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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Hari Om

The all-pervasive presence of the Lord has often inspired the champions of the path of devotion to relate to the Divine as a life partner. This is especially true of the female saints of India like Meerā, Lāl Ded, Akka Mahādevi, etc. Āndāl - from the southern state of Tamil Nadu - belongs to this exalted category and her ecstatic love poured out in the form of poetry that has stood the test of time. While her life is shrouded in the mysterious sands of time, her legacy of popularising 'the path of unbridled love towards the Divine' amongst the masses, cutting across caste lines, is unique and unparalleled.

When we realise the maze-like structure of this material world, we try frantically to find the exit door and many a time, get confused about the number of paths that appear in front of us. Many of these seem to be heading in totally opposite directions and we are at our wits' end. If you identify with this situation, here is help at hand. Swāmi Chidānanda resolves many such apparent contradictions in his featured article, 'The Way of Rising'.

The temples of India are sites designed to recharge the spiritual energy of human beings and the science behind their architecture is one of the branches of knowledge that are well-documented in the ancient texts on *āgama shāstra*. This system has inspired many a great edifice across the world, including the great Sun temple at Konark, the Brihadeeshwara temple at Tanjore and the Angkor Wat temple complex in Cambodia. In this issue, we are taking you to one such awe-inspiring temple that is fairly well-preserved, with worship happening till this day. Please read about the Lingarāja temple at Bhubaneswar, which is a fine example of the Kalinga style of architecture and is a sight to behold.

Swāmi Chidānanda recalls his meeting with Sivāya Subramuniya Swāmi, one of the foremost champions of orthodox Hinduism outside India.

Here is wishing that the contents of this issue help you progress on the only path that truly matters in gaining lasting happiness in life.

For Swāmi Chidānanda
Cdr HC Guruprasad (IN, Retd)



Inner Flame

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- Compiled by Dakshu Mansukhani



Immersed in bliss

Just as in North India, Rādhā is celebrated as the 'Queen of Bhakti' (devotion) and among female devotees, Mirā Bāi's name is taken as an example of complete devotion or *bhakti* to Lord Krishna, so also in Tamil Nadu, Āndāl is remembered for her pure love and devotion. In one of the two poems she sang and which are still sung today, she emphasizes that the ultimate goal of life is to seek surrender and refuge at the Lord's feet who, in her case, was Lord Vishnu in the form of Shri Krishna.

Āndāl is one of the most extraordinary personalities in religious history. She is known in her native tongue of Tamil as an *Ālvār*, one who is

'immersed' in the depths of enjoyment of God, the Omnipresent Mysterious One. Tradition accounts for 12 *Ālvārs*, of which Āndāl is the only female. Between the fifth and ninth centuries, in the Tamil-speaking region of South India, these saints revitalized the Indian religious milieu, sparking a renewal of devotional worship throughout the subcontinent. Travelling from place to place, from temple to temple, from holy site to holy site, they composed exceedingly beautiful poetry on their Divine Beloved, Vishnu, as an expression of their love for Him. Anyone can see why their poetry was so attractive; both impassioned and philosophical at the same time, with their words cutting across all barriers of caste and class, attracting one and all to their faith. In doing so, they sculpted a new religious heritage of intensely emotional *bhakti*, or untainted love of the Divine, whose impact is still felt today in the religious life in India. Āndāl, whose life and poetry are celebrated every December-January, is the most visible contributor to this heritage.

The Mysterious Life of Āndāl

The life of Āndāl is expressive in its romantic simplicity. Her birth is reminiscent of the 'birth' of Seetā in the Tretā Yuga. A devout *brāhmaṇa* named Vishnucitta lived in Villiputtur, a town near Madurai. His daily duties included procuring flowers for the worship of the

Lord at the local temple. One morning, as he went about his business, he discovered a baby girl lying under a *tulasi* plant in his flower garden. Having no family of his own, Vishnucitta felt it was God's grace that gave him this child; he named her 'Godai' or 'a gift of Mother Earth'. Filled with joy, he took her home and raised her as his own.

Godai grew up in an atmosphere of love and devotion. Vishnucitta doted on her in every respect, singing songs to her about his Beloved Krishna, teaching her all the stories and philosophy he knew, and sharing with her his love of Tamil poetry. The devotion Vishnucitta had for his Beloved Lord intensified further in his daughter, and before long, she was passionately in love with Lord Krishna. Even as a child, Godai made up her mind to marry none but the Lord of Brindāvana, and refused to think of any human being in similar terms. She imagined what it would be like to be His bride, playing the role of His beloved, enjoying His presence. And unknown to her father, she adorned herself daily with the flower-garland he prepared for the Lord at the temple. After admiring her reflection and thinking of herself as His ideal bride, she would put the garland back for her father to take to the temple and offer to the Lord. In a poem which she later wrote, she unabashedly admits it:

"Āndāl from the swan filled Pudukkottai,
Sang she, in her sweet voice,
Several enchanting sweet odes,
For being sung during,
The worship and adulation of Pāvai.

They are but a garland to him,
***From her who wore them first,
Before presenting them to Him.***



One day, Vishnucitta noticed a strand of Godai's hair on one of the garlands. Shocked and saddened by this desecration of what was meant only for the Lord, he scolded Godai for her misuse of the garland and discarded it. He carefully prepared a new one and offered it to the Lord, begging His pardon all the while. That night, the Lord appeared to Vishnucitta in his dream and asked him why he discarded Godai's garland instead of offering it to Him. He told Vishnucitta that He missed the scent of Godai's body in the flowers, and that He preferred them that way. Would he please continue to give the garlands once worn by Godai? Overcome with emotion, Vishnucitta awoke and cried tears of both joy and remorse. It dawned on him that his daughter was someone whose love of God was so intense and pure that even he had not comprehended its extent. Her spiritual

depth was such that the Lord Himself wished to share her presence. From this day on, she became known as 'Āndāl', the girl who 'ruled' over the Lord.

Āndāl blossomed into a beautiful young woman as she came of marriageable age. But when asked to marry, she stubbornly refused, saying that she would only agree to marry Sri Ranganātha, the Lord at the great temple-town of Srirangam. Vishnucitta despaired, wondering what was to become of his daughter. One night, Lord Ranganātha appeared in his dream and asked that Āndāl be sent to Him in all her wedding finery. Simultaneously, the Lord appeared before the priests at Srirangam and asked them to prepare for the coming of Āndāl. Once again, Vishnucitta was filled with both joy and sadness; joy that his beloved daughter would attain her goal, but sadness at losing her at the same time. He made all the wedding preparations and arranged for Āndāl's journey in a palanquin to Srirangam.

Āndāl waited with excited anticipation as the wedding party approached Lord Ranganātha's shrine. As they entered the temple, she jumped out of the palanquin, unable to restrain herself any longer. Running into the temple sanctum, she embraced Lord Ranganātha and disappeared in a blaze of glory, having joined her Lord. She was only fifteen years old.

A Champion of the Bhakti movement

This 9th-century mystic poet, who wrote exclusively in the Tamil language, was



**The Divine Couple:
Āndāl and Rangan in Srivilliputtur**

elevated to the status of a goddess within two centuries of her birth and had (and still has) a tremendous influence on the religious milieu, particularly in South India along with the other eleven Vaishnava saints, the *Alvārs*, who 'dived deep and drowned themselves in the love of god', indicating their complete devotion to Vishnu, often addressed in Tamil as *Tirumāl*, the 'Sacred Dark One'. Today, even though some question her existence, insisting that she is a fabrication of her poet-saint father's imagination - in as much as a girl couldn't have possibly displayed such erudition, erotic longing, mastery of language and poetic imagination embodied in hallowed verse - one cannot deny the influence she has had, especially among women-devotees of Vishnu and his avatar, Shri Krishna. The additional attraction of Āndāl's poetry to women devotees was that it was written in the poet's mother

tongue, familiar to the people, as against the little-known and used Sanskrit of the high-class Brahmins. This genre of poetry in medieval India lays emphasis on God as an entity that is easily accessible to all, celebrates the spirit of personal prayer and stresses on the composing of devotional hymns. Being the earliest proponents of the *bhakti* movement, both the Alvārs as also their counterparts, the Shiva-worshipping *Nāyanmārs*, had this particular characteristic in common. The movement thus strikes against the caste system. The *bhakti* movement became instrumental in the retreat of established and wealthy Buddhist and Jaina sects and, simultaneously, curtailed Brahmin monopoly on religion, even as kings converted to the Hindu faith. Undeniably, Āndāl played a great role in these developments, especially through the two works which are attributed to her.

Contribution to Literature

Āndāl's two compositions, written in her short life, are in Tamil and are unique in their literary, philosophical, religious, and artistic content. Her contribution is even more remarkable, considering that she was a teenage girl when she composed these poems, at a time when there is no other record of Tamil women composing poetry. Far from being the prattling of a youngster, Āndāl's verses display a literary and religious maturity far beyond her years.

Āndāl's first work, *Tiruppāvai* or 'The Path to Krishna', was composed when she was about thirteen. *Tiruppāvai* is a poem of thirty verses in

which Āndāl imagines herself to be a cowherd girl during the incarnation of Lord Krishna. In it, she yearns to serve Him and achieve happiness not just in this birth, but for all eternity, giving in lyrical, devotional verses, the descriptions of vows undertaken to obtain a good husband, even as she acknowledges Vishnu's incarnations as Vāmana, Shri Rāma and Shri Krishna:

*We worship your feet which measured
the world then,
We worship your fame of winning over
the king of Southern Lanka,
We worship thine valour in breaking the
ogre who came like a cart,
We worship thy strength which threw
the calf on the tree,
We worship thine goodness in making
the mountain as an umbrella,
And we worship the great spear in your
hand which led to your victory,
We have come here to sing always for
ever your praises,
And get as gift the drums to sing,
And worship our Goddess Pāvai.*

In another part of the poem, she refers specifically to Krishna, the 'worshipped one', 'Him':

*To Him the enchanter of all,
To Him the son of Mathura in the north,
To Him who played and frolicked,
In the shores of holy Yamuna,
To Him who is the ornamental lamp,
Of the family of cowherds,
And to the Dāmodara who made,
His mother's womb holy,
We came after a holy bath,
And offered pure flowers at his feet,*

*And sang with our mouth,
And brought the thoughts of him in our
mind,
And we were sure,
That all our mistakes of the past,
And all that we will do in future,
Will vanish as ashes in fire,
Oh, Goddess Pāvai.*

In this month of Mārgazhi
On this day filled with the light of moon,
Come for bathing,
Oh ladies who are richly dressed,
And Oh ladies in rich homes of
cowherds,
For he with the sharp spear,
He who kills his enemies without
mercy,
He who is the son of Nanda gopa
He who is the darling son of Yasodā
Who wore scented flower garlands,
He who is a lion cub,
He who is pretty in black colour,
He who has small red eyes,
He who has a face like the well-lit
moon,
And He, who is our Lord Nārāyana
Is going to give us big drums,
So that we bathe and worship Our
Goddess Pāvai,
In a way that the whole world sings
about.*

Exhibiting not only her own deep rapture
in her worship, with great generosity, she
also calls out to her friends to experience
the same joy:

*Oh daughter of the cattle baron,
Who milks herds of cows,
And wages war on enemies
And makes his enemies lose their*

*strength,
Oh Golden tendril,
Oh lass who has the mount of Venus,
Like the hood of the snake,
Wake up and come,
When your flock of friends,
Have come to your courtyard,
And sing of Krishna,
Who has the colour of the cloud,
Oh rich, rich lady,
How can you neither move nor talk,
And lie in deep trance,
And not worship our Goddess Pāvai.*

Her other, longer composition,
Nāchiār Thirumozhi ('A Woman's Song'
or 'Sacred Sayings of the Goddess') is a
set of 143 verses, in fourteen sections of
10 or 11 verses each, in which she
expresses her restlessness and
eagerness to marry Krishna and Krishna
alone. These 143 verses are a part of the
4000 divine hymns of *Nālāyira Divya
Prabandham*, composed by the 12
Ālvārs, and compiled in its present form
by Nāthamuni during the 9th–10th
centuries. These were sung by the
Ālvārs in devotional ecstasy in various
shrines of Vishnu, made famous as
Mangalashasanasthalas, meaning
'praying that the holy shrines be happy
all the time'.

Nāchiār Tirumozhi describes the
quest for Vishnu, primarily through the
voice of a lovelorn girl (often read as
contiguous with the poet's own voice).
The poem is erotically charged,
sensuous and deeply felt, and is
remarkable for its complexity and frank
descriptions of feminine desire (even

when that desire is primarily directed towards god). This poem fully reveals Āndāl's intense longing for Vishnu, the Divine Beloved. Utilizing classical Tamil poetic conventions and interspersing stories from the Vedas and Purānas, Āndāl creates imagery that is possibly unparalleled in the whole gamut of Indian religious literature. However, conservative Vaishnava institutions do not encourage the propagation of *Nāchiār Tirumozhi* as much as they encourage Tiruppāvai. An example of two verses from one set of 10, entitled 'The Song to Rain Clouds: Clouds spread like Blue Cloth' are appended here:

8.1. Clouds spread like blue cloth
across the vast sky
Has Tirumāl my beautiful Lord of
Venkatam,
where cool streams leap come with
you?

Tears gather and spill between my
breasts like waterfalls.
He has destroyed my womanhood.
How does this bring him pride?

8.2. Clouds that spill lovely pearls
what message has the dark-hued lord
of Venkatam sent through you?
The fire of desire has invaded
my body I suffer.
I lie awake here in the thick of night,
a helpless target for the cool southern
breeze.

Some of Āndāl's verses expressing love for Lord Vishnu are written with such bold sensuality and

startlingly savage longing, hunger and inquiry, that even today many of her most erotic poems are rarely rendered publicly. In one such verse, Āndāl dispenses with metaphor and imagines that she herself is lying in the arms of Krishna, and making love to him:

*"My life will be spared / Only if he
will come / To stay for me for one night / If
he will enter me, / So as to leave / the
imprint of his saffron paste / upon my
breasts / Mixing, churning, maddening
me inside, / Gathering my swollen
ripeness / Spilling nectar, / As my body
and blood / Bursts into flower."*

The impact of Āndāl's works on the daily religious life of the South Indian has been tremendous. Just like the Ramayana, people are never tired of listening to the Tiruppāvai. The poem itself is recited with great religious fervour by women, men, and children of all ages, particularly in Tamil Nadu. The daily services in most Vaishnava temples and households include its recitation. Both of these works, particularly the Tiruppāvai, have been extensively commented upon, by innumerable scholars in a number of languages over the centuries. Today, there are many translations of the Tiruppāvai in Western languages, which make these poems available to an even wider audience.

Āndāl is, till today, one of the best loved poet-saints of the Tamils. Pious tradition reckons her to be the veritable descent of *Bhoomi Devi* (Mother Earth)

in bodily form to show humanity the way to His lotus feet. She is present in all Sri Vaishnava temples, in India and elsewhere, next to her Lord, as she always desired, an endearing feature of the depictions being the distinctive bun or tuft of hair held together at the side of her head, instead of the usually worn bun on top of or at the back of a woman's head. During the month of *Mārghazi* (December-January), discourses on the

Tiruppāvai in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Hindi and English take place all over India.

Sources:

<https://ramanuja.org/sv/alvars/andal/>
Venkatesan, *The Secret Garland: Āndāl's Tiruppavai and Nacciya Tirumoli*. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2016.
Translation of THIRUPPAVAI from Hindupedia Wikipedia



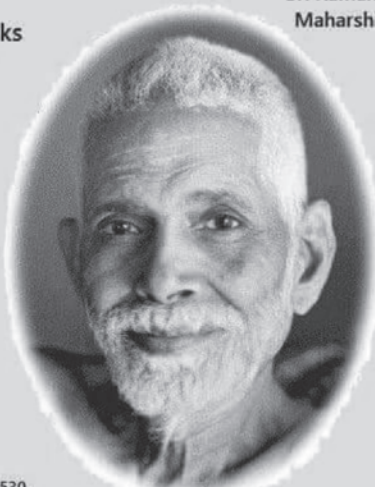
Even better than the man who thinks
"I have renounced everything"
is the one who does his duty
but does not think
"I do this" or "I am the doer".

Even a *sannyasi* who thinks
"I am a *sannyasi*"
cannot be a true *sannyasi*,

whereas a householder
who does not think
"I am a householder"
is truly a *sannyasi*.

~Talk 530.

Sri Ramana
Maharshi





- Swāmi Chidānanda



There is sometimes much confusion with regard to the roadmap to Self-realization, the ultimate goal of life. Many are the illustrious teachers and numerous are the paths that they prescribe. Typically, we are inspired by a bunch of teachings from someone and that introduces us to the vast domain of spirituality. Once we are in, we get to know many other kinds of teachings and there seem to be many contradictions between what different teachers, gurus and guides say. Let us attempt to recognize the common ground and reconcile the differences.

Assuring words

The popular verse¹ in *Bhaja Govindam*, stating that 'satsanga' (holy company) is the first and major step towards liberation, has always inspired millions,

giving them new confidence every time they feel lost.

*Holy company awakens detachment,
Detachment dispels false values;
Freedom from delusion leads to seeing
the unwavering truth,
The truth then blesses us with liberation!*

'Satsanga', translated as 'holy company', is actually much more in its significance. Worth mentioning are two of its many meanings. Reading (or listening to audio versions of) elevating spiritual literature is also a form of *satsanga*. In a sublime sense, *satsanga* can mean 'being with the Self, as the Self' for the Self is the ultimate truth (*sat*). The extrovert mind endlessly dwells on sense pleasures where there is the division between the 'enjoyer' and the 'enjoyed'. Hardly anyone suspects that this division is created by thought only. Vedānta declares that there is no division whatsoever in life. We have to, however, rise to the higher consciousness to see this truth of oneness of all there is. The beautiful verse quoted above charts the path to arrive at the elevated consciousness. In short, this *satsanga* is apparently a simple way but actually elusive to most people. Many spiritual events get practically reduced to a mechanical affair. Both the speakers and the audience remain caught in some patterns and the fire of inquiry does not

get kindled. In principle, however, the potential in a *satsanga* can never be denied.

Geetā's advice

The fourth chapter of the Bhagavad-Geetā mentions and extols many kinds of spiritual practices, calling all of them different *yajnas* (literally, 'sacrifices'). Every one of them, the Song Celestial² says emphatically, is a powerful means to bring about inner purification, and thus pave the way to liberation. A verse says, without getting into any religious technicality, that living in self-control (which could simply be moderation in everything) is a *yajna*. Exercises of breath regulation, acts of charity, adherence to regular study of the scriptures and the practice of other limbs of the 8-fold (*ashtānga*) yoga, qualify for being called³ a *yajna*. In the context of our discussion, all of these are facets of the way to rise.

We take the remarks by Lord Shri Krishna as a morale booster when he accords the status of a *yajna* to very many spiritual practices (*sāadhanās*). He unhesitatingly praises all of them as the sure tools to wash away⁴ our mental impurities. The rationale behind such praise is that every one of these practices involves putting aside our ego or the pleasure-seeking habits of our conditioned mind. Attachment to 'I, me and my' is the quintessential obstacle, as we seek to rise in spirituality. A variety of *sāadhanās*, taken up with sincerity and dedication, expose the foolishness of our attachments and we let go of many a rigid position that we had earlier clung to.

The Different Yogas



It is in this spirit that we have always held the different *yogas* – *bhakti*, *jnāna*, *rāja* and *karma* – in high regard in Sanātana Dharma (Hinduism). *Bhakti* makes our thoughts flow towards God and, in the process, our ego is no more fed. *Jnāna* gives us glimpses of our true nature and our contemplation of the Self causes gradual starvation as far as the little, separate self is concerned. *Rājayoga* can ably tame all our negative energies and bring about '*nādi-shuddhi*' (purification of the channels within us where the subtle energy – *prāna* – flows). *Karmayoga* too weakens our self-interest.

In a crisp way, Shri Ramana Maharshi declares⁵ that all the four celebrated *yogas* are meant for the separate self to stay in (and merge with) the Spiritual Heart of ours. Looked at in that way, the *yogas* (the paths) are time-tested ways to manage the thought-flow within us. Flawed thought-processes have caused our bondage and sorrow. When the basic error (superimposition, *avidyā* or *adhyāsa*) is removed, the

spiritual awakening, which reveals liberation, just happens.

Need for Caution

The rishis of yore knew the typical pitfalls that seekers fall into. It is not at all uncommon to find scholars of the Upanishadic literature get terribly diverted by the well-known temptations of this world. They then pay lip service to Vedānta. They may, at best, earn much praise for their lectures or books but, as regards their own spiritual journey, they are stuck way behind. Name, fame, lust, greed and different forms of hidden insecurity can hold back even learned people, coming in the way of their smooth progress. The Mundaka Upanishad calls a spade a spade, when it exhorts us to be vigilant (*apramatta*)⁶. The divine commentator (Bhagavān Bhāshyakāra) Shri Shankarāchārya defines *pramāda* (lack of care) as the longing for external gratification. Scholarship is known to be inadequate as regards keeping our longings under check.

*Upāsana*s, vows, prayers and *japa* come into the picture here. Though they are criticized on the higher plane of pure *jnāna*, they are, in fact, very useful to most people. It is an irony that they prepare a seeker to reach the higher ground of operation and, after a seeker reaches there, they look ridiculous to her (or him).

She had taken their help at one time but she may mock at them later. She may even call them 'traps' or 'obstacles'! The ground reality, however, is that these 'lower exercises' weaken the tendencies

towards '*pramāda*' (error, carelessness) and strengthen alertness. Therefore, our scriptures have 'high plateau' portions, where it is loudly said that no amount of *karma* can liberate us and 'low plateau' portions, where we are strongly advised to be regular in different *karmas* that purify the inner equipment (*antahkarana*).

'No Way' versus 'Find Your Own Way'

Advanced Vedānta dismisses all paths. There is no journey at all, it declares, and insists that it is a matter of 'being' rather than 'becoming'. The Vedānta, however, is most



accommodating when it comes to the larger number of novices (and unprepared souls) who pick up the Upanishads anyway. For such people, it is said that they have to identify their *swadharma*, where they belong, and they should adhere to their chosen path (one of *bhakti*, *jnāna*, etc.) with steadfastness. Mature students, therefore, find there is no contradiction between the two positions of 'no path to truth' and 'multiple paths to truth'.

Earnestness can be said to be the most important ingredient of a successful spiritual voyage. If we are earnest, we will figure out where we stand, what our follies have been and how we ought to proceed. When we are not earnest, we live in ways that foster deception. A variety of internal fissures develop in our personality. Lack of sincerity at a deep level is the cause of endless confusion and, as a result, lots of frustration too. Therefore, some intense introspection can be the medicine for the ailment called 'lack of clarity about how to get going' or, how to find the *way to rise*.

Notes:

- 1 'satsangatve nihsangatvam..' – Bhaja Govindam, verse 9.
- 2 'samyamāgnishu juhvati' – Geetā 4.26
- 3 Geetā 4.28
- 4 'yajna-kshapita-kalmashāh' – Geetā 4.30
- 5 'hrit-sthale manah-svasthatā' – Upadesha Sāra, verse 10
- 6 'apramattena veddhavyam' Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.4



The true Middle Way is not the smooth path of least resistance negotiated with easy compromises and happy mediums; but rather, it is that path of practice which most effectively counters the mental defilements that impede progress by resisting the aspirant every step of the way. The spiritual path is often arduous, being full of hardship and discomfort, while the inner forces opposed to success are formidable, and even intimidating. Thus, the work of the spiritual warrior requires potent counter measures to subvert the inertial powers of laziness, craving, pride and self-importance.

-Ajhan Maha Boowa



Stories teach

The Sun and the Cave

- Sufi

One day, the Sun and a cave struck up a conversation. The Sun had trouble understanding what 'dark' meant and the cave didn't quite get the hang of 'light and clear', so they decided to change places.

The cave went up to the Sun and said, "Ah, I see, this is beyond wonderful. Now come down and see where I have been living."

The Sun went down to the cave and said, "Gee, I don't see any difference."

When the Sun went down, it took its light along and even the darkest corners were illuminated. That's why the Sun couldn't see any difference.

I love one of the quotes from an old book that said "The enlightened ones

can never be sent to hell or pushed into darkness. They carry their heaven on their shoulders all the time".

We thought that heaven is a place where we are supposed to go; perhaps, it is a state of mind we are supposed to achieve.

If you are full of darkness within, full of negativity, fear and doubt, you unknowingly become a cave. It's a hell within and no matter how much you accumulate, you still remain hollow.

If you are illuminated like the Sun, then the darkness of the cave wouldn't matter. You could be in the worst of circumstances; you'll still be able to find a blessing somewhere.

You'll be carrying your heaven with you.



We humans prefer a manageable complexity to an unmanageable simplicity.

**-Bruno Barnhart,
Benedictine-Camaldolese monk**



- Compiled by Ratna Viswanath

Bhubaneshwar, the capital of the state of Odisha, is a city of temples, several of which are important from an architectural standpoint. Lingarāja Temple, dedicated to Lord Tribhubaneshwara or Lingarāja, is one of the oldest temples in Bhubaneshwar and is the most prominent landmark of the city. It is one of the major tourist attractions of the state. Bhubaneshwar, Konark and Puri constitute the 'Swarna-tribhuja' (golden triangle) of Odisha and attract a large number of pilgrims and tourists.



Lingarāja temple was constructed between 1025 and 1065 A.D. It is a majestic temple and is 180 feet tall. Noted critic and historian James Fergusson (1808-1886) has described it as 'one of the finest examples of purely Hindu Temples in India'.

The temple receives an average of 6,000 visitors per day and receives lakhs of visitors during festivals. It is

maintained by the Temple Trust Board and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The temple precincts are open only to Hindus.

The Origin of the Temple and the Legend associated with it

Lord Shiva told Devi Pārvati that Bhubaneshwar was favoured by Him over Varanasi. Pārvati decided to see the city for Herself. She went there in the guise of a cowherdess. As She was moving around in the city, two demons by name Kritti and Vāsa confronted Her and desired to marry Her. Even though Pārvati refused, they kept following Her. Finally, She asked the demons to carry Her on their shoulders and vanquished them by crushing them under Her own weight. Shiva then created the Bindu Saras lake to quench Her thirst, and took abode here as Krittivāsas or Lingarāja. The *lingam* is 'swayambhu' (self-manifested).

Bhubaneshwar is known as *Ekāmra Kshetra*, as the deity of Lingarāja was originally under a mango tree (*eka āmra* or *ekāmra*), as noted in *Ekāmra Purāna*, a 13th-century Sanskrit treatise. The city derived its name from 'Tribhubaneshwara', the presiding deity of this temple.

The Lingarāja temple is said to have been first built by the ruler Jajāti Kesari of the Somavanshi dynasty, with

later additions from the Gangā rulers. Also known as the Pānduvanshi / Kesari dynasty, the Somavanshis ruled parts of present-day Odisha between the 9th and 12th centuries.

An important aspect of the temple is that it represents the syncretisation of Shaivism and Vaishnavism sects in Odisha. Shiva is worshipped here as Harihara, a combined form of Vishnu and Shiva. The temple also has images of Vishnu, possibly because of the rising prominence of the Jagannāth sect, influenced by the Gangā rulers, who built the Jagannāth Temple in Puri in the 12th century.

Architecture and Layout

The temples of Odisha are considered masterpieces of Indian Architecture for their detailed plan, proportions, seamless joints, elegant craftsmanship and impressive dimensions. The Lingarāja temple is an outstanding specimen of the Orissa style of temple-building and represents Odia architecture at its mature best.



A gigantic structure dominating the entire landscape of Bhubaneswar, the temple stands within a spacious compound (with area of nearly 2,50,000 sq. ft.) The temple faces east and is built of sandstone and laterite.

A fascinating aspect of the structure is the way the turrets inserted on the ribs of the tower incorporate miniature replicas of the tower itself. Moreover, there is an optical illusion at play, which is why this 180-foot-high temple looks bigger than it actually is. Each inch of the tower is sculpted. The temple's walls are adorned with intricate carvings and inscriptions and add to its architectural elegance.

The boundary wall has a thickness of 7.5 ft. Alongside the inner face of the wall, there is a terrace to protect the compound from any external attacks. There is a viewing platform beside the compound wall, offering a good view of the main exteriors. This was originally erected for a visit by Lord Curzon, when he was Viceroy.

The *Shivalingam* in the sanctum of the temple rises to a height of 8 inches above the floor level and is 8 feet in diameter. It is believed to be of granite.

The temple is built in the *rekhaddeula* style with four components or frontal projected sections namely, *deula* or *vimāna* (structure containing the *garbhagrha* or *sanctum sanctorum*), the *yajana-mandapa* (the hall for prayers) or *jagamohana* (assembly hall), *nata-mandira* (festival hall or dance hall) and *bhoga-mandapa* (hall of offerings).



These four structures are in axial alignment and progressively descending in height. The *nata-mandira* is associated with the rising prominence of the *devadāsi* system that existed during the time. The *nata-mandira* and the *bhoga-mandapa* are of later origin, when compared to the other two main sections.

The *vimāna* and *jagamohana* are awe-inspiring and a source of wonder, as to how big blocks of rocks could be lifted to such great heights during construction, when modern technology was not available. The *jagamohana* is decorated with various sculptures. In its northern and southern sections, it has windows with balustrades. The *nata-mandira* and the *bhoga-mandapa* are open halls. There are life-size images of the *pārshva-devatās* namely, Pārvati, Ganesha and Kārtikeya in the northern, southern and western niches respectively. These are made of chlorite.

Inside the temple compound are a large number of small shrines

dedicated to several gods and goddesses. The Bhagawati temple is located in the northwest corner of the courtyard.

The main entrance is located in the east, while there are small entrances in the north and south. One can enter the temple through the 'lion-gate', which has statues of lions on both the sides of the gate. A depiction of lions crushing an elephant has been showcased at this entrance. The door in the gate of the entrance porch is made of sandalwood. While entering the temple, a trident can be seen, which consists of a statue of Lord Shiva and two statues of Lord Vishnu on both the sides of the gate.

The exquisite carvings depicting chores of daily life, the activity centres, etc., make the temple a place for social and cultural gatherings, somewhat like a modern community centre.

Three distinct *purāṇic* episodes are found on the walls of the *sanctum* and of the *jagamohana*. On the southern door of the *jagamohana*, the marriage scene of Lord Shiva has been depicted where Shiva wears the crown of a bridegroom but is otherwise a *digambara*. The images of Bhrukuti, Brahmā and Pārvati are associated with the scene. On the southern facade of the *sanctum* is a scene of Yashodā churning curd and child Shri Krishna disturbing her. The image of Nanda is also associated with it. The third episode on the western side of the *vimāna* is a simple depiction of Lord Shiva's marriage.

The *bhoga-mandapa* is huge and has four doors, one on each of the sides. The exterior walls of the hall have decorative sculptures of men and beasts. The hall has a pyramidal roof made of up several horizontal layers, arranged in sets of two, with an intervening platform. It bears an inverted bell and a *kalasha* at the top.

The *nata-mandira* has one main entrance and two side entrances. The side walls of the hall have decorative sculptures displaying women and couples. It has a flat roof sloping in stages. There are thick pylons inside the hall.

The *jagamohana* has entrances from south and north and has a 98-foot-tall roof. The hall has a pyramidal roof made of up several horizontal layers arranged in sets of two, with intervening platforms, as in the *bhoga-mandapa*. The facade to the entrances is decorated with perforated windows with lions sitting on hind legs. The inverted bell above the second unit is adorned by a *kalasha* and lions.

The *sanctum* is square in shape from the inside.

The vast Bindu Sāgar (Saras) lake is the centre around which are located the multitude of temples of Bhubaneshwar. It is located in the north side of the Lingarāja temple. The 1300 feet-long and 700 feet-wide lake is the centre of activities for the people of Old Town and is the hub of temple festivities.

On the western banks of Bindu Sāgar, lies the beautiful garden of



Ekāmra Kānana (forest of a single mango tree). The garden is home to a variety of plants, traditionally associated with Hindu gods and goddesses and having spiritual and medicinal significance. It covers a vast expanse of over 500 acres and is the biggest botanical garden in the city.

Festivals and special pujas

The *lingam* is worshipped everyday with milk, water and *bhānga*. 22 worship services are offered each day. Once a year, an image of Lord Lingarāja is taken to the Jalamandir in the centre of the Bindu Sāgar lake.

Mahāshivarātri festival is the major festival celebrated in the temple and in 2012, this event was witnessed by 2,00,000 visitors.

Rukuna Ratha Yātra is held on

Ashokāshtami in April. ‘*Rukuna Ratha*’ literally means the chariot which does not take a U-turn. Both these festivities draw huge crowds to the temple.

Nearby places of interest

Other important temples in Bhubaneshwar are the Ananta Vāsudeva, Rājā Rāni, Mukteshwara, Kedāreshwara, Siddheshwara, Parasurāmeshwara, Brahmeshwara temples. The Tribal Museum and the Khandagiri and Udayagiri Caves are also places that are worth seeing.

Plans for renovation of areas surrounding the temple

The Odisha State government has announced a special package for the development and beautification of the area around the Lingarāja temple. A 66-acre Ekāmra Kshetra Yojanā has been launched as part of this project.

The renovation of historic water tanks, modern provisions for parking, Lingarāja Heritage Project, development

of Kedāra Gouri and Mukteshwara temple premises, e-auto programme and establishment of a heritage interpretation centre will be carried out. A park will be set up in front of Lingarāja Temple and vehicle movement in front of the temple will be banned. Development of amenities for tourists will be the priority.

Bindu Sāgar water tank will be cleaned, using modern technology; other historical tanks will be renovated. This apart, security in the temple will be strengthened. More open area will be created in front of the temple.

Getting there

The nearest airport and the nearest railway station is Bhubaneshwar. The old town and Lingarāja Temple can be accessed by city transport buses, auto rickshaws and taxis.

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Fleeting Moments, Enduring Impressions

SIVĀYA SUBRAMUNIYA SWĀMI An Embodiment of Inspiring Dynamism

- Swāmi Chidānanda

The setting

It was perhaps a summer day in the year 1995. I was serving as the Resident Āchārya at the Chinmaya Mission San Jose (CMSJ) in the San Francisco Bay Area (the Silicon Valley). The Secretary of the Mission Center, Ms Uma Jeyarasasingam, had come to know that the famous Swāmiji of Hawaii was in town and was interested in paying a visit to our center. When she discussed the matter with some of us, everyone was delighted and said, in one voice, "Let us welcome him here!"

So it was that the next morning at about 9 am, the tall white man in orange robes – Sivāya Subramuniya Swāmi – was at 1050, Park Avenue, San Jose, which was the nice facility where CMSJ was running at that time. This two-storeyed building had been a private law school, *The Lincoln School of Law*, before Pujya Gurudev Swāmi Chinmayānandaji had signalled to the local committee, in the second half of the 1980s, to buy it and convert it to a CM center. With several classrooms and two nice halls, it used to be buzzing with activity, especially during weekends. I lived at this place for five years – November 1993 thru August 1998 – before returning to Mumbai, India. A nice room on the ground floor was my accommodation for the entire duration. The hall upstairs was a temple of Lord Shiva and was also used to hold many *satsangas* or classes. The hall downstairs

was used for things like dance classes, Children's Bāl Vihār classes, Sanskrit classes for different age groups, classes for different Indian languages and music classes. These activities kept the place busy, with some of them taking place during weekdays also. I too held six to eight classes on Vedānta every week in an upstairs room, which was a bit larger than the other rooms.



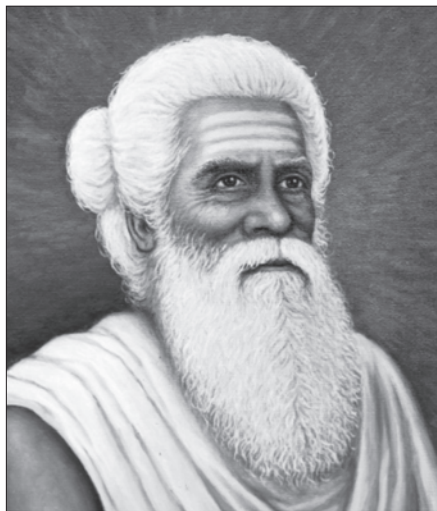
The student before sannnyāsa

The special guest

The special guest of the day was quite an orthodox Hindu monk, who was known for

observing many rules of monasticism. A staunch follower of a kind of Shaivism as per a certain tradition in Sri Lanka, Swāmiji had an interesting background. He was born in 1927 in Oakland, California. At the age of 20, he had journeyed to India and Sri Lanka, and in 1949, was initiated into *sannyāsa* by a renowned *siddha* yogi and worshipper of Lord Shiva. This guru of his was regarded as one of the remarkable mystics of the 20th century.

Satguru Sivāya Subramuniya Swāmi (1927–2001), known as ‘Gurudeva’ among his followers, was a Hindu leader and author. He made a Hindu monastery in Kauai, Hawaii and founded the magazine ‘Hinduism Today’. Subramuniya Swāmi was an author of many books on Hinduism, metaphysics, yoga, Shaivism and meditation. I remember using his book on ‘Ganesha’ for material on vegetarianism, when I had to speak on the topic at Georgia Institute of Technology to a small audience of some 50 people in 1998. In that book, he provides a lot of details about the merits of a vegetarian diet. His voluminous book on Shiva is also a treasure of relevant and useful information. He was one of the most traditional and well known people of Hinduism during the last two decades of the 20th century. He was one of Shaivism’s most revered Gurus, the founder and leader of the world’s first Hindu church (Saiva Siddhānta Church). The magnificent temple, the āshram and the rudrāksha garden that he had created in Kauai, are described by those who have gone there, as truly beautiful and very much worth seeing.



**The Guru Jnānaguru Yogaswāmi
of Jāffnā, Sri Lanka**

The meeting

He gladly accepted our invitation to have some breakfast first. At the dining table itself, we could feel the warmth and friendliness of this holy man. He was good-humoured and made everybody comfortable with his lighthearted remarks. After breakfast, we went upstairs to the hall (Shiva temple) where some 30 to 40 members were waiting. It was a working day and many did not know of this special function, well in time.



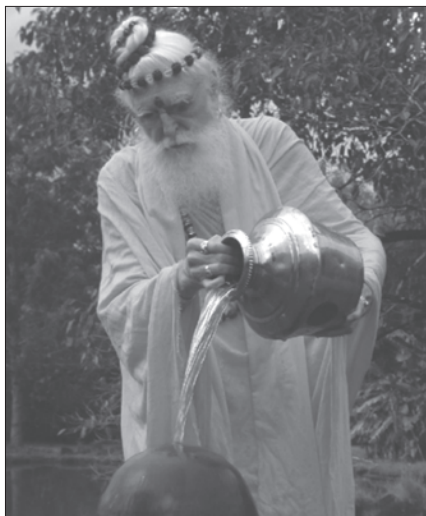
**The student (many years)
after *sannyāsa***

At the main function, all that I remember now is how he briefly narrated his own story of how he had been inspired to start a worldwide movement to let people everywhere know the charm and power of Hinduism. One of the comments he made was about how the 'yellow orb' of the large 'M' found at all McDonald's cafes, had given a suggestion to him in the early days. He saw in the logo the prospect of a good idea reaching great heights and becoming available to people around the globe.

He, of course, highlighted the importance of Shiva-bhakti and spoke of the broadminded outlooks of Hinduism, which has many kinds of *sādhana* to suit different kinds of *sādhakas*. The audience was excited at the inspiring lecture given by a personality that exuded love, cheer and dynamism.

The Magazine

In those days, in the mid-1990s, I was a regular reader of his magazine HINDUISM TODAY and admired the contents and the design a lot. Even to this day in 2021, I do not know of any other magazine in the world that covers so much about what is happening to Hindus around the world, to their temples and to their religious practices. This magazine also brings together articles by and messages from numerous Hindu saints and spiritual leaders. I was also impressed by the



A devotee of Lord Shiva

magazine's touching upon controversial issues like cloning, euthanasia, mercy killing, homosexuality, etc. Thus, in their reporting, its monthly issues carried together old traditions and new developments.

Conclusion

I do not remember any particular exchange of ideas with him, though we surely had talked about a few things. I look back with much happiness at the good fortune I had, of

meeting this mahātmā. Many years later, in 2014, I spent several days in the company of his successor Satguru Bodhinātha Veylanswāmi. Both Bodhinātha Swāmi and I were special guests at the inaugural celebrations and poojās of the Hindu Temple of Greater Fort Worth, Texas in June 2014. I hear from Dr Subramanyam Boyāreddi and Smt Subhāshini of HTGFW that Bodhinātha Swāmi is a source of very good knowledge about temple architecture (*āgama-shāstra*), various rituals that are needed to start and run a temple and also the finance management in the context of keeping a temple up and active. That is enough indication towards how meticulous his guru, the founder of the Shaivaite Hindu Monastery in Kauai had been, carrying spiritual studies and practical wisdom together. All of us, Hindus, have ample reason to hold this American-born Swāmiji in high esteem for his life of dedication and for his substantial contributions to our faith.

During a prank, a student stuck a paper on his classmate's back that said "I'm stupid"; he asked the rest of the class not to tell the boy.

Thus the students began laughing throughout the day. Shortly afterwards, the mathematics class started and their professor wrote a difficult question on the board.

No one was able to answer it except the boy with the sticker. Amid the slight laughs, for which he didn't know the reason, he walked towards the board and he solved it; the teacher asked the class to clap for him and removed the paper on his back.

He told him "It seems that you don't know about the paper on your back that one of your classmates put and the rest of them kept it a secret."

Then the teacher turned towards the rest of the class and said "Before I give you a punishment, I will tell you two things:

"First, throughout your life, people will put labels on your back with many bad things written on it to stop your progress.

"If he had known about the paper, he would not have gotten up to answer the question.

"All you have to do in life is ignore the labels people give you and use every chance you have, to progress, learn and improve yourself.

"The second is that, it is clear that he does not have any loyal friends among you all, to tell him about removing the paper. It does not matter how many friends you have; it is the loyalty between your friends and you, that matters.

"If you don't have friends who can defend you behind your back, who can watch over you, protect you and who genuinely care about you, you are better off alone.

"To the person who placed the label: that word you said against the other person may cause a lifetime of damage to the person.

"Don't place on people, tags that will destroy them when it will not build you."

Think about it!



What do we learn from the Upanishads?

Life's Purpose

- Swāmi Chidānanda

The Upanishads are way above the million pursuits of worldly life. They are very clear that all the achievements in this world, however marvellous they may look, cannot remove the sense of inadequacy that torments the human heart. Therefore, they ask us to have the 'vision of the supreme truth', which alone removes sorrow.

The knots of the heart are cut asunder; all doubts are torn to pieces; all the bonds of karma are annulled, when THAT, which covers the higher and the lower, is seen.

भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिः छिद्यन्ते सर्वसंशयाः
क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन्दृष्टे परावरे

*bhidyate hridaya-granthih
chidyante sarva-samshayāh
ksheeyante chāsya karmāni
tasmindristhe parāvare*

Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.8 (Mundaka 2, Section 2, mantra 8)



Laughing faces do not mean that there is absence of sorrow! But it means that they have the ability to deal with it.

-William Shakespeare



- Swāmi Akhandānanda Saraswati Maharaj

You are bound to have an urge to serve, because you cannot live without service from others. The point to be pondered is how you want to serve others. Do you wish to serve as per your liking or do you wish to serve them as per their desire? Do you want to give them happiness or do you want to do some good to them? There is a difference between these two, although they may occasionally be the same. Our own *vāsanās* (latent tendencies) get mixed up with the service. You have to observe yourself minutely and check whether the service you render, fills you with pride.

If your service to the Lord, to the *ātman* in all beings, to mankind, in general, to society, to particular caste, religion, class or to any other, gives you a feeling that you have done something great, then such service does not belong to others but it becomes service to oneself.

If the sandalwood paste is applied to your forehead, if the garland is placed on your neck then it is you who experience all the joy and pleasure. It is in this regard one has to exercise great care in seeing that your service to others does not give rise to any pride in you.

The universe is vast. Its needs and necessities are numerous. Service you render is not even a drop in the ocean. Just think of the knowledge, the power and the wonderful actions of the Lord seated in your heart-you will realize that you have no entity separate from Him. Just become His instrument and continue to serve.

(2-01-1985)



It's not what you look at that matters,
it's what you see.

-Henry David Thoreau





अनेकसंशयोच्छेदि परोक्षार्थस्य दर्शकम्।
सर्वस्य लोचनं शास्त्रं यस्य नास्त्यन्ध एव सः ॥

The scriptures are certainly the 'eyes' for all of us!
They clear many doubts and show to us such meanings (truths)
that are not directly visible.
One who does not know any scriptures is blind indeed!



- Chuang Tzu



If a man is crossing a river
And an empty boat collides with his own skiff,
Even though he be a bad-tempered man
He will not become very angry.

But if he sees a man in the boat,
He will shout at him to steer clear.
If the shout is not heard, he will shout again,
And yet again, and begin cursing.
And all because there is somebody in the boat.
Yet if the boat were empty,
He would not be shouting, and not angry.

If you can empty your own boat,
Crossing the river of the world,
No one will oppose you,
No one will seek to harm you.



Understanding Impermanence

- Sheng Yen (1930-2009)

When I was young, it seemed forever between birthdays; now each year flies quickly by. I turn around and twenty years are gone! From the perspective of cosmic time, a life is shorter than the blink of an eye.

Buddhism teaches that all phenomena—all things seen, heard, thought, or experienced—are impermanent, arising and perishing in a fragment of time. When Shākyamuni Buddha first turned the Dharma Wheel at Deer Park, he expounded the doctrine of impermanence.

During every evening service, we recite, “Be mindful of impermanence; be careful of idleness.” The canon of Buddhism is full of admonitions about impermanence.

The time you have to practice is precious, fleeting. Once gone, it can never return. If you maintain a clear awareness of impermanence, you will not waste time engaging in vexing thoughts like jealousy, arrogance, or pointless criticism of others and self. Not only does this harm you, it harms those you come in contact with. Therefore, keeping this in mind, this principle of impermanence, you will work harder and practice better, and you will benefit yourself and others.

When you are drowsy during practice, think of impermanence—you will realize you have no time to waste

sleeping; when distracted by a scattered mind, remember impermanence—you will realize there is no time to waste on scattered thoughts. Coming to retreat is a rare opportunity; make the best of it.

If you have been on many retreats and think you've been practicing seriously for years, this is self-delusion. If you consider one or two hours of daily meditation and a yearly retreat as continuous practice, you're mistaken. Most of your practice time, including now, you are lost in vexation, wandering thoughts, and drowsiness. Is this true practice?

Great Chan practitioners never let their minds stray far from impermanence, and when not meditating, they use the teachings of the Buddha-dharma to help themselves and others.

When you truly realize that life is impermanent and time is short, you will be able to practice consistently and hard. From now on, prostrate to your cushion, your Bodhi-mandala, before sitting, to remind yourself of this. Vow to be diligent. After you sit down, make another vow not to anticipate the bell. Plunge wholeheartedly into the practice. You must do this, because life is impermanent, and time is short.

While being mindful of impermanence, continue to relax your body and mind. It sounds inconsistent,

but you must have an alert and diligent, yet relaxed, attitude. Tension will exhaust you. If you relax to the point of falling asleep, kneeling on the hard floor for a few minutes should wake you up. If merely drowsy, open your eyes wide and stare at the wall while you continue to meditate. That will help drowsiness subside.

Because our sense of time in daily life is slow, maintaining a mind of impermanence is difficult. We become complacent and think we have all the time in the world. Retreats equip us with knowledge and experience of impermanence that can only enhance our daily lives.

Understanding impermanence does not mean taking license to do whatever we want, since “it is all going to end soon anyway.” On the contrary, because we understand impermanence, we know we have no time to waste in idleness, especially in practice.

I once met a man with only a few months to live who accomplished several years' worth of practice in those remaining months. If you can develop a similar attitude and apply it to practice, your progress will be quick and smooth.

Courtesy / Source:

Attaining the Way - A Guide to the Practice of Chan Buddhism, by Master Sheng Yen

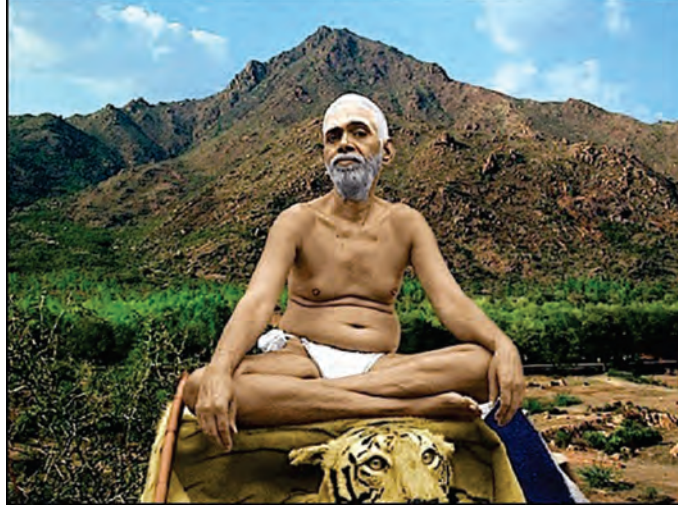


Once you know with absolute certainty that nothing can trouble you but your own imagination, you come to disregard your desires and fears, concepts and ideas, and live by Truth alone.

-Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj



ETERNAL VIBRATIONS
PUT ASIDE YOUR EGO
That is the greatest austerity



अहमपेतकं *ahamapetakam*
निज-विभानकम्। *nija-vibhānakam*
महदिदं तपो *mahadidam tapo*
रमण-वागयिम्॥ *ramana-vāgiyam*

These are the words of Ramana: Living without egoism is the highest tapas, which reveals one's true nature.

उपदेश-सारःUPADESHA SĀRA, verse 30

{Maharshi Ramana displayed an amazing skill at pinpointing the 'essence' of various spiritual issues. Here in the above selection, we find him declaring what the most important aspect is – in any austerity that we may choose to perform. Being free from ego can lend a divine touch to everything we do in our daily life, which need not be packaged as a religious or spiritual activity. In contrast, if we are egoistic, everything we do will have serious shortcomings even if it comes in the form of some impressive religious ceremony or as a spiritual exercise.}



FOWAI FORUM

Wisdom for Right Action

Dissemination of spiritual and secular wisdom is the main objective of the Fowai Forum. Educational activities, human welfare and services to all life are its concerns. Insights and observations especially based on Indian culture and heritage will find expression in its activities.

This public trust came into being in the year 2006. Registered as per the Mumbai Public Trust Act of 1950, the Forum engages in organizing talks and workshops as well as in publication of books and audio-visual media.

F.O.W.A.I. = Flame Of Who Am I?

“Who am I?” is the most basic question of life. The understanding of the self, the ‘me’, can cause radical change in the quality of life. This requires turning (the flame of) attention towards thoughts and emotions. When likes and dislikes fall away, pure perception takes place. That heralds freedom.

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