

The Maharshi

Nov/Dec 2006

Vol. 16, No. 6

ADVAITIC SADHANA

BY S. S. COHEN

Below is the conclusion of Chapter Three on Dhyana (meditation) from S. S. Cohen's 1975 publication, titled Advaitic Sadhana.

CHAPTER 3 — DHYĀNA

To those who are unable to choose their own subjects for concentration the following hints are given.

1. Meditation on the nature of the Being, which is the source and substratum of all thoughts known in the ..śrutis (the revealed scriptures) as the *ākāśa* (ether) of consciousness, or Heart, develops an intuition of it, wearing away all the images from the meditating mind, polishing it and, finally, revealing it to be the shining sun of knowledge, free from the dark cloud of the phenomena (or thoughts) that have hitherto been covering it. Its other names are: *Cit*, *Caitanya*, *Ātman*, *Paramātmān* (Pure Mind, Pure Consciousness, Self, Supreme Self), etc. *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad* describes this practice graphically thus:

O Śāṇḍilya, be happy. Place the Self in the midst of the *ākāśa*, and the *ākāśa* in the midst of the Self and, having reduced everything to *ākāśa*, do not think. You will not entertain then either internal or external thoughts. Abandoning all thoughts, become abstract thought itself. As camphor dissolves in fire and salt in water, so does *manas* (the thinking faculty) dissolve in *Tattva* (the Reality). What is termed *manas* is the knowledge

of everything that is cognised. When this knowledge and the cognised object are alike lost, there is no second path. By giving up all cognition of objects, the *manas* is absorbed and *Kaivalya* — the aloneness of Being — remains.

It will be observed that this approaches the Reality — *Sat-cit-ānanda* (Existence-consciousness-bliss) — from its *Cit* aspect, that is, as Consciousness.

2. Another helpful method is to begin meditation with a happy mood, with no object in view but the feeling of happiness in the heart. This can be created in so many ways in the imagination and maintained throughout the duration of meditation. Happiness, being the nature of the Self, facilitates the approach to it, provided the mind is kept easy, thought-free and alert without self-assertiveness. The mental and physical relaxation which precedes sleep is also felt here, but without its companion, torpor. This should be held on to for as long a time as possible and, whenever a thought appears, it should be immediately checked to prevent a return to the welter of thinking and feeling. A conscious, thought-free and happy alertness is the principal ingredient of this method and, when made firm by practice, it will eventually turn out to be the very consciousness of the quest. If a blank state supervenes in meditation it should be ignored and not dwelt upon, for it

will dissipate in the course of the practice. The thought of the blank is more harmful to the meditation than the blank itself. This approaches the Reality from its *ānanda* (bliss) aspect.

3. Sri Ramana Maharshi takes the search for the root of the 'I'-sense to yield the best results, and so it has proved to many of his disciples. It is based on the undeniable fact of one's own existence, which is self-evident and, as existence is by its very definition eternal and absolute, tracing one's 'I' to its source is bound to reveal its truth. The common man identifies this 'I' with the body and becomes inextricably involved in the complex problems of the body, but the seeker has since a long time detached himself from the grossest form of this identification, as is proved by his spiritual urge. When he appears before the Guru and determines to dedicate himself to the life of the spirit, it is obvious that his 'body-I' relation has become attenuated enough to break down when persistently challenged by investigations, which, in this school, consists of the Self-inquiry 'Who am I?' The knot which ties the one to the other grows looser as the seeker's attention is more and more diverted from the insentient body to the nature of his sentient 'I'. This inquiry — *vichāra* — (which is associated with the Maharshi's name), when thoroughly mastered and intelligently applied, acts in two ways: by meditation it wards off all other thoughts and retains the mind's purity, and by analysis and reflection it exposes the insentience and transience of the body, as contrasted with the infinite, intelligent 'I' which pervades it as life and consciousness. As the water in which a sponge has been soaked alone remains after the sponge is removed, so does the intelligent pervader of the body alone remain when the body or body-thought is cut down by the dual process of *vichāra* and *dhyāna*. This approach to the Absolute is from the *Sat* or Being aspect.

4. There is yet another method which is used in *dhyāna* yoga by the few who cannot straightway begin meditation, namely, breath-control (*prāṇāyāma*). A vast literature has been written on this method, with which, however, this yoga does not concern itself, except for the sole purpose of stabilising the mind. It is a proven fact that breathing and thinking function

simultaneously in the waking state, so that if the breath is controlled by a special exercise, the thinking faculty follows suit as a matter of course. With alternate inhaling and exhaling, there comes in between them a short period of rest called *kumbhaka*, which secures a corresponding rest in the mind, and which by practice can be lengthened at will to bring the attention to a focus from which the *dhyāna* can start on its own. This is the strict use that the *dhyāna* yogi makes of the *prāṇāyāma*. If he goes much farther than this, or fails to resort to *dhyāna*, he ceases to be a *dhyāna* yogi but a digressor into practices which lead to unpredictable ends.

The foregoing few methods of *dhyāna* are, let it be clearly understood, mere hints to the *sādhaka* to include in his own peculiar approach. Hints are also the Guru's directions. Meditation, being the spontaneous urge of the external man to surrender himself — his thoughts and feelings — to the Eternal in him, is purely individual, so that it may be truly said that meditation has as many forms as there are meditators. It may even begin with an external worship (*upāsana*) or devotional outpourings and gradually mellows down to the point where thoughts are suspended, including that of the worshipped object, leaving the yogi's own self alone as the ultimate residue. In all cases, the external worship has eventually to turn upon itself and become Self-worship, which is the highest *bhakti* (*parābhakti*), than which there is no higher.

It has to be remembered that one and only one method should be used at a time, or else the yogi will be completely baffled. If he is in doubt about the advantage of his approach, he should try the one that he thinks suits him best, give it a fair trial, and then abandon it, should it prove unsuitable till he finally stumbles on the best and easiest. Generally yogis find their own form of meditation almost from the start, as naturally as free water finds its own level by an immutable natural law. *(To be continued)*

“The rise of the urge to seek the 'I' is itself an act of Divine Grace, for which one has to pray.”
— Sri Bhagavan

THE VOICE OF THAYUMANAVAR

THE SILENT SAGE - PART II

We continue with the life story of Thayumanavar, an 18th Century Tamilian saint, whose poetry beautifully defines the path to Liberation and the exalted states of the Liberated. Biographical notes and translations are by Dr. B. Natarajan.

THE MASTER

One day Thayumanavar went up to the rock-temple for his daily worship. There he met a Sage who belonged to the order of St. Tiru Mula. The Master and the disciple discovered each other. The disciple fell at the feet of the Master, shedding tears of joy and poured out his heart in sublime hymns.

The Master blessed him graciously, took him alone, and accepted his devotion.

“Master” said the disciple, “I shall follow Thee, renouncing home and royal service.”

“Wait. Good soul!” admonished the Teacher. “Be a householder until you beget a child. Then I shall come to initiate you in meditation. Be silent. Rest in peace; keep quiet; have faith. You will reach the supreme state of Bliss.”

Having said this, the Master went away. Thayumanavar shed tears of joy and gratitude at the love of his gracious Master who opened his inner eye and followed his teachings faithfully.

LIBERATION

The free soul, hungering for the inner delight, cannot live in the limitations of a royal court. Its proud pleasures are flimsy shows of vanity. It is a place for flatterers and not for sages and seer-poets.

Thayumanavar would make his life a song offering to the Divine of his heart. He would live in the Divine, for the Divine. He lived in tune with the Infinite and would not seek the lightning smile of royal favour. He would be the king of the Spirit’s kingdom and never a slave of worldly empires. He would enjoy the soul’s birthright.

He remembered God in all the changing phases of life. He aspired for grace and never for gold.

As knowledge dawned upon the aspirant, he rose above the mythic imagination of mental poets, coloured exaggerations, fads, creeds, cults and dogmas. Faith in the inner reality gave him force. Force fructified into grace and grace into knowledge. He drew the mind from the wandering senses into inner recollection, and contemplated

upon the pure reality which he was. He discriminated the Spirit from the body of nature. He internalised his attention, intensified his concentration, controlled his thoughts and lulled his mind to meditation. A dynamic peace possessed him. His heart widened into a deep compassion for all. His equal vision saw one Soul in the king and in the subject. Life in harmony with the Divine was eternal springtime; life in separation was cyclonic winter. His brain thought, his heart loved, his vital liked nothing but the Divine.

The invincible Grace heard his heartbeat. It influenced the king. Chokkanatha was a devotee of Siva and lover of saints. He saw a holy saint in his secretary, Thayumanavar.

“*Thayumanavar*,” said the king one day, “your Pilgrim Soul seeks the inner temple. I see the hidden light flaring up in your emotional symphony. We see the world with a thousand-eyed mind and are deluded. You see the spirit of things with the one-eyed heart. Can the myriad-eyed night equal the one-eyed day? Your soul hungers after the Supreme Reality. State service is a hindrance to your aspirations. Waste not your days in politics and diplomacy. You are no more the king’s servant; the king is your servant. Come, I shall raise a peaceful Ashram for you, and you can fix yourself in yoga there.”

“I am grateful to you, O king; God has heard my prayer from your heart. I am liberated; thanks,” said the saint, and he repaired to the banks of the Kaveri to continue his meditation.

The king raised a fine hermitage on the river bank and served the saint devoutly.

THAT IS MOTHER

The saint was self-absorbed. The mind was nullified like burnt camphor in the flames of self-consciousness. Body-consciousness was lost in the Infinite Spirit. The body changes and falls like the petals of a flower. The immortal Spirit rises up at the magic touch of the Divine Energy generated by meditation. The saint realised the

Self of all, throbbing in his heart. He felt the pinch of hunger when any one was hungry. He shivered when a poor man had no clothes for the winter.

One day the king offered him a rich shawl. At that moment, a poor old lady passed by shivering in the cold. Thayumanavar gave the shawl to the lady, saying, "Mother, you need this more than I."

The king felt insulted and demanded an explanation.

King: Swami, I gave a fine shawl for your use and you have presented it to the old hag of low caste. Why so?

Thayumanavar: No caste, no hag! I gave the shawl to the Universal Mother! It is She who has received back what belonged to Her.

SILENCE MEETS SILENCE

The great silent sage, Sadasiva Brahmam, sanctified the atmosphere of India in those days. He moved steeped in trance. The sky was his roof and earth his home. To see him was to know the Real. His songs were already popular among the learned. On his way to Pudukottah, Sage Sadasiva met Thayumanavar in 1738. Their meeting was like the meeting of Vedanta and Siddhanta.

"*Silence is Peace; Silence is Bliss; Silence is Knowledge*" wrote the sage.

Thayumanavar already a lover of Silence, became yet more silent.

THE KING DIES

The times were troubled by plots of enemy chiefs and by open skirmishes. Now the Maharatta cannon thundered and now the Mussalman powder exploded. The foreigners became aggressive. Peace was in exile and war shook the land with terror. Traitors betrayed masters. Enemy spies created divisions in the camp.

King Chokkanatha was a good man but not a good ruler. He called to his help anybody and everybody. The only true helper was the Tondaman of Pudukottah, a brave hero who guarded the Trisirapuram fort with the help of his Marava heroes. But a double-dealing Iago sent a secret spy to the sabre-rattling Maharattas. The Maharattas had politics in their brain and courage in their heart.

One night when everything seemed quiet, the fort entrance opened; the main door swung aside; trumpets were heard, guns reported; cannons boomed; the Maharattas were in the heart of the city.

Chokkanatha was choked with grief.

He must either become his enemy's prisoner or die, shedding his blood in fighting an overwhelming force.

Chokkallatha would do neither.

He shouted aloud the name of God: "Siva, Siva, how false is the world! How dangerous sovereignty and how heavy the crown! Man has a treacherous tiger in him. How can I trust human nature? I take refuge at Thy feet, Siva ! Siva !"

The king died of a broken heart. The pathetic scene inspired the Naik army with new courage. Raghunatha Raya Tondaman, the famous king of Pudukottah, took charge of the task of guarding the fort. Vigilant swords and cannons kept the Maharatta hordes at bay. The Tondaman crushed the enemies whose plots were leading to a conflagration. The dread of war being over, Rani Meenakshi, the widow of Chokkanatha, assumed sovereignty (1731-1736).

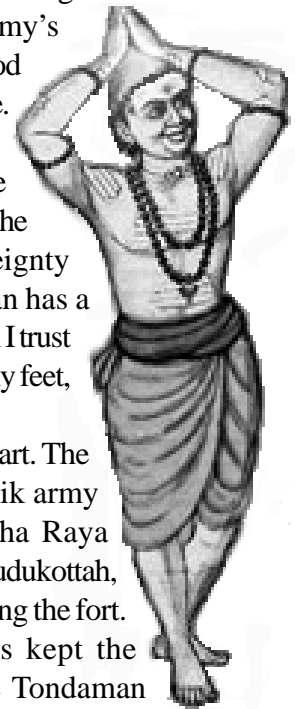
THE LOVE NOOSE

The first man to attract the queen was Saint Thayumanavar.

"Holy Sir" implored Queen Meenakshi, "I am helpless and alone. You are the only wise man whom I can trust. Your head and heart alone can save the Kingdom. Its welfare depends upon you. Come and help me, in the name of my husband who loved you so much!"

The saint took pity upon the helpless queen; he felt obliged to do his best to maintain peace and restore order in the realm. Under his influence, treachery was knocked down like an uprooted tree.

The den of misrule became a heaven of order and discipline, under the control of Thayumanavar. The Rani was all regard for him. But her regard carried passion into her youthful heart. His beauty of person, his strong will, wisdom, sagacity, political acumen, religious fervour, austerity and sweet words, worked like magic upon her imagination. Regard turned into affection, affection into love, love into lust, and lust inflamed hidden passions in the uncontrolled mind. She treated him like her close companion. The friendship ripened into love, and she



approached him alone one night with a pining heart, with passion-lost modesty.

She stood before the meditating saint like an image of lovelorn beauty. The saint knew her wiles.

Thayumanavar: What has brought you here, Queen, at this hour?

Queen: My heart has brought me to you, sir. I offer myself to you in surrender. I love you.

Thayumanavar: But I love none but the Divine in my heart.

Queen: Sir, consider me as your wife.

Thayumanavar: I consider you as my Mother. Mother, do not test me. I am your simple child.

Queen: My lord, I dedicate my life to you; embrace me now, or I shall embrace death.

Thayumanavar: That shall not be, Mother. O God, save me from the noose of lust. Divine Force, save me from this flashing sword of lustful eyes. Let not my purity be killed by its venomous edge.

Queen: My beloved sir, I shall give you all my wealth; love me.

Thayumanavar: Woman, your wealth is filth.

Queen: I surrender my kingdom to you.

Thayumanavar: Your kingdom is wardom. Leave me in peace.

Queen: My man, it is the Queen's order. Obey me.

Thayumanavar: I obey only the King's order. The King of my soul is God.

The Rani cast a lust-lit look and departed like storm-driven lightning. Her love changed into wounded pride; she meant harm and the saint knew it.

Next day, she was determined to force him to her will. She ordered one of her ministers, Narayanappa, to bring the saint to her private apartment. The minister went, saw, came back and reported that the saint had escaped; his whereabouts not known! She sent spies abroad. But before she could avenge herself, civil war raged in the kingdom; Chanda Saheb assailed her capital; conspirators and opportunists shattered her peace and the minister himself rebelled against this woman of intolerable pride and suspicious conduct. We shall see the result of these political upheavals later on.

HOW DID HE ESCAPE?

(To be continued)

Mahanyasa Purvaka Rudrabhishekam

Led by

Murthy Vishnubhatla & Dr. M. G. Prashad

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On

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7:45 am - 8:00 am Guru Vandanam

8:00 am - 9:00 am Arunaprashna Parayanam

9:00 am - 10:00 am Mahanyasa Parayanam

10:00 am - 2:00 pm Rudrabhishekam with
Ekadasha Rudra Parayanam

Luncheon Prasadam

will be served after the program

For more information call 718.560.3196

What is Vairagya

A young man from Trichy asked Sri Bhagavan on the mention in *Upadesa Manjari* of *atyanta vairagyam* (total dispassion) as the qualification of a ripe disciple. He continued: "What is *vairagya*? Detachment from worldly pursuits and desire for salvation. Is it not so?"

M.: Who has not got it?

Each one seeks happiness but is misled into thinking pain-associated pleasures as happiness. Such happiness is transient. His mistaken activity gives him short-lived pleasure. Pain and pleasure alternate with one another in the world. To discriminate between the pain-producing and pleasure-producing matters and to confine oneself to the happiness-producing pursuit only is *vairagya*. What is it that will not be followed by pain? He seeks it and engages in it. Otherwise, the man has one foot in the world and another foot in the spiritual pursuit (without progressing satisfactorily in either field).

—Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, No. 302

BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA, OCEAN OF MERCY

By M. M. Mennon

It happened on 5th may, 1948, during my second visit to Bhagavan Ramana at Tiruvannamalai. I was seated in the hall a few yards away from the couch of Bhagavan, immersed in the serenity and the peaceful silence emanating from Him, when suddenly an idea entered my mind. I had heard that a disciple should get initiation from a guru for the success of his *sadhana* or spiritual discipline, and that that was why Saint Kabir lay himself down on the *ghat* of the Ganges to be touched by the blessed feet of Guru Ramananda who would not otherwise initiate Kabir because he was a Mussalman.

I knew that Bhagavan Ramana did not formally initiate anyone by any mantra except by his benign, penetrating and peaceful look; so I sat in the hall thinking what to do.

It was soon noon, and the bell rang calling devotees to their noonday meal. After lunch, I approached the young *sannyasin* who attended on Bhagavan and requested him to ask Bhagavan whether he would graciously clear a doubt of mine. In the afternoon when Bhagavan took his seat among the devotees the *sannyasin* pointed at me and whispered my request in Bhagavan's ears. Bhagavan readily consented and gave me an encouraging look.

It was very easy for me to make the request, but I felt hopelessly embarrassed to carry out my decision. I thought that it would be an unpardonable crime to disturb the silence of the hall by my attempt to address Bhagavan and that the people in the hall might not look with favour at my audacity. I was confused and did not know how to start. I perspired profusely and felt very shy. I had no courage to open my mouth and so was forced to keep quiet, even though I felt a great urge to talk to Bhagavan.

After about 15 minutes Bhagavan beckoned to the *sannyasin* and asked him to tell me to go ahead with my doubt clearance. Again I felt very shy and nervous and could not speak. Another quarter of an hour elapsed and still I did not address Bhagavan, when Bhagavan told the

sannyasin again to ask me what my doubt was. Seeing how merciful Bhagavan Ramana was and how much interested He was in my welfare, I closed my eyes and prayed to be excused for the sacrilege of addressing Him and disturbing the deep silence prevailing in the hall. I prayed for courage and I felt courage entering my mind. I could not delay any longer and blurted out in Malayalam thus, "Bhagavan! I have heard about your *vichara marga*, but have no clear conception of it. Is it to sit in a quiet place and ask oneself the question 'Who am I' repeatedly or meditate on that question as on a *mantra*."

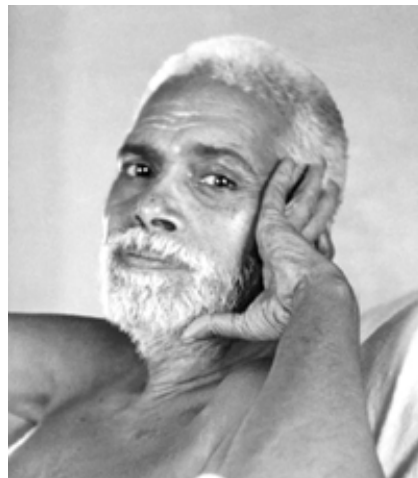
On hearing my words all eyes were turned towards me and I felt very shy. Then Bhagavan looked straight at me and replied tersely and clearly in Malayalam. "No, it is not repeating or meditating on 'Who am I?' It is to dive deep into yourself and seek the place from where the 'I' thought arises in you and to hold on to it firmly to the exclusion of any other thought. Continuous and persistent effort will lead you to the Self."

I was overwhelmed with happiness. Though I had only a vague idea about what Bhagavan said, I felt that Bhagavan had initiated me and that His Grace had descended on me. The bliss I felt cannot be described. I could not contain myself and I felt like sobbing. I would have become overwhelmed with ecstasy in this hour of the fulfillment of my desire, but my neighbor, a Telugu gentleman, who could not follow the conversation between Bhagavan and me, interrupted to ask what Bhagavan had said. I explained that I was unable to speak Telugu and his query ended there.

I am able to recall even now the happiness I felt then in all its intensity, and I consider myself especially blessed by Bhagavan. When I recall this incident I realize how infinitely merciful Bhagavan was to all, and how tenderly he cared for the spiritual welfare of humanity. If we took one step towards Him, he willingly took ten steps towards us.

Glory Be To Bhagavan Ramana!

—from *Fragrant Petals*



The Seeker Will Obtain Guidance and Solace by Staying Near This Hill

ONE day, as we were going up the hill, he [Bhagavan] picked up a small glistening pebble from the path and held it out to me saying,

“Someone from abroad has written asking for a stone taken from a holy part of this hill. He does not know that the whole hill is holy. This hill is Siva Himself. As we identify ourselves with the body, so Siva has chosen to identify Himself with this hill. Arunachala is pure wisdom, appearing in the shape of a hill. It is out of compassion to those who seek Siva, that Siva has chosen to reveal Himself as a hill visible to the eye. The seeker will obtain guidance and solace by staying near this hill.”

—Recorded by Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami



Letters from Sri Ramanasramam

By Suri Nagamma. Includes all of the 273 letters from all previous books and incorporates her 28 'Recollections', formerly published in *Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam*. The author, who was a beloved devotee of the Master, wonderfully captures the unique personality and teachings of the Sage, while graphically recording many incidents in the Old Hall. The Maharshi had personally gone through most of the letters and encouraged her in this writing by specifically relating many incidents and dialogues to her so they could be recorded.

pp. 744, hardbound

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Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation have been going on in a few places near or in large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please contact the individuals below for more information.

Atlanta Area — Mangalam Kalyanam (678-423-7324 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

Ann Arbor, MI — Mohan & Gayatri (734-623-7199 cedararbor@yahoo.com)

Connecticut Area — Prashanth & Shobana (860-691-1862 / vprashanth@msn.com)

Dublin, Ohio — Abilash & Madhavi (614-789-9058 / mungamuru@hotmail.com)

Miami, Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Robinson (954-755-4758 / arunahill@earthlink.net)

San Francisco Area — Swaminathan & Sangeeta (510-979-1679 / nachiketas@hotmail.com)

Washington, D.C. Area — Prakash & Mamtha Adiseshan (703-257-5589 / adiseshan@worldnet.att.net)

Ottawa, Canada — Anantha Padmanabhan (613-733-8250 / padmanabhan_ananth@hotmail.com)

Toronto, Canada — Krishnan & Padma Sastri (905-849-6005 / psastri@hotmail.com)

Vancouver, Canada — Zoya (604-921-9692 / zoyaonline@yahoo.ca)

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