night of Brahman, Nature is inert, and cannot dance till Shiva wills it: He rises from His rapture, and dancing sends through inert matter pulsing waves of awakening sound, and lo! Matter also dances, appearing as a glory round about Him. Dancing, He sustains its manifold phenomena. In the fullness of time, still dancing, He destroys all forms and names by fire and gives new rest. This is poetry, but none the less science.”

— *The Dance of Siva* by Ananda Coomaraswamy

Lord Nataraja of Chidambaram, the *Adalvalla*n of Tillai has been praised in ecstatic song by the four great Tamil saints Appar, Tirujnanasambandar, Sundararmurti and Manikkavachakar. Other Nayanmars in the rich Tamil devotional tradition have also added their voice. The supremely graceful Lord Nataraja lives in the sanctum of a thousand temples in India and is equally visible in museums and art galleries all over the world. His divine dancing form permeates and transcends the circle of this world. While our saints see different aspects of Siva in the form of Dakshinamurti who is said to reside on sacred Arunachala or say, Tyagaraja at Tiruvarur, it is Lord Nataraja who has captured the minds of scholars and lovers of beauty. A modern physicist Fritjof Capra describes an evening experience on the seashore thus: "As I sat on that beach my former experience came to life; I 'saw' cascades of energy coming down from outer space, in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses; I 'saw' the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy; I 'felt' its rhythm and 'heard' its sound and at that moment I 'knew' that this was the Dance of Shiva, the Lord of the dancers...."¹

How many can claim to know this Dancer? Or for that matter, His Dance? And who indeed can tell the 'dancer from the dance'? In the noble temple of Chidambaram, adjacent the statue of Lord Nataraja, is a screened-off niche called the *Rahasyam* or secret. After the ritual worship of Lord Nataraja by the priests who conduct the prescribed offerings to the Lord, one may move to the side of the shrine in the *Kanaka Sabha*i, the golden hall, and see what lies behind the curtain which the presiding priest raises. When the screen is lifted we see only a garland of golden bilva leaves embedded in the dark stone wall. Of the five elements Siva in this Temple represents *akasha ambaram* or ether which has no tangible form. This is the mystery of the *Rahasya*. The *akasha* cannot be contained by a form; it can only be hinted at. Chidambaram is also the place where Siva dwells in the *chit* or consciousness. So he dwells within as pure consciousness and

² Capra, Fritjof, *The Tao of Physics*, Shambhala, Boston, 2000. p.11.



John Maynard

yet also charges all of space with His presence. This is an awesome thought.

In the same *Kanaka Sabhai* area is the Vishnu shrine in Chidambaram. He reclines as Govindaraja on the snake *Ananta* (without end), also named *AdiSesha* (existing from primordial time). *Vishnu* means all pervading as well as in-dwelling. In the same inner shrine precincts, cut off from the rest of the large temple complex, we have the all-pervading formless Siva as *akasha* and *chit*, alongside the celestial Lord Nataraja who dances in ecstasy. Then there is Vishnu who is ubiquitous over time and space and is also the eternal witness or *sakshi* within. It is worth recalling that at Kurukshetra when Krishna transforms himself into the *Vishva roopa* or all-pervading form, Arjuna is unable to accept the power of the darshan and pleads with Krishna to “Show me your ordinary self”. However we view these powerful sacred myths they are all pointing to the exceptionality of the *Kanaka Sabhai*. They are saying this is no ordinary place, pay attention.

Hinduism has always believed in offering to people options, taking into consideration differences in the qualities of mind and heart. God can be with or without form. Form too can be in myriad shapes. The basic assumption is that having chosen our *ishtha devata* (family or individual deity to which we especially give homage) we allow others to choose theirs. It is in the same spirit we need to act in the unique presence of the two deities in Chidambaram. Sadly, over the centuries this has not been the case. Vishnu and Siva devotees have not always lived by this value.

The Chidambaram Nataraja is the most artistically crafted. During the *Mahabhishekam*, the *abhishekam* liquids flow down from the Lord's crown over the nose and down to the *gaja hasta* (left hand swung to the right) where it gently flows to the tip of this hand and then further down to the uplifted left leg. It can be said to be an unrivalled marvel in iconography. It is a perfect sculptural creation whose shape is instantly recognised and appreciated by lovers of beauty.

Volumes have been written about the icon of Lord Nataraja and its underlying symbolic meaning. To give a very brief description,

the figure of Siva rests on a double lotus pedestal, which, in *kundalini yoga* represents the heart *chakra*. That also explains why the temple is *chit ambalam* (*chit* as *sabha* or hall).² In Siva's matted locks are a serpent, a skull, Ganga, a crescent moon and a wreath of leaves and flowers. He has a *makara kundala* (man's earring) in the right ear and a *patra kundala* (woman's earring) in the left ear. He wears the sacred thread and anklets. One end of the *udara bandhana* (waist-band) loosely flutters because of the whirling movement of the dance.

There is an arch round the entire figure, which also has the lotus pedestal for base. The outer fringe of the arch has tongues of flame. The Lord is four-armed. Two of them touch the arch, the upper right hand holds a drum and the upper left hand holds a satchet of fire.

All sound is said to have emanated from the drum. So language as well as music had their origin in this drum. The sense of rhythm and the concept of *tala* in music also came from Lord Nataraja. The fire in his upper left hand indicates the fire of knowledge which burns up ignorance. His front left hand is lowered towards his upraised left foot which indicates the ever-present uplifting redemption through grace.

Below Siva's feet lies the *apasmara purusha*, on whose back Siva has his right foot firmly planted. While the literal meaning of *apasmara* is forgetfulness, the demon is said to be ignorance, *maya* or the ego, who is forgetful of the Self. The snake in the hands of the demon is said to have fallen from the wrist of Siva in the whirl of the dance. From a structural point of view the entire weight of the figure falls on the foot that tramples the demon.

Siva as Nataraja is to be seen as symbolising life as well as death, creation as well as destruction, as He represents *panchakriya* (five actions) in Chidambaram. He is in charge of *srishti* or creation, *sthiti* or preservation, *samhara* or destruction, *tirobhava* or concealment and *anugraha* or bestowal of grace. He reveals specific aspects of Himself in different temples throughout the land of Bharat but in Chidambaram alone He manifests all five activities.

² *Ambara* is sky in Sanskrit. It is *chidambaram* or consciousness-space. *Ambaram* in Tamil is a hall where an assembly takes place.

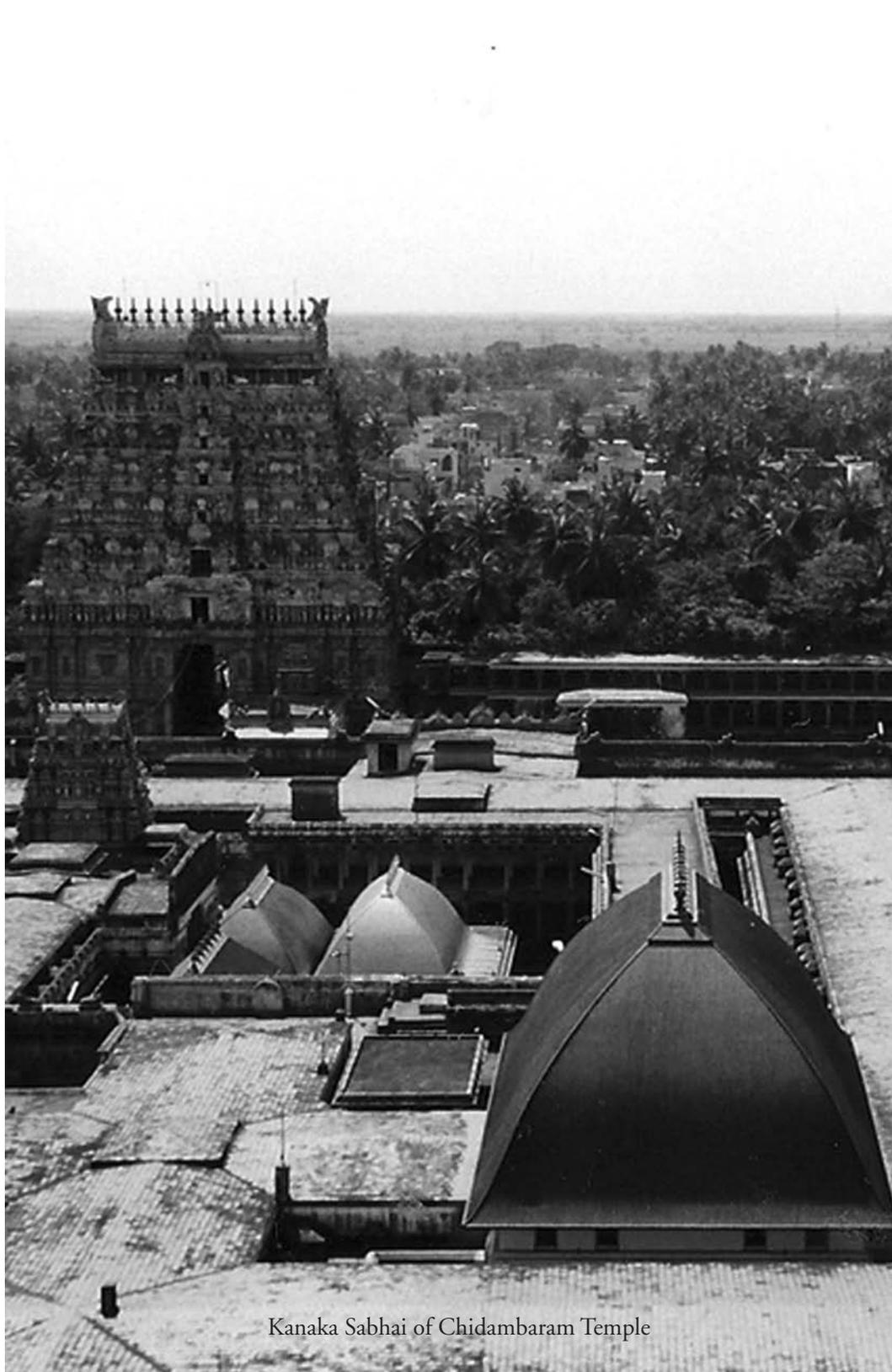
Before the Arrival of Nataraja

Though many temples like to indicate their temple was there at the beginnings of time, the chronicles of Chidambaram indicate that Lord Nataraja appeared at a later date than is usual in the traditional archives. Lord Nataraja made His first appearance in the legend of the rishis in the Darukavana forest. In a slightly different narrative this myth is close to the heart of Sri Ramana devotees, because it led Bhagavan to compose one of his three key compositions, *Upadesa Undiyar*.

The *rishis* followed the school of *purva-mimamsa* of the Vedas which elevates the path of *kamya-karmas* (actions done with desire for the fruits) to a position of pre-eminence. They denied that there was any principle except *karma*, that is, except for any actions performed by the individual, nothing else mattered. They believed in the assured efficacy of rituals. The deluded *rishis* held that they were the architects of their own destiny and rejected the existence of a Supreme Being. Their wives too, were so conceited that they complacently believed their virtue was clearly demonstrated by their ostensible chastity and loyalty to their husbands.

As in all sacred stories of hubris, they were taught a humbling lesson and this time it was in the shape of the simultaneous manifestation of Siva as Bhikshata (the naked mendicant) and Vishnu as Mohini (the enchantress). The two exercised a spellbinding effect on the *rishis* and their *patnis*, which exposed their basic flawed nature. Such a bitter truth was hard to bear and in a fury, the sages created a fire out of which various fearsome creatures emerged. Siva calmly made ornaments of them all — the tiger, whose skin He wore; the snake that He calmly wrapped round His neck; and finally the demon, *apasmara purusha*, on whose back He rested one foot, as He whirled and whirled in His *tandava* dance. The sages had no choice but to admit defeat.

In the history of Hindu philosophy, this refutation of the sages who subscribed to the Mimamsa philosophy by Siva and Vishnu is perhaps seen as a symbolic representation of the defeat of *Mimamsa* by *Vedanta* which teaches that rituals are not enough and that there is a Supreme Being behind all manifestation.



Kanaka Sabhai of Chidambaram Temple

Tillai takes its origin from the Tillaivanam dance, a promised repeat of the dance in the Daruka vanam. According to traditional accounts, after hearing a report of this dance, two of Siva's ardent devotees, Vyaghrapada and Patanjali, prayed to be allowed to witness it. Siva promised that one day He would dance in the forest of Tillai which was the centre of the universe. The story goes that Jaimini, the author of the *Purva Mimamsa Sutras* became an ardent devotee of Lord Nataraja and awaited the Dance of Siva along with Vyaghrapada, Patanjali and Hiranyavarman, a king from the north, who came hoping to be cured of a disease that tormented him.

Siva and Kali

When Siva came to Tillai the place belonged to Kali. The legends are told now from the perspective of Siva's devotees. The goddess Kali, who was proud and self-willed, after destroying a demon continued on a blind rampage, displaying her unbridled powers (*sakti*). As the story goes the gods decided she had to be checked before she did more damage. It was then that Kali agreed to a dance competition in which the victor would have right of place in Tillai and the loser withdraw to the edge of the forest. Kali was able to execute every step of the Lord of the Dance. Suddenly Siva lifted one foot right on level with His head (*Urdhva Tandavam*). As modesty prevented Kali from taking that posture, Siva won and delighted His devotees with the promised *Ananda Tandavam*.

Kali withdrew to the outskirts of Tillai where a temple sprang up round her. Her defeat was not a bitter one. She was conquered not by prowess but by love. She is still there today and her limpid smile is as sweet as the gaze of an innocent child.

After Lord Nataraja was established at Tillai, the temple was renovated and enlarged, it is said, by Guru Namasivayar who came from Arunachala with that express purpose. From a small shrine under a tree in the forest it emerged as *Koyil* or Temple. Today Lord Nataraja and Chidambaram are synonymous.

The Priests of Lord Nataraja

The *Tillai-moovayiravar* or the three thousand of Tillai, is a group of *brahmins* known as *Dikshitaras* who have been with the temple from the time of its inception. According to an account presented by them to Dr. Rajendra Prasad on his visit in 1957, "The pagoda arose when the Lord Nataraja together with 3,000 *Dikshitaras* appeared at this place to bless His great devotees Vyaghrapada and Patanjali. The *Dikshitaras* claim themselves to be of divine origin and according to them *Brahma* took them from Tillai to perform a *Yagam* near Varanasi where they stayed till Hiranyavarman, at the suggestion of the Chidambaram deity, invited them back to Chidambaram. When they had arrived they found there were only 2,999 and a voice from above announced that the God Himself, *Sabha Nayakar* (chief of the assembly), was the missing one. These traditions seem to imply that from the inception of the temple the *Dikshitaras* have been regarded as part and parcel of the institution."

Where did the *Dikshitaras* come from initially? 'Antarvedi' say legends, which could be the area between Ganga and Yamuna. It could have been Kashi as it was an ancient centre of Siva worship. It is said that when they were away from Tillai serving Brahma, they missed Nataraja and so He manifested Himself from their *yajna* fire as *Ratna Sabhapati*, an emerald image of the Lord which they brought back with them to Tillai.

Vyaghrapada, Hiranyavarman, Patanjali and Govindaraja

The early history of the temple is shrouded in mystery. The historical identity of Vyaghrapada and Patanjali cannot be established because by the time they were first written about they had acquired mythical features and status. Vyaghrapada, as the name implies, had the feet of a tiger. He collected flowers for worship at dawn and might have been described as having the keen eyes and swiftness of the tiger. Later these became his physical attributes.

Hiranyavarman came to Tillai from Gouda Desa after giving up his throne to his brother. It is said he suffered from leprosy which was cured when he bathed in the Sivaganga tank. Vyaghrapada crowned him and formally gave him the Chola emblem of the tiger.

Hiranyavarman set up the first temple, re-inviting the Tillai three thousand from the Gangetic Plains. Significantly, Chidambaram is the only major ancient temple in South India that follows *Vedic* rituals. The majority of temples follow different *Agamic* rituals.

Patanjali³ is said to be the incarnation of AdiSesha, the serpent on which Vishnu reclines. Hearing Vishnu's account of the dance at Darukavana, AdiSesha is said to have received permission from Vishnu to pray for a vision of that dance. As Patanjali, he set up a shrine for Siva in the Tillai forest and waited for Siva's dance. After he had witnessed it, he is said to have remained with Lord Siva. As the incarnation of AdiSesha, Patanjali is always depicted as being half snake and half human. The deity he set up for worship is known as Anantisvara, the Lord of Ananta.

Today, at the tank called Tiruparkadal in the large Chidambaram temple complex, can be seen the figures of Govindaraja on Ananta and of Patanjali with folded hands in front of Siva. But for many centuries there was no Govindaraja as the Chola King Kulottunga II decided that the natural place for Vishnu was the ocean and cast him out of the Chidambaram temple.

In the complex sometimes violent history of the Kaveri basin, the later Cholas supported the Saiva cause and the Hoysalas and Nayaks supported Vaishnavas. The Vaishnava Acharya Ramanuja set up a shrine for Govindaraja at Tirupati, taking an image from the temple of Lakshminarayana in Karunguzhi. The king Krishnappa Nayak re-established a shrine for Govindaraja in Tillai, in the face of strong opposition. A few priests threatened to jump off the *gopura* if Govindaraja was brought back. The Nayak king went ahead refusing to heed their threats and a few did die in protest. Krishnappa was not against the worship of Siva because he provided for 50,000 *kalams* of paddy for Saiva mendicants. The issues were rituals, procession of the deity, control of the hundred pillar *mantapa* and other matters relating to temple administration.

³This Patanjali is not to be confused with the author of the *Yoga Sutras* of the same name.



Courtyard of Kanaka Sabhai

At one point to everybody's shame even the agent of the Nawab of Arcot had to intervene. In the twentieth century Sir Annamalai Chettiar repaired both shrines and arranged for worship of both deities with architectural changes to allow for separate processions. Two phrases used in the rituals of Nataraja seem to bear the linguistic impression of the presence of Govindaraja: *ani tirumanjanam* and *tiruppavadai amudu*. The Lord's holy bath is *tirumanjanam* for Vaishnavas; Saivas prefer the term *abhishekam*. *Tiruppavadai amudu* refers to food offerings heaped up in front of the deity; in Vaishnava parlance food items are all *amudu* or ambrosial gift from the gods to be accepted with gratitude.

An Aside on Madurai and Chidambaram

The lore and significance of both the Meenakshi temple in Madurai and the Nataraja temple in Chidambaram are part of Tamil culture. When discussing the dynamics in a marriage and which partner is more dominant, there is a Tamil phrase 'Maduraiya? Chidambarama?' That is, 'Is it Madurai or Chidambaram?' The Madurai temple is dedicated to the goddess Meenakshi and Siva is at best, Meenakshi-Sundaesvarar, her spouse, whereas in Chidambaram, Nataraja is all-in-all.

The History of the Sixty-three Saints

It was during the reign of Kulottunga II that one of the greatest classics in Tamil came to be written. This was *Tiruttonda Purana* better known as the *Periya Puranam*. Arulmozhidevar Sekkizhar, a high-ranking man in the Chola administration, was unhappy to see the king reading *Jivaka Chintamani* a Jain literary classic. Sectarian bias is clearly evident here as Sekkizhar spoke in no uncertain terms about its uselessness both in this world and the next. He asked the king instead to read about the lives of the Saiva saints. Kulottunga accepted the advice and gave Sekkizhar a large sum of money and sent him to Tillai to write an elaborate work on the lives of the Saiva saints. Perhaps this was one of the earliest instances of a commissioned work on the Tamil saints.

Sekkizhar sought the Lord's grace and was told to start his work with the word *Ulakelam*. He then sat down in the thousand pillared *mantapa* and wrote 4,253 stanzas. The king came to Tillai when he heard the work had been completed. Faith gives people extra sensitive ears. The assembled gathering heard the tinkling anklets of the divine dancer and also a voice which said the king should hear the work recited and explained by the author himself. Sekkizhar's discourse went on for a year and people of all castes were able to benefit from it.

Chidambaram Temple Down the Ages

Sri Sankaracharya, the exponent of Advaita philosophy is said to have presented a *Sphatika Linga* (crystal *lingam*) to the temple. He also possibly installed the *Sri Chidambaram Chakram*, a mystic diagram with great symbolic meaning and power. The centre of the Yantra is Mount Kailasa; the *bindu*, or most inner centre represented by a dot, represents the first manifestation of creative principle when the one becomes the many. The divine unity expands and becomes the mystic three, the Trimurti or the innermost triangle standing on its apex, that is downturned, which symbolises the three powers of Sakti, *jnana* (knowledge), *kriya* (action) and *iccha* (will). This yantra and its symbolism, however one chooses to interpret it, is also called the *Chidambara Rahasyam*, perhaps because in early times the *chakram* was kept near Nataraja at the place where today the screen conceals the empty niche and the gold *bilva* leaves.

Individual contributions of kings and commanders are not elaborated upon here. Aditya I started gilding the hall at Chidambaram with pure gold which he had brought from his plunder of the Kongu country. Since Parantaka I completed the work he is credited with creating the *Pon-Ambalam* or *Kanaka Sabhai* or Golden Hall. His son Gandaraditya's contributions were of a different nature altogether: he composed hymns on Nataraja of Tillai.

It was in the time of Rajaraja I that the lost hymns of the great saints were discovered. Rajendrachola's construction of the new capital at Gangai-konda-cholapuram, close to Tillai, increased Tillai's importance for future kings of the Chola lands.

Kulottunga I set up on the cross-beam of the entrance to *Moolasthanam* a precious stone given as tribute by the king of Kambhoja. Incidentally a couple of verses inscribed in the temple refer to him as an incarnation of Vishnu. Kulottunga II was responsible for both the infamous eviction of Govindaraja and the writing of the *Periya Puranam*.

Right through the reign of the later Cholas, the Pandyas, the Vijayanagar and the Nayaka rulers Chidambaram continued to grow in stature. Kings rose and fell but there was no conqueror who did not worship Nataraja. Things changed with the arrival on the scene of the British and Haidar Ali. There was fierce fighting between Haidar and Sir Eyre Coote, the British general. Both occupied the temple at different times, as fortunes rose and fell. The walls of the temple still wear the scars of the Anglo-French wars. For some time the idols of Nataraja and Sivakamasundari were kept in safe custody at the Tiruvarur temple and brought back in 1773 CE.

Nataraja seems to have suffered vicissitudes of fortune earlier too. According to research done by Se Rasu, Nataraja and Sivakamasundari were out of the temple between 1648 and 1686. B. Natarajan refers to an episode that took place during this time, his source being U.V.Swaminatha Iyer. Fearing for the safety of the deities, (ironic though it might seem) two elderly *dikshitar*s hid the deities in the deep hollow of a tamarind tree. By the time the *dikshitar*s decided the images could be brought back, those who concealed them had died. The two *dikshitar*s who were sent to fetch the image were wandering around helplessly when they overheard some men talking about taking two bulls to the *Ambalapuli* (the sacred tamarind tree).

They too, went there, met the owner of the grove who decided to reveal the secret of the tree. He said he had discovered the idols one morning and as they could not lie there neglected, he announced to everyone that he had been directed in a dream to offer worship at that particular tree. Daily offerings of fruit, flowers and milk were made. The Lord certainly knew how to take care of Himself, how to let Himself be found and how to guide those who had come to take Him back.

A Broad Outline of the Temple and its Administration

The temple has four main *gopuras* (towers) built by and added to by different kings at different times. The kings mainly responsible were Vikrama Chola, Kulottunga II, Krishna Deva Raya, and Ko-perunjinga. The east and west *gopuras* have the 108 *karanas* of Bharata's *Natya Shastra* depicted with descriptive labels. All four *gopuras* are in the third *prakara* (the outer walls of the complex). The four great saints Manikkavachakar, Appar, Sundarar and Sambandar are said to have entered by the east, west, north and south respectively through whatever gateways existed then. A very recent addition to the third *prakara* is an immense bell donated by a devotee from Germany.

There are five *sabhas* or halls. The *Chit Sabha* or *Chitrambalam* holds the processional images of Nataraja and His consort Sivakamasundari, the *Sphatika Lingam* and the *Ratna Sabhapati* (made of emerald). The gods are said to have gilded this *sabha* first. Subsequently many kings have added to their personal glory by gilding it over as and when the need arose. This place also contains the *Chidambara-Rahasyam* with its gilded bilva leaves. The black curtain covering the leaves symbolises ignorance and is lifted three times after every *puja*. The *Kanaka Sabhai* adjoins it and the two are connected by five steps. These steps represent the five holy syllables *panchakshara*, namely *na ma shi va ya*. The *abhisheka* of Lord Nataraja and Sivakamasundari usually takes place in the *Kanaka Sabhai*. The *palliyarai* or bed room is in the north-west corner of this inner *prakara*. Siva, represented by his *padukas*, is taken there in a palanquin every night and he stays with Sivakamasundari. The morning rituals start with the *padukas* being brought to the *Chit Sabha*.

The *Nritta Sabhai* or Hall of Dance is in the shape of a chariot drawn by horses and is located in the second *prakara* opposite the *dhvajasthamba*. This houses the image of Siva dancing the *Urdhva Tandava*, the dance with which He defeated Kali. The *Deva Sabhai*, holding more than a hundred bronze figures, is also the place where the periodic meetings of the *dikshitaras* take place.

Twice a year the *abhishekam* of Nataraja and Sivakamasundari is held in the majestic *Raja Sabhai* which displays exquisite friezes of dancing figures and has two huge stone elephants at the entrance. This Thousand Pillared Hall, where Sekkizhar read out his *Periya Puranam*, is called the *Raja Sabhai* because the coronation of many kings has been held here.

The construction of the shrine of Sivakamasundari, also known as *Tiru-kama-kottam*, was started during the reigns of Kulottunga I and Vikrama Chola and completed during the reign of Kulottunga II. On the outer side of the sanctum walls there are niches containing the three *shaktis*.

The administration of the temple is entirely with the *Dikshitar*s. Every *Dikshitar*, on marriage, becomes a trustee of the temple with full rights. This has encouraged early marriages. They did not receive government support from the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board as financial help meant surrender of administrative freedom. Understandably the Tillai Three Thousand who claim to have come with Siva about two millenniums ago are not willing to do this. For them it would also be a betrayal of trust as Siva is said to have announced that He is one of them. The *Dikshitar*s do not own income-yielding property either. They depend entirely on offerings made at the temple and on donations.³

The *Arudra Darsanam* and *Ani Tirumanjanam* are the most important festivals, when Chidambaram veritably becomes *Bhooloka Kailasam* or *Kailasam* on earth. There is an annual dance festival. For performers it is a privilege to dance in the presence of the Lord of Dance. Every dancer dreams of an opportunity to make an offering of dance to the Lord. It is a mystical experience for many who have done so.

Close to Chidambaram on the eastern side lies Tiruvtokalam. This place is identified as the spot where, after giving Arjuna the *Pashupata-Astra*, Siva disappeared from view. Tirujnananasambandar lived there and walked to Chidambaram every day for darshan, because he felt it was indelicate to live in the immediate vicinity of that holy place. The river Kollidam which is also called Vada-Punya-Kaveri or the northern branch of the holy Kaveri joins the sea near Mahendrapalli.



Kumaradeva

T.V. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN
AND DAVID GODMAN

Kumaradeva, a Karnataka king who renounced his throne to attain liberation, was part of a distinguished lineage of Gurus who lived and taught in South India in the 16th and 17th centuries. According to his hagiography,¹ Kumaradeva had spent his penultimate incarnation in Mallikarjuna, nowadays known as Sri Sailam, in Andhra Pradesh. In that life he was performing *nishkama tapas* – rigorous and selfless meditation – and directing it towards Lord Siva. He had a companion, another *sadhu* who was performing *tapas* alongside him.

Siva became aware of this anonymous *sadhu*'s strenuous efforts and decided to manifest before him to offer assistance.

¹ All the biographical information on Kumaradeva in this article has been taken from *Kumaradevar Sastra Kovai*, by P. Arumugam Mudaliar, published by Golden Electric Press, 1923.

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‘Devotee, what boon do you want?’ he enquired.

The *sadhu* had been harbouring a request in his mind, but when he opened his mouth to speak, something completely different came out.

The details of the unplanned request are not known, but they were bad enough to cause great anger in Siva, who cursed him with the following words: ‘May you become a *jatamuni* [a kind of demon with long matted hair]!’

This was a not a curse for some future life; the transformation was immediate.

Shocked by this sudden turn of events, the devotee prostrated at Siva’s feet and pleaded with him.

‘I made a mistake by not asking for what I really desired. Supreme Being! What can I do now? When can I be released from this curse?’

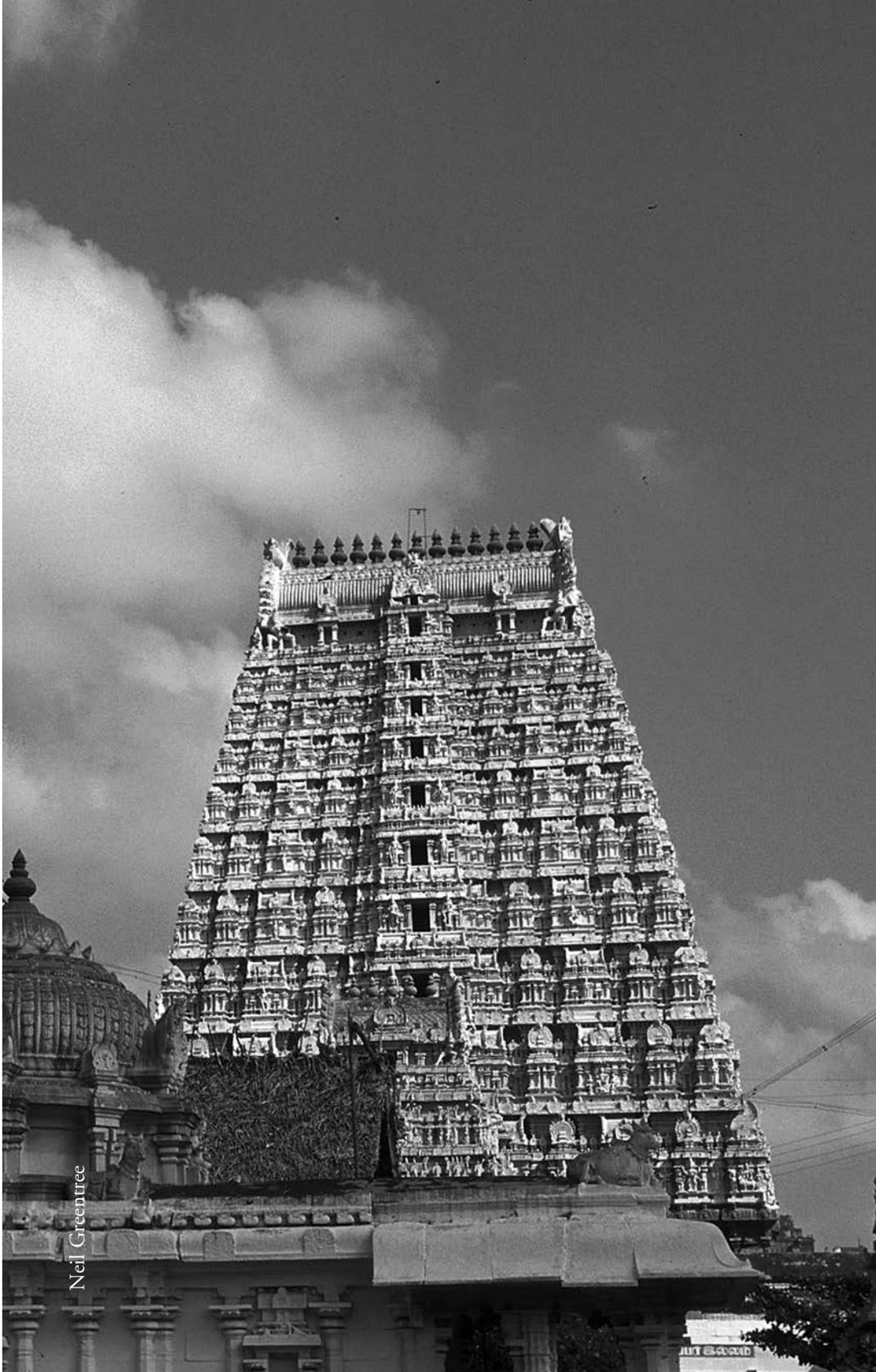
Siva gave him the following prescription: ‘Go to Vriddhachalam [a town near Chidambaram] and live there on the branches of the mature bodhi tree that is growing on the bank on the Manimutta River. The devotee who has been performing *tapas* next to you will, in his next life, be born as a king in the Karnataka region. After ruling there for a brief period, he will develop a distaste for worldly life that will lead him to Peraiyur Santalinga Swami. He will attain liberation through the grace of this swami. His Guru will then instruct him to go to Vriddhachalam where he will stay under the same bodhi tree in which you will be living as a *jatamuni*. If you prostrate to him and beg him to release you, you will be freed from your curse.’

‘When will he attain liberation?’ asked the *jatamuni*.

Siva replied, ‘He has already taken five consecutive pure incarnations. In each one he performed intense *nishkama tapas* and directed it towards me. This is his sixth pure birth. In his next life he will attain liberation.’

Saying, ‘This is my good fortune,’ the *jatamuni* took leave of Siva, went to Vriddhachalam, took up residence in the tree specified by Siva, and waited for the time when he would be released from his curse.

The destinies ordained by Siva then began to unfold. The devotee who had been doing *tapas* with the *jatamuni* took a new birth as Kumaradeva in the Karnataka region. He ruled there as a king for a



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short period of time before taking *sannyasa*. After his renunciation, he asked his former chief minister to send a message to Peraiyur Santalinga Swami that gave details of his history, his renunciation, and his desire to see him. Then, without waiting for an answer, he went there in person and fell at the Guru's feet.

Santalinga Swami wanted to test the maturity of Kumaradeva.

He looked at his *kaiettu tambiran*, a scribe-disciple who always stood near the Guru in order to write down important teachings, and said, 'Appa [a term of endearment], this person looks like a king. He is not fit for this path. Ask him to go home and rule his kingdom again.'

The scribe was a mature man who could see or intuit that eighteen distinct marks that are said to appear only in those true devotees who have intense and extreme maturity were all manifesting in this former king. Since he did not want to disobey his Guru or reveal this information to Kumaradeva, he contrived to pass on the information to Santalinga Swami in sign language.

Santalinga Swami was aware of all this himself. Softening his stance a little, he turned to the *tambiran* and said, 'Tell him to go outside and cut grass for my bullocks'.

Kumaradeva was given a sickle, along with a rope to tie the cut grass with, and was dispatched to the nearby fields where he joined a group of *pallars* (members of an agricultural caste) who were already engaged in cutting grass.

Kumaradeva held a bunch of grass in his left hand and attempted to cut it near the ground with his sickle. However, being completely inexperienced, he only succeeded in inflicting a severe wound on the hand that was holding the grass. Instead of getting upset about the gaping wound, he got angry with his right hand for being so incompetent.

The *pallars*, who had been observing the strange and unskilled behaviour of the new grass cutter, approached him and asked him who he was.

'Oh, I am just a worker who has been asked to cut grass to feed the bullocks that pull Santalinga Swami's cart.'

The *pallars* were not convinced. His incompetence at one of the most basic agricultural tasks, combined with his aristocratic bearing, led them

to believe that he might be a king. Realising that he was incapable of accomplishing the simple task that had been assigned to him, they took pity on him, cut the grass that was required, and tied it with the rope that Kumaradava had been given. They then lifted it up and placed it on his head so he could walk off with it. Unaccustomed to bearing heavy loads, Kumaradeva's head buckled under the weight. Realising that Kumaradeva did not have the necessary neck muscles to carry the grass to its destination, the *pallars* carried it to the *math* and placed it outside the door.

On the two succeeding days Kumaradeva was again sent out to cut grass for Santalinga Swami's bullocks, and each time the *pallars* cut the grass for him and delivered it to the *math*. On the third day the worker who was carrying Kumaradeva's load for him met the *tambiran* who had conveyed Santalinga Swami's original orders. He told him about the strange new worker who couldn't either cut or carry grass and who had slashed his hand on his first attempt. The *tambiran* reported these developments to Santalinga Swami.

Santalinga Swami decided that he would test Kumaradeva a little more. He came outside and got angry with him, just to see how he would react. Kumaradeva became a little frightened when Santalinga Swami verbally attacked him, but other than retreating a little and standing some distance away, he displayed no reaction to the assault.

That night Santalinga Swami called his *tambiran* and said, 'Pack two separate cooked-rice parcels for myself and Kumaradeva. Hang them on opposite ends of a pole and give the pole to Kumaradeva. Then ask him to accompany me with it.'

They set off together, with Santalinga Swami walking in front of Kumaradeva.

After travelling for some time Santalinga Swami turned round and rebuked him, shouting, 'Why are you delaying?'

Kumaradeva replied fearfully, 'On one side the *acchu lingam* [axis *lingam*] is tugging me, and on the other side the *gana yuddham* are pulling.'²

² In this highly cryptic pronouncement the *acchu lingam* represents the Self while the *gana yuddham* (the hordes of warring warriors) represent the outward moving senses who are always trying to take attention away from the Self.

This enigmatic but profound reply sent Santalinga Swami into a state of ecstasy. He sat down on the bank of a nearby tank with Kumaradeva and asked him to mix the rice from the two packages. Kumaradeva obeyed the command and then served Santalinga Swami, treating the rice as *naivedya* (sanctified food offered to a deity). When Santalinga Swami had indicated that he had received enough, Kumaradeva took some himself, treating his portion as *prasad*.

The two of them spoke together before Santalinga Swami decided it was time to return to the *math*.

This meeting was a turning point in their outward relationship. Kumaradeva began to perform *sadhana* under the supervision of Santalinga Swami and soon realised the Self through his Guru's grace.

Since Siva had ordained that the enlightened Kumaradeva would one day travel to Vriddhachalam to release the *jatamuni* from his curse, Santalinga Swami turned to him one day, addressed him as 'Maharaja,' and ordered him to visit that town.

Kumaradeva took leave of his Guru and began to travel there on foot. As he was walking through a forest near Chinnasalem, Pazhamalainathar (Lord Siva residing at Vriddhachalam) appeared in the form of a brahmin. Knowing that Kumaradeva was walking towards his town, he set up a wayside stall that served free drinking water to travellers.

As Kumaradeva approached, the brahmin addressed him saying, 'You seem to be exhausted. Drinking water is available here. Drink as much as you want and quench your thirst.'

Kumaradeva accepted the brahmin's offer before continuing with his journey to Vriddhachalam.

The long walk exhausted him. When he finally arrived at his destination, he decided to rest under the shade of the large bodhi tree that was growing by the side of the River Manimutta. Within minutes of sitting down he fell into a deep and blissful sleep.

Periyanyaki (the goddess presiding at Vriddhachalam) came to know of his arrival. She took some milk that had been kept for her *abhishekam* and came in the form of a brahmin woman to where Kumaradeva was sleeping. She sat down next to him, placed

Kumaradeva's head on her lap, and fed him with the milk she had brought.

Kumaradeva woke up, saw the woman, and asked who she was.

She replied, 'Kumaradeva, I am Periyanyaki. Come and stay forever in my place and live happily here.'

Then she mysteriously vanished into thin air.

This incident left Kumaradeva wondering, 'Mother, what can I possibly give you in return for this grace?'

Within minutes he was lost in ecstasy.

The *jatamuni*, who had been staying on the branches of the bodhi tree, observed all this and thought that the person he had been waiting for had finally arrived. He climbed down the tree, took the form of a brahmin, and fell at the feet of Kumaradeva with great humility.

'Who are you?' enquired Kumaradeva.

'I am a *jatamuni*.'

'Why have you come to see me?' enquired Kumaradeva.

The *jatamuni* then narrated the story of how the two of them had once been *sadhhus* together, and how Siva had cursed him to remain as a *jatamuni* in the bodhi tree until Kumaradeva came there to release him.

When the story had been concluded, Kumaradeva carried out Siva's wishes and released the *jatamuni* from the curse.

Kumaradeva remained in Vriddhachalam since his Guru had asked him to be there. Some accounts say that he used the shade of this bodhi tree as his base.

One day Periyanyaki appeared to him again and requested him to compose some *jnana sastras* (scriptures on true knowledge). Kumaradeva doubted that he had the capacity.

He replied, 'Though I am your slave, I am not able to do this'.

Periyanyaki told him, 'I myself will abide in your tongue and complete the *sastras*.'

Kumaradeva accepted the order and went on to compose sixteen *jnana sastras*. In one portion of the sixth *sastra* – which is entitled *Jnana Ammanai* and is addressed to the deities of Vriddhachalam who enabled him to compose the work – he gave details of his life and his

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spiritual development. The lines all conclude with the exclamation ‘*ammanai!*’ This is a celebratory shout that indicates joy and delight in all the incidents and opinions that are mentioned in the poem. The original *ammanai* poem was composed by Manikkavachagar in Tiruvannamalai over a thousand years ago. The *ammanai* exclamation in that particular poem is thought to be derived from a triumphant shout of joy made by young girls as they scored points in a game that involved keeping a number of balls in the air.

Here, then, is an extract from Kumaradeva’s own *ammanai* poem, his exultant retelling of his path to liberation:

Worshipping the feet of Azhattu Pillaiyar – *ammanai!*
I rooted out doubt and erroneous understanding – *ammanai!*
Reaching the feet of Vriddhambhikai³ – *ammanai!*
opening the eye of true *jnana* – *ammanai!*
and meditating and dwelling on the conclusion – *ammanai!*
I will now declare what I have experienced,
as I experienced it – *ammanai!*
Father, mother, wife, relations – *ammanai!*
these are attachments of the soul – *ammanai!*
Wealth, ornaments, land, empire – *ammanai!*
these are attachments to objects – *ammanai!*
These two are external attachments – *ammanai!*
Remaining with these – *ammanai!*
thinking there is no lack in – *ammanai!*
noble lineage, wealth, handsome looks, attire – *ammanai!*
I lived for some time, wallowing in them – *ammanai!*
without paying attention to the excellent path – *ammanai!*
not performing *Siva bhakti*, *tapas*, and offering gifts – *ammanai!*
It was through providence that my mind became clear – *ammanai!*
Impermanent, impure and misery-causing – *ammanai!*
maya of this nature is most certainly unreal – *ammanai!*

³ Azhattu Pillaiyar is the name of Ganapati at Vriddhachalam, while Vriddhambhikai is Siva’s consort there.

Eternal, immaculate and having enduring bliss – *ammanai!*
 this state of liberation is one's own [state] and real – *ammanai!*
 After realising this, disregarding completely – *ammanai!*
 the happiness of a householder's life – *ammanai!*
 I renounced it in my youth as false and moved towards – *ammanai!*
 the golden feet of *jnana* Guru Santalinga – *ammanai!*
 I came, I praised him, and I prostrated – *ammanai!*
 He placed his golden feet on my head and then – *ammanai!*
 made clear to me the path of liberation – *ammanai!*
 He said, 'Exert yourself on *tapas* at Vriddhachalam' – *ammanai!*
 Obeying his command I stayed there – *ammanai!*
 remaining there motionless, night and day – *ammanai!*
 I merged in *tapas* – *ammanai!*
 Vriddhambhikai came and taught me – *ammanai!*
 As she was explaining I realised – *ammanai!*
 clearly the experience that is free
 from doubt and wrong understanding – *ammanai!*...⁴

Seeing everything as 'I' – *ammanai!*
 I remained without any anxiety – *ammanai!*
 Only my being manifests and exists – *ammanai!*
 only my consciousness appears – *ammanai!*
 only my bliss is experienced as happiness – *ammanai!*
 all is only *sat-chit-ananda* – *ammanai!*
 I saw and attained myself through myself – *ammanai!*
 I remained, experiencing happiness alone – *ammanai!*
 I became convinced that the happiness
 experienced in objects – *ammanai!*
 is only my own bliss – *ammanai!*
 From now on I will not think of or desire any object – *ammanai!*
 There is no bliss in it – *ammanai!*
 I obtained freedom from desire and fear – *ammanai!*
 as I became the eternal blissful one – *ammanai!*

⁴ *Jnana Ammanai*, sixth *sastra*, lines 1-34.

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Whatever happens to come to me in the present – *ammanai!*
I will experience it in a state of desirelessness
and abide in the [natural] state – *ammanai!*
When I think, I see myself as ‘this’ – *ammanai!*
as the various non-existent objects – *ammanai!*
In my thought-free state I am only myself as One – *ammanai!*
Seeing only myself here and there – *ammanai!*
I remain without any anxiety... – *ammanai!*⁵

There is nothing other than ‘me’. I swear to this – *ammanai!*
I will hold the red-hot iron in my hand [swearing]
that this is the truth – *ammanai!*
Not knowing myself for such a long time – *ammanai!*
was like languishing in fear, without knowing my way – *ammanai!*
What recompense can there be in me – *ammanai!*
for the compassion of Sankari⁶, who has no equal – *ammanai!*
for bestowing her cool grace? – *ammanai!*
From now on it will be proper for me
to render elegant service – *ammanai!*
wholeheartedly to her devotees – *ammanai!*
May this holy *kshetra* of Vriddhachalam shine forth – *ammanai!*⁷

Though Kumaradeva’s written works are studied in Vedanta *maths*, he himself was brought up in the Virasaiva tradition. This is a subdivision of the Saiva faith which originated in Karnataka about 800 years ago. It still has many adherents there. The traditional accounts of Kumaradeva’s life stress his Virasaiva background and beliefs and generally include the following entertaining incident:

Once Kumaradeva went to Tiruvarur to witness its annual festival. As Sri Tyagaraja, the presiding deity of Tiruvarur, was travelling in his chariot, moving through the main streets that surrounded the

⁵ *Jnana Ammanai*, sixth *sastra*, lines 67-88.

⁶ The consort of Siva.

⁷ *Jnana Ammanai*, sixth *sastra*, lines 91-100.



temple, Kumaradeva stood in front of the moving vehicle and had *darshan* of the deity.

Two Saivas who witnessed this spoke to each other in a sneering way: 'Look at this deluded Virasaiva!'⁸

When he overheard this comment, Kumaradeva addressed Thyagaraja: 'Lord, if the Virasaiva faith is a delusion, then let this chariot continue. If it is the way of grace, then let this chariot come to a halt.'

The chariot ground to a halt.

After issuing this challenge and achieving the desired result, Kumaradeva went and sat under the shade of a nearby tree.

The king of Thanjavur, who was also a trustee of the temple, learned that the chariot had unexpectedly stopped. Since he had taken a vow that he would not eat until the chariot had returned to its starting point, he became extremely concerned and initiated several different attempts to get the chariot to continue. The chariot, though, refused to budge from its spot.

Feeling both anxious and exhausted by his failure, he prayed, 'Lord, what can be done now? Through whose agency has this event occurred? My vow is not possible to fulfil.'

The king then learned about the incident between Kumaradeva and the taunting Saivas which had occurred earlier that day.

He went to Kumaradeva, prostrated to him, and appealed to him for help. Kumaradeva, though, was unmoved.

He told the king, 'What business do you have with this "deluded" person? Go away!'

The king persisted by both praising and beseeching him, adding, 'You should forgive this fault of ours and make the chariot move again.'

Kumaradeva finally agreed to help by taking up the matter with Sri Tyagaraja directly.

Accompanied by the king and his entourage, he stood before the chariot and addressed the deity: 'If the Virasaiva faith is the way

⁸ The implication in the original is not that Kumaradeva is a deluded person, but that the Virasaiva faith is based on deluded principles.

of grace, let this chariot move. If it is delusion, then let the chariot remain motionless.’

Immediately, and to the joy of everyone watching, the chariot began to move, reaching its starting point without any further problems.

The first *jnana sastra* that Kumaradeva composed under the supervision of Periyanaayaki, was *Maharaja Turavu* (*The Renunciation of a Great King*).⁹ This later became a standard text on Vedanta in the Tamil-speaking world. It is one of sixteen Vedanta texts that comprise the syllabus in some traditional South Indian *maths*. *Maharaja Turavu* covers many topics but its principal theme is extolling the virtues of physical renunciation and ascetic living.

In *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk number 648, Bhagavan mentioned one of its verses with great approval:

In *Maharaja Turavu* [Kumaradeva writes that he] was seated on the bare ground, the earth was his seat, the wind was the *chamara*; the sky was the canopy; and renunciation was his spouse.¹⁰

Then Sri Bhagavan continued:

I had no cloth spread on the floor in earlier days. I used to sit on the floor and lie on the ground. That is freedom. The sofa is a bondage. It is a gaol for me. I am not allowed to sit where and how I please. Is it not bondage? One must be free to do as one pleases, and should not be served by others.

‘No want’ is the greatest bliss. It can be realised only by experience. Even an emperor is no match for a man with no want. The emperor has got vassals under him. But the other man is not aware of anyone beside the Self. Which is better?

⁹ An article on Kumaradeva and a translation of *Maharaja Turavu* was serialised in the *Mountain Path* from April 2010 till January 2011.

¹⁰ This is a free rendering of verse 64. The full translation is as follows:

The king remained resplendent with the earth as his bed, and the sky, appropriately, as his canopy. Existing in happiness as the one Self, the moon and the ruddy sun became his lamps, the wafting breeze his befitting yak-tail fan, and renunciation his wife.

Though the verses of *Maharaja Turavu* that praised an ascetic and frugal lifestyle clearly resonated with Bhagavan, he did not accept Kumaradeva's contention, repeated in many of the verses, that physical renunciation was an essential prerequisite to Self-realisation. There is no record of Bhagavan ever giving permission to a devotee who wanted to give up his family or financial responsibilities in order to pursue a spiritual life full-time. If Bhagavan was asked about this, he would usually reply that it is the mind that has to be renounced, not physical circumstances, and that realisation did not depend on adopting a particular lifestyle.

Sadhu Natanananda (known in his earlier life as Natesa Mudaliar) was one of the devotees who sought Bhagavan's permission to renounce family life and become a *sannyasin*. As a keen student of vedantic texts, Natanananda had probably read *Maharaja Turavu* and accepted Kumaradeva's prescription that physical renunciation was a pre-requisite for serious seekers. This is why, in refusing his request, Bhagavan cited a typical renunciation verse from *Maharaja Turavu* before going on to point out that in later works Kumaradeva had changed his view and taught that renunciation of the ego was more important than the external variety. This is B. V. Narasimhaswami's account of Bhagavan's reply:

[Around] 1926 Natesa Mudaliar approached Maharshi and said that he desired to become an ascetic, as that seemed the only course for him, since domestic life was standing in the way of his achieving peace and control of mind. Maharshi tried to dissuade him, and pointed out that if one quitted home to escape a single hindrance and went to the forest, ten hindrances would beset him there, as though they came up on purpose to test his mettle. 'But do not ask me why I came,' said Maharshi. 'Somehow I came then.'¹¹

¹¹ Bhagavan is saying here, 'Do not ask me why I myself left my family and came to Tiruvannamalai. It is something that just happened.' Also, the circumstances were different. Bhagavan did not leave to take up a life of spiritual practice in Tiruvannamalai. When he left Madurai in 1896, he was already fully enlightened.

[Bhagavan then] quoted *Maharaja Turavu* [saying] that the king, when he left home and all, no doubt said, 'If a man goes southward [from a starting point in South India] he will never go to the Ganges. Similarly, one who stays home will never obtain liberation.'¹²

But the same king at a later stage said that there was no difference between domestic life and a hermit's.

'Just as you are free from cares of home when you are here,' said Maharshi, 'go home and try to be unconcerned and unaffected even in the midst of home life.'

Natesa Mudaliar got the same negative reply on two or three later occasions when he again broached the subject of *sannyasa*. Maharshi's words proved to be quite prophetic. Natesa Mudaliar, with an impetuosity which no doubt did credit to his heart, put on *kashayam* [orange robes] and became a *sannyasi*. But he was prevailed upon, after a few years, to resume his place as a householder and work for his family as a teacher in a school.¹³

According to Kunju Swami, Natanananda asked Bhagavan to give him the orange robes of a *sannyasin*. Natanananda had brought the cloth to the old hall but Bhagavan refused to touch it. Natanananda then placed the cloth on the stool in front of Bhagavan that visitors put their offerings on. After a few minutes he took it away and began to wear it. A few months later, when Natanananda decided to give up his life as a *sannyasin*, he presented the orange robes to Bhagavan. For the rest of his life he only ever wore white clothes.¹⁴

In his reply to Natanananda Bhagavan noted that Kumaradeva 'at a later stage said that there was no difference between domestic

¹² This is verse 72 of *Maharaja Turavu*. The original verse reads:

Will those staying south of the Ganga reach the river and bathe in its holy waters if they walk southwards?... Similarly, those who remain as householders will not reach liberation.

¹³ *Self-Realization*, 1993 ed., p. 224.

¹⁴ *The Power of the Presence*, part one, p. 97.

life and a hermit's'. This is most probably a reference to a sequence of verses in *Advaita Unmai* where Kumaradeva's views are almost indistinguishable from those of Bhagavan.

81 There is no need to renounce everything. If karma leaves you, everything will leave [along with it]. If karma remains, they [objects] will associate with you. Give up clinging to them or renouncing them. Knowing that [these things manifest] according to your karma, exert yourself only to attain the firm knowledge 'I am the Self'.

82 Even if those who are firmly convinced 'I am the Self' continue to remain as householders, they will lack nothing, and they will be free from all blemishes. Even if they renounce a householder's life, will those who do not have the firm conviction 'I am the Self' attain liberation merely because of this [renunciation]? Will their births come to an end?

83 It is not appropriate to say that those who remain as householders will have to experience sorrow and delusion [*soha* and *moha*] and that for those who have renounced and become *sannyasins*, sorrow and delusion will leave. Sorrow and delusion will not end in those who do not know 'I am the Self'. It will only end for those who have the knowledge 'I am the Self'.

84 There is no need either to renounce this world or cling to it. It is enough for one to know that the world is an illusion. Instantly, it will leave. If it is asked, 'What should be renounced and what should be clung to?' the correct solution is to renounce *jivatva* – the feeling 'I am a *jiva*' – and instead hold tightly to Self-attention.

85 It is not necessary to think about choosing between a householder's life and *sannyasa*. Neither is an obstacle. Self is attained by remaining motionless, excluding all thoughts except the thought of the one [Self]. The obstacle to merging with that Self state is the feeling 'I am a householder' or 'I am a *sannyasin*'. Get rid of it. ▲

HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

Bhagavan's Steady Guidance

SOL SANDPERL

My very first acquaintance with Ramana Maharshi was in a used bookstore in Montreal, Canada, when I happened upon Mouni Sadhu's book, *Concentration*. I had been interested in different spiritual books, considering myself somewhat of a seeker and delving into what I hoped would answer some deep-seated questions. There was one statement in this book that came from a sage by the name of Ramana Maharshi which was, "The mind is simply a bundle of thoughts." I was enamoured of him right then and there. I kept him in my mind – adding to my bundle of thoughts! I started to read books about him and his life and teaching. I knew that help and guidance could be obtained from Sri Ramana, but I didn't know exactly how it would work or how he could ever help me.

It came to me soon enough! Out of a strong dread of death came the question, "How can I overcome this fear?" At the time, I was practising Zen on my own, meditating, and pursuing enlightenment. The answer did come! It was a few days later, and it was subtle. It was almost like a gravitational pull towards self-inquiry. The

question, “Who am I?” which is central to Ramana Maharshi’s teachings emerged from within me. I knew this was coming from him, yet it was so seamless and subtle that it felt like it was coming from me. But this pull that I am referring to was as if it was always there. It simply required my attention. It became stronger when I turned toward it consciously. Bhagavan has said that if you take one step towards God, God takes ten steps towards you. Although this helped, it was the beginning of what was to be a long journey.

A few years later, still searching, I found myself in a monastery in Japan practising Zazen. The strenuous year of training was good for strengthening the “warrior spirit” that would be necessary on my journey to the Self. Hosshin-ji Temple forced us to face our attachments to comfort. There was not much sleep, lots of meditation and it was cold. The monastery itself was on the Japan Sea and was buffeted by the cold winds from Siberia in the winter. The Zen Masters loved it – such good training. When my time at the monastery had run its course, I decided to travel toward India. I stopped at Tiruvannamalai, where Ramanasramam is located. Even though I was in awe of the Ashram, I only stayed for a few days, as I was anxious to return to the West after being gone for so long. After two more years back in my hometown of Montreal, I was not happy with my situation... and felt that my karma with that city had come to an end. Bhagavan called me to Arunachala once again. The trip was very potent. On the one pradakshina that I did around Arunachala, I encountered a leper with stub-like hands and a very warm effulgent smile. I grasped his hand and put a coin in it. I was not repulsed, but warmed by this holy being.

Upon returning to the West (this time to America), I entered the Providence Zen Center. But I soon found myself in the midst of tremendous anxiety and despair as a result of doing inquiry and laying myself bare, as it were. Fears and conflicts that were buried sprang forth, and I was overwhelmed. It felt as if I were running in a marathon where previously I had only run a mile. One afternoon, I had taken solitude in the woods, wrestling with the question, “How can I overcome this?” I was desperately asking for help. Suddenly,

I heard Swami talking to me. It was his voice in English, and he said, "Sol, you must fight!" I felt better — but could not yet lift off the heavy burden of my mind. It was here that I received the help and great teaching of Zen Master Seung Sahn, a Korean master whom I had just recently started practising with. With his help, I mustered up enough energy and drive to get through it. I had to temporarily abandon self-inquiry and go straight to mantra practice with bowing. Bowing was a very strenuous activity that calmed my mind and gave me a sense of control over my situation. I was forced to practise hard in this manner to keep me on an even keel. Although the Zen Center helped me greatly, I was unsure about whether staying there was right for me. I entreated Bhagavan as to whether I should continue practising there, and this is what happened: A few days later, as I was flipping through *The Life and Teaching of Ramana Maharshi*, by Arthur Osborne, my finger stopped on a line that read, "Providence will take care of you." That resolved my doubt immediately, and I practised there for another five years, gaining strength and equanimity in the process.

After leaving the Zen Center, I came to Boston. I was not asking Swami for much at that time. My spiritual practice had become stagnant. I was going through the motions. The mantra became an obstacle. That which had earned me some freedom years earlier was now an impediment. Hidden feelings and emotional demons would not surface freely to be experienced so that I could let them go. Eventually I found myself in dire straits again. A good friend recommended I try to see a therapist, which I also felt I was directed to by Swami. The therapist recognized that my practice was ready to enter into a new phase, a new season. He had encouraged me to look at my feelings without judging and not try to escape them. He felt that they needed to be allowed up into the light of consciousness. However, the intense feelings of fear and panic escalated to a point of near collapse. I could barely function. One late night, while sitting in my apartment, I wondered to myself, "What are these intense feelings? What is at their core?" I was too exhausted to resist, and so I cocked my ear to listen to the sound of the whirling chaos of my anxiety. And I started to hear some distant yelling.

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I listened closer, and it became a little more distinct. Now I even heard my mother, and then my father screaming. I recognized it. It was at the peak of my parents' divorce. I was eleven. They were fighting. It was mentally very violent. The police were called to the house several times within a period of a few months.

The recognition that this mass of fear had a substance to it, a shape was liberating. I was beginning to learn a valuable lesson — don't resist negative feelings, just look at them. Let them tell you their story — without interrupting them. Be still — let them unfold and show themselves.

It was then that I could return back to my main practice — the mantra — but I used it only as a gentle backdrop with which I allowed myself to experience the fear that was in me. As one of my Zen teachers put it, the mantra was no longer the driving engine, but more subtle, rather like a white crane in a snowstorm. There, but barely visible.

Soon thereafter, it seemed like enough fears and obstructions were cleared from the mind, and this allowed me to find my wife... my soulmate. We soon had a child, and I found family life deeply satisfying. My situation became very structured, focused, and blessed. Ramana Maharshi was never forgotten, and I continued to read his books, subscribed to *The Mountain Path*, and even introduced my wife to him — who was also very moved by him.

One morning, a change in my practice occurred. Sitting in meditation I felt the urge to try *vichara* instead of *mantra*. Swami appeared inwardly and literally gave me a little push with a practical urging, as if to say, "Try this — it's so much better and less of an encumbrance." I did it, and realized the ease and directness of self-inquiry. I realized I had been the repeater of the mantra, the mantra itself, and the resister of the mantra. I saw all of this flashing through my mind. Swami nudged me into direct practice, and I have never returned to mantra practice since.

Another instance when Bhagavan's direct influence was felt was one morning in meditation when I felt the old panic re-arising. I was afraid that it would escalate and I would be 'in trouble' again. Suddenly, I remembered the Heart on the right side. I felt Swami

push my attention to the Heart and place his hand over it. I knew immediately that I was safe from escalating fears once and for all and that ABIDING IN THE HEART was a powerful and direct route to the Source. Indeed it was the Source.

Another small but uncanny example of Swami's guidance — a little while ago, I became captivated with the idea of experiencing what I believed to be a past incarnation in ancient Rome. I knew that Swami did not recommend delving into that. He said it leads to more trouble. (Now you have the karma of two lifetimes to think about!) I showed restraint, and did not pursue this desire. A few weeks later I found a book in the library by Horace, an ancient Roman writer who wrote vividly about day- to- day life in Rome. This satisfied my craving in a very safe way. I felt Swami's hand in this, and I was very grateful.

A few months ago I was meditating in the morning, and I was frustrated. I wanted to recapture the sense I had a few weeks earlier of the bliss and clarity of not thinking. But now I was removed from it...and angry! I asked Bhagavan for guidance. Again, I was pointed towards *vichara*. "Who is angry?" I asked. "Who feels like they have 'lost the experience of oneness?'" Self inquiry revealed that the anger was a thought, and that which wanted to recapture an experience was the I-thought — the mother of all thoughts. The I-thought was masquerading as me — but it wasn't me. It was and is a phantom!

I have found that in the early morning in the state just before being fully awake, self inquiry becomes easier. At that time I experience many thought structures that at first seem real and foreboding and very large, until it suddenly becomes apparent through self-enquiry that they're just thoughts. Swami has indeed shown me that the direct route to realize our true Self is to weaken the thought structures by seeing through them again and again, with steady and long practice until they cease altogether.

"—Who am I?" Why is this question so important to me? Because I realized that I was making a fundamental error. I believed that I was separate from the universe. I lived in my thoughts — in a bubble of thinking. I rarely, if ever, looked at the world directly. I rarely did something totally wholeheartedly. ...because I was distracted... distracted by a false 'I thought'. Waking up from this by asking, "To

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whom do these thoughts occur?” led me to a different angle of vision which changed everything. It cut any and every knot. The silence is priceless even if I can't stay in it permanently yet.

How lucky I am! Thank you, Swami. ▲

On the Death by Drowning of a 10 Year Old Boy

Upahar

I saw you just the other day
racing happily around the village,
with your dear big brother, whose heart
so sorely grieves for you.

They say the holy lake covered your eyes
They say you bore the sacred name 'Arunachalam'.
Tears rise to blind us,
we cry out for understanding, for forgiveness.

We remember with our whole being our lost beloved ones,
newborn, ancient, or like you, suddenly and mysteriously
moving beyond our view.

We know nothing, and must now bow
to this un-knowing;
yet something in us deep and true
continues endlessly to praise
the One who gives and takes away,
the endless Heart too vast for sadness or even joy.

We offer this Child to You,
who is already forever only Yours.

Our trust in You grows and deepens in every moment,
Arunachala, Master of the lake of souls.
Our true prayer rises to you in the silence.
Hear our prayer
Hear our prayer.

The Story of the Diamond

QADRE ALAM
TRANSLATED BY NAWAZUDDIN

In a small hut near the city, there lived a woodcutter who was busily occupied with looking after his family. Though his means were meagre, he was a very contented man.

One day, while he was passing through the forest, he spotted a small piece of glass glittering in the sunlight. The glass was very clear, and sparkled with lustre. The woodcutter had heard of diamonds and their value. Thinking that this must be a diamond and that the Lord had provided him with it, he quickly picked it up and went home.

On seeing the woodcutter, his wife became perplexed and asked him why he had returned home so soon. She wondered, “Where is his stock? Has he lost it or has someone taken it?”

The woodcutter said, “Do not get agitated. Look! The Lord God has given me a diamond”.

The wife said, “Show me the diamond immediately, I am eager to see it”.

Nawazuddin lives in Tiruvannamalai and is a retired bank official. He devotes himself to the study of Sufism to which he was initiated by his father, Rafaidia.

Taking his wife to the corner of the house, he showed her the piece of glass. On seeing it, excitedly she said, "Go and sell it. Our days of poverty and destitution are over. Finally, the Lord has granted us comfort and peace."

The woodcutter said, "Listen to me. This is a large diamond. If I take this to the bazaar, people would unnecessarily lay claim to it. They would say, 'Where is this woodcutter and whence this diamond? Certainly he has stolen it from somewhere.' People would slander me and we would be divested of our diamond as well as of our lives. It is better to devise a plan to dispose of this diamond, or else we will get into trouble. Moreover, we will not get a fair price for this diamond. It is sensible to keep it safe and to sell it through a middleman."

The woodcutter kept the piece of glass in a small box and wrapped the box in rags of blankets, and then hid the bundle amongst the lumber. With his meagre resources he managed to maintain his family for a few days, and when they ran out of food, he started searching for an intermediary to help him sell the diamond. One of his friends directed him to a Master jeweller in the nearby city.

The woodcutter went and found the Master jeweller, and he saw his authority and the exalted position he occupied. He was surrounded by many people, some sitting and others standing with folded arms. There were other jewellers too, sitting in chairs and checking the quality of gems. On seeing this, the woodcutter stood aloof from the crowd, reverentially in the presence of the jeweller. The jeweller was a wise mystic, and had magical powers. Gently he looked at the woodcutter and, summoning him, enquired after him.

The jeweller said, "When the sun casts its rays often it transforms mere stones into rubies and cornelians."

The woodcutter replied, "O generous one, I am a poor man. I have come to behold your feet."

In compassion, the jeweller gave him some money, which the woodcutter politely accepted and went home. With that money he looked after his family for some time, all the while pinning his hopes on the diamond he had hidden.

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Again, he went to the jeweller and hopefully stood in his presence, waiting to be addressed. Again, the jeweller gave him alms. Once more, for the third time, the woodcutter went to pay his respects to the jeweller. Respectfully, with folded arms, he prostrated before him and told him he had been cherishing the hope of making an entreaty at his feet.

The jeweller said, "My brother, tell me whatever you have to say."

The woodcutter replied, "There is too much of a crowd here. People of both high and low birth are gathered here. If I could get a private audience I would consider myself fortunate."

The jeweller was a kind man, and he invited the woodcutter into his private chamber. The woodcutter again reverentially prostrated before him and told him the story of what he had found.

The jeweller allayed his fears and said, "Fear not my friend; go and bring your diamond here and I shall fetch a good price from the king."

The woodcutter said, "I am afraid of bringing it here. Please do take the trouble of visiting my home."

The jeweller, being blessed with piety and noble manners, agreed, saying, "All right. Let us proceed to your home, my friend."

Whoever is destined to be favoured with a treasure of Divine Grace, usually undergoes sufferings in this world. When God wants to shower His Grace on someone, He merely adopts some means to exhibit it when He pleases.

The jeweller prepared his conveyance and arrived at woodcutter's home in a dignified manner. The woodcutter spread an old mat for him to sit on, and his family paid obeisance to him.

The jeweller said, "Where is your diamond? Bring it here and I shall assess its price."

The woodcutter took down the bundle from the lumber and started removing the rags. Mystified on seeing this, the jeweller thought, "The diamond is a small thing, but how enormous the padding. With what terrible and dreadful things has this woodcutter wrapped up the diamond! He should have been more careful."

Finally the woodcutter opened the bundle, took out the small box and gave it to the jeweller. The jeweller opened the box and lo! What he saw was nothing but a piece of glass.

“Although this is only a glass piece, the poor woodcutter has fashioned his hope on it,” the jeweller thought. “If I tell him the truth, he will become very despondent. He must have heard the name ‘diamond’ and has held on to this glass piece thinking it a diamond. Let me employ this woodcutter as an apprentice and teach him the art of identifying gemstones.”

The far-sighted jeweller said, “Dear friend, very precious and of a rare distinction is your diamond. If I take this to the king, I fear he would demand it for a low price. On the other hand, if the king seeks this diamond, we shall get a better price. Till such an opportune time arrives keep this diamond safe and never look at it. And also, until then be at my service without any reservation and I shall look after you.”

Saying this, the jeweller returned to his house. Acting according to the counsel of the jeweller, the woodcutter re-packed the glass piece and hid it in the lumber. Then he hurried to the service of his new master.

The jeweller took hold of the woodcutter’s hands and called all the other jewellers to his side. Emphatically he said to them, “This poor fellow has come to serve me. Basically he is a woodcutter. Keep him with you always and teach him the art of analyzing jewels.”

Since everyone in the assembly was under the authority of the Master jeweller, they commenced teaching him. Those lessons started yielding good results and the woodcutter profited by learning the techniques. For a long period, and in this way, he was groomed, and he attained distinction in acquiring the skills.

After a further period, the Master summoned all the jewellers and enquired whether the woodcutter had acquired the necessary skills to distinguish various jewels. Everyone present assured the Master that he was now an adept in his art. The Master went inside his chamber and came out carrying diamonds mixed with quartz and crystals. He gave this mixture to the woodcutter and asked him to find out whether those jewels were good or otherwise.

After carefully examining the stones, the woodcutter said there were quartz and crystals also in the mixture. The jeweller then asked him to separate the gemstones.

The woodcutter pointed out to him the gems and the other stones. The jeweller, in order to test his knowledge, insisted that they were all pure and unalloyed gems. He said, "And you say some are diamonds and a few are quartz."

The woodcutter said, "Esteemed Master, the intrinsic value and real merit of each substance is established and has been revealed to me under scrutiny."

The jeweller complimented him and said that he now had the talent to distinguish a precious stone from a pebble.

After sometime the jeweller called the woodcutter and told him that the king desired a large sized diamond. "Go and bring your diamond and I shall sell it for a good price," he said.

Happily the woodcutter went home, opened the bundle and looked at the piece of glass in the box. He realised that it was neither a crystal nor even quartz, but a piece of glass. With a sense of shame he sank into an ocean of remorse, like a naked man immersing himself in water.

Ruefully he thought, "Who am I? I am a mere woodcutter; how did I think I was a jeweller? How could a crystal be equal to a diamond? I am a peasant and he is a prince; I am ignoble and he has noble virtues; he is high and I am low. How often I have lied to him about the diamond. By employing untruth as a ruse I became friendly with him. I lived on his sustenance by deceit. How stupid I was to summon his august presence to my home for the sake of a mere piece of glass. What a faithful and tolerant person he is! Even after seeing the glass piece, he gave me shelter. How kindly he tutored me. He never let my hopes be shattered into despondency. Instead he taught me the art of gemmology.

"He showed me the way so that I am clear in my understanding. By transforming a woodcutter into a jeweller he has made a beggar into a king. How can I now appear before him? I am thoroughly mortified." Ruminating thus on his follies, the woodcutter remained at home.

The jeweller understood why the woodcutter had not returned with his diamond. He sympathized with him, knowing that shame

prevented him from facing him. So, once again he went to the home of woodcutter and asked him why he had not brought his diamond.

Like a mortar of lime getting dissolved in water, the woodcutter prostrated at his feet. Tenderly the jeweller said, "O friend, indeed you have arrived at the fountainhead of truth, even though your journey started from ignorant assumption.

"It is the aspiration to own a diamond and know its value that has shown you the way. The love of the diamond made you seek the jeweller. From the Master jeweller you learnt the science and art of gemmology by working with other jewellers. The love of the diamond has made you attain an eminent position and, abandoning your false and pretentious knowledge, you have adopted fidelity with fairness."

The Master jeweller continued to mentor him and made him a jeweller among jewellers.

The jeweller's role is metaphorical. All obstacles are removed from the path of the man that God grants true knowledge to, and his heart is illumined with the Truth.

Now listen to the wisdom of this parable. The cut glass, which the woodcutter carefully preserved, is the outward form of religion. The rags and box are the rituals of worship. The endeavour to keep the glass piece safely is faith, and the dread of losing it is steadfastness. The value of the diamond is grace and the vision of the Lord. How could anybody get a fair value without the mediation of an intercessor? When the woodcutter wanted to sell the diamond he started to search for an intermediary. The friend who directed him to the jeweller is the worldly preceptor. The Lord, in order to grant him His vision, directed him to the Master jeweller who is none other than the Spiritual Master.

The Spiritual Master, after noticing the sincerity in the woodcutter's quest for the Truth, taught him by his personal grace and favour. Until the Master casts his grace, the road to salvation cannot be found. Subsequently, a novice can discern truth from falsehood. The right way is shown to one who has an earnest desire to know the truth, even if he is deluded.

The genuine diamond is the Soul of Prophet Mohammed, in whose light the entire universe is manifest. The Light of Mohammed is the

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Light of God. Know in certainty that the same light is reflected in the soul of Adam. Therefore the genuine diamond is essentially the light of the perfect man. The jeweller is the Master, with whom the stations of the way can be traversed. The house of the jeweller is the soul of man, and the house of the woodcutter is the body of man.

When Qadre Alam embraced Badre Alam as his Master,
Qadre Alam too achieved the status of pir. ▲

Prayer

Ana Callan

You are my heart, O Arunachula!

You are the flower of my being.

You are the melody that soars
through lifetimes
in this wild, illusive dream.

But you are not elusive.
You are the steady font of love
that flows in endless waves of grace
through every strand of us.

Strand us into lustrous jewels
that make music to enchant you.

Will you receive the petals
that we scatter at your feet?

Let us turn to you
in humble gratitude
as you deliver us
of our impurities
as you draw us slowly,
surely, passionately
back to The Absolute.



D. Thiyagarajan

Advaita Vedanta and Kashmir Saivism

JOHN GRIMES

Advaita Vedanta philosophy is often spoken of as the crown of Upanisadic thought based on Sankaracarya's commentaries that rendered mystical Upanisadic thought logically self-consistent and rationally intelligible. Likewise, Kashmir Saivism is known as the most prominent philosophical system of the Tantric tradition led by Abhinavagupta extracting Tantric thought from a jungle of mystic, symbolic, and mysterious ideas and presenting it in a rational, cogent, and coherent manner. Many believe that India's two greatest philosophers were Sankara and Abhinavagupta.

Both of these philosophical systems claim to be exponents of *advaita* or absolute non-duality. Kashmir Saivism declares that there is nothing that is not Siva (*Sivo bhokta, Sivo bhojya, Sivo karta, Sivah karma, Sivah karanatmakah*)¹ and Advaita Vedanta declares that there is nothing that is not *Brahman* (*sarvam khalvidam brahma*). Further

¹ Siva is the Subject of enjoyment; Siva is the Object of enjoyment; Siva the Doer; Siva is Action; Siva is the Cause of action.

similarities coincide in that they both accept: a self-luminous Self (*atman*); that Reality is Consciousness (*cit*); that the nature of the Absolute is indeterminable and indescribable; that the world is an appearance (*abhasa*); that ignorance (*ajnana*) is the cause of bondage and that wisdom (*jnana*) is the means to Self-realization; and that there are *jivanmuktas* or individuals—liberated-while-living-in-a-body.

All these similarities are astonishing and, on the surface, would appear that the two schools of philosophy expound a similar doctrine. However, there is one important aspect in which they radically disagree. Advaita Vedanta views the world-illusion as a superimposition (*adhyasa*) upon *Brahman* while Kashmir Saivism holds that the world is a spontaneous self-projection (*svaprakasatva*) of Siva. In other words, according to Advaita, the world is thought to be neither real nor unreal (*sadasatvilaksana*), a mere appearance while Kashmir Saivism considers the world as a *real* projection of Siva.

In the third, revised and enlarged edition of his book, *Kashmir Saivism: The Central Philosophy of Tantrism*, Kamalakar Mishra, presented a new chapter (chapter 11) comparing and contrasting Advaita Vedanta with Kashmir Saivism. His contention is that Kashmir Saivism has something significant to say to Advaita Vedanta to improve upon its philosophy and Advaita has something to say to Kashmir Saivism that will render it more complete.

The dilemma, that all philosophical systems must reconcile is, “how to explain the seeming dichotomy between absolute non-duality and multiplicity”. Is multiplicity an illusion as Advaita claims or is multiplicity the spontaneous self-projection of Siva and thus real?

It is crucial that one understands the distinction Advaita makes between the absolutely real (*paramarthika*) and the empirically real (*vyavaharika*) points of view. This distinction pervades the entire system and what is true from one point of view is not so from another. Without being entirely clear with regard to this distinction, it is likely that one will accuse the Advaitin of inconsistencies and contradictions.

From the empirical point of view, Advaita admits of numerous distinctions. Metaphysically, there is the problem of the One and the many. Individuals are different from one another and there exists a

seeming plurality of things. Epistemologically, there is the subject-object dichotomy, as well as the problem of truth and error. Ethically, there is the problem of bondage and freedom. However, from the Advaitin's Absolute point of view, there is only *Brahman/Atman* — One and non-dual (*ekam eva advitiam*).¹

The pluralism that is experienced at the empirical level, and with which philosophical enquiry commences, is not the final truth. Advaita avers that anything that is experienced is real, in some sense or other. Therefore, Advaita's epistemology is realistic and posits that every cognition points to an objective referent — whether veridical or erroneous. The question becomes: Exactly *how* real are the things that are experienced in the empirical world? Sankara avers that the things of the world are real only so long as the empirical order lasts for a given individual. "The division of real and unreal depends upon knowledge or experience: That is real whose knowledge does not miscarry; the unreal on the contrary, is the object of a knowledge that fails or goes astray."²

As a consequence of this, if the resulting knowledge is not later contradicted, it follows that the real is that which lasts or is eternal. According to Sankara, the real is that which lasts, which suffers no contradictions, which is eternal and unsublatable. Things of the world may be said to be real until they suffer sublation. Thus, they are called 'what is other than the real or the unreal' (*sadasatvilaksana*), illusory (*mithya*). Since they are *cognized*, they are not unreal (*asat*). Since they are sublated, they are not real (*sat*). By this criterion, *Brahman* alone is absolutely real; *Brahman* alone is never subject to contradiction. All else is considered real by *courtesy* only.

Mishra states, "The basic criticism of the Advaita Vedantic position from the side of Kashmir Saivism is that the presupposition about action/activity with which the Advaitin starts is one-sided".³ He says

¹ *Chandogya Upanisad*, VI.ii.1.

² *Bhagavadgitabhāṣya* of Sankara II.16. Also: *Brahmasutrabhāṣya*. II.i.2 and III.ii.4.

³ Mishra, Kamalakar, *Kashmir Saivism, The Central Philosophy of Tantricism*. Indica Books, D40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi, 221001, U.P., 2011, p. 448. See www.indicabooks.com

that four consequences follow from this presupposition. 1) Since action is a sign of imperfection and since *Brahman* is perfect, there can be no action in *Brahman*; 2) *Brahman* being inactive, there can be no *srsti-kriya* in it and hence creation cannot be taken as the work of *Brahman*; 3) If creation is not the act of *Brahman*, then how to explain the creation of the world? 4) If the world is not an active creation of *Brahman*, then how to explain the sentences of the *Upanisads* which clearly and explicitly proclaim that *Brahman* created the world?

The primary objection Advaitins have to such questions is that they claim their doctrine has not been correctly understood and that such objections are mere ‘straw dogs’, imaginary fantasies, that the opposition has conveniently set up and then attacked. Advaitins do not actually hold that action is not a sign of imperfection. From their absolute perspective, action is non-existent. Advaita declares that nothing has ever been created. Finally, Advaitins contend that not all statements in the *sruti* need be taken literally.

Bhagavan Ramana replied, when asked how creation came about, “Various accounts are given in books. But is there creation? Only if there is creation do we have to explain how it came about.”⁴ There are diverse creation theories each seeking to explain or explain away creation. All such theories are purely mental, mere intellectual explanations. The *Upanisad* says about the Reality, ‘*Yato vaco nivartante aprapya manasa saha*’ – ‘whence words return along with the mind, not attaining it’. Each theory about creation may be considered true from the standpoint of an individual’s thought, but there is no creation in the state of realization. When one sees the world, one does not see the Self. When one sees the Self, the world is not seen.

Mishra points out that if the Advaitin proceeds from their presupposition that *Brahman* does not act, then by logical demand they must come to the position that the world is a mere superimposition. He then goes on to say that such a position implies duality — on the one hand there is an actionless *Brahman* and on the other there is

⁴ Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2002, p.154. 17-2-46 Afternoon.

ignorance or *maya* superimposing the world-appearance on *Brahman*. Mishra presents a view that is held by all Kashmiri Saivites that *avidya* or *maya* is an independent reality different from *Brahman*.

But is this really the Advaitin's position? A projection upon a substratum, a snake upon the rope, has no existence apart from the substratum (rope). Never is the snake other than the rope; never is the superimposed other than the substratum. Silver is not apart from the shell; the mirage is not apart from the desert. Likewise, the world of phenomena is not other than the Self. Is there now, was there ever, will there ever be a snake in the rope?; water in a mirage? To equate an unreal appearance as a second to *Brahman* is a misunderstanding. There is no rope, there is no snake, there is no real world-as-world for the *mukta*.

Mishra says that if the non-duality of *Brahman* is to be saved, the world-appearance must be taken as the self-projection of *Brahman* and not a superimposition on *Brahman*. But for the Advaitin, there is no world-appearance that must be saved. Need one save the objects that appear in a dream? Need one save the water in the mirage or the snake in the rope? Advaita's position is that there is nothing to be projected, nothing to be transformed and to suggest such does violence to Advaita's position.

In order to realize that one is really *Brahman*, one must accept the world as unreal. Why? Sri Ramana said, "For the simple reason that unless you give up the idea that the world is real your mind will always be after it. If you take the appearance to be real you will never know the real itself, although it is the real alone which exists. The point is illustrated by the analogy of the snake and the rope. You may be deceived into believing that a piece of rope is a snake. While you imagine that the rope is a snake you cannot see the rope as a rope. The non-existent snake becomes real to you, while the real rope seems wholly non-existent as such."⁵

Mishra says that the Advaitin may reply that *maya/avidya* is the power (*sakti*) of *Isvara* and that the world-appearance is a self-

⁵ *Maharshi's Gospel*, Book 2, Chapter III 'The Jnani and the World', 2000, p. 49.

projection of *Ishvara* through his *maya sakti*. But then the Saivite asks, how does *Brahman* become *Ishvara*? He replies that *Brahman* cannot become *Ishvara* because there is no *kriya-sakti* in *Brahman*. Thus duality will remain. There will now be *Brahman* and *Ishvara*. Thus, the question still remains for the Advaitin how the formless (*nirguna*) becomes that with form (*saguna*)?

In every philosophical debate, the proponent of a particular position wants to play on his own turf, that is, to get the opponent to accept his presuppositions. However, when the opponent refuses to accept the proponents presuppositions, and instead offers his own, then any conclusions which are formulated will change. The *siddhanta*, the final position of Advaita Vedanta, is that nothing has ever happened. An example offered is that of the experiences and objects encountered in one's dreams. Upon waking, no one will say that they really performed the actions or encountered any objects that were experienced while dreaming. It is true that, while dreaming, the dreamer believes the experiences and objects to be real, but upon waking the dreamer says that it was all an illusion, an appearance with no existential reality.

Mishra contends that Advaita Vedanta can contribute three important metaphysical points to Kashmir Saivism for its completion: 1) Kashmir Saivism should explicitly and clearly accept the distinction between the two levels of reality (the *paramarthika* and the *vyavaharika*); 2) Kashmir Saivism should formulate a clear theory of ignorance (*avidya*) in order to explain how the illusory 'becomes' (appears as) the real; 3) Kashmir Saivism should accept the distinction between the real (permanent) nature and the accidental nature of reality (Siva) – what in the Advaita tradition is called the distinction between the *svarupa-laksana* and the *tatastha-laksana* of *Brahman*.

Every form of *advaita* or absolute non-duality has to accept two levels in one and the same reality (the absolute and the relative/ apparent). Without this distinction there is no way to relate the seeming plurality with the One. Plurality has to be accepted as the apparent/ illusory appearance of the One that is Real. When Kashmir Saivism claims that plurality is a self-projection of Siva and is real,

then logically difficulties arise. If a table-as-table is *real* and Siva has self-projected Himself as the table, then, the concept of real has real consequences. This necessarily implies that Siva may never “get back to being Siva.” It is only when the table is a concealment, a temporary covering (*abhasa*) of the Real, that the underlying Reality is not competing with another reality.

Mishra points out that although the word *abhasa* means something illusory, Abhinavagupta calls this illusion real (*satya*). It is pointed out that Abhinavagupta never meant to suggest that objects in the world, table-qua-table, etc., are real. He posited that appearances as appearances are real — that is, they are projections of Consciousness that are experienced. He also defined *abhasa* as real in the sense that all physical appearances are active self-projections/self-creations of Consciousness and not mere superimpositions. Finally, Abhinavagupta gave *abhasa* an aesthetic value in that those individuals who experience objects derive pleasure and joy from the experience.

Mishra points out that there are instances where Abhinavagupta has argued, like Gaudapada or Ramana Maharshi, that there is really no bondage, no liberation, no birth, no death — from the point of view of Siva. However, this aspect of Kashmir Saivism is rarely mentioned due to the fear that people, upon hearing it, would misunderstand and thereby do no *sadhana* (spiritual practices) let alone help others in the (seeming) world.

Mishra also speaks of the Advaitin’s doctrine of *svarupa-laksana* and the *tatastha-laksana*. According to Advaita, knowledge may be viewed in two aspects: the empirical and the metaphysical. Metaphysically, the fundamental essence of knowledge (*svarupa jnana*) is Pure Consciousness beyond the relative duality of the knower and the known. It is self-luminous (*svayam jyoti*) and self-existent (*svayam siddha*). It IS the non-relational, non-dual Reality. It is not an aspect of, nor an attribute of pure Consciousness. Empirical or relative knowledge, on the other hand, is an expression of pure Consciousness through a mental mode (*antahkarana vrtti*) of a cognizer. This empirical knowledge takes various relational forms according to the nature of the object, i.e., internal cognitions (subjective) that are

psychological and external sense-perceptions (objective) which are psycho-physical.

Mishra points out that creation, in Kashmir Saivism, is the very nature of Siva. If creation is the *svarupa* of Siva (like Consciousness and Bliss), then it necessarily follows that Siva cannot be free from creation, cannot be without creation, as it is Siva's very nature. Yet, the very nature of Siva demands He is free to create or not create and even to be *without* creation if He so chooses. Further, if creation is the *svarupa* of Siva, then Siva would not be absolute non-duality but would be unity-in-difference (*visistadvaita*). These problems can be overcome by elucidating a doctrine like Advaita's *svarupa-laksana* (essential nature) and *tatastha-laksana* (accidental attributes superimposed on the essential nature of a thing).

Kamalakar Mishra's *Kashmir Saivism: The Central Philosophy of Tantrism*, is a very well-written and extremely thought-provoking book. In this work, Mishra has expounded and explored the central themes (history, epistemology, Siva-Sakti, Sakti, creation, *abhasavada*, problem of evil, concept of *pratyabhijna* ('self-recognition'), bondage and liberation, means to *moksa*, the left-handed doctrine or *kaula sadhana* and sexual sublimation) found in Kashmir Saivism. This latest edition contains a chapter, Kashmir Saivism vis-à-vis Advaita Vedanta, and it is this chapter that provoked this paper. 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 endeavor will prove extremely rewarding. ▲

The Quest

Chapter Thirteen

Miracles and Sadhana

LUCIA OSBORNE

Arunachala, the heart of the universe, is also a magic mountain. “Just as we identify ourselves with the body so does Siva identify himself with Arunachala,” Bhagavan explained. In 1981 a visitor to the Ashram, Pamela Lightbody, had an unforgettable experience on the Hill. It revealed itself to her as a flaming white Light without beginning or end just as in the legend, according to *Arunachala Mahatmya* Siva revealed Himself to Brahma and Vishnu to end their dispute. The one who could find the beginning or end of the Light would be the victor. This proved impossible. Mortal eyes could not stand the radiance of the Light so Siva was implored to take a form which mortal eyes could behold and thus he took the form of Arunachala.

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

Devaraja Mudaliar, a staunch devotee, a lawyer by profession and author of *Day by Day with Bhagavan* and *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana* sometimes talked in the hall about miracles. He was, on his own admission 'rather partial to miracles'. Bhagavan told him the details of two miracles of which he had knowledge and added that miracles occur even now. During the early years of his stay on the Hill, a lady alighted from the train at Tiruvannamalai railway station at night, got into a *jetka* (horse-cart) and told the driver to take her to a certain street in the town. The driver took her to an out-of-the-way place and was about to rob her of her jewels. In her anxiety she called on Arunachala. Suddenly two police constables appeared on the scene, heard her complaint, escorted her safely in the cart to her house and went away. The lady noted down the numbers of the two police constables and subsequently made enquiries about them intending to thank or reward them, but no such police constables could be traced at the police station and none of the police at Tiruvannamalai knew anything of the night's occurrence.

Bhagavan told another similar story on that occasion. There was an elderly cripple, a relative of T.K. Sundaresa Aiyar (T.K.S.) who was very devout and used to make the circuit of Arunachala Hill in spite of his disability. After many years' stay at Tiruvannamalai, he once got so vexed at the treatment he received from his relatives with whom he was staying and on whom he depended, that he decided in disgust to leave Tiruvannamalai. Before he left the outskirts of town, a young Brahmin appeared before him and, with apparent rudeness, snatched away his crutches, saying, "You do not deserve these." Miraculously he found he could walk normally. To walk round Arunachala on crutches would have hastened his release but not if in a resentful mood. Devaraja maintained that it was Bhagavan who performed the miracles.

When told so Bhagavan took no notice of it.

All troubles and perils come from 'otherness', animate or inanimate, be it wild animals or robbers or from missing trains or losing things and so on. What relief to wake up from such a night's dream into the 'waking state.' The dream person and the waking person were not different people. They were one. The waking state is also a dream, a

longer more consecutive one. We dream ourselves in a belt of illusory time with birth, old age, and death and innumerable shifts and changes of life like that king in the *Yoga Vasistha* story who dreamt a lifetime of misery in the duration of several minutes of illusory time, the duration of a thought, away from his kingly state.

Sadhana is waking up from the dream of life into Oneness of Being. We are God's dream. God is 'I AM' in absolute perfection and purity. 'Jehova' means 'I All'. 'I AM that I AM' is the reply to Moses. 'Be still and know that I AM God' or rather that God is 'I AM'. We identify ourselves with the body. It is also 'I am' but tied to some state or other, vulnerable, conditioned, insecure. And this vulnerable, insecure conditioned 'I am' reaches out to the perfect, all-embracing, all-powerful 'I AM' in a state which an ancient describes as more of happiness than happiness itself, a state of such well-being that finite words are too poor to describe it. A state where there is no birth, old age or death. So the finite 'I am', the embodied human being reaches out to Infinity, the 'I AM' in absolute perfection which is its own Self. What could be more gracious than your own perfect Self to your own limited self? That's why Bhagavan wrote in the *Five Hymns to Sri Arunachala*, "Kinder Thou art than one's own mother." That's why saints welcome whatever comes as Grace good or bad coming from 'your own Self that is trying you, that is preparing you to receive Grace'. In Hinduism it would be to clean your sheet of *karma* so that ever-present Grace can well up.

Master Dogen, the Japanese Soto Zen master, counsels: "In the midst of desire and grasping which we cannot do away with however much we try, in the midst of our deluded thoughts and ideas we are to try to discover the world of release.

"The life of desire and grasping is that all the time though I think I will not get angry, anger arises. I think I will not say stupid things, yet they come out.

"By the power of spiritual discipline the true emptiness can be experienced and true emptiness is liberation from all finitude....

"What is this anger which arises, what is this complication, what is this greed? In this way we directly confront the wrong thoughts

and ideas. Spiritual discipline enables us to have actual experience of the world of emptiness which is liberation.”

When meditation becomes uneven, restless, that is the time to persevere to break through. It may steady itself or not, but as Bhagavan assures us and is proved by actual experience, sincere effort unfailingly brings results sooner or later. Calmness develops naturally out of a state of inner composure brought about by perseverance without trying to force results. Nor must one try to induce calmness by means of artificial rigidity. When we feel we can do no more we pray or surrender. In prayer we turn to the inexhaustible motive power, the Source of all power which is our own innermost Self in absolute purity.

What could be more gracious, we repeat, than our own infinite all-powerful supremely blissful SELF, I-I, to our finite distressed, vulnerable self, I (ego). “Our prayers are granted. No thought will ever go in vain. Every thought will produce its effect some time or other. Thought force will never go in vain,” Bhagavan assures us. However the effect will be produced at the right time. Adversity may be necessary for some to open their inner vision to the Reality of God, their own Self. “Sweet are the uses of adversity,” says Shakespeare.

Ibn Ata-Illah: “May the pain of trial be lightened for you by your knowledge that it is He, be He exalted, that is trying you. There is no doubt that for men of God their best moment is the moment of distress, for this it is that fosters their growth. By this suffering their hearts are purified and transformed into pure substance.”

Koran: “The best of your moments is that in which you are thrown back on your own helplessness; it may be that in distress you will find benefits that you have been unable to find anywhere else. The uncertainty of life has a substratum of Certainty which we feel vaguely or to a greater extent and reach out to it.

“Just as in the plant the urge towards the sun and air compels the germ to break through the darkness of the earth so the germ of enlightenment concealed in the innermost heart of all men high or low ultimately breaks through the obscuration caused by the illusion of an objective world with all its entanglements.

“There is one light of the sun though it is interrupted by walls, mountains and innumerable impediments. There is one universal substance though it is broken up into myriad bodies and with its peculiar qualities. There is one soul though the nature and the limits of the individuals among which it is distributed are legion. And there is one intellective soul though it seems divided.” Marcus Aurelius.

“Birth here is the seat of all pain arising from the body...” is how the *Bhagavad Gita* puts it in a nutshell, “and also from the mind and is of an ever-changing nature.”

In a world subject to so much distress from most painful diseases which are legion, from violence, from innumerable ills afflicting the human body and heart amidst a little unsteady happiness; a world subject to continuous change, we begin to seek for something of eternal value, a state transcending conditioning, which is permanent, free, above sorrow.

The ‘original sin’ is a mistaken identification of the Self with the body, senses, and mind. The whole process of *sadhana* is the undoing of this original error. Kabir calls this world a thorny garden and ‘the city of thieves’. One who enters it gets entangled.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad joyfully sings, “As a falcon or an eagle flying to and fro in the open sky and growing weary folds its wings and sinks to rest so the Spirit of man hastens to that world where finding rest he desires no desire and dreams no dream. And whatever he has dreamt, be it that he was slain or oppressed or fallen into an abyss or whatever fear he beheld in the waking world, he knows now that it was from ignorance. Like a god, like a king he knows he is the All. This is his highest joy. He has passed beyond all evil.” ▲



Viswanatha Swami

A Hidden Gem

MURRAY FELDMAN

Viswanatha Swami first came to stay with Bhagavan when he was about 19 years old. His father, Ramaswamy Iyer, was a first cousin of Bhagavan.

I had the good fortune to spend considerable time with this great devotee of Ramana Maharishi from April 1976, until he became ill and passed away at 75 years of age on the 22nd November, 1979. How he came to Bhagavan has been written about elsewhere. Here I attempt to show how he exemplified, so wonderfully and devotedly the teachings of Bhagavan.

When I first came to the Ashram in 1976, I sought out Mrs. Osborne to hear about Bhagavan and to discuss his teachings and their practical application. She told me that I should visit an unassuming older devotee by the name of Viswanatha Swami who, except for his work on *The Mountain Path*, was living quietly at the back of the Ashram in a side room of the old dispensary.

Murray Feldman practises and teaches homoeopathy in Vancouver, Canada. He first came to Bhagavan in February 1976. He planned on staying for four days and stayed for four years. He has been visiting the ashram on a regular basis since that time.

I found his room near the dispensary the next day and went to visit him around 4 pm. Timidly approaching his open door, I saw a grey-bearded man sitting quietly on his bed with his legs dangling and staring straight ahead. I asked him if he was Viswanatha Swami. He nodded and gestured for me to enter and sit on the bench opposite him. I asked him a question about the application of 'Who Am I'. He did not look at me but said very tenderly, "Bhagavan's teaching is one of the Heart." At that moment, he closed his eyes and a beautiful delicate silence filled the room. I too closed my eyes and we sat together in this stillness. Time passed very quickly and after about an hour, he opened his eyes and gestured for me to leave. He said that I could come the next day around the same time if I wished to. This was the beginning of an extremely beautiful and important period in my life. I had planned to stay at the Ashram for only four days but nothing pulled my heart elsewhere during the next couple of years. I am sure it was to a large degree Viswanatha who made Bhagavan come alive for me. It is very true that Bhagavan's presence is profoundly felt at the Ashram but Viswanatha brought Him alive as a Guru in the flesh.

After that remarkable first day, I went to visit Viswanatha daily. For two months, he hardly spoke another word to me. But after that, he told me many stories of being around Bhagavan. He represented Him in such a beautiful and true way. His love for Bhagavan and His teachings were evident in his words and his manner and he often mentioned how still and beautiful Bhagavan was.

During those two months effortless peace became my constant companion and I had the opportunity to sit with Viswanatha daily and to watch him with other people. Ashram workers, old devotees and others would come in and talk to him about their problems. He gave advice, medicine, money, food and patience to all those who came for help. He was always surrounded by a wonderful peace. Even his movements seemed silent. I began to feel that he embodied a culmination of the three yogas; deep devotion for Bhagavan, *jnana* (wisdom) and effortless selfless service. He constantly gave to others in such a kind way without any hesitation.

After a period he allowed me to spend more time with him and we started to do *pradakshina* together. These were wonderful times as he brought Ramana so alive on these walks. He would point out the places where Bhagavan would sit and it was easy to imagine Ramana in these places. Once when we were walking he said, "People say that Parvati walked here. This I don't know about but what I do know is that Bhagavan Himself walked along this very place where we are walking now." Words cannot explain the love that was in his voice as he said this. When Viswanatha walked, he was so quiet. He walked perfectly straight, rarely looking to the left or right: just silently walking. One time when we did a *pradakshina* in the rainy season we got soaking wet. When the rain started to come down, even here, he showed his love for Ramana by reminding me of the gift of this beautiful rain that Bhagavan was giving us. We laughed and laughed with joy at this gift. When we arrived late at the Ashram we went in to get food and Balu served us with equal joy. Viswanatha spoke with great affection about Balu and how he loved to serve the devotees.

Once he told me how Bhagavan came to his room in the middle of the night knocking on his door. Bhagavan said to him, "Quick, quick, let's go for *pradakshina* before anyone else finds out." The two of them walked together and Bhagavan gave him teachings along the whole circumambulation of the hill. Viswanatha had such a beautiful smile when he told me about this. He did not smile a lot but when he did his whole face beamed and when he laughed his whole body laughed.

Viswanatha always encouraged me to visit the places in the area that were associated with Bhagavan. He would ask me if I had visited places like Mango Tree Cave, Pavazhakkunru, and Turtle Rock (where Bhagavan had his second death experience).

Once I did not visit Viswanatha for two days as I had dysentery. I was staying in a small hut at Saraswati Nilayam and was shocked and very touched when, who should I see approaching me at 4 pm but Viswanatha Swami! He said, with a smile and a chuckle, "Mohammed has not come to the mountain, so the mountain has come to Mohammed." He gave me some *chyavanaprash* he had brought. Viswanatha was very fond of *chyavanaprash* as a general

tonic. After that, he said, come, we are going for a walk. I said that I had dysentery but he replied that I would be fine. Needless to say, I was fine. After walking for a while, I asked where we were going. He told me, "It's a secret and you will like it." We walked out of the town to a small shrine. This was Gurumurtham one of the places where Bhagavan had stayed in His early days. Viswanatha showed me the indentation in the wall where Bhagavan had sat for long hours. Viswanatha was always ready to talk about Bhagavan and his teachings.

During one period, I became very sluggish and dull. I decided to do a retreat in Hyderabad with the well-known Buddhist meditation teacher Goenkaji. When I returned from this retreat several people were critical of my need to go away. This disturbed me so I thought I would ask Viswanatha about it. I went to the Ashram in the morning planning to see him in the evening. As I started walking up the steps by the bookstore I met Viswanatha as he was coming out of the Ashram office. He looked at me, smiled, and asked if I wanted to go for tea. It was a hot summer's day and he was carrying his umbrella. As we were walking out of the Ashram, bells started to ring. Viswanatha said, "Sound comes out of silence, sound is sustained in silence and sound returns to silence, silence is all." We drank the tea and I thought this was a perfect time to talk with him, but I felt shy. We walked back to his room and he said, "Come into my room, there is an article I want you to look at for *The Mountain Path*." He gave me the perfect opportunity but I still felt shy to do so. After I had read the article, he asked for my thoughts on it. He then asked me if I had anything else to say and I said no. He said to come back around four. As I left however, he called me back and said, "Hey you, what do you want?" I was amazed at how Bhagavan had so wonderfully set the whole thing up to help remove my doubts and worries. I told Viswanatha about the Goenka meditation that I did and how the meditation emphasizes the purification of the latent (unconscious) mental tendencies. He looked at me so sweetly and slowly started to lie down on his bed. As he was lying down he said, "I know nothing about the mind or its tendencies. All I know is, be asleep to it all." I am sure to this day that his face changed complexion, almost becoming

grey, and he started to snore. I was sitting there and he was snoring. At that moment, an Ashram worker came in to see Viswanatha. He saw Viswanatha sleeping there and he promptly lay down on a bench as well and started to snore. I decided to lie down too on the bed beside Viswanatha and went into a deep deep stillness. After a while, I became aware of the noises around us and looked. Viswanatha was rising from the bed and staring at me. He said very pointedly, “Do you understand?” The Ashram worker was still snoring. Viswanatha laughed and said, “He does.”

As I read over these few words, I see that they just cannot convey the beauty of this great devotee of Bhagavan. His love for Bhagavan and his gratitude to Him shone in every action he did and in every word he uttered. It is strange that we never spoke about Viswanatha’s initial meeting with Bhagavan, but everything he said and did reflected his love and devotion. Sitting quietly at the back of the Ashram in his room, he truly was a hidden gem. ▲

Mother Maya’s Magic Picture Show

Alan Jacobs

This so-called world you view, dear aspiring friend,
 Is a crazed creation of one’s ignorant mind;
 It’s produced by latent tendencies, that we find
 From many previous lives, and in the end,
 It’s like a dream at night in which we pretend
 We believe as real; but it’s nothing of the kind!
 It’s like a film, and the spool will soon unwind,
 So pictures on the screen ’twill swiftly send.
 Sages term it ‘instantaneous creation’,
 It depends on the seer; but who is seeing?
 So we’re trapped in fanciful fascination,
 Tricked by coloured pictures that mind’s revealing.
 This world’s a product of one’s imagination
 And we’re deceived by such a strange sensation.



Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Three

Tulasidas Recovers from Infatuation

NABAJI SIDDHA

In an attempt to infuse dispassion in Tulasidas, Atma Ram said, “Dear son! You are a great treasure. You are learned in the Vedas and endowed with discrimination. How can you allow yourself to be tempted by the physical body, which is nothing but flesh, bones and blood? The body is like a pot filled with filth and stench. How sad that the lure of sex has turned your life upside down! Lust has ruined even great ascetics like Viswamitra. Aren’t you inspired by the example of the intrepid ascetic Suka, who stood his ground, unaffected by the charms of Rambha, and thus earned the adoration of even the Trinity?”

These words wrought no change in the condition of Tulasidas. Overcome by self-pity, Atma Ram blamed himself for begetting a son who lived such a loathsome life. He wondered by what means he could free his son from his obsession. He became thoughtful, “If that woman could be here now, I would extinguish the fire of his desire for her with my powers.”

It is exactly at this moment that the Lord, who is sworn to protect His devotees, summoned the celestial woman and asked her to go

back to Tulasidas to console him. Heartened by this, the woman reached the garden. On the sudden appearance of the woman, Atma Ram asked her in surprise, “Who are you, young woman? Why have you come here?”

Bowing to him, she said, “O Mahatma, I am a celestial being. I come here sometimes to refresh myself under the cool shade of these trees.”

On seeing her, Tulasidas once again became unconscious with excessive yearning. Then, the other boys informed Atma Ram that it was this same woman who had cast the spell on Tulasidas and reduced him to this state of misery and ridicule.

Atma Ram gently asked the woman to come near him. When she approached him, using his mystical powers, Atma Ram extracted all the blood from her body and transferred it into a pot. Immediately, the woman became emaciated and pale, losing all her beauty and charm. Reduced to a skeleton, she looked like a ghost. Her suave demeanour and coquetry turned to ugliness. She could not move her limbs. She was like a withered tree, stripped of its leaves and deprived of its life-essence.

Reviving his son who was unconscious, and showing to him the woman's pathetic condition, Atma Ram said, “This body is a container of filth. There is no end to satiating one's desire for the pleasures derived out of the perishable body. Now, look at her body which set you on fire! Do you feel any attraction for this corpse-like thing? Why do you want to wallow in such hollow pleasures? Lusting for women leads one away from the righteous path. It destroys one's merits. One loses all friends and relations. It breeds jealousy, ill-will and deception. Your load of sins will multiply. You will revolve in the cycle of birth and death for ever. Misery, diseases, unrest and lack of peace will stalk you. Do I need to list the names of people who descended into hell due to lust? The stories of The Ramayana and The Mahabharata should be enough to show where lust leads.

“Even if one is a Vedic scholar, or has taken to repeating the name of God, or worships the almighty Lord punctiliously and practises awesome austerities, all such merits will turn into dust if he even

looks at a woman, other than his wife, with lustful eyes. Desire for another woman makes man a terrible sinner. One who is invincible against such temptations is indeed a hero! While the world worships the latter, it abhors the former. He who indulges in the evil act of adultery will be born blind or an imbecile.

“If you approach a chaste woman with evil desire, the fire of her chastity will burn you. You will be punished mercilessly in hell. Chaste women have performed many miracles. When Sati was humiliated, the great *yajna* was reduced to ashes. When Sita was slandered, the earth quaked and cracked. There are examples galore.

“It is the power of such chastity that makes the rains fall in season, keeps the sun and moon in their orbits and keeps alive all the *dharma*s in the world. Noble women remain unshakable in their *dharma* of chastity, whatever the trials they have to pass through. They stand firm in their purity even if the supreme Lord seeks their favour, or the sun and moon fail to make their daily rounds, or the earth turns upside down, or emperors shower on them precious gifts or scriptures enjoin *niyama* and *nishtha* upon them!”

While Atma Ram was discoursing thus to his son on the dire consequences of an immoral life and on the grandeur of a pure life, the celestial woman who stood motionless was amazed at the prowess of the father, whose power could sap all her beauty and charm. She was overcome by fear and fatigue. A desperate prayer went forth from her helpless heart to the Lord, “O Lord, if You do not come to my rescue now, I don’t know what else will befall me.” The playful Lord, infusing into her enough vitality, released her from her predicament. Instantly, she soared into the sky and disappeared.

Thereafter, Atma Ram talked to Tulasidas about the code of morality and sense control and slowly disillusioned him about the charm of the celestial nymph. He said, “From this day, give up the desire for women other than your wife. Don’t ignore my words and go chasing after sensual pleasures and women of low morals. Never walk in the direction where prostitutes live. If you succumb to their wiles once again, your redemption will be endangered and you will have to suffer regret for the rest of your life. Don’t hurt any living

being or utter a lie for any reason. Worship God without fail and be regular in your *japa*. Don't indulge in deceitful acts or join the company of evil-doers. Remain steadfast in righteous deeds. Don't waste your life by loitering in the streets; don't be uncaring towards the weak or slander spiritual guides and *mahatmas*."

Gradually, he brought about a change in Tulasidas' mind. He did not want to leave his son in the service of the emperor in the city where temptations abounded. He made ready to leave with his family for his ancestral home in Rajapur. There, he left his son in the charge of his wife and said, "O my dear partner! Call our daughter-in-law Mamata here to live with you both. Take good care of our son and live happily. I intend to leave soon for Naimisharanya to dwell in the company of the great ascetics and meditate on *Brahman*."

The noble woman, however, was reluctant to part with him. When she got ready to accompany him, Atma Ram dissuaded her, saying, "If you come with me, who will look after Tulasidas and guide him on the right path? Don't reject my words. Your *dharma* and austerity lie in obeying my wish. This alone will secure you an immortal place among noble women.

"Though I have studied the scriptures I have been unable to practise the truths and obtain the direct experience of the wisdom contained therein. This has caused me anguish. My days as a householder are over. Don't argue with me any further. I have had my share of the travails of worldly life. If you ever feel disenchanted with this *samsaric* life, then come to Naimisharanya by all means. There you will be blessed with the holy company of saints and sages and walk the path of bliss.

"The path, taught by my preceptor, and this life are worlds apart. The thirst to engage in meditation and austerities overwhelms me. I want to remain absorbed in the bliss of the *Atman*. He who neglects spiritual practices is equal to a corpse. Human life is as evanescent as a bubble on the water. I do not want to fritter away this life like an ignorant man. *Tapas* is the bridge to cross the ocean of worldliness. It is indeed tough to live a life of mind control, which alone helps one to traverse the dark passage of bondage and attain one's true nature.

“It is not the nature of the mind to incline towards rare bliss, but rather to wallow in the common pleasures. Unless one courts the company of saints who are inseparable from Truth, the state of effortless abidance in the Self is unattainable. When people slog even to gain the trifles of worldly and heavenly pleasures, to what lengths of self-denial and effort should one resort in order to attain the exalted state? Rare indeed is a person in all the three worlds who is freed from worldly tangles and who experiences the magnificent glory of spiritual illumination. Let me proceed on my quest, dear woman, without placing any obstacle before me.”

Witnessing his father’s dispassion, Tulasidas felt contrite about his own condition. With tears welling up in his eyes, he bowed to his father and said, “Please allow me to accompany you to Naimisharanyam.”

Atma Ram replied, “My dear child, your attitude is positive and righteous. However, detachment can take root only after you go through the experience of worldly life; sudden dispassion caused by listening to someone’s talk or discourse will not be enduring. After some time, the mind which has not experienced the worldly pleasures in a *dharmic* way will lose its dispassion and hanker with more ferocity for the same pleasures. Such a man will lose the merits of both worlds — the *dharma* of a householder as well as that of ascetics — and end up as an outcaste, having betrayed the norms of both. It would be just like a prostitute shunning her way of life for a short time on listening to a discourse and falling back into the same mode of life soon. Such dispassion is temporary.

“On our own conviction, that sense-indulgence will impede our spiritual evolution and hurtle us towards hell, we should embrace a *sadhu*’s life. When we try to resist the temptation of even one sense we fail miserably. While so, how can we resist the onslaught of the deceitful mind, which plays havoc with all senses, madly dancing to the music of external stimuli? We can hardly hope to realize God, given these imponderables. Even loss of honour and ridicule of society do not spur a man to keep his sensory life in check. How, then, will he purify the treacherous mind and devote his life to the Lord?

MOUNTAIN PATH

“Only a woman of adamantine will can resolutely protect her purity through thick and thin, whereas you are a boy, already given to wild passions. Your wife is an innocent young girl. Your wish to accompany me, leaving her behind, is a passing whim on your part. Your path is to go through the worldly life, enjoying the sense pleasures within the norms of social and scriptural sanctions, and attaining dispassion in due course. Then, courting the fellowship of saints, following a high standard of spiritual discipline, you would aspire for a higher life of eternal bliss. This is the suitable course of life for you.”

Then, Atma Ram departed for Naimisharanyam where, inspired by association with exalted souls, he gave up all attachments and, following spiritual practices sincerely, he was drowned in the waves of eternal bliss of *Brahman*. ▲

Who Can Be Known By Enquiry

Alan Jacobs

Who can be known by enquiring “who frees?”
The Master who lives in the cave of the heart,
Not separate from one’s Self, being the start,
Of the final search from bond to release.
The Sage appears when the soul is ready,
With strong gaze of grace he says “be aware
That God and his wisdom are already there!”
He acts as a brake to make the mind steady,
While mercy flows freely in sunshine and air,
Hindered only by our being unready.
If you come to him, meekly with an empty cup,
His grace is then bound to fill it up.
The Master’s glance is the grace of the Lord,
He cuts you free with his mighty sword.

108 Sonnets for Awakening – and Selected Poems by Alan Jacobs is available from Mantra Books (www.mantra-books.net) John Hunt Publishing Ltd.

TRANSLATION

Arunachala Purana

Chapter Four

In Which Parvati Devi Masked the Divine Eyes

SAIVA ELLAPPA NAVALAR

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

“In the great city of Anantapuram (dwelt) seven Brahmins (who) in their age of indiscretion committed numberless deeply evil deeds. Subsequently, when wisdom dawned upon them, they meditated upon the feet of Brahma, who rides upon the swan as his vehicle, and for many days took only green leaves for food, performing arduous *tapas*. (289)

At that time Brahma appeared to them and said, ‘Sinners, if you perform *tapas* in the prescribed manner on the seven mountains, these heads covered by matted locks will be reduced to dust along with your [evil] *karma* by the spear hurled by Murugan.’ Four-faced Brahma disappeared, and they undertook that *tapas* (as prescribed). (290)

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

“Your well-honed spear clove apart the seven mountains along with those seven who sat atop them. Know that the waters [it brought] grew red with their blood as they perished. Therefore you are not at fault in this.” She finished speaking, and Murugan worshipped her feet and remained there in joyful mood. Meanwhile the ruddy hue of the heavens grew darker, just as [the waters] had grown red with the blood of those great sages. (291)

The gloom spread abroad; it was if the darkness that diffused itself previously, when She had masked the Lord’s eyes, had pursued Her to that place, just as the *karma* that envelops us follows us into our next birth. The heavens were filled with stars; it was as if the gods, seeing that Parvati was residing in a little shelter of plantain trees, had stretched out a pearly canopy of their own for Her. (292)

As the moon arose, it was as if the evening, as Durga, had cut off the head of the night, in the form of the *asura* Mahisa, and was displaying her blood-soaked form in the evening sky, whilst holding a crystal lingam in her hand. Then the moon set in the west, and the red sun arose, like the eye on the forehead of the Lord whose throat is adorned by the poison *halahala*, opening with a brilliant flash to banish the surrounding darkness which had fallen as his other eyes were masked. (293)

Completing Her morning observances in the Ceyaru river, which is as sacred as the Ganges, Parvati mounted her golden palanquin and journeyed on as the Vedas thundered out. Espying the noble mountain Annamalai, which excels as the mountain of fire, which consumes, like mountains of cotton, the evil *karma* of devotees who have embarked upon the path to freedom from the [three] base defilements, She prostrated herself before it. (294)

Victorious, [those who dwell in] the burning *desert tracts* divide up the spoils plundered [from wayfarers] and make offerings to Durga; in the *mountain areas* [the *Velan*] performs the *veri* dance; in all the

woodlands and pastures, the women of the herdsman caste dance the *kuravai*; the villages of the *agricultural lands* conduct festivals in celebration of Indra, who (se garland) diffuses a sweet perfume; and all [the people of] the *groves bordering the ocean* dry (the meat of) the fierce swordfish in their yards, and then dance under the influence of their god [Varuna].¹ (295)

Pouring forth waters (deep enough) to hide bright(ly caparisoned) elephants with their trunks; bringing joy by spreading out over the great, pure earth; bearing along gold mixed in its current; rising in flood with large amounts of Indian saffron dissolved in it, and buffeting (honey-filled) beehives so that they broke asunder, the holy river resembled Vishnu himself, glorious in the four directions.

Alternative translation:

Pouring down upon the illustrious demon *Khara* a (rain of) arrows, so that he was completely hidden; delighting in the company of pure maidens; keeping company with his consort Lakshmi; manifesting his greatness so that the hearts of Vaishnavite devotees completely melted, and vanquishing the demon *Madhu*² in battle, the holy river resembled Visnu himself, glorious in the four directions. (296)

¹ Classical Tamil *Akam* poetry, which deals with love and the inner life of the mind and heart in general, is structured in five divisions, five types of landscape called *tinai*, each with its own distinctive mood, time and season, and typical flora, fauna, inhabitants, social customs, artefacts and so on. The *kurinci tinai* — *mountain tracts* is associated with lovers' union; it is here that the *veri* dance takes place, an exorcism ritual performed by the *Velan* — *shaman-priest* of Murugan; the *palai tinai* — *desert tracts*, is associated with separation; the *mullai tinai* — *woodland and pasture*, with the heroine's patient waiting for the return of her lover; the *neytal tinai* — *maritime tracts*, with anxious waiting, pining; and the *marutam tinai* — *agricultural tracts* with lovers' quarrels and sulking. Of course a single area like that around *Tiruvannamalai* could not be associated with all five, other than in the imagination of the poet. The following verses, leading up to Parvati's arrival in the city itself, are all set in the landscape of the *agricultural tracts* — *marutam tinai*.

² *Khara* and *Madhu* are *asuras* slain by Visnu in his incarnation as *Rama*.

MOUNTAIN PATH

As the waters came on, spreading over the land, the fine rice paddy grew up and trembled (in the breeze), as if [mother earth] grew cold, and her hair bristled. The ears grew green, like the feathers of the green parrots who inhabit the wooded groves; then, as they took shape and ripened, they rose up erect, like the necks of crowing cockerels. Finally, the (ripe) ears drooped, as if paying homage, thinking, “This is the place where Lady Uma is performing *tapas*.” (297)

Ever watchful, the ploughmen, judging when it is ripe, reap the crop, tying it in bundles. When they pile up the unthreshed paddy in heaps, it seems as if the Seven Mountains are rising up to do battle with the realm of Indra; and when they release their oxen to tread out the paddy, it is as if the horses of the sun are circling in the heavens. Separating the straw they pile it up in mounds like Mount Mandara itself. However much they gave away, those fields of the agricultural lands would never run short of paddy. (298)

[In the paddy fields] dark carp, seeing the reflection of the eyes of the women of the ploughman caste, rise up and approach, thinking, “These are carp like us!” Then drawing near, and seeing the reflection of their curving eyebrows, they become afraid, thinking they are bows, and draw back. Winged insects approach those beautiful faces, which induce the infatuation of desire, thinking that they are lotus blossoms, then fly away startled on seeing the reflection of their noses, which look like *champaca*³ flowers. (299)

In the paddy fields the labourers grab at the calves of the girls [as they pull out the weeds], mistaking them for *varal* fish, and then grab again, mistaking the tops of their feet for turtles. All over the agricultural lands the (pink) lotus and the blue water lily pour forth nectar, as if

³The flower is *Michelia champaca*, and belongs to the magnolia family. Its blossoms are large and yellow, and are highly perfumed and attractive to insects. It is not clear why the blossoms should be mistaken for the reflections of noses, or why insects should be startled on seeing their reflection.

they are weeping, (complaining) to the winged insects⁴ that they have been bested by the faces and eyes of those girls with breasts like young coconut fruits. (300)

(Startled), as buffaloes, angered by their own reflection, charge into the deep waters, geese and young pelicans fly off into the rich farmland landscape. Labourers wearing jewelled ornaments that sparkle like fire beat their harvest drums, and, for lack of the accompanying sound of any reed pipe, the host of winged insects buzzing around the girls' braids, pipes up a tune (in its place). (301)

The agricultural lands were indeed at their most glorious, like Indra's royal elephant, with chains forged from all the hordes of buzzing insects, displaying its fan-like ears in the form of golden ears of paddy, exhibiting an abundance of surpassing richness, and oozing a thick syrup of fresh nectar. (302)

Leaving the rice fields with lotus blossoms [that resound to] the music [of winged insects], Parvati approached along the northern avenue (of the temple), which the people of the earth praise, arriving at the street of tall temple cars⁵ bedecked with banners that reach up to the heavens, in order to go and praise the holy lotus feet of Lord Annamalai. (303)

When the moon passes over the summit of the (temple's tall) *gopuram*, which all men revere, the very stain (on its face) disappears, due to [the brilliance of] the matchless diamonds [embedded in it], and the sun's green horses all turn coral-red, due [to the radiance] of the rubies with which it is inlaid. (304)

⁴ *Tamil text: karumpinutan* — to the sugarcane has been amended to *curumpinutan*, — to the winged insects; it does not make any sense for the water flowers to complain to the sugarcane.

⁵ This is *Car Street* on the eastern side of the temple, where the great temple cars stand to this day.

MOUNTAIN PATH

The heavenly Ganga runs dark like the Yamuna, due to the beautiful (blue) radiance of the sapphires that adorn the walls and ramparts (that reach up to) the earth-nurturing clouds, and the various other elevated locations, which rival Mount Meru in height. (305)

Mistaking them for grass, the horses of the sun graze on the spreading rays of the green (emeralds) that adorn the upper terraces where beautiful maidens dance, to the sound of drums that roar like the ocean. (306)

Traversing those beautiful thoroughfares, and entering the beautiful temple, She perceived the Supreme One, the Master who rules my heart, wise Lord Sonagiri, and made obeisance to Him with melting heart. Then, accompanied by numbers of *saktis*, She retired and made her way to [the place called] *Sthaleswara*.⁶ (307)

(There dwelt) crores of *tapasvins*, resembling Kausika,⁷ great in *tapas*, with their toes resting on a spike, their legs bent back, fixing their gaze upon the nose, kindling the (inner) fire, liquifying the bright ambrosial nectar and consuming that pure *amrita*.⁸ (308)

Gathered there were many crores of Siva *jnanis*, who entertain no desire whatsoever other than that of removing the three defilements, developing a perfect equanimity towards both good and evil deeds, and destroying the mind, in their quest to attain the liberation in which one dwells as the [supreme] Self, upon the elimination of the [personal] self. (309)

(To be continued) ▲

⁶ *Sthalesvara*, literally the *Supreme god of sthalas*.

⁷ *Kausika*, the descendant of King *Kusa* and Brahma himself, is the great Vedic sage *Visvamitra*, whose story is recounted in the *Balakanda* of the Sanskrit *Ramayana* of *Valmiki* and the Tamil *Ramayanam* of *Kampan*.

⁸ During yogic *samadhi*, the flame of the *yogagni* - *fire of yoga*, extending from the base of the spine to the head, melts the *amrita* in the *brahmarandhra* (*sahasrana chakra*). In that deep state of meditation that nectar of divine bliss flows down from the *sahasrana chakra* and the yogi consumes it with joy and ecstasy.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE PHILOSOPHICAL VERSES OF YOGAVASISTHA An English Translation of *Yogavasistha-sara* with Commentary and Sanskrit Text by Swami Bhaskarananda. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600004. 2009. pp91, Rs35. www.sriramakrishnamath.org

The Yogavasistha is one of the great works in Advaita Vedanta. It records the ancient teaching given to Lord Rama by his guru Vasishta. It is sometimes known as the *Maharamayana*. Both are said to have been written by Valmiki. Bhagavan quoted it often and included in the Supplementary Forty Verses on Reality, verses 21 to 27, which come from *Yogavasistha*.

The original text is a massive work of some 32,000 couplets. A shorter version called the *Laghu Yogavasistha* was culled by a Kashmir pundit said to have lived in the 9th Century. The essence of this mighty work was then further reduced in essence to 223 verses by an unknown pundit, which has become a classic and there are a number of English translations available. It is translated by a senior Swami of the Ramakrishna order who divides the book into two sections: English and a Sanskrit *devanagari* script. This is a useful addition to the literature. The translation is crisp with judicious comments and short editorial interpolations to help the reader. — TV Ramamurthy

SOCRATES WITHOUT TEARS The Lost Dialogues of Aeschines Restored by Alan Jacobs. O Books, Winchester, UK, 2011. pp.92, US\$9.99. ISBN: 978-1-84694-568-7 www.o-books.com

Western philosophy is essentially based on the Socratic dialogues in which the historical Socrates in the 4th Century BCE discussed ethical philosophical and metaphysical problems. Plato's Socrates made significant contributions to the how we know things and in the field of logic. The record of these dialogues was preserved for the most part by the dialogues of Plato and the accounts of Xenophon. History has debated how true they were to the original since they recorded a different picture of Socrates. There were others who also recorded conversations with Socrates, among whom were Aristotle and Aeschines. It is difficult to know what account is the most accurate since these surviving works are often philosophical or dramatic in content. They are not factual histories as we would understand them today.

Xenophon, for example, is said to be a more reliable witness than Plato who tended to embellish Socrates as a holy man. We owe to Socrates the saying “I only know that I know nothing.”

When the Roman Empire fell many of the libraries which housed important texts were destroyed. Among the few which survived the most significant was the library of Alexandria which in its turn was destroyed in the Muslim invasion in the 8th Century. Various fragments of this library survived and sporadically turn up. The present book claims to be the fragments of dialogues recently discovered at Cairo in 2008, as recorded by Aeschines who according to the ancient records was more robust and earthy in his portrayal of Socrates. The book under review consists of six dialogues and a brief account of Socrates’ last days in prison. The most interesting dialogue is ‘Psyche or a Dream Within a Dream’ which purportedly shows the influence of Vedanta. Socrates speaks of waking up from a dream within a dream and extrapolates upon the possibility that this world too in which he speaks to his audience is a dream. Socrates then surmises that this realisation came as a message from his inner Self. In the known Socratic dialogues he refers a number of times to his inner guidance, an oracle which guides him along the right course of action.

— Christopher Quilkey

WHO ARE YOU REALLY! A Travel Guide to Life by Stuart Rose. O Books, Winchester, UK, 2010.pp.117, US\$19.95. ISBN: 978-1-84694-343-0 www.o-books.com

Stuart Rose is involved with a small ashram in Wales. He read for his PhD in Religious Studies in mid-life after a diverse career and a great deal of travelling. He was introduced to the teachings of Bhagavan in the early 1990s. He has written four books and many articles on spiritual themes and edits the writings of an Indian yogi, Swami Maheshananda. The reason the reviewer has made these initial comments is to show the author has the credentials to write a short authoritative exposition on the question of identity and spirituality. Many so-called teachers in the West today are qualified to a greater or lesser extent. It is rare to find someone who has the intellectual equipment, the sincere practice and experience.

The author has an original voice coupled with wisdom and familiarity with his subject. What we are seeing today in the West are the first buds of a native-born spirituality rooted in the traditions of India but living and applying those principles in a western setting. We do not see the Sanskrit

terms essential to explain Vedanta in its traditional context but we do see the underlying principles couched in modern terms without loss of authenticity. The author's explanations of the mental body — its mind, memory, intellect and I-ness — is a case in point. The language to explain the *vijñānamaya kośha* and the *manomaya kośha* is apt and free of technical obscuration.

It is a practical book. The middle section of '112 Pointers to a Brighter Lifestyle' are stimulating and creative. The thread running through it is existential questioning. At times it verges of the self-help variety of books profusely available today but does not fall into the trap of offering an easy panacea of psychological tips. It is more subtle than that.— Andrew Clement

SIMILES OF THE BUDDHA An Introduction by Hellmuth Hecker. Buddhist Publication Society, PO Box 61, 54 Sangaraja Mawatha, Kandy, Sri Lanka. 2009. pp206, Price not mentioned. ISBN: 978-955-24-0336-1 www.bps.lk

The challenge teachers face when imparting subtle knowledge is how to create helpful 'hooks' which a student can easily assimilate and memorise the intricacies of doctrine and practice. Similes are useful tools and have been employed in all traditions. They make spiritual matters easier to understand and can contain multiple layers of meaning. The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* is replete with similes. They were Sri Ramakrishna's favourite methods of teaching.

Employing concrete sense experiences and stories, a teacher takes the image to a deeper level and opens the eyes of the student to the possibility they contain an illuminative insight that can transform their behaviour and outlook for the better. The sense world is a reflection of the mind and these similes assist us to see the connection between the outer and inner worlds and the repercussions our thoughts and attitudes have both on ourselves and the world we inhabit.

The book's compiler claims that the Buddha's discourses contain the richest mine of similes that cover all aspects of theory and practice. The book is not an introduction to the Buddha's teachings and one requires some knowledge of doctrine to appreciate the subtleties the similes express. Nor is it a comprehensive collection of the Buddha's similes. Some of the examples from the various sutras are complex and only a diligent follower of the Buddha would gain an understanding of their intent. There is a pedantic edge to the book which may put off the less than conscientious reader. — Peter Pichlemann ▲

ASHRAM BULLETIN

Pali Thirtam

The *Pali Thirtam* which is adjacent to the ashram was completely dried out both by the intense summer sun and the paucity of monsoon rain from the previous year. The ashram embarked on cleaning out the silt and deepening the tank. For many decades the ashram has maintained the holy tank. The rich mud (*kalimannu*) dredged from the bottom of the tank is nutrient-rich, and has been distributed to the ashram gardens while hard bedrock stones has been used for levelling and construction work.

Homa for Rain

Due to the unseasonal weather conditions and the lack of suitable rain the ashram initiated a *homa* in honour of Varuna. The *Varuna Japa Homa* is a rite designed to please Lord Varuna and bring rain. Sri Ramanasramam priests and pundits, in solidarity with mutts and temples in South India, performed the *Varuna Japa Homa*. The Ashram event took place on Monday, August 20th starting at 5.30am with *Vighneswara Puja*, *Punyahavachanam*, *Mahanyasam* and *Varuna Japa Homa* followed by *puṇṇahuti* and *deeparadhana*. Immediately afterward there was a special *abhishekam* at *Pali Thirtam*. The month of August did bring some rain before and after the *homa* and *Pali Thirtam*, after being completely dry for six months, is now filled to about 40% capacity.

Independence Day

The 15th of August is a national holiday and in solidarity with the rest of the country, the ashram observed National Independence Day by raising the country's flag atop the Ashram dining hall. Later that morning, the new library (*Granthalaya*), was officially opened by ashram president, V.S.Ramanan.

Bhagavan's Advent

On the 1st of September, 1896, a boy of sixteen arrived at Arunachala, never to leave His presence again. The encounter would prove fateful not just in the lives of those who gathered round him then but for all posterity. On August 31st, 2012, sixty devotees from Madurai Ramana Mandiram stopped in at the Arayaninallur Temple, Tirukoilur, and chanted *Aksharamanamalai* in remembrance of Bhagavan's stay there

last century. They then proceeded to Ramanasramam, and the next morning the 116th Advent celebrations began with Tamil *parayanam* in Bhagavan's shrine at 5.30am, 1st September. *Mahanyasa puja* was then performed before a large gathering of devotees.

Inner Path

From the beginning of August the Forestry Department of Tiruvannamalai has blocked the entrances to the inner *pradakshina* path and effectively banned its use by devotees, saying that since the path passes through reserve forest, it is an offence to trespass it. The Forestry office claims that frequent outbreak of fire on the hill is due in part to the illegal entry into the forests round the hill. There is apparently a fine for anyone who violates the prohibition. Increasing numbers of people have used the inner path particularly during full moon nights both because of the encouragement of new ashrams which have sprouted up round the hill and because the regular outer path on the township road has become increasingly commercialised and ugly. With more and more people using the inner path it has inevitably resulted in degradation of the forest area. The Forestry office also intends to remove all the marker stones which guide devotees.

Road Construction

Road work has begun on the roads to Tiruvannamalai from Chennai and Bangalore. It is part of a major project to link Puducherry and Bangalore by a first class highway, NH-66. There will be considerable disruption on the roads during 2012 and through 2013. One estimate says it may take eighteen months to complete the work. A report in *The Hindu* on 8th December 2010, said that some 19,000 tamarind and neem trees will be axed in the process. *The Hindu* also quoted NHAI (National Highways Authority of India) officials who said they would make all efforts to save as many trees as possible. They also said the NHAI would plant three trees for every tree felled. Toll gates may be set up near Singarapettai, Tiruvannamalai and Gingee. Once the road is finished it should reduce travel time between Tiruvannamalai and Chennai by at least half an hour.

Work on a by-pass road to the south of Tiruvannamalai connecting the Tindivanam and Bangalore roads has commenced. It begins some five kilometers out on the Bangalore road, passes near the

Rangammal Hospital and behind the *Samudramaeri* (large tank), and then connects up with the ring-road to the east which presently joins the Tirukoilur and Tindivanam roads.

Obituaries

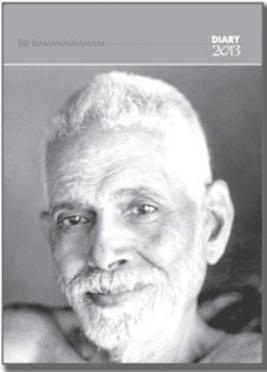
Sri M. Janakiraman, father of J. Jayaraman, head librarian at the ashram, was absorbed on the 4th June, *Vaishakha Pournami*, at Tiruvannamalai after a short illness. He was born on the 15th September, 1921. He commanded the love and respect of all in his Post and Telegraph Department from which he retired as Post Master General. During his visits to the ashram, though a healthy ardent agnostic, he would be seen standing reverently gazing Bhagavan's statue and the *Ramaneswara lingam* at the shrine. He was liked by devotees for his quite, gentle disposition and winning friendly smile.

Sri Suryanandan was born on the 18th December, 1922 to P. S. Ramaswami and Janaki Ammal. A devotee of Bhagavan from a young age, he joined the British Royal Air Force at seventeen and saw service in the far-flung outposts of the British Empire. In October 1947, he was air-lifted to Kashmir along with thirty soldiers of the Sikh light infantry division to secure Srinagar Airport where he served as radio operator.

In 1965 he married S. Mahalakshmi, daughter of Prof. K. Swaminathan. As career demanded, the couple shifted to Belgaum and then Kolkata, and in both places, conducted Ramana Satsangs. After retirement as deputy director of Civil Aviation in 1986, the two made their home at Arunachala. PRS volunteered his services at Arunachala Reforestation Society, eventually serving as Vice-President and de facto Secretary. Known for his self-effacing, compassionate disposition and unfailing devotion to Bhagavan, P. R. Suryanandan was loved and respected by all. In recent years, though suffering poor health, he nevertheless maintained his cheerful good spirits right up till the end when, at the age of 89, in the early morning hours of the 29th of August, he merged in the Feet of Arunachala. ▲



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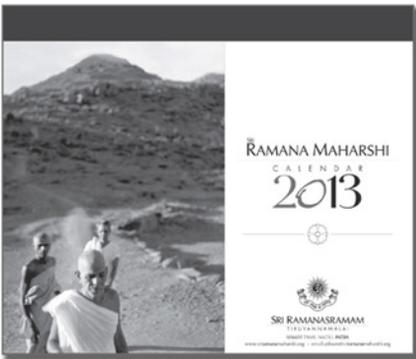
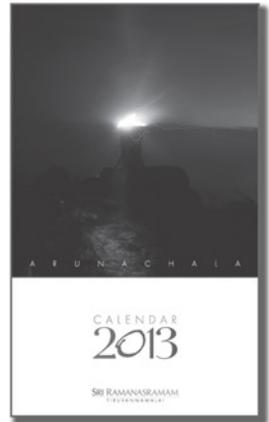


DIARY - 2013

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(Postage and packing charges extra)

15. What is the difference between *dhyana* and *samadhi*?

Dhyana is imagination of the mind, made through one's own effort; in *samadhi* there is no such effort.

— Sri Ramana Maharshi, *Spiritual Instruction, Chapter II*
