

# Introduction to *Ozhivil Odukkam*

ROBERT BUTLER

*The serialisation of a translation and commentary by J. Jayaraman of Ozhivil Odukkam by Kannudaiya Vallalar was first begun in the July issue of The Mountain Path, 2004, and continued over the following three issues, ending in April 2005 at verse 38. Readers are recommended to consult these articles, which contain many original and thought-provoking insights. Previously, J. Jayaraman had edited and published in The Mountain Path a selection of 88 verses from the unpublished translation by Munagala S. Venkataramiah (see article below in the section entitled Previous editions and translations). These articles appeared in the four 1988 issues, under the title 'To Withdraw As Pure Being – Ozhivil Odukkam'. The current translation is an entirely new endeavour in which the text has been translated by Robert Butler with a commentary contributed by S. Ram Mohan.*

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>.

**The text and its author**

*Ozhivil Odukkam* by Kannudaiya Vallalar is a 15th century Tamil work in 253 venba verses. Its main assertion, which it drives home by means of numerous terse and pithy illustrations, often drawn from everyday life, is that the non-dual reality is unattainable in the mental world of the body-bound consciousness, and that, to attain it, or rather to realise it as our true nature, we must abandon all concepts, whether of Vedanta, Siddhanta or anything else, relying entirely on the inner witness of our own consciousness. The work is clearly written from the perspective of one schooled in the philosophy of Saiva Siddhanta, a circumstance which is compounded by the fact that the only available commentary, by Tirupporur Chidamabara Swamigal, an eminent Tamil poet and scholar, leans heavily towards Siddhanta terminology rather than emphasising the advaitic aspect of the verses. However such considerations do not in the final analysis detract from the fact that *Ozhivil Odukkam* is a great work of Advaita, with many parallels to the teachings of Sri Bhagavan himself.

It is a work which advocates the path of Self-knowledge as the means to liberation, very much in the manner of Sri Ramana's *Ulladu Narpadu* (with certain reservations), and there are a number of verses which recall the latter both in style and content. It mercilessly lampoons false gurus with their pedantry and posturing, and warns against the ego which only perpetuates its own existence in its ridiculous and self-defeating attempts to transcend itself. As for the style, the text is terse and vivid, full of striking images which are deliberately designed to jar and shock the consciousness of the reader out of its comfortable ego-based frame of reference.

*Ozhivil Odukkam* is written entirely within the frame of reference of the philosophical school of Saiva Siddhanta. However there can be no doubt that the point of the work, as evidenced in each of its 253 verses, is not to inculcate the principles of Saiva Siddhanta, but rather the opposite; it is to demonstrate that Saiva Siddhanta, Vedanta, or any other belief system for that matter, is powerless to

aid the disciple in taking the final step towards union with the divine, at which point all mind-based constructs must be transcended and abandoned. This endeavour is exemplified in the very title of the work, which can be translated as “Subsiding [into the Self] through the elimination [of obstacles, i.e. the personal consciousness, the ego]”, or, taking a slightly different grammatical interpretation, “Ceaseless abidance [in the Self]”. Paradoxically, all those teachings which are in the beginning aids to realisation, in terms of preparing and purifying the consciousness of the disciple, become in the end obstacles and must be left behind, a point which is given much emphasis at several points in the text itself.

The biography of the author gives us clues as to why the influence of Saiva Siddhanta should be so clearly in evidence in his work. According to *The Lexicon of Tamil Literature* by Kamil Zvelebil, the author’s monastic name was Sambandha Saranalar (c. 1400-1450?), an eminent Saivite who composed Saiva works such as *Tattuvavilakkam*, before changing his allegiance to *aikkiyavada* Saivism, and his name to Kannudaiya Vallalar, in which guise he became a great spiritual leader, teacher and poet, and, of course, composed the great work *Ozhivil Odukkam* in which Vedanta and Siddhanta are reconciled. From the foregoing we might expect that not only would the author tend to speak from the viewpoint of Saiva Siddhanta, but that he would continue to promote, up to a certain point, positive Saivite values, such as the paths to liberation, *charya*, *kriya*, and *yoga*. However, he makes it clear that none of the foregoing has any place in the process of the final merger with the Self, Sivam. In fact he devotes a chapter to the elimination or eradication of each of these in turn. His condemnation of yoga and its associated practices is particularly damning.

Other accounts of the author’s life are numerous and contradictory. The earliest dates for him have been given as 1380-1476. Others give a much later date, the early decades of the 17th century. In one account he is said to have been born into a wealthy family of Sirkali, a town near the east coast of Tamil Nadu, 20 km from Chidambaram.

It is also referred to as Tonipuram, 'Boat City', in view of the legend that Lord Siva used it as a boat when a flood engulfed the earth. The city was famously the birthplace of the great saint Jnanasambandhar. It is said that whenever Vallalar's family visited the temple complex, they paid homage at the shrine of Jnanasambandhar twice, burning camphor and offering praises, once as they entered, and again as they left the temple complex, and that thus it was that a great love for, and devotion to the saint grew up within the young boy, which in the course of time ripened into realisation and union with Lord Siva. No other details appear to be known. One might speculate that, like Sri Ramana Maharshi, he was one of those rare souls who, due to his spiritual maturity, was able to attain realisation at an early age without the aid of an embodied guru.

It seems likely that Kannudaiya Vallalar, from the tenor of his verses, would have belonged to one of the Siddhanta monastic orders, possibly as the head of a math, or at least as a high-ranking spiritual teacher and preceptor. However his allegiance to the saint Jnanasambandhar, whom he claims as his only guru, suggests that he realised that the intellectual and physical rigours of the monastic existence could not bear fruit without the qualities of self-surrender and devotion, exemplified in the lives of the great saints of Tamil Nadu. One version has it that he was the son of Meykanda Sivachariar, an Acharya of the Saiva Siddhanta School, and that he abandoned this path in favour of the path of direct realisation.

On the surface level, *Ozhivil Odukkam*, after an opening chapter which covers a dazzling array of advaitic topics in no particular order, delineates the path of the mature disciple, as he becomes ready for divine grace, finds his guru, transcends the traditional paths of *charya*, *kriya* and *yoga*, renounces the world inwardly and (optionally) outwardly, and merges finally with Sivam. However, the whole text is so deeply imbued with the aim of conveying some sense of the supra-mental state of union with the Real, and of awakening in the reader a desire and hunger for this state, that any sense of narrative or progression is entirely transcended. *Ozhivil Odukkam* is like a

many-faceted jewel, each facet reflecting the light of the truth in its own sparkling and original manner.

The text is accompanied by an extensive *urai* or prose commentary, written by Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal. His guru was Kumara Devar, a Kannada king who famously renounced the world to become the disciple of the renowned Santalinga Swamigal. Both of these wrote works which number amongst the most important advaitic texts ever written in the language of Tamil. Before becoming the disciple of Kumara Devar, Chidambara Swamigal had become an accomplished scholar. The encyclopaedia of Tamil literature, *Apitana Cintamani* refers to him as Ilakkana Vittuvan – a scholar of language and letters. It is not surprising therefore that he wrote a number of commentaries, including several on the works of his guru's guru, Santalinga Swamigal, and the one on *Ozhivil Odukkam*, which was written at the behest of Santalinga himself. The commentary is excellent in many respects, but it does occupy itself in some detail with Siddhanta philosophy and metaphysics, somewhat to the detriment of the advaitic content of the work. The difficulty of the text itself, and the complexities of the commentary appear to have led on occasion to the mistaken belief that the work is more concerned with the minutiae of Siddhanta philosophy, rather than the issue of non-dual Self-realisation, which is absolutely not the case.

As can be seen from the foregoing accounts, there are few indisputable facts about the life of Kannudaiya Vallalar. However it seems clear that he possessed a life-long allegiance to Jnanasambandhar as his guru, and that this allegiance caused him at some point to reject the philosophical and scholastic norms of Saiva Siddhanta in favour of a direct gnosis of the nature of the Self, Reality, inspired by his guru.

### Previous editions and translations

In 1851 *Ozhivil Odukkam* was first published in Tamil, along with the *urai* of Chidambara Swamigal, by the Tamil Siddha Ramalinga Swamigal, author of the hymns which are known collectively as the *Tiruvarutpa*. The text was next published in the early years of the 20th century. The copy used for this translation was published in Madras in

1908, comprising the text and original commentary only. Subsequent editions have followed this pattern, giving the text and original commentary only. Recently a new Tamil edition has been published, authored by a devotee of Sri Ramana and Muruganar, writing under the name of Mukavai Kanna Murukan Adimai, consisting of the text in Tamil and a commentary in modern Tamil, which incorporates elements from the original commentary, and draws upon the works of Sri Ramana and Muruganar to provide illustrative examples in support of its explanation of the text. This is available from Sri Ramanasramam Book Depot. The only English translation I know of is that by Sri Munagala S. Venkataramiah (later Sri Ramanananda Saraswati), the compiler of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. The typescript, with a short introductory preface by Sadhu Arunachala (formerly Major A. W. Chadwick), is kept in the Sri Ramanasramam archives. It appears to be in draft form, requiring further editing, and was never published, although, as indicated in the preface, the authors clearly expected it to be published by the ashram, as were other favourites of Sri Ramana, such as *Tripura Rahasyam* and *Advaita Bodha Deepika*, both of which were translated wholly or in part by Swami Ramanananda Saraswati.

### **Ramana Maharshi and *Ozhivil Odukkam***

References to *Ozhivil Odukkam* are scattered throughout the works which record devotees' conversations with Sri Bhagavan, and their reminiscences of him. Srimati T. R. Kanakammal, in her recollections, *Ninaivil Niraindhavai*, tells an interesting story which illustrates the regard in which *Ozhivil Odukkam*, as a work of Advaita, was held by both Bhagavan and Sri Muruganar. She tells how one day Muruganar was explaining the meaning of certain verses from *Ozhivil Odukkam* to her in the presence of a visiting swami from Kovilur Math. First he would explain the verse from the point of view of its Siddhanta-based commentary, and then according to the teaching of Bhagavan. At some point the swami interposed, asking whether the latter interpretation was from the point of view of Vedanta or Siddhanta. The question seemed to take Muruganar by surprise, and

he replied, “I do not know Siddhantam, nor do I know Vedantam. All I know is ‘Ramanantam’.”

It is clear also that Bhagavan actively encouraged Muruganar to write his own commentary on *Ozhivil Odukkam* from the Vedanta standpoint. This work was never started. However the fact that this request was made and tentatively accepted by Muruganar is clear from two prefatory verses to the unwritten *urai* which are recorded in the eighth volume of *Sri Ramana Jnana Botham*, the portmanteau collection of Muruganar’s unpublished verses. We quote these two verses, below (*Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*, vol. 8, vv 1832-1833), for the reader’s interest and as a blessing upon this current endeavour.

*Ozhivil Odukkam* reveals the ultimate Reality which remains ever attained. In order that this work may achieve the richness [of being adorned by a vedantic commentary], I will, with grace abounding, ascertain the true intention [of its author], Kannudaiya Vallalar, and I will bring out a commentary, penetrating his work with the light of pure consciousness, the state of remaining awake in the Heart.

My Lord, who ruled me in such a way that I should no longer, through delusion, fall into error, commanded me to write a vedantic commentary on the illustrious work, *Ozhivil Odukkam*. He himself will let me know [its correct meaning], remaining in my heart so that his command is executed.

At times, in translating *Ozhivil Odukkam*, I had the sense that the six centuries separating Sri Ramana and Kannudaiya Vallalar had telescoped down, and the two were revealed as one in their timeless, transcendent state; it seems that Vallalar is talking about Sri Ramana himself in his final years when in verse 228, describing the *jnana* guru, he says:

Dwelling detached from a body weakened through its effortless rejection of worldly desires; the last residue of spent karma lingering about him like the scent of faded flowers; his gaze where ever dwells the joyous bliss of freedom from the senses; his divine countenance – these images shall never leave my heart. ▲

TRANSLATION

# *Ozhivil Odukkam*

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

Alas, will they [the false gurus] ever free themselves from the error of prescribing to us how we may obtain the fruits of union [with Sivam], when they do not possess the evidence provided by their own consciousness? [Their disciples are like] strangers who do not know [where they are], wandering about, getting lost and suffering, after taking directions to a place from someone who has never been there himself. (6)

This verse expresses the author's horror at seeing the disastrous condition into which the disciple is led by heeding the wrong guidance

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or the false guru. The false guru, though he himself has not attained the state of union with the divine, attempts to prescribe to the disciple how he can reach that state. Woe betide him! Can these imposters ever become free of the great error of such misguidance? Even in the worldly plane a stranger journeying on the instructions of an ignorant fellow traveller, who himself has never been to the place of destination, will certainly lose his way and come to grief. How much greater the harm that can come to someone on the spiritual plane from the attempts of the would-be guru to convey to him a state of being which he has never experienced himself!

Know that only he is the *jnana guru* who with a glance brings the disciple to absolute stillness, having perceived [in him] the state of maturity wherein he becomes harmonised [with the Self] as that which is false gradually disappears, so that he dissolves into the waves [of the ocean] of bliss of union [with the divine], in which he exists as Reality itself. (7)

Having described the characteristics of the false guru, (vv 3-6), the author now speaks of the attributes of the true guru, the *jnana guru*. In his enlightened state he is able both to recognise those disciples who are already experiencing a degree of the bliss which precedes the annihilation of the ego, and to establish them in that state by focusing the energy of grace upon them through his glance. The state of bliss which typically precedes final liberation is one in which the aspirant runs the risk of being caught up in, and overwhelmed by that state, mistaking it for liberation itself. At this point the guru fixes *his gaze upon him so that he is not agitated* – *pathaiyaamal paarkkum*, enabling him to merge in the state of the Self which is beyond even bliss.

The Tamil phrase used to describe the evolving state of the mature devotee, *poka poka porunthi* – *becoming harmonised [with the Self] as the false gradually disappears* describes the gradual process through which the mind is purified and made steady prior to its final elimination in the state of realisation. This phrase finds an echo in the words of Krishna (in *Bhagavad Gita*, 6.25): “Let him gain little by

little (*shanaih-shanaih*) tranquillity by means of reason controlled by steadiness, and having fixed his mind on the Self, let him not think of anything else.”

In divine silence, overflowing with the bliss of Sivam, the guru speaks [without speaking], like a honey bee regurgitating the nectar it has consumed into the honeycomb. For those [disciples] who at that time wait in attendance without any thought in their minds, like the seasons which appear in due course, his words will constitute lofty *tapas*, or the import of the Vedas. (8)

A honey bee collects nectar from flowers and discharges it into the honeycomb, without contaminating it in any way, even though the nectar is discharged only through its mouth. Similarly the guru absorbs and transmits the knowledge of Sivam, free of any contamination by his body, mind and senses. In due course, the supreme bliss or jnana of the guru will surely manifest itself as a glance of grace, a thought of love, words of instruction or by mere touch. This is movingly expressed by Sri Ramana in *Akshara-mana-malai* v.63: “Look at me! Think of me! Touch me! Ripen me and make me fit! Then be my master and rule me, O Arunachala!”

Just as the seasons of the year silently bide their time to manifest in due course, unaffected by the cycles of growth and decay that they cause, the grace of the guru, flowing in divine silence, will surely be granted to those disciples who patiently dwell in the service of the master, unaffected by the changing conditions of their bodily incarnation. The phrase *without any thought in their minds* might be translated as *free of all objective thought*. There can be no thought without an object, and when thought turns in upon itself, it subsides into pure being. Such is the state of the disciple who is ripe for divine grace. The presence or absence of the spoken word is not at issue in the authentic communication between guru and disciple. Sri Ramana eloquently expresses the nature of this communication as follows: “Silence is ever-speaking; it is the perennial flow of language; it is interrupted by speaking. These words obstruct that mute language.

There is electricity flowing in a wire. With resistance to its passage, it glows as a lamp or revolves as a fan. In the wire it remains as electric energy. Similarly also, silence is the eternal flow of language, obstructed by words.” *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 246, 8th September 1936.

Like a lamp in the dark, like the shining of the moon and sun, the holy word of him whose form is supreme bliss, and who transcends even grace itself, resembles a rain of ambrosia, a voice from the heavens, or a good omen. Know that there is in it no trace of the ego. (9)

Lord Siva’s *arul sakti* – *power of grace* is required by the individual soul, the *jiva*, to bring about its final union with Sivam, the Self. However, upon that union, there no longer exists any individual soul to experience that grace. Therefore it is said here that the guru, who is divine grace made manifest, transcends even grace. This grace of the guru is described as manifesting in three different degrees: at first it is like the flame of lamp, burning in the darkness; later it is like the moon, which radiates the reflected light of the sun, and in its most powerful manifestation it is like the sun itself, in whose light the duality of seer and seen is entirely effaced.

The analogies of a *rain of nectar*, a *voice from the heavens* and a *good omen* are given to emphasise the truth that the words of the guru are in their very nature free of any contamination by the ego. The earthly rains are munificent. Their downpour makes the world flourish, with no expectation of reward on their part. However, as generous as they are, at times a heavy downpour of these beneficent rains may itself cause harm. Guru’s grace, on the other hand, is like a rain of nectar. The more it pours down, the greater the benefit to the aspirant. The disembodied *voice from the sky* – *ambara sol* (*asariri* in Sanskrit) can speak only the truth, and a *good omen* indicates that what one desires will come to fruition, just as the guru’s words carry the assurance that the aspirant’s longing for liberation will be fulfilled.

The guru who, like the shadow person in the sky, materialises in the bliss [of the Self], is the enemy of *maya*. His compassionate word in which the mind has died is like the utterance of a man possessed, a brave warrior, a king, a spurned lover riding the palmyra branch, or a suicidal maniac. (10)

In truth there is only the Self. However, for the mature disciple, the guru appears to manifest in physical form as a solid, three-dimensional reality, the true nature of which is known upon realisation to be the Self, whose nature is bliss. For a description of the unity of god, guru and Self the reader can do no better than refer to *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharishi*, Talk 198, 10th June 1936.

In the technique of the shadow person, Sanskrit *chaayaa purusha*, the practitioner concentrates intensely on his own shadow, then looks up into the clear sky, where a shadow image of a person appears; through practice he will come to recognise this as himself, whereupon it will act as a guide, aiding him in his search for self-knowledge and enlightenment. Here it is being employed as a simile for the way in which the disciple's earnest desire causes the guru to manifest in human form. Therefore the guru is said to materialise in [the] bliss [of the Self].

The final part of the verse gives a series of analogies pointing to how the words of the guru are unaffected by his bodily incarnation:

*A man possessed* – when a man is possessed, his normal faculties are suppressed, and his words are those of whatever demon or supernatural entity is possessing him. In the same way the words of the jnana guru are the pure expression of the Self, unaffected by his physical incarnation and attributes.

*A brave warrior* – a brave warrior will pursue his enemy to the death without regard for his own life, just as the jnana guru will have relentlessly pursued the enemy that is his own ignorance until it is destroyed.

*A lover riding the palmyra branch* – In Tamil *Akam* love literature the last recourse of a spurned lover, unable to make his beloved's heart melt towards him, is to dress up a *madal* – *palmyra* branch as a horse,

with flowers, bells and so on, and ride it through the village streets proclaiming her harshness to the world, oblivious, in his obsession with his beloved, to the ridicule and censure of all and sundry. Thus he is compared to the jnana guru, who, in his quest for the real, is oblivious to everything but his love for the Self, Sivam.

*A king* – just as the ordinance of a king is all-powerful within his own realm, the utterance of the jnana guru is all-powerful in the realm of the Self.

*A suicidal maniac*, literally *one for whom death is bliss* – just as a person intent on suicide has no thought other than that of his own destruction, the jnana guru has no other thought than that of the elimination of the disciple's personal consciousness.

This work was created for our salvation through the grace of the one known as Sambandhar of Sirkazhi, he who is learned in the Vedas, the pure One, the King of Tamil, who, cutting away the contamination of my personal self through [the initiation known as] *sadya-nirvana-diksha*, and establishing me [in the state of Sivam], reveals [through me] the path of liberation. (11)

The commentator notes that this verse constitutes the *nul marapu*, which we might translate as the *work's lineage, established authority, ancestral line*, which, as readers of the *Introduction to Ozhivil Odukkam* and the text and commentary to verse one in the last issue will know, is declared by the author to be from the Tamil saint Jnanasambandhar.

Here Jnanasambandhar of Sirkazhi is referred to as *suddhar* – the *pure one*, as he has freed himself from the three *malams*, the three deadly impurities which obscure the soul, *kanma, anavam and mayai*. See verse four and commentary. He is the 'adopted' son of Lord Siva, who the *Svetasvara Upanisad* describes as *niravadyam* – flawless. He is the adept of the Vedas. He is also master of the Tamil tongue. Sri Sankara's reference to *Dravida sisu* – the *Tamil Child in Soundarya Lahari* is thought by some to refer to him. His powerful songs constitute the first three books of *Tirumurai*, the anthology of Saivite devotional works, popularly known as the Tamil Veda. In his

songs he refers to himself as *Marai jnana sambandhar* and *Marai jnana munivar – Jnanasambandhar*, the sage who is learned in the Vedas.

The author ends by affirming that he is fully qualified to transmit the teaching of Jnanasambandhar, and thus of revealing the path of liberation, having received from him the initiation known as *sadya-nirvana-diksha*, which enables the disciple to attain salvation instantaneously. *Nirvana-diksha* is defined by the Tamil Lexicon as ‘the third or last step in initiation which enables the disciple to free himself from the bonds of existence and attain emancipation.’ Sanskrit *sa-dyas* (*sadyo* in combination) means, literally, *on the same day*, and hence, *at once, instantaneously*.

The Self exists free of all association in the absolute fullness that is free of all divisions. Many are the means pursued by those who desire to be released from the suffering caused by the defilements that obscure it. As one might tip a bag upside down to fully reveal its contents, we shall now speak of the state of your subsiding through the destruction [of your personal self], in which you[r true Self] do[es] not die. (12)

Vallalar declares that many are the means found by those who strive to get rid of the sufferings caused by the obstruction veiling the knowledge of the Self. We are reminded of the fifth verse of *Thiruvaymozhi* where Nammazhvar declares, “Many are the ways to know God; each differs in way and content, depending on the mental setup of the devotee. By following any chosen path diligently, one would reach cosmic consciousness.” The paths are many but all are seen merely as means to an end upon the attainment of Self realisation.

Hindu theories of the nature of reality are many and varied, but they mostly centre around the arguments as to whether the soul and god are in essence identical (*abheda – non-different*), entirely separate (*bheda – different*) or both identical and separate (*bhedabheda – both different and non-different*). The import of the present work is to dismiss all the foregoing and reveal the absolute truth which transcends all such arbitrary divisions, which occur at the level of the mind only.

At the end of the verse the words *ozhivil odukkam*, which, as we know, is the title of this work, appear for the first time. The words can be, and have been, translated into English in a variety of ways. They can be translated as “Subsiding [into the Self or Sivam] through the elimination [of obstacles, i.e. the personal consciousness, the ego]”, or, taking a slightly different grammatical interpretation, “Ceaseless abidance [in the Self or Sivam]”. Both meanings are valid and both would very probably have been intended by the author. In order to make it clear that it is not the eternal, unchanging Self which dies, but only the ephemeral and essentially non-existent personal self, he qualifies the phrase with the words *nee maaLaa – in which you (i.e. your true Self) do not die*.

In the concluding portion of the verse, Vallalar gives an apt simile for launching this work. He says that he will lay forth his arguments as one might *tip a bag upside-down*, or *turn it inside-out*, to fully reveal its contents. This is the first of a great number of striking and powerful images with which the author illustrates his subject matter, driving home his point with similes and metaphors rendered all the more effective by being largely drawn from everyday life, our common experience.

Hear the title of this work, which speaks in a clearly comprehensible manner of the consciousness in which the word of the guru, the holy scriptures and one’s personal experience are harmoniously combined, and of the limiting factors which veil it. It is ‘Ozhivil Odukkam’, the seed of all works which elaborate upon these matters. (13)

In this verse Vallalar announces the title of this work, *Ozhivil Odukkam*, the meaning of which was discussed in the commentary to the previous verse. He declares that *Ozhivil Odukkam* is the work which truly reveals the true knowledge acceptable to all the three sources of validation, that is, the scriptures, the words of the guru and one’s own experience. The most mature disciples may attain realisation merely on hearing the words of the guru. For those of

lesser attainment there are the holy scriptures to assuage their doubts, but for all, without exception, the personal validation of one's own consciousness is absolutely essential. The work is described as the *seed* from which all other works *unfold*, in the sense that its subject is consciousness itself, the source from which all thought, and hence all written works, evolve, and into which they finally subside.

Its other subject is described as *munai caarvu* – *those things adhering to [consciousness], [which] oppose [it]*, since in one sense realisation is only the elimination of those obscuring factors that prevent us from realising that we are not and never could be apart from the Self. In the Siddhanta system the *pacu* – *soul* is unable to know *pati* – the *Lord* because it is obscured by *paacam* – *the worldly bond*. In Advaita, which does not admit of the concept of an eternal soul or *jiva* existing separately from god, *caarvu* would equate to *maya*, within which the *jiva* is an illusory appearance. These obscuring factors are here jointly described as *caarvu* – *things which adhere to, are attached to [pure consciousness]*. *munai* means to be *angry with, fight, hate*, expressing how the limiting factors which constitute the worldly bond are antagonistic to realisation of the truth.

The other paths, of which *cariyai* is the first, treat of the *disciplines of tantra and mantra*, and can only lead to further attachments. Know that this path is the teaching given only to those who, through merit previously earned, are extremely mature in the *tapas* of renunciation, in order to remove their [remaining] attachments. (14)

In this verse, Vallalar talks about the superiority of the path shown in *Ozhivil Odukkam* to other traditional paths. *The disciplines of tantra and mantra* correspond to divisions of the Saiva Agamas; *tantrakalai* deals with rites and ceremonies etc. and *mantrakalai* treats of *mantras* (prayers, hymns, invocations, etc.). Siddhanta recognises four stages on the spiritual path: the first and lowest is *cariyai*, Sanskrit *caryaa*, in which the initiate worships the deity with mantras and performs various external religious duties; the second is *kiriyai*, Sanskrit *kriyaa*,



in which the initiate is allowed to perform rituals including puja; the third is *yokam*, Sanskrit *yoga* in which the aspirant performs yogic *asanas* – physical postures and *pranayama* – *control of the breath*, and engages in meditation and contemplation, and the highest is *nanam*, Sanskrit *jnana*, the direct path in which the disciple seeks to attain direct intuitive awareness of his oneness with Sivam, the supreme reality.

Although useful as a means of purification for the aspirant, the lower paths are portrayed in *Ozhivil Odukkam* as hindrances to those who are qualified to follow the path *nanam*. Vallalar says that though they may be useful as preliminary procedures, they carry the risk of conditioning the devotee's mind and causing him to become immersed deeper and deeper in attachment to the very act of worship itself, rather than using it as a ladder for future evolution on the spiritual path.

Finally the author states that this work is intended for those extremely mature in the tapas of renunciation. The implication appears to be that this work will be most useful to those who, in previous births, have passed through the other three degrees, and have entered the current birth ripe for liberation through the direct transmission of *nanam*. This class of person should on no account allow himself to become sidetracked on these lower paths. Whatever our view on rebirth in general, most would agree that people's interest in and aptitude for the spiritual quest appears to be something that they possess from birth, and it is only the few that ever come to view the extinction of their personal self as a worthwhile goal. Only the few therefore are likely to profit from the study of such works as this. In fact later verses will show how worldly people will view the *jnani* as a madman, a fool and even an heretic.

This work is for those who would enter fire, or abandon themselves to a tiger or a snake, if the guru so commanded it. They are to him as life is to the body, as the eyelid is to the eye, or as thread is to the needle. It will be of no use to the spiritually immature, just as a banana tree will not be consumed even if

burned in a hot fire, nor a clay pot transformed into gold by  
the alchemist's stone. (15)

In this verse Vallalar identifies those to whom this work will be useful, and contrasts them with those who will not get benefit from it. He puts emphasis on the fact that it is meant for, and will be useful to, the ardent disciple who would do anything for his guru. That sort of disciple will, on the guru's command or for his sake, readily enter fire or defy a tiger or serpent. Those who are caught in a fiery blaze, or in the jaws of a tiger or a venomous serpent will never survive. Likewise those disciples who have been caught up in the grace of the guru will see the total destruction of their ego, their individual identity.

The relationship of such disciples to the guru is like that of life to the body, the eyelids to the eye or thread to the needle. The three similes are very profound. The perfect disciple serves the guru unflinchingly, just as life identifies itself with the body, and dwells within it unflinchingly sustaining it and serving it. Likewise, just as the eyelid reacts instinctively to protect the eye from anything that is likely to damage it, the disciple never leaves the master and protects him in any every way possible. Finally, just as thread has no choice but to follow the needle, the disciple cannot but follow and obey the guru.

The author ends the verse with two similes illustrating how the work will not benefit those who are spiritually immature. In the first of these, the disciple's lack of spiritual maturity is compared to the way in which the stem of a banana tree will burn. The banana tree or plantain is actually, in botanical terms, a flowering plant, not a tree, as it does not form a woody trunk, but retains a sappy green stem which is very hard to burn. The four stages of spiritual ripeness are given as follows: *mantataram* – *exceedingly slow*, *mantam* – *slow*, *tiiviram* – *swift*, *tiivirataram* – *exceedingly swift*; these terms refer to the speed at which fire will take hold of, respectively, *(the flower-spike of) a banana tree, green firewood, dry firewood and charcoal*.

In the second simile the immature disciple is compared to a clay pot, which even the *sparsa vedi* – *alchemist's stone*, which turns base metals into gold, will not be able to transform, since clay, not being a

metal, cannot be affected by it. Similarly, even the powerful proximity of the sadguru will not have any effect on the spiritual progress of an immature aspirant whose mind is not yet ripe. Even the flow of grace from the guru is not of any use to him. Vallalar refers to such a person as *ezhai* or *spiritually poor*. Though in normal parlance the Tamil word *ezhai* refers to a person who is poor in a material sense, here it specifically refers to a person who is bereft of spiritual wealth.

This work is intended for those who experience it as would a sensualist, immersed in the thrilling waves of an ocean of bliss as he listens to a song about the fivefold pleasures of the lover's embrace; like the lotus flower opening at dawn, its mouth like the tiny slit in a tinkling bell; or like those who succumb to delight on hearing a song from the lutes of celestial minstrels. (16)

In this verse Vallalar indicates the target audience to whom this precious book is intended. It is meant for those *sadbhaktas* who would study in the same way of self-absorption as a libertine would enjoy an amorous song, as the lotus flower with its mouth resembling a tiny slit in a tinkling bell on a girdle or anklet, opens at sunrise and as a music lover listens to music.

The first line of the verse illustrates the bliss of the *sadbhaktas* through a powerful simile. When a person who has fully experienced the pleasures of love sings an amorous song, composed by a poet who himself has experienced those pleasures, it will evoke in him the actual sensation of experiencing the pleasure, just by his singing it. Abhinava Gupta, the famed Sanskrit aesthetician of Kashmir, terms aesthetic delight as 'transfer of experience'. A *rasika* will not be able to fully empathise with the impact of the song unless he himself has experienced and internalised the pleasures portrayed in the song. Likewise a guru will be able to transmit the bliss of atmic experience, the bliss of self-realisation, only when he himself has experienced it, and as for the disciples, only those who are mature and have already experienced a degree of that bliss will be fit to receive its transmission. This transfer of experience is indeed the purpose of this book.

The second analogy is to the lotus flower that opens at dawn to the touch of the first rays of the sun. Here the disciple is the lotus flower and the *sadguru* is the sun of jnana in whose presence the lotus of the disciple's heart cannot but open. This is beautifully brought out by Poygai Azhwar in verse 67 of *Divya Prabandham*, which says, "The river will flow only towards the ocean; lives in the world will look towards the god of Dharma (or Yama, god of death); a rising flower will look for the sun; my consciousness is looking forward only to the union with the lord of cosmic consciousness."

The third analogy is to those who experience bliss on hearing the music of celestial musicians, playing the *kinnari*, a type of two-stringed lute, played by the *kinnara* – *celestial musicians*.

These three analogies delineate the state of spiritual bliss of a person who has the potential to completely dissolve his personal identity in divine bliss. This is an important verse because it makes clear the author's intention to compose a work that has the power to directly point to, and actually invoke in certain ripe aspirants, the state of being which is the subject of the work itself. We shall see as the work progresses that these terse verses, full of images which are bold, vivid, visceral and concrete almost to the point of tangibility, are designed to impact directly upon the experience of the reader, and are not simply a set of instructions or prescriptions for action at a later date.

For a work that does not bow [to any god], there can be no obeisance [paid to any god]. What good would it do if, begging indulgence for its flaws, I solicited praise on its behalf? Whether I begged indulgence for it or not, it would not be pleasing to all. Yet there is no work that would be considered bad by all. (17)

This verse stands as an *avai adakkam* – *homage paid before the assembly*, in which, in traditional works, the poet confesses his lack of worth before the assembly of his peers, and begs for their indulgence in overlooking its flaws. With characteristic forthrightness the author states that, because this work is a *vanangaa urai* – *a work that does*

*not bow down*, there is no point in trying to excuse or mitigate its faults. In other words his *avai adakkam* consists solely of a blunt statement to the effect that for a work such as this no such pleading is even admissible!

But what is it to which the *work does not bow down*? We can derive from the text no less than three different interpretations of the phrase *vanangaa urai*, and hence three good reasons why such homage might be inadmissible. On the simplest of levels, we could take the phrase to mean a *work that is lacking in humility, an arrogant work*. In this case it would be saying that, if it were truly a work written out of arrogance, it would be idle to ask anyone to excuse it.

In the second interpretation, the one adopted in the translation above, the words are interpreted as meaning a *work which does not bow [to any god]*. A work of this kind invariably contains a homage or obeisance to one or, as often, a number of deities, such as Siva, Murugan, Ganesha, Parvati and so on. However, since a principal argument of the work is that realisation will not be gained by worshipping a deity as separate from oneself, the author asks what would be the point of deliberately committing that error, merely to comply with the convention that demands that such an obeisance be made? The main idea in this interpretation is that the poet is portraying himself as afraid of offending traditionalists by omitting the obeisance, and of offending the strict Advaitists by including it. In this way he might hope to satisfy both parties, at the same time underlining the non-dual credentials of the work as a whole.

In the third interpretation, the words are taken to mean a *work that does not yield [to dualistic concepts]*, i.e. one which does not admit of the existence of anything but the non-dual reality. If it succeeds there is no more to be said, and indeed, no one to say it, and if it fails, there is no way of minimising that failure by pointing out any specific good qualities in it. This is a point which is eloquently taken up in the next verse.

The sounds made by those who, forgetting themselves entirely, weep uncontrollably [at a funeral] will not chime with the rhythm

of the drum, [the sounds of] the flute, and [the movements of] those who dance to them. Listen, for such is the nature of this work. If I am to explain it, [I would ask] who will be left to judge of the utility of a work which has no [objective] fruits? All one can do is dissolve away, so that one unites with it. (18)

In this verse, Vallalar says that the worth of this work is not in its technical construction or grammatical excellence; its utility consists in conveying the state of dissolution of the ego in the Self. To explain this, the author gives a dramatic presentation of a scene in a funeral house. There are professional mourners at the house who are paid to sing mournful songs with dance and accompanying music. They have no emotional attachment to the deceased, but remain in full control of themselves while performing their dance and music. On the other hand, the bereaved persons themselves, who are emotionally attached to the deceased, are totally lost in their grief. They weep uncontrollably and are quite oblivious to what is going on around them. Having become totally dissolved in their sorrow, their sobbing expressions will not be in tune with the drum beat, flute playing and dance movements of the professional mourners. In the same way, the author intimates that he has composed this work, not through intellectual artifice, but by totally immersing himself in the non-dual bliss of the self and that, this being so, some flaws are likely, but should be excused by the lofty endeavour that inspired it.

Since the work is written from the standpoint of the ego-free state in which the bondage of good and evil deeds does not exist, it does not admit of any karmic fruits, or anyone to reap them. Clearly, the only way to understand a book that was composed in such a state is to enter that state. In such a state there will be no personal self remaining to deliberate on its merits and demerits. Perhaps this book will help the ripe seeker to enter that state. The author seems confident of that.



TRANSLATION

# *Ozhivil Odukkam*

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

**W**ords cannot grasp and express the loss of the ego consciousness. Will the people of the world be able to grasp it by going up to it on foot, by thinking about it, or by looking at it? Should you wish to understand it, it is like being shown the entire ocean reduced to an image in a peepshow, or like the subtle signs that women make to their lovers. This you should know. (19)

By *words* are meant the Vedic and Agamic *shastras* and their various commentaries. The *shastras* talk about the Self, but are helpless to

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describe it. Mind, trying to define it, comes back defeated.<sup>1</sup> People of the world try to grasp the nature of an object by examining at first hand, evaluating it with their minds or examining it visually. Can such strategies ever grasp the state of the loss of ego consciousness?

The author illustrates his point with two analogies. In the first he asks the reader to imagine someone who has never seen the sea, looking at an image of it in some form of peepshow. For such a person to imagine it as it actually is after being shown a representation of it in the glass of a peepshow will require a great leap of imagination. In the same way the readers of this work are asked to look beyond the actual words and attempt to grasp the state it is attempting to convey through their own spiritual intuition.

The second simile alludes to the subtle, imperceptible signals of a woman to her lover. The subtle signs she employs to communicate with her lover are not understood by other people, who are unable to interpret them. Likewise only a mature sadhaka will understand the import of this work which treats of the loss of ego and the dawn of self-knowledge.

Can divine silence, the undivided non-dual bliss, which is [onelfold, yet twofold] like the trunk of an elephant, be grasped by speech or mind? If you dwell upon it with the insight of *jnana*, in the way one recognises a house by the crow perched upon it, or the moon by the finger pointing at it, you will become Sivam. (20)

This verse continues the theme of the preceding one. The author cites the example of the elephant's trunk, which serves a twofold function, first as the subtle organ of smell, and secondly as the grosser organ of touch, yet is not defined by either of these. Likewise, the state of reality cannot be defined either as one and undivided, as Sivam or

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<sup>1</sup>*Taittiriya Upanisad*, II-iv-1: One is not subjected to fear at any time if one knows the Bliss that is *Brahman* failing to reach which (*Brahman*, as conditioned by the mind), words, along with the mind, turn back.



the Self, or as multiple, as the individual consciousness which perceives a world of multiplicity, yet it includes and transcends in its non-dual nature both of these, which in the end are both mental concepts, the creations of the mind.

How does the disciple interpret and understand the subtle teachings of the guru? He takes them simply as pointers towards the truth. Just as we might identify a house which is hidden amongst trees or other houses, having being informed by someone that it is the one with a crow perched upon it, the mature disciple takes the teachings of the guru as pointers towards the truth he is seeking, using his own spiritual insight to make the final step towards realisation. He does not take those teachings to be the truth itself, no more than the house seeker takes the crow perched upon it to be the house itself. This is the import of the phrase *if you dwell upon it with true insight* (jnana).

The second analogy reinforces the first. Here the truth or the true state is compared to the bright moon in the sky, and the guru's teaching, to a finger pointing towards it. Time spent discussing the pointer, and its nature, without attempting to grasp the thing pointed at, will be time wasted, as will time spent dissecting the content and style of the guru's utterance, without attempting to grasp its inner essence.

Those who engage in reasoning and argument are ignorant fools, like ticks on the teat of cow, [unable to drink the milk], like a great buffalo who drinks the water [only after muddying it], or like those who would grind up sandalwood without using water. If you heed their words – a collection of falsehoods which are like the many streams of water flowing through a sieve or strainer – behold, hell will be your destiny. (21)

In this verse the author warns against using mental reasoning as a means to attain the authentic knowledge of the real. Such people are referred to a *tharukkar*, from the Sanskrit *tarka*, meaning *reasoning, the*

*art of reasoning, logic, dialectics.* They are unable to grasp the essence of spirituality, like the tick which can bite the cow's flesh but cannot drink its milk. Caught up in their own logic, which ever obscures the truth they are trying to grasp, they are like the buffalo who wades into the water, muddying it before it is able to drink. Divorced from true insight, their painstaking arguments will be fruitless, as will be the attempt to make sandalwood paste without water. Sandalwood paste is made by rubbing the sandalwood on a stone with water. Without water, of course, a paste could not form.

The futility of such endeavours is emphasised in the final analogy of the verse, where truth is compared to water, and its formulations by the different schools of thought and belief, to a sieve or strainer through which the water is passing. Truth, like water, is only one, but just as water passes through a strainer in a series of streams through the various holes, the logicians and theologians attempt to divide up and label this truth according to their various logical systems. Water is always the same regardless of which hole in the sieve it passes through, just as the truth we are seeking is always the same, whatever systems of belief we may from time to time espouse in our attempts to attain it.

In this verse, Vallalar gives a powerful warning to those who would waste their time in empty dialectics. The beautiful poem in *Thevaram* (§ 3376) by another great saint-son of Sirkazhi, Tirujnanasambandhar, conveys a similar idea. He sings, "Do not try to test the Reality through dialectics or sharp intellectual prowess. The Absolute shines effulgently in your heart – find Him there!"

The god of death himself, Yama, also instructs Naciketas in *Kathopanishad* likewise: "The Self is not gained by the weak, not through high intellect nor through massive learning of the *srutis* (sacred texts). It reveals itself to those who diligently seek it." (*Kathopanishad* 1.2.23).

Know that the search for the sadguru is the sign of extreme spiritual maturity. It is like that of a blind man seeking water after suffering from the heat of a forest fire in the

mountains; or that of a calf at the times when it yearns for its mother, or like that of someone who is totally obsessed with the thought of possessing a certain object. (22)

The topics of the mature disciple seeking and finally finding his guru, and the dynamics and meaning of that relationship are dealt with in Chapter Two of this work. Here it is clearly implied that the requisite intensity of desire for liberation will arise only in the most spiritually mature, those who have made the most strenuous efforts to overcome their worldly attachments.

Patanjali in *Yoga Sutra* 1.22, distinguishes three types of disciples – the soft (*mrudu*), the middling (*madhyama*) and the intense (*tivra*). Vallalar says that the search for the guru should be of the third type, intense, as indicated in the three analogies in the verse itself. Sri Ramakrishna says that the search has to be intense like the one-pointed effort of a person whose head has been pushed under water to come up out of it. There is no place for anything other than this in his mind. So intense should be the search for the guru.

Without a single, unifying nature, a multitude of different forms, male, female and neuter, are created, evolve and disappear. In order for this to take place, there must be one Creator who is the cause of these phenomena. Those works which reveal Him are the Vedas and Agamas. (23)

The phenomena which make up the world are described as *iyalbu indri* – devoid of [one, essential] nature. There is no identifiable single underlying nature for the myriad phenomena that make up the world. This leads to the conclusion that there must be a single underlying cause for these disparate phenomena. This cause is stated in this verse to be *kaarana kattaa oruvan* – one Creator [who is] the cause [of these phenomena]. In Hindu philosophy *kaaranam* – cause is threefold: *mutal karanam* is the immediate, proximate cause, as the clay from which pottery is made, or the primitive maya out of which the universe is produced; *tunai karanam* is the secondary, instrumental or co-efficient

*cause*, as the wheel used by the potter or the creative energy, *kiriyai catti*, in Sanskrit, *kriyaa shakti*, of Lord Siva, and *nimitta kaaranam*, is the efficient cause, as the potter, or Lord Siva himself, the ultimate Cause of all that is, although, unlike the potter, not involved in any way with the actual act of creation. The following three verses expand upon the nature of this supreme reality, Sivam.

That Sivam (the Self) is not known unto itself nor does it know anything that is other than itself. If it possessed thought then there would be for it the absence of thought, forgetfulness. [Therefore it does not possess thought]. There is for it no birth or death. The five divine operations unfold in its mere presence. The blissful voice of the Vedas and Agamas gives only the merest hint of its nature. (24)

That whose very nature is pure knowingness, consciousness, cannot, by definition, know itself. It can only be itself. As Sri Ramana Maharshi points out in v. 33 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, the very question as to whether the supreme reality, the substratum of the individual consciousness, can know itself is an occasion for ridicule: “To say ‘I do not know myself’ or ‘I have known myself’ is an occasion for ridicule. Why so? Can there be two selves, with one making the other its object, when it is the experience of everyone that they are one?” By the same token, because Sivam contains and transcends all that is or ever could be, there cannot be anything separate from itself for it to know, as Bhagavan asserts in v. 12 of the same work, “Since it shines without anything other which it knows, or which makes it known, the Self is [true] knowledge.”<sup>2</sup>

A further argument against the notion that Sivam, the supreme reality, might know something as other than itself is now given: since thought has no permanent nature, but is forever arising and subsiding, to impute thought to the supreme reality would imply that

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<sup>2</sup> The translations of *Ulladu Narpadu* in this commentary are taken from *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, published by Sri Ramanasramam.

the consciousness exhibited by that supreme reality was intermittent, subject to lapses and forgetfulness, which is a nonsense.

In the final part of the verse the nature of the mode of functioning of that supreme reality is dealt with. The five operations of the deity are defined in Siddhanta as *creation, preservation, destruction, veiling and granting of grace*. In this analogy the pure consciousness, in performing these operations, is compared to the sun, since all phenomena are seen to arise, subsist and decay due to its mere presence, just as the world we experience is a function of the mere presence of pure consciousness.

Beginningless, it exist for all eternity; it is unchanging and all-transcending; it is infinitely subtle; it neither waxes nor wanes; it is unmoving like the ether through which the air moves; know that it is the absolute fullness [of the Self]. (25)

This verse continues to expand upon the nature of the supreme reality, in whose mere presence the origination, existence and dissolution of all worlds take place. It *did not come into existence, but has always existed – utiyaatu ulatu aaki*; it is *transcendent – ongi*, in that it is not affected in any way by the manifestation over which it presides. Although unaffected by anything, it pervades everything entirely. Therefore it is *infinitely subtle – ati suukkumam*. Being of one essence, itself alone, there is *no change or modification within it – peraamal*. As the Absolute its nature is infinite; there is therefore *no contraction or expansion of it – kuraintu aagaamal*.

Like the unmoving ether and the wind, the supreme reality, Sivam, is devoid of all movement. Just as the wind, when in motion, is distinguished from the unmoving background of the ether, the pure space which supports it, consciousness, in the unenlightened state, manifests as the world against the unmoving background of the Self. When the wind dies down, it is indistinguishable from the ether, just as consciousness becomes one with the Absolute upon the eradication of the individual consciousness, which prior to that had erroneously perceived in it the trinity of god, soul and world.

Its eightfold form; its five divine operations; the divine forms [in which it manifests according to its] will; the rewards [accorded to the worshippers of those forms]; its absolute perfection, which is impossible to perceive with the mind; the revealing of it [through the agency of the guru]; the meditation practices [which are prescribed on the spiritual path]; the non-dual state in which you subside, as bliss arises upon the loss of yourself; the duality [which precedes that state] – all these are due to Sivam's grace. (26)

Here a brief resume is given of the function of the divine in relation to the world and the individual soul in the traditional Saiva Siddhanta model of reality. The world comes into being through Lord Siva's grace for the salvation of souls. Having been involved with various external manifestations of the divine, the soul in time comes to feel that there is a transcendent reality which it cannot apprehend, at which point the guru appears to point the way. The *jiva* thus becomes involved with various religious and ascetic practices, experiencing various spiritual states, until it attains access to Lord Siva's grace, through which it is freed from the impurities which cause it to perceive itself as a separate individual, whereupon it experiences the states of *parai yogam* and bliss, before merging in non-dual union with Sivam. It should be emphasised again here that this work is not attempting to teach a Saivite, or any other belief system. Rather does it aim to show that all such belief systems are ultimately illusory, and will surely be left behind upon the loss of the personal self, the ego. Having been brought up in the Saivite tradition, and with a readership composed entirely or mainly of Saivites, it is perhaps inevitable that the author should take Saivism as the model in his analysis of formal religion and its relationship, or lack of it, to the non-dual experience of the Self.

When we speak of 'you', of the worldly bond, and of Him who is your support, [you should know that] you alone are the ground [for the other two]. Just as, when firewood

is kindled into fire, the flame cannot be known separately from its heat, just so, you are That [the Self]. (27)

This verse supports the contention made in the commentary to the previous one, that it is not the specifics of any particular belief system that concern the author, but only the need to illustrate how in the final analysis all such belief systems must be transcended. In Siddhanta, the world, the soul and god are seen as eternally existing primal entities, with god, Sivam, somehow subsuming the other two, but without, in essence, having any connection with them at all. However, the author undercuts all such ratiocination with the extraordinary statement *neeeye talam aam – you alone are the ground [for the other two]*. Sri Ramana makes precisely the same point in *Ulladu Narpadu* when in v.3 he states, “Every religion postulates three fundamentals. The argument as to whether one First Cause manifests as three or whether three First Principles remain as three will continue as long as the ego exists. To remain in one’s own true state after the ‘I’ has perished is the highest attainment.” The ideas of an external world, which entraps us through the organs of sense, action and thought, and a deity who can lead us to salvation from that world, arise only in the consciousness that is deluded as to its true nature. That consciousness is the *talam – ground* against which this drama is played out.

In the latter part of the verse the individual consciousness and Sivam are compared to the flame and its heat. Fire is only one. Just as the flame and its heat cannot be separated, so the individual consciousness, *pacu*, cannot be separated from *pathi*, Sivam. The Tamil commentator, Chidambara Swamigal, rounds out the analogy by suggesting that the light of the fire can be compared to *paasam – the worldly bond*.

Ceaselessly the conscious soul, united with the body and the rest of the faculties, endures unbearable torment, veiled by the three *avasthas*, waking, dream and deep sleep. It is as if they had taken poison. That is the way of the three

impurities, which constitute the objects of your desires. Know that if [the *avasthas*], the mould [that shapes the individual consciousness], is removed, it will be seen that the way of divine grace is only yourself. (28)

The *avasthas* are the states of *waking, dream and deep sleep or unconsciousness*. As long as these dominate our awareness, there is no time at which the *conscious self* and its *inert conditioning factors* (consisting of the physical, sensory and mental faculties) are not inextricably linked, and no opportunity therefore for that awareness to free itself and glimpse its higher nature. It is as if it were in a permanent state of being *poisoned or drugged – vidam pusittaal pol*.

The result of being veiled by these states is to become involved in the world of the ego, oscillating between desire and fear under the influence of the three impurities *anavam, kanmam* and *mayai* (see the commentary to v. 4), which mould our experience in those three states.

The answer to this dilemma, says the author, is to strip away this mould and to realise that *you are the way of grace – nee arul vazhi*. 'You' is the pure 'I' which is present in all three states, which 'mould' our experience. Therefore *arul vazhi – the path of grace* is simply the consciousness 'I', turning in upon itself, so stripping away those conditioning factors, and allowing itself to dwell simply as itself, in its true nature. The alternative is to attempt to investigate one's own nature through the mental and sensory faculties which condition us in the three *avasthas*, an attempt which can only leave us yet further embroiled in the delusion of the three *malams*. ▲



TRANSLATION

# *Ozhivil Odukkam*

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

If, for those who know their true self, there are no instruments of knowledge, no [embodied] self, and no fruits [of these to be experienced], can we say, ‘Know Sivam!’? Like the gold which shines ever brighter on being refined, we will eliminate your personal consciousness, so that, as it is worn away, you remain as Sivam only. (29)

**F**or those who have followed the advice given in the previous verse, the very notion of ‘knowing Sivam’ as something external to themselves will no longer have any meaning. We might then ask

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what method might be employed to break out of and escape from this mould, mentioned in the previous verse, if all our mental and sensory faculties are declared invalid for such a purpose. The answer is given in a simile which compares the purification of consciousness to the refining process for gold.

Gold itself cannot be improved or changed; all we can do is remove its impurities so that it shines in its full radiance. It would be laughable to add something to it in an attempt to make it more pure. In the same way, the personal consciousness, the ego, cannot reveal and know Sivam, the real, for it is itself the impurity that obscures it. However, by remaining still, that is, by refusing to be drawn into the world of the mind and senses, that ego self will gradually be weakened and the light of Sivam will grow. This is the very process signified by the very title of the work *Ozhivil Odukkam*, one of whose meanings we have given in the commentary to v. 12 as ‘Subsiding [into the Self or Sivam] through the elimination [of obstacles, i.e. the personal consciousness, the ego].’

This theme of purification, of elimination of the false, is taken up by Bhagavan in *Upadesha Untiyar* v. 25, ‘To know the true nature of our Being, eliminating all attributes (like name and form, which hinder right perception) is to know the divine. When limiting adjuncts (*upadhis*) are removed, the Self shines forth within us.’

Is the Self, which is infinite bliss, exterior [to the individual consciousness]? Observe the nature of a life subjugated to the ego, which is like that of a fish swimming in the milk ocean, [yet unable to drink the milk]! The light of the Self endures without rising or setting, yet that [ego] transforms it into darkness, just as the action of fire can be suspended by mantras. (30)

In this verse the author advances yet another potent argument in favour of the non-dual view of the world. He asks *poorana aanantam aam taan purampo?* – Is the Self, which is infinite bliss, exterior [to

the individual consciousness]? Without even attempting to say what reality is, surely we must admit that, whatever it is, we are in it and of it, and, in a real sense, we are it, yet somehow remain unable to 'realise' that fact. The author expresses this idea by comparing the jiva to a fish swimming in the Ocean of Milk.

The Ocean of Milk, which in Puranic legend was churned by the *devas* and *asuras* to extract *amrita*, is compared to the bliss of the self, and the jiva, to a fish swimming in it, feeding off only the other flora and fauna it finds there (i.e. the phenomenal world of maya) rather than drinking the milk (i.e. the bliss of the Self), the medium within which it is living and from which it is never separated. This image appears also in v. 34 of *Tiru Arul Payan* – 'The Fruit of Divine Grace', by Umapathi Sivacariyar, a member of the school of Meykandar Tevar, in which he gives a masterly summary of the tenets of Saiva Siddhanta in a hundred terse *kural venba* verses, 'Souls, [immersed] in grace, [rejecting it], turn back to the sea of delusion, like fish in the Ocean of Milk.'

*akkini-t-tampam*, Sanskrit *agni stambha* is the art of suspending the action of fire by magic, one of *arupattunaalu-kalai* – sixty-four arts. The essence of fire is its heat, just as the essence of the individual consciousness is the pure consciousness of the Self, Sivam. In the same way that certain mantras can supposedly be employed to mask the heat of fire, *anavam*, the principle of egoity, masks the true knowledge, jnana, which is the essence of the personal self.

Sivam can be compared to the ocean; the soul, to its water; the impurity [which gives rise to the ego], to the salt in the water; karma, to the wind that stirs up the ocean, and the ego consciousness, to the waves upon it. Know that, in this way, that fundamental [ignorance], through the medium of the mental faculties and the five senses, whirls you ceaselessly about like a top. (31)

In this verse it is stated first that, like the ocean and its water, there is no essential difference between the absolute reality, Sivam, and the personal self, the soul or jiva; what differentiates them are the factors which affect the latter, the first of which is *anava malam*, the principle of egoity, the arrogance which causes it to ascribe its actions to itself and not to the deity. This impurity, like the salt dissolved in sea water, is inseparably united with the unenlightened jiva. In this unenlightened state, the actions in which the jiva engages disturb the still ocean of pure consciousness which is its basic nature, just as the winds upon the ocean disturb its surface, giving rise to waves. The individual consciousness, the mind, is nothing other than the proliferation of these waves: *potham alai* – individual consciousness [is] the waves [on that ocean].

Inwardly realise that you are the knowledge that knows the reality in which earth and the other elements, hearing and the other senses, the mouth and the other organs of action, the mind and the other organs of perception, the eye and the other organs of sense, and nada and the rest of the pure and pure-impure *tattvas* are seen to be unreal and cease to exist. [Know also that you are the knowledge that knows] the support that makes you aware of yourself as a finite soul. (32)

In the first part of the verse the 36 *tattvas* – universal constituents are listed in abbreviated form. These belong to three categories, impure, pure-impure and pure, each evolving from the previous one. The highest of the *tattvas* is the Siva *tattva*, this is the highest of the pure *tattvas* and is sometimes referred to as *nada*. Having listed these *tattvas*, the author defines the Real in relation to them, saying that it is *kandu agandra unmai* – the reality in which [the *tattvas*], being known, cease to exist. The *tattvas*, being insentient, have no existence other than as an appearance in the supreme reality, the Self, or, in Saivite terms, Parasiva, or Atattva. As long as these *tattvas* are taken to be real, a *caarpu* or support, appears from them in the form of the

individual consciousness, the *jiva*. Thus the author is instructing the disciple to the effect that he alone is the enduring reality within which the appearance of the world occurs. Freed from its false identification with the world appearance, the false 'I' of the ego disappears, and the liberated consciousness is revealed in its true nature as the non-dual reality of the Self.

The five divine operations are nothing other than the five states of the soul. Clearly understand the wondrous dance in which they ceaselessly delude you, spinning you endlessly like a whirling firebrand through these five states. You are like a clear crystal in which the five colours are reflected. (33)

In this verse the author merges the paradigm of the operations of the deity with that of the human soul, the *jiva*. The five *avasthas* are waking, dream, insensibility as in deep sleep or unconsciousness, *turiyam* and *turiyatitam*.<sup>1</sup> The correlation of the five divine operations with the body-mind and senses is exact: the world and its objects arise, persist and disappear with the mind and senses in the states of waking, dream and deep sleep, corresponding to creation, maintenance and destruction; veiling corresponds to the delusion in which the mind identifies with the world and its objects, and the granting of grace to the soul's realisation of its true nature.

In its embodied state the *jiva* is said to be like a whirling firebrand – *kollivattam aakave*. When a firebrand is whirled round in a circle, its single point of light, its red flame or ember, appears as an unbroken, continuous circle of red light. In the same way, the states which veil

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<sup>1</sup> The fourth and fifth *avasthas*, *turiyam* – the fourth and *turiyatitam* – beyond the fourth are not explained in the commentary. In Siddhanta these have technical definitions relating to the condition of the soul when it first incarnates and, under the veil of *anavam*, is cognisant only of its own existence. According to these definitions these *avasthas* can be loosely equated with veiling and granting of grace. These terms are not to be confused with their counterparts in Vedanta, in which they are employed simply to denote the state of reality which lies beyond the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. See *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk §353*.

the pure consciousness of the individual jiva succeed each other in an apparently unbroken series, such that the individual perceives them as permanent, whilst remaining unaware of the underlying pure consciousness. To emphasise the point that this pure consciousness, however obscured, is not affected by this process, it is compared to crystal placed against a coloured background. Just as a clear crystal appears to possess the colour of its background, whatever colour that may be, the pure consciousness, whilst remaining unchanged, appears to be modified by the succeeding states of waking, dream and deep sleep.

The modifications of maya are endless, like the delusion caused by intoxicating liquor. They will not be eliminated by your own efforts unless you remain as you are, without identifying with them, as one who is merely playing a part in a masquerade. This you should know. (34)

The modifications of maya – *maya vikaaram* are the experiences undergone by the individual consciousness, the soul, or jiva, in the five *avasthas* – states mentioned in the previous verse. Chidambara Swamigal notes that although this practice of non-identification can occur only in the waking state, it will enable the operation of divine grace, which in turn will eliminate the waking state, and the other states along with it, which consist of the *vasanas* – seeds, latent tendencies generated through identification with the experience of that waking state, i.e. maya. In *Vichara Sangraha*, 1.5 Bhagavan explains that the elimination of the idea that one is the gross body is sufficient to eliminate the other bodily sheaths which appear in the other *avasthas*, “It is on the gross body that the other bodies subsist. In the false belief of the form ‘I am the body’ are included all the three bodies consisting of the five sheaths. And destruction of the false belief of selfhood in the gross body is itself the destruction of the false belief of selfhood in the other bodies. So inquiry is the means to removal of the false belief of selfhood in all the three bodies.”

The concept of the *sadhaka* playing his part in the world without attachment will be familiar to many readers from v. 27 of *Ulladu*

*Narpadu Anubandham*, translated from *Yoga Vasishtha* by Bhagavan himself: Released from all bonds of attachment and with equanimity of mind, acting outwardly in all situations in accordance with the part you have assumed, play as you please, O hero, in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Once the fear caused by mistaking a rope for a snake has gone, will it come back, however much we try to recreate the situation, weeping and trembling as before? Similarly, even if a Siva yogi, in whom the elimination of the five divine operations, (i.e. the five *avasthas*) is firmly established, should fix his thoughts on these and summon them, bidding them return one more time, they will not stir. What more is there to say? (35)

Just as in the darkness a rope can easily be mistaken for a snake, in the state of ignorance, we take the world's appearance for reality, not seeing the underlying substratum, which is known as the Self, Sivam or Brahman. Once we see the rope in the light of day for what it is, we cannot recreate the illusion that it is a snake. Similarly a Siva yogi, one who is united with Sivam, or the Self, the Real, can no longer see as real the phenomena that play out upon the underlying substratum or screen of that Self.

The knowledge of the Siva jnani does not know itself. It is like the eye of someone who is stripping away the husk of an immature plantain. Although he may continue to speak [of 'I' and 'you'], there remains nothing that is different from himself. The word 'I' is just a word to him, just as to the tongue the word 'tongue' is just a word. (36)

The banana tree does not have a stem as such. The leaves grow from an underground corm and are tightly wound round each other to form what is called a pseudo stem, which has the appearance of a

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<sup>2</sup> The translation is taken from *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

stem or trunk. If these leaves are prised apart and peeled away, there will be nothing left to be seen. However this will not be the case with the stem of a banana tree that has flowered and fruited, in which an edible stem called the *vazhai tandu* is formed. Hence an immature or virgin banana tree is specified.

The unconditioned, pure awareness is compared to the eye, and the layers of illusion (the *tattvas*) that mask the understanding of the devotee are compared to the sheaths of rolled up leaves that compose this virgin plantain stem. Just as the eye is unaffected by the peeling away of the successive layers of the plantain, and simply remains at rest once the last leaf is peeled away and nothing whatsoever remains, pure, unconditioned awareness presides over the elimination of the successive layers of illusion without being in any way affected by this process, and simply remains at rest, once these layers of illusion have been removed. The eye of the person who is stripping away sheath after sheath of the virgin plantain tree continuously looks at the gradually attenuating stem, expecting some residual kernel to be revealed at the end. However he finds at the end that nothing remains of the stem after all the sheaths have been stripped away. Likewise, following the instructions of the Master, the inner eye goes on observing how the thirty-six *tattvas* are peeled away, one after the other, leaving no final residue after their elimination.

This absolute, true knowledge does not know itself objectively, nor does it know anything else external to it, just as the eye, whose nature is to see, cannot see itself. This *ariyaa arivu* – knowledge which does not know [objectively] is described by Ramana Maharshi in v.12 of *Ulladu Narpadu*: ‘That in which knowledge and ignorance are entirely non-existent is [true] knowledge. That which knows [itself or the world] is not true knowledge. Since it shines without anything other which it knows, or which makes it known, the Self is [true] knowledge.’

Although the jnani may continue to function in the world as if he were still subject to the illusion of duality, this is only an appearance. Just as, when the tongue says the word tongue, that word does not define its nature or function in any way, when the jnani, established



in the Self, uses words like ‘I’ and ‘you’, this does not imply anything about the nature of that Self, i.e. that it possesses duality. Just as the words at the disposal of the tongue are without measure and do not affect it in any way, the jnani is not affected by any of the outward appearances of duality that others may observe in his behaviour.

Since it is said [in the *Vedas* and *Agamas*] that all that one knows is not oneself, is it not evident that simply remaining still is to dwell as That (i.e. the Self, *Brahman* or *Sivam*)? Although its mouth may open and close, does a severed head know anything? Ascertain the truth for yourself. (37)

Here we see the use of the phrase *summaa iruppatu* – remaining still, quiet, at peace, which has a very powerful meaning in Tamil. It refers to the state of remaining as one with the Self, the most powerful and dynamic state of all, as Bhagavan himself tells us in *Aksharamanamalai* v. 37, ‘O Arunachala, when you yourself slumber in quite repose, enjoying bliss, what recourse for myself might there be, other than this?’

Again the author reminds us forcefully that all that the *Vedas* and *Agamas* can ultimately do, is tell us what we are not. We must enter the non-dual silence of the Self to find out what we are. What else is there to do, other than dwell like the mountain Arunachala in the unfathomable silence of pure being?

In the latter part of the verse, the Siva jnani is compared to a head which has been severed from its body, which represents the world composed of the thirty-six *tattvas*. In the state which transcends the *tattvas*, there remains nothing for the jnani to know, since he dwells in the state of pure consciousness, free of all limiting factors such as the organs of sense and action, the state which is pure knowledge itself. The analogy is quite appropriate, since from the point of view of the observer, he remains in the body, and still has a head and mouth, yet these are powerless to convey in words the state in which he is established.

If the Self, which neither knows nor forgets, is regarded as an object by those who would know it, is this delusion, or is it knowledge? To know consciousness is simply to remain as consciousness. Therefore know that, in one sense, consciousness is like the thirty-six *tattvas*, each of which, respectively, is not aware of its own knowledge (i.e. does not possess self-consciousness). (38)

This verse continues to elaborate upon the point made in the two previous verses, namely, that That whose nature is knowledge, which we call the non-dual Reality, Sivam, Brahman, the Self, etc., being one and undivided, cannot be known objectively. Moreover, the disciple is being told that, since he is not, and could not be, other than that Reality, he already possesses that knowledge as his own nature, and that therefore to know it, all he needs to do is to remain as he is, having freed himself from the delusion of the thirty-six *tattvas*.

The verse begins with a recapitulation of a theme first introduced in v. 24, 'If it (the Self) possessed thought, then there would be for it the absence of thought, forgetfulness. The arising and disappearing of thoughts is an illusion which appears to arise in the Self, whose nature is unchanging being-consciousness-bliss.'

Here, paradoxically, the Self and the *tattvas* are said to be similar in that neither knows itself, or themselves; the Self because its nature is knowledge, pure consciousness, and therefore there is nothing for it to know, and no 'other' to know it, and the *tattvas* because they are inert, totally without consciousness, entirely dependent upon the Self, pure consciousness, which provides the substratum for their apparent existence. Both are absolute: the Self is total truth, pure being, and the *tattvas*, total falsehood, absolute non-being.<sup>3</sup>

Will Sivam, your unseen support, which is beyond even the *nada tattva*, ever be known objectively by you? It would

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<sup>3</sup> "I am saying that the Self is self-sufficient. One need not discuss the *tattvas* to find the Self." Talk §641.

be as if you could lift the earth itself using a lever. If it did appear to you, it would be like a finger touching its own tip, or a mouth eating its own face and laughing about it. Consider and know. (39)

The *nada tattva* is synonymous with the *siva tattva*. It is the highest of the *tattvas*, and the one from which all the other thirty-five originate. This *tattva* is very high in its nature, being conceived of as the first emanation from the godhead, the womb of the Self, into manifestation. The author mentions it to emphasise the absolute gulf which exists between the unchanging Reality, the Self and any form of manifestation, however exalted or subtle, whose nature is impermanence.

The point of the verse is driven home by a series of three powerful analogies which require little comment, other than to say that they underline the ludicrousness and arrogance of our attempts to dissect Reality without once turning the light of enquiry upon our own self. Each more farcical than the last, they present us with a *reductio ad absurdum* of all our attempts, ever so seemingly plausible, to fathom Reality with the mind.

You are like a clear crystal that takes on the colour of its background. Why then, in order to be free of attachment, do you attempt to know objectively the [true] attachment, [which is Sivam]? Know that the ignorance which attempts to know Sivam as an object separate from itself is known as *anavam*. (40)

The manner in which a crystal changes to reflect the colour of its background is an image that is often used to suggest the way in which the world appearance manifests within the Self without affecting it in any way, as the following lines from Tayumanavar demonstrate:

“The five senses, the five elements, the organs of action, and all the rest, you are not. You are none of these. Nor are you any of the qualities that pertain to these. You are not the body, nor

are you knowledge and ignorance. You are *cit*, the real, which is like a crystal, reflecting the qualities of whatever is placed before it, and yet having no connection with it. It is I who, through my nature, will impart to you true knowledge in the measure of your spiritual maturity.” Hymn 14. Verse 18, lines 2- 4.

In this verse the word *patru* – attachment is used twice, once in the normal sense, to refer to the illusion of worldly attachment, which in Saivite terms, consists of the thirty-six *tattvas*, and again to refer to Sivam, the Self, as that which never relinquishes its hold upon the jiva. The author probably has in mind the well-known v. 350 of *Tirukkural*:

“Hold onto the attachment to Him who is without attachment. Hold onto that attachment to be free of [worldly] attachment. The only way to experience the Self, Sivam, is to realise that it is not other than oneself, and to remain still, so that, unaffected by any form of obscuration, one merges as one with it, just as the crystal remains clear and bright when it is removed from the coloured background against which it stands.”

In this analogy the clear crystal is the Self, and the crystal placed against a background is the Self when it reflects the thirty-six *tattvas*, the world illusion of *maya*.

*anavam*, which appears at the end of the verse, is, as we have seen earlier, the principle of egoity which causes the soul to believe that it itself, not Sivam, is responsible for its own actions. The concept of *anavam* has distinct non-Advaitic connotations when taken in its technical definition according to Saiva Siddhanta, in that it is deemed to be an irreducible entity which, though it can be repressed, is always a potential attribute of the soul, like the verdigris in copper. In the current Advaitic context however we take the word to refer in a general sense to the ignorance or delusion that causes us to mistake the illusory world appearance for the Real, in other words as a synonym for the Advaita term *avidya* – ignorance. ▲

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

To know oneself through grace, to experience the all-embracing reality in the state of *parai* as one becomes merged with that grace, [to become bliss itself] as the state of *parai* disappears, and finally to attain the transcendent state which is beyond even bliss, is the [state of] divine silence of the non-dual Siddhanta. Know that this is also the final goal of Vedanta. (41)

*A*<sup>rul</sup> – grace is the power by which Sivam, the Real, confers upon the soul enlightenment as to its true nature. Through this power of grace, the jiva develops discrimination and realizes that it is not the

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non-Self, the ephemeral world of the thirty-six tattvas with which it previously identified itself.

Vallalar goes on to say that when the work of grace is complete, the state of *parai* supervenes. *Parai* is a Siddhanta term which describes the state which supervenes as the culmination of the work of grace; in this state everything is now of the form of grace itself, and the *jiva* is no longer aware of itself as a separate entity, just as the flame of a lamp is no longer visible in the full light of the sun. This state is synonymous with *paripuranam* – *the all-embracing fullness [of Reality]*, since there is no longer a personality to experience it as other than oneness. The state of *parai* appears comparable to the state which Sri Ramana Maharshi refers to as the *atma sphurana*, the ‘I-I’ state:

“Again, *sphurana* is the foretaste of Realisation. It is pure. The subject and object proceed from it. If the man mistakes himself for the subject, objects must necessarily appear different from him. They are periodically withdrawn and projected, creating the world and the subject’s enjoyment of the same. If, on the other hand, the man feels himself to be the screen on which the subject and object are projected there can be no confusion and he can remain watching their appearance and disappearance without any perturbation to the Self.”<sup>1</sup>

Although a state of bliss is not specifically mentioned, it is clearly implied in the verse that the state of *parai* is followed by one of *anantam* – *bliss*, since it is said that the final state of realisation is *anantatitam* – *that which is beyond bliss*. These successive states which precede full realisation, grace, *parai* and bliss, are a feature of the Siddhanta doctrine. Such concepts are problematic of course for Advaita Vedantists and others who will argue that, since none of these states are the final realisation of the Self, it is fruitless to divide and classify them in this way, and that to do so will only cause confusion and misunderstanding. However, we should not lose sight of the main thrust of this verse, which is to say that there is only one state of realisation, and that it is the goal equally of Vedanta and Siddhanta. The fact that this final state is beyond the ability of any religion, sect

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<sup>1</sup> Venkataramiah, M., (comp.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §62.

or school of thought to convey is emphasised in the phrase *the divine silence of the non-dual Siddhanta*.

‘The conclusion of the Vedanta, (in which the first, second and third persons merge as oneself), [is that] one experiences the bliss that ensues upon the extinction of that self, and [finally] there is no one to say, “This is bliss”, is the deathless state of liberation.’ Thus spoke [Jnanasambandhar], he who, untaught, knew the Vedas. (42)

When the ‘I’ arises and grasps the objects of sense, the external world appears along with the second and third persons, ‘you’, ‘she’, ‘it’, etc. However, when the ‘I’ is turned in upon itself, and shines as itself alone, as ‘I-I’, *tanay – as oneself*, there exists a state of pure objectless self-identity, in which the first person, ‘I’, of the mind and ego does not arise. In such a state there is of course no possibility that the second and third persons will arise either.

The freedom from the objectivising ‘I’ of the ego engenders in the sage a feeling of bliss, which is the natural consequence of the removal of the feelings of loss, suffering, incompleteness, etc. which are the features of discriminating consciousness. However, the true *jnani* perceives a residue of egoity in such bliss and transcends it to remain in the natural state *which does not say (i.e. in which there is no one to say) ‘This is bliss’*.

Tiruporur Chidamabara Swamigal (TCS) again identifies the speaker in the verse as his guru, Jnanasambandhar, who as a small child grasped the inner meaning of the Vedas without any tuition through the grace of Lord Siva.

Stripping away *kalai* and all the rest (the *adhvan – paths to liberation* in Saivism), and revealing [to me my true nature], he annihilated my former vision so that it receded and vanished in the distance, just as, for those who climb a mountain, their new perspective replaces the one they experienced at ground level. Free of all *vasanas*, he shrouds me [in his infinite bliss] and never leaves me. Should I attempt to speak of his glorious might, only silence will result. (43)

TCS takes *kalai* to refer to *kala attuva* – *the path of kala*. In the Siddhanta system there are six paths to liberation, called the *attuva*, Sanskrit *adhvan*, each of which, in initiation, is shown to be absorbed by the next one, till the last is absorbed by the *tirodhana shakti* – *veiling power*, and this in turn by Siva. These six paths are *kala* – *power or attribute*, *tattva* – *principle or category*, *bhuvana* – *region, world*, *varna* – *letters*, *pada* – *words and mantra*. The implication, again, is that such aids to spiritual advancement must in the end be transcended and left behind before the disciple can obtain final realisation.

As in many other verses the author uses a powerful image which plays upon the imagination, to suggest a state which cannot be described in words. He compares the heightened spiritual experience to that of someone climbing a mountain. As he climbs higher and higher, the ground and surroundings that he has left behind appear smaller and smaller, less and less significant, until they are no longer visible. The reality for our climber now is the mountain landscape, with peaks extending range upon range over vast distances against the open skies. In a similar way, to the enlightened sage, the phenomenal world, so real and present to normal consciousness, fades into insignificance against the ever-present, unchanging background of the Self. The background is for him the foreground, the immutable Reality; eventually the former landscape of the phenomenal world disappears completely, because in the continuum of pure consciousness, there are no longer any discrete, separate objects, any self-existent phenomena existing independently of the Self.

The guru, being established in the state in which he is free of *vasanas* – *inherited dispositions* is able to hold the disciple in that same state through the power of his mere presence. *Vasanas* are the inherited dispositions which the *jiva* carries from birth to birth due to its identification with its actions and their fruits. The words “in his infinite bliss” have been suggested by the commentary of TCS who glosses: *...the glorious might of my guru who, shrouding me in his infinite, all-pervading bliss, in grace manifested within me, within as without.*



He said, 'All that you refer to [objectively] as "this" is false.' And now, for me, there remains no dwelling place other than the all-embracing expanse of the Self. 'Know that we are that,' he said. Shall we call it the sun that turns night into day, or shall we call it [the ocean of] supreme bliss? I know not. (44)

The guru teaches the disciple that anything that appears in his field of perception is not himself. The disciple realises that there is no place for him in the world picture, other than as the witness of all that appears as the world. This background is here referred to as *potu – general, common*, referring to the Self as the common screen upon which all the world picture appears. Accordingly the guru teaches him that he is not other than that Self, *athu nam – We are that*.

'Unless it is revealed to you, you cannot know [the Self],' he said. Should you attempt to know that which endures as the cure for the forgetfulness [of your true identity], that would be like an arrow aimed at the sky as its target. Though we speak of knowledge, [the voice that communicated that knowledge] will be as a voice from the heavens. (45)

In this and the preceding three verses the author refers directly to his master's teaching. There is not the suggestion here of the transmission of some kind of objective knowledge; all that is required for the disciple to realise the Self is to discover that he is not, and never has been, other than that Self. This truth is communicated through the guru's mere presence, which constitutes the *marunthu – cure* for the disciple's *maravai – forgetfulness of his true identity*. In the Vedanta text, *Sanatsujaatiam Sanatsujata*, to the question 'What is death?', replies, 'Forgetfulness of One's true identity as Self is death.'

Vallalar uses another vivid metaphor to indicate the futility of the attempt to objectively grasp the nature of reality. It is futile to try to strike the sky by aiming an arrow at it, since the sky is everywhere, including the arrow's point of departure itself. In the same way, like that arrow, thoughts that arise in the Self will run their course and

disappear back into the Self; any idea that at some point in their course they have hit their target, i.e. grasped the nature of the Self, is clearly false. Such is the nature of all philosophy and metaphysics, here dismissed by the author in a few terse syllables.

The transmission of knowledge from guru to disciple occurs only from the perspective of the disciple. The guru remains in the immutable state of the Self. Hence his voice is compared to a disembodied voice from the heavens, a common device in Hindu literature for expressing divine communication between the gods and men.

[The three defilements], *anava*, *kanma* and *maya*, produce the illusion of multiplicity, but as these disappear, their foundation destroyed, can the state of *nishtha* which then remains possess duality? Apart from consciousness there is nothing. You should remain just as the ether remains, untouched by the shadow of any object. (46)

*Nittai*, Sanskrit *nishtha*, has a number of possible meanings, related to religious and spiritual practices. See v. 26 for example, where it is used in the plural to mean *meditation practices*. Here it refers to the state of dwelling as the Self, Sivam, upon the elimination of the obscuring factors, which are constituted in Siddhanta by the three *malams* mentioned previously. TCS glosses: ‘Since there is no other *nishtha* beyond the *nishtha* in which the states of waking and sleep have departed and the personal consciousness has been eliminated, he [the author] says, ‘Can it be many?’ The point is that the state of realisation, abidance as Self or Sivam, is only one and not many.

On the elimination of the three *malams*, consciousness stands alone, with nothing it might make its object: *arivukku ethir illai* – *there exists no object for consciousness to grasp*. To illustrate the point Vallalar invites us to imagine how the space of the heavens might react to the presence of the phenomena that occur within it. Of course we will not be able to imagine any way in which pure space might be affected by those things. In the same way, we are advised to remain as the Self, untouched by the illusory world of the mind and senses.

When consciousness is without movement, that is the all-embracing fullness of Reality. Inasmuch as there is movement in consciousness, that Reality appears false. This is like the opening and closing of the eye. As an illustration of this, observe the manner in which there is wind when the air moves, and when it is still, there is not. (47)

Mind is nothing other than the arising of movement in consciousness. The importance of stilling such movement within consciousness is underlined in Sri Ramana's translation of *Devikalottaram* v. 10: "When the mind moves even a little, that is samsara. When the mind abides firmly and motionlessly (in the state of the Self), that is *mukti*. This is certain. Therefore know that the wise man must hold his mind firm by supreme Self-Awareness."

The word *puranam*, Sanskrit *purna*, means fullness; it is used here to indicate the absolute Reality, that which embraces all that is or ever could be, the source of the infinite potential of creation. Later, in v. 90, the Self will be characterised a *verum pazh – a pure void*. The Self subsumes equally the all-embracing fullness of manifestation, as in the waking state, and the pure void of the unmanifest, as in deep sleep, yet is beyond both. This Reality appears false to the extent that the mind-based personal consciousness convinces us that it is itself the Reality. The 'Real' thus becomes just another mental construct which the mind perceives as exterior to itself, something to be sought after and gained.

When the eye closes the world picture ceases to appear in a person's field of vision. In a similar way, when the personal consciousness subsides into the universal consciousness of the Self, the entire world of names and forms no longer appears in the *jnani's* consciousness.

For those who have transcended even the consciousness that is experienced as the *nada tattvam*, Siddhanta, which is itself the final conclusion of the Vedas, will not be different from Vedanta. Between the state in which the practice of saying 'Not this, not this' has been transcended and personal consciousness and the attachment [which gives rise to it] have been destroyed,

[and the final state, beyond bliss], consciousness-bliss will arise  
in you. (48)

In the first part of this verse the author appears to be making two main points: firstly, that Siddhanta is not different from Vedanta, in that it expresses the final conclusion, the sum and inner meaning, of the Vedas themselves. Secondly, that the jnani, who has transcended the mind and its world of mental constructs, will not be confused by the apparent differences between the two systems of thought; he will realise that both are different means to the same end, and that, in any case, both will need to be left behind once the edifice of personal consciousness which supports them is dismantled.

In the second part of the verse the author talks about the state of *arivananda* or *jnanananda* – *consciousness-bliss*, which arises on the elimination of the personal consciousness, with the implication that this blissful state is not to be confused with the final state, *anandatita* – *the state beyond bliss*, which is the state of union with the Self.

As long as the disciple is unable to free his consciousness from its tendency to identify itself with the world-illusion of *maya*, he must continually remind himself of its fundamental unreality, rejecting those unreal phenomena, saying *neti, neti* – *not this, not this*.

In the pure state of the Self, there is no movement, either in terms of the *jiva* merging with the Self upon the subsidence of the ego, which lies even beyond the thirty-six *tattvas*, or of the Self coming [to manifest upon the subsidence of the ego]. If you describe that state as ‘oneness’, there will still remain some residual trace of ‘you’. Know, therefore, that nothing whatsoever can be said of it. (49)

Before realisation, that state is thought of in dualistic terms, such as ‘I merged with the Self’ or ‘The Self merged with me.’ In the pure state of the Self upon the elimination of the ego, no such concepts can arise. In this verse the author uses the word *timirppu* – *numbness, paralysis* to mean *the ego*. TCS gives the following explanation: ‘He (the author) uses the word *timirppu* for *anavam* because *anavam* arises

in the *jiva* without being part of its nature, just as paralysis arises in the body without being part of its nature.’

*Anavam* is described as *tattuva-atita* – *beyond the tattvas* because according to Siddhanta it is an eternal potential of the soul, different yet inseparable from it. The implication is that even when the thirty-six *tattvas* have been transcended, there can still remain some trace of *anavam* – egoity in the soul. It is just such a subtle trace of egoity which, even after the elimination of the *tattvas*, will prevent the unwary disciple from progressing beyond the state of *jnanananda*, mentioned in the previous verse, into that of *anandatitam*, oneness with the Self.

This verse warns those who may have had some experience of the Self not to attempt to characterise it any way, such as saying, ‘It is only One,’ and so on. Should they find themselves doing so, they may take it as a sure indication that the state of the Self has not been attained.

The unalloyed state of overflowing bliss is comparable to the state of total unconsciousness. Those who have transcended even that state will be like the rays of the silvery moon [of the Self], moving in the ambrosial essence which lies beyond the sphere of consciousness. (50)

The word *unalloyed* is an attempt to translate the Tamil word *verruverum*, which means *totally empty*, here in the sense that the state of bliss is totally empty of any content other than itself, hence the translation *pure* or *unalloyed bliss*. This verse assumes that the subsiding of the ego, or *anava malam* in Siddhanta, has already occurred.

The state of *anantam* – *bliss* upon the subsiding of the ego is similar to *kevalam* – *unconsciousness*, as in deep sleep, firstly in the sense that in this state also the mind and the world picture that arises with it are not present, and secondly, in the sense that the experience of neither state can be described, as there is no objectifying consciousness to witness it. Fundamentally of course the two states are entirely opposed, the first being one of bliss and pure consciousness upon the removal of *anava malam*, and the second, one of total veiling of consciousness by the same *anava malam*. The perceived separation of god and soul,

Sivam and *jiva*, is only an illusion; both are fundamentally one, like the moon and its rays.

Rather than removing the states of remembering and forgetting, [showing you the means for] the destruction of your personal self, and thus destroying it, to babble on about using this method or that method to dissolve away that personal self is quite useless; it is akin to playing games with *mantras* or performing magic tricks; it is like throwing a gourd into the ocean; it is the imprisonment of true knowledge. (51)

The Self is compared to the ocean, and the mind, ego, or personal self, to a gourd floating in it. The disciple's mind, continually stimulated into activity by the instructions of a false guru, is compared to a gourd, which rather than sinking into the ocean of the Self, floats on the surface continually driven hither and thither by the movements of the mind. Realisation is only possible when the mind is in abeyance. Therefore the manifold prescriptions of the false guru can only serve to imprison it further, preventing it from freeing itself and subsiding into the reality of the Self. These prescriptions are therefore characterised as *jnana cirai – the imprisonment of jnana*.

Upon the elimination of sound and the rest of the *tattvas*, when 'self' and 'other' cease to be, the question of the merits of Siddhanta and Vedanta will be meaningless. My son, the state of liberation is indescribable; it is beyond bliss itself. To define it in dualistic terms is merely the play of the mind. (52)

The words 'the merits of both Siddhanta and Vedanta cease to be' have a double meaning: firstly, they assert that both Siddhanta and Vedanta are equal in having the lofty goal of teaching the path of liberation, *mukti*, and secondly, that both of these philosophical systems are transcended in the final state of *mukti* itself. Vedanta speaks of the one Self, the Atman or Brahman, whilst Siddhanta speaks of the two, Sivam and the soul. However, once the distinction between the knower and the known is eliminated, these distinctions also will cease to have any meaning, and both will be seen merely as equally

valid means to gain the same end, the state of liberation. This state is described as *anirvacanam*, Sanskrit *anirvacaniya* – *unutterable, indescribable*, not simply because it is impossible to describe, but because in that state there exists no objectifying, conceptualising, dualistic consciousness, no ‘person’ to attempt to describe it.

Sri Ramana brings out the same idea in v. 34 of *Ulladu Narpadu*: “Without knowing within the Heart, wherein [the mind] merges, the Reality that exists eternally as the nature of everyone, and remaining established there, to engage in disputes, arguing, ‘It exists; it does not exist,’ ‘It has form; it is formless,’ ‘It is One; it is Two; it is neither,’ is ignorance born of illusion (*maya*).”

The great drum of the lofty Vedas beats, declaring that these eight paths are not for the *Siva yogi*: mental anxiety, fear, disgrace, piety, revulsion, rites performed for removing the sins of the ego, and the observances of caste and religion. (53)

Those who have not become one with the supreme reality are [ever-changeful] like the moon reflected in water. Know that the austerities and other actions performed by those who have attained that supreme reality are like the actions of washing the heavens with rainwater, or setting fire to the wind. (54)

The consciousness of those who have not attained oneness with the supreme reality is unstable and ever-changing, like the image of the moon, changing with every movement of the water in which it is reflected.

In the second part of the verse two fanciful images are given to indicate that the actions of the *jnani* are only the play of the divine. Neither actions nor the fruits of them can be ascribed to him, and any action he may appear to perform will have no karmic consequences for him. To the unenlightened observer his actions may appear as irrational as those of attempting to wash the atmosphere with rain, or burn the wind with fire.

To impute wrongdoing to a *Siva yogi* is like censuring the god of death [for killing] or accusing the wind or the sun of

impropriety [for associating with that which is unclean or improper]. It is caused by the bondage of the three defilements, that powerful bewilderment which, whirling along [those who make such accusations], ceaselessly drives them before it. (55)

TCS expands the words ‘whirling along’ as ‘whirling [them] through each of the *avasthas*.’ One who has not reached the unmoving state of the Self will be caught up in the cycles of waking, dreaming and sleep, which constantly alternate with each other, not allowing him to perceive the unmoving background of the Self.

If it is only a dog that one is riding, what does it matter if one falls off, or succeeds in riding it? Similarly, what does it matter to the *jnani* if the world, which to him is a ghost-like appearance, blames him or praises him? He is not touched by it. For him there is neither honour nor disgrace, neither past nor future. Free of all limitation, he does what is required. (56)

If a man were attempting to ride a horse or an elephant, his failure might be of some consequence to himself or others. However, if it were a dog he was attempting to ride, a creature generally despised and regarded as unclean, success or failure would be of no consequence whatsoever. Similarly, to the *jnani* his body is a thing to be despised as the cause of all ills, and it is of no consequence to him whether it is praised or reviled. When it was reported to Sri Ramakrishna that some people were abusing him as a charlatan or madman, Sri Ramakrishna laughed and said, ‘Do not bother! They are doing me a great service by accusing me falsely, they are taking away a part of my *prarabdha*!’

In the second part of the verse the *jnani* is said to be not touched – *toyyaar* by the world. Here the word ‘touch’ translates, somewhat inadequately, the Tamil verb *toy* which has the meanings *to become soaked, steeped, to mix, blend, mingle, unite with*. The *jnani* exists in the world, but it does not permeate or penetrate him in any way, since he is one with the Self, which is like a cinema screen, untouched by the picture of the world which appears upon it. ▲



TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

**W**e may refer to our Lord Sambandhar, who gave to us the four paths, the first of which is ‘The Way of Truth’ [*jnana*], and the last of which is ‘The Way of the Servant’ [*cariyai*], as an ascetic, a king, a blissful one, a yogi, a hedonist, a virtuous one, or as Death itself. (57)

The terms *canmarkkam*, Sanskrit *sanmarga* – the way of truth, and *tatamarkkam*, Sanskrit *dasamarga* – the way of the servant refer, respectively, to the paths of *nanam* and *cariyai*, the highest and

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lowest of the four stages on the spiritual path according to Saivism, which were discussed in the notes to v. 14. In this scheme the second highest of the paths, *yokam*, is referred to as *cakamarkkam*, Sanskrit *sahamarga* – the way of the friend, companion, and the third highest, *kiriyai* is referred to as *carputtiramakkam*, Sanskrit *satputramarga* – the way of the good son.

TCS glosses that the jnani is a *poki*, Sanskrit *bhogin* – hedonist, epicure, voluptuary in that he swallows up the personal consciousness. As the slayer of the disciple's ego, or, in Saivite terms, the three malams which afflict him, the jnani is referred to as maravan – Death.

The holy form of the jnani, he who has attained mastery over the conjuring trick of the *tattvas*, he who is free of the personal self, he who is without anything that is his, is the place where perpetual bliss burgeons forth. All the delight experienced by his divine body, which resembles the trunk of the elephant [in its twofold nature], is *puja* to the Lord, and it is through this *puja* that the world flourishes. Consider this. (58)

The *tattvas* are likened to a conjuring trick – *caalam*, Sanskrit *jaala*, because they create the appearance of a reality which is in fact entirely illusory. Taking *caalam* in the sense of multitude, company, assemblage, which is also one of its meanings, the phrase in question would mean mastery over the host of the *tattvas*.

The actions of the jnani whose consciousness is established in the Self, whilst appearing to resemble those of a normal body, are experienced by the jnani as the pure bliss of the Self, and indeed constitute unbroken worship of the Self. In a similar manner the elephant's trunk combines the outer, visible function of touch with the more subtle inner sense of smell in the one organ. See also v. 20 where the same simile is used.

Bodily unguents, chaplets of flowers, jewellery and garments embroidered with gold are suitable for royal consorts, greatly

desired by their kings, but not for widows bereft of all gold and jewels. Enjoyments are for the *jivan mukta* only, and not for those who are like oxen [toiling on the paths of *cariyai*, *kiriyai* and *yogam*]. (59)

This verse states that *bokam*, Sanskrit *bhoga* – fruition, enjoyment, pleasure, delight are only for the *jivan mukta*, in the sense that the only true delight is the bliss of the Self. For those who have not realised the Self, all pleasures are worldly pleasures, which can only lead to pain and hamper them in their search for the divine, and must therefore be avoided at all costs.

The elephant is considered glorious in must, but when a dog goes mad, is that the same thing? Similarly when a jnani transgresses the accepted limits, it is considered to be decorous, but this is not the case when one bound by karma transgresses those limits. (60)

The elephant is a noble and powerful beast, whose imposing nature is only exaggerated by its ferocious behaviour during the must or musth. By contrast the dog, which at the best of times is considered by many as a base and inferior creature, is even more despised and reviled when it becomes rabid.

The words ‘one bound by karma’ are a translation of the word *kanmi*, Sanskrit *karmin*, meaning literally the performer of an action. In Tamil it typically has the meaning of sinner, perpetrator of crimes. Here it has the sense of someone who, not being realised, an ajnani, believes himself, and not the Self, to be the performer of his actions. The greatest of sins is that of believing that one is oneself the originator of one’s own actions, since that misapprehension is the source of all crimes.

For those of the highest spiritual attainment, the holy scriptures are not sufficient to bestow upon them the wonder of divine

grace. It is a blessing which words cannot describe. It assumes countless forms, and those who come to receive it are of countless different types. (61)

One who has attained the highest level of spiritual maturity is described here as *adipakkuvattaan*. He possesses *adipakkuvam*, Sanskrit *atipakva* – extreme maturity. Compare v. 15, *tivirataram*.

The Tamil word translated as blessing in this verse is the noun *peru* from the verb *peru* – to obtain. It has a variety of meanings including receiving, obtaining; the thing obtained, a boon, blessing; and also worth, merit, desert. Here of course it refers to the attainment of realisation of the Self. It therefore conveys the triple sense of the merit which leads to the gaining of realisation, the attainment of that realisation, and the blessing conferred by attaining it.

Those who dwell as knowledge upon the abolition of ignorance; who, upon the abolition of both [knowledge and ignorance], do not know even that knowledge, and hence are not separate [from the Self], have attained absorption in true knowledge (*jnana samadhi*) through the loss of their personal self, and in that very instant are liberated whilst in the body (*jivan muktas*). (62)

To the unwitting onlooker the thousand eyes of Indra have a noble aspect, but to him, [knowing them as they once were] as vulvas, they possess the quality of unending shame. Of what use are the austerities of those who merely wear the bright ascetic's garb, even if they endure for countless eons of time? They are like courtesans [who feel their own shame] even as the world honours them. (63)

Indra, the king of the gods, is here referred to as *makavaan*, Sanskrit *makhavaan*, as the performer of many sacrifices (*makha*). He was cursed to be covered in a thousand vulvas by the rishi Gautama for

the sin of seducing his wife. Gautama later commuted the punishment to a thousand eyes instead. The story is told in the first book of the *Ramayana* and elsewhere.

*Having given in the first chapter a general account, in no particular order, of the themes to be treated in the work as a whole, Vallalar now proceeds to give a largely sequential account of the stages leading up to realisation of the Self, Sivam. Chapter 2 discusses the attributes pertaining to aspirants of the various degrees of spiritual maturity and discusses the role of the guru in this process. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are dedicated to a discussion of the first three of the paths to liberation mentioned below, particularly in terms of their inability in themselves to confer nanam, final liberation.*

*When the jiva reaches the requisite degree of ripeness, the shakti – energy of Sivam turns from its role of tirotai – veiling to one of the granting of arul – grace. This is called catti nipatam, Sanskrit shakti nipada, which has been translated as ‘The cessation of the veiling aspect of Sivam’s energy of grace’. The uttamar – superior ones are those who will now embark upon the four paths of cariyai, kiriyai, yokam and nanam, which lead to realisation and union with Sivam. The word nipada means falling down, descending upon. The meaning given by the Tamil Lexicon for catti nipatam is accordingly, ‘Settling of the Divine Grace in the soul when it is ripe.’ However this alternative translation has been preferred since according to Siddhanta Sivam’s grace is never absent from the jiva. It is only its function that changes:*

“Thus *Shakti nipada* is not a new and unfamiliar *Shakti* coming to the soul, but the same *Shakti* that was there all the time, but is now behaving differently; though this may give the impression that the former hostile *Shakti* has gone away, and a new and kindly disposed *Shakti* has taken its place.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Saiva Siddhanta, An Indian School of Mystical Thought*, H.W.Schomerus, p.257.

## Chapter 2

*The extinction of the superior ones' [attachment to the world] through the cessation of the veiling aspect of Sivam's energy of grace.*

The benefactor and king of gurus [Jnanasambandhar] taught me the way in which the four states beginning with *calokam* correspond to the four paths beginning with *cariyai*. He also imparted to me the teachings [suitable for], and the qualities [characteristic of], the [corresponding] four degrees of spiritual maturity found amongst disciples. (64)

The four states referred to in this verse describe the spiritual state of the disciple on each of the four spiritual paths. The state of *calokam* – dwelling in the realm of god corresponds to the path of *cariyai* and is the state in which the disciple has freed himself from the thirty-six *tattvas* through the operation of grace; the state of *camipam* – nearness to god corresponds to the path of *kiriyai*, and is the state in which the disciple merges with grace, so that the personal consciousness is suppressed; the state of *carupam* – bearing the likeness of god corresponds to the path of *yokam*, and is the state of *parai* in which the personal consciousness is almost entirely eliminated, and the state of *cayucciyam* – identity with god corresponds to the path of *nanam*, in which the state of *parai* is succeeded by bliss, and ultimately the state beyond bliss, as it merges with Sivam.

These four states correspond respectively to the four paths of *cariyai*, *kiriyai*, *yogam* and *nanam*, the four stages on the spiritual path in Siddhanta, which are described in the notes to v. 14. *cariyai*, Sanskrit carya, in which the initiate worships the deity with mantras and performs various external religious duties, is the first and least spiritually advanced of the four paths. As v. 14 itself makes clear, none of the first three paths is considered by the author suitable for the conferring of true realisation. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this work are accordingly devoted to describing the inadequacies of these initial paths and indicating the means for transcending them.

At the end of the verse a further fourfold classification indicating the disciple's degree of spiritual maturity is mentioned. These correspond to the four paths and states listed in the first part of the verse, and were described in the notes to v. 15; these four degrees are as follows: *mantataram* – exceedingly slow, *mantam* – slow, *tiiviram* – swift, *tiivirataram* – exceedingly swift.

The words of our master were not simple replies, made in the manner of a *kinnari* player, matching his accompaniment to the measure of what he hears. His words were like the pure notes that rise from the golden lutes in the hands of those who remain lost in bliss whilst beholding the divine dance of Lord Siva. (65)

Unlike the false guru, who answers questions from the same standpoint as that of the disciple who asks them, that of the ego veiled by the three *malams*, the true guru, in this case Jnanasambandar, lost in the bliss of the Self, speaks only from the standpoint of the Self. His words are spontaneous and unfailingly true. The answer that is tailored to a question can only raise more questions. The reply of the true teacher annihilates the questioner along with the question. The *kinnari* is an Indian lute, of which twenty-two varieties are listed in the Tamil Lexicon. It is described there as 'A musical instrument smaller than the *vinai* (the most well-known type of Indian lute), having two steel strings.' The spontaneous and involuntary outpouring of the words of grace or *upadesha* from the guru who is merged in the bliss of the Self is compared to the notes that pour spontaneously from the lutes of heavenly minstrels who are lost in contemplation of Lord Siva's divine dance. ▲

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
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**F**or the highest degree of seeker, the pure state [of the Self] may be attained through the mere silent glance of the guru. For [the second degree], those who have understood the nature of the personal self, a single word will be as the elixir of life. [For the third degree] a few words [will be enough], like the intermittent call of the owl. [For the lowest degree that state can only be obtained by constant instruction], like the constant humming of a honey bee, drunk on nectar. (66)

The second part of this verse is extremely elliptical. The words in brackets in the above translation are based on the commentary Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has 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>.



of Chidambara Swamigal. The guru's teaching can be conveyed by a silent look, a single word, a few words spoken at appropriate moments, or a continued series of detailed instructions, depending upon the level of ripeness of the disciple.

The words *highest degree of seeker* translate the Tamil word *uttamar*, which is a plural personal noun based on Sanskrit *uttama* – *uppermost, highest, chief, most elevated*, and is a reference to those disciples who have attained the highest degree of spiritual development, *tivirataram* – *exceedingly swift*. In the title to the chapter it is applied equally to all four grades of seeker, but that is not the case here.

The words *those who have understood the nature of the personal self* references the degree of attainment that corresponds to the path of *yokam*. Chidambara Swamigal defines this state as follows: *yokam is the suppression of the personal consciousness, such that it does not manifest in the least degree*. This state is that of *carupam* – *bearing the likeness of god*, falling short of the highest state *cayucciyam* – *identity with god*, which is characteristic of the *uttamar* mentioned previously.

The Tamil word *tumpi*, here translated as *honey bee*, can also signify a *flying beetle* or *dragonfly*. Chidambara Swamigal gives a pretty explanation of the image, comparing the guru's instruction to the buzzing of a honey bee: *just as a male bee continually flies around a female bee, who is unconscious, humming and buzzing, until she regains consciousness and flies away with him*.

A young girl, as her breasts develop and her sense of modesty grows, becomes reserved and covers herself up, no longer exposing her naked body except in the embrace of her husband. In a similar fashion the reality of the Self will only be known upon the eradication of the personal consciousness, which alternates between suffering from the fruits of its actions, and experiencing bliss when it is brought to stillness. (67)

By *young girl* is meant a girl who has reached the age of puberty, the threshold of adulthood, and can therefore no longer go naked

as young children do. Just as the maturing girl will avoid exposing herself to other men and keep herself for her husband, the mature seeker will turn away from the objects of sense and keep his attention on the Self. In contrast the unstable mind, unable to dissociate itself entirely from the world of the senses, is unable to establish itself in the Self and thus alternates between periods of suffering and happiness. The Tamil word translated here as *stillness* is *tampanai* – Sanskrit *stambhana* – *stopping, restraining, paralysing*; the sense here seems to be that of stilling the mind by such means as *yoga* and spiritual discipline. Such attempts can meet only with temporary success, until the ego once more reasserts its power.

One may learn about the five *malams*, the myriad individual souls, the Lord, the five divine operations, the *avasthas* and the defective individual consciousness; one may follow the path of *cariyai* and the rest. However, the understanding in which the affliction of the ego has not been annihilated will be [useless] like the tiny gold fragments embedded in the wax of the goldsmith. (68)

The first three *malams*, *anavam*, *kanmam* and *mayai* are the three impurities that veil the soul, and are explained in the notes to v. 4. According to the commentary of Chidambara Swamigal the other two are *tirotai* or *tiroтана catti*, described by the Tamil Lexicon as ‘Siva’s Energy which provides worldly experiences for the souls, hiding spiritual truths from view’; and *mamayai*, which the Tam. Lex. equates with *cuttamayai* – *pure maya*, the five pure *tattvas*.

No amount of intellectual knowledge and outward spiritual practices can confer realisation unless the personal self of the disciple is eradicated. His knowledge will remain hidden and inoperable like the minute fragments of gold embedded in the goldsmith’s wax. The goldsmith would use a lump or ball of wax called *urai mezhuku* to gather up the tiny particles of gold which remained on the *urai kal* – *touchstone*, after testing its quality. In the touchstone method a line is created by rubbing the gold against a small tablet of a certain type of dark coloured stone; the goldsmith can then deduce the purity of

the alloy from the colour of the line, technically known as a streak, left on the stone. Clearly these microscopic fragments would be entirely useless as long as they remained embedded in the wax. In the same way the *jiva's* essential nature as Sivam will remain hidden and inoperable as long as it remains masked by the *tattvas* and the three *malams*. Chidambara Swamigal glosses: *The knowledge of those who have [merely] learned about and understood the three eternal principals (i.e. pati, pacu and pacam) is not manifest as their personal experience, but remains obscured by the [three] malam[s], just as gold which has been rubbed [on the touchstone] and become embedded in it remains hidden, if [the wax] is not melted and [the gold] extracted. Therefore he says [Like] the gold in [the goldsmith's] wax'.*

Like poverty in an alchemist, like disease in a great physician, or like betel spit on a self-proclaimed war hero, what a degrading thing it is for people to go about saying, 'I am That!' when what they are really doing is totally eradicating in themselves the bliss that comes from true knowledge. Who could save them from such humiliation? (69)

The Tamil word for alchemist here is *vati*, a shortened form of *iracavati*, Sanskrit *irasavadin*. The basic meaning of *rasa* is *sap, juice, essence*, and hence it comes to mean *mercury (paada rasa)*, which was of paramount importance in the science of alchemy, one of whose principal exoteric aims was the transmutation of base metals into gold and silver. Any poor person who claimed to be able to perform this feat would of course be reviled as a fraud.

The word *tambalam*, Sanskrit *tambula*, in the context of this verse, means the red spittle caused by chewing betel. The word can refer either to the betel leaf or its chewed residue. Anyone who claimed to be a great warrior but was so little feared or respected that people would spit their chewed betel on him would clearly be an object of scorn and ridicule. It is a great error to make false claims about oneself in any walk of life. However, to make false claims about one's spiritual attainment is an even greater sin.

In this verse three similes are given to illustrate the fate of the bogus teacher. Such a teacher gives himself away through his inability to give up his attachment to the objects of sense, just as the false doctor, alchemist and warrior give themselves away, respectively, by failing to cure their own sickness, alleviate their own poverty, or command the respect of others. Chidambara Swamigal glosses: *not gaining the bliss of jnana through his own experience, but destroying it in the mire of sense objects and remaining there to wallow in this mire of sense objects...*

The joyful words of the *jnani*, spoken before those who are free of delusion, will be fitting instruction to others of lesser attainment also. Remain still and listen, like the herdsman, [who watches over his herd, asleep yet] not sleeping. The malady [of your *karma* in this life] will be expunged, like dirt in cloth. I have said all that needs to be said. (70)

When listening to the words of the guru, the disciple should remain alert and aware, as in the waking state, yet empty and free of thoughts, as in deep sleep. He is therefore compared to the herdsman who cannot afford to sleep, but remains in a state of restful awareness, ready to react to any sound, such as the bells around the necks of his cattle, which might indicate that his herd requires attention. By giving up the sense of doership and remaining in the state described above, the disciple will cease to accumulate any further *karma* to be experienced in future lives. In this state, the *karma* accumulated in previous lives, including that portion of it which is being experienced in the current life, will also begin to exhaust itself and become inoperative.

Those who devote themselves to spiritual practice will have endured birth by egg and the other three kinds of birth in countless different incarnations; finally they will have been born in human births, and, once the effects of their good and evil deeds have been equalised, will embark upon the paths of *cariyai* and the rest in the service of god; these are the people who possess the four kinds of maturity that are hard to attain. (71)

*Those who devote themselves to spiritual practice* is a translation of the words *tava càrpil nirpor*, which means literally *those who dwell on the side of tapas* (spiritual practice). The word *tavam*, Sanskrit *tapas* embraces religious austerities of all kinds, from bodily mortification to intense meditation. The word *carpu*, here translated as *side*, has meanings like *place, support, help, attachment, dependence*. It therefore refers to people who no longer rely on worldly things for their salvation; people whose allegiance is now to the spiritual.

In the Hindu tradition there are four types of birth: *andacam*, Sanskrit *andaja* – *produced from eggs or spawn*; *cuvetacam*, Sanskrit *svedaja* – *engendered by heat and damp* (literally *sweat*), e.g. insects, worms etc.; *urpiccam*, Sanskrit *udbhijja* – *sprouting from seeds, roots* etc., i.e. plant life; *carayucam*, Sanskrit *jarayuja* – *born from the womb*, i.e. mammals and humans. The living things that are born in the four ways mentioned above fall into seven categories: creatures that live in water; creatures that crawl; creatures that fly; animals; unmoving things (plants and trees etc.); mankind and gods. The total number of species is given as 84 lakhs, that is to say, 8,400,000.

In its journey to Self-awareness over many births, the soul begins to learn from its mistakes, abandoning evil deeds in favour of virtuous ones. At a certain point, the good deeds cancel out the bad ones and the soul becomes ready to receive divine grace. This is what is meant by the equalisation of deeds. Chidambara Swamigal summarises: *For those in whom there is the equalisation of deeds and malaparipakam* (the maturing of the three *malams*), *there will be the four kinds of maturity*. The state of *malaparipakam* is associated with the equalisation of deeds in that this equalisation can only happen at the due time, when the fruits of those deeds are ‘ripe’ for consumption. *Malaparipakam* is defined in the Tamil Lexicon as ‘Stage of a soul when its three *malams* meet with the cause of their removal.’ The respective attributes of each of these four stages, have been referred to previously in the notes to vv 15 and 64. These are discussed again in more detail i vv 80–83.

Feeling revulsion for worldly enjoyments, feeling no desire for the lower worldly pleasures or the higher states of bliss,

rejecting them all as absolutely false, a mere conjuring trick, the disciple will begin to ask, ‘What is this body, who am I, and what is my source?’ and he will say, ‘We shall seek out the one who will reveal to us the truth of these matters!’ Thus arises the longing to make one what formerly appeared as two. (72)

The *inferior state of bliss – patha muttikal* referred to in this verse are states of bliss experienced prior to the attaining of *para mutti – supreme liberation*. Disciples who are becoming ripe for liberation will experience various levels of bliss as they begin to free themselves from their worldly entanglements. However attachment to such states is no less to be avoided than attachment to worldly things.

The word translated as *longing* in the final sentence of this verse is a translation of the Tamil word *thettam*; it has two main meanings: *earnest desire, appetite, longing* and *seeking, search, pursuit*. We might therefore expand the last section to say something like: *Thus arises the longing to make one what formerly appeared as two, coupled with the quest to find the teacher who can grant that realisation.*

They will perspire; tears will course down their cheeks; their hearts will thump and their bodies will shake; speech will desert them, and their minds will become agitated and confused; their bodies will burn feverishly, churned up like the roiling clouds; and their hair will stand on end. Such are the eight symptoms which mark those who desire [to find the guru]. (73)

An air of distraction; thoughts [fixed on the guru]; sighs [on thinking of the guru]; fevers inexplicable to others [caused by those thoughts]; refusal of all sustenance; reluctance to speak; keeping silence; mental confusion; fainting and death – these ten are the states [of the disciple before he finds his guru]. (74)

These states are variously interpreted by commentators. This translation follows the *urai* of Chidambara Swamigal, the bracketed

portions in the main text indicating the general sense of his interpretation.

The words *arai nottam* have been translated as *an air of distraction*. Chidambara Swamigal glosses: *with a diminished attention due to the mind being turned inward, away from the world*. Commenting on *ariyaa curam – unknown fevers*, Chidambara Swamigal says that the disciple, overcome by the intensity of his thoughts and emotions, is overwhelmed by fevers which are inexplicable to others.

The words *reticence in speaking* translate the Tamil *urai torraa maanam – a dignity by virtue of which speech does not arise*. Aware that no one else could possibly understand what he is experiencing, the aspirant prefers to maintain a dignified silence in that regard. The words *mental confusion* translate the Tamil word *vikalam – delirium, confusion, agitation*. The aspirant is driven to distraction by his quest, which has so far been unavailing.

Know that at the very instant that the guru reveals his holy form, and that which is inner manifests outwardly, as the physical manifestation of their quest, he will grant initiation of the six kinds – three inward and three outward, as prescribed [in the Vedas and Agamas] – to those of highest maturity, who have petitioned him, as [the river of devotion] overflows its banks. (75)

The verse begins with the pregnant phrase *thettam tiranda tiru meni*, which we might translate as *the holy form in which [the object of] his quest has materialised [in human form]*. The sense is that the eager longing of the disciple for the guru at some point brings about the guru's physical manifestation, an event which in turn reveals to the disciple that, unknown to himself, the guru, in the form of the Self, has been within him from the beginning.

The three inner forms of initiation are *tiru nokkam – by the holy glance*, *bhavanai – by thought* and *yokam – by yoga*, and the three outer forms are *parisam – by touch*, *vakku – by word* and *nul – by holy scripture*.

The disciple's *petitioning* the guru would consist of him asking the guru the questions they had found themselves unable to answer in v. 72. However before asking such questions, the disciples would pay homage to the guru in traditional fashion, described by Chidambara Swamigal as follows: *having circumambulated the acarya many times, having made ashtanga prostration and other form of obeisance, then, arising and standing with joined palms, offering many praises....*; only then would they address the guru. A detailed description of such an initiation (as in Lord Siva manifesting as guru to Manikkavacakar), is found in Ch. 2, *Holy Perunturai*, of the *Tiruvadavur Adigal Puranam*.

The bracketed words *the river of devotion* are taken from Chidamabara Swamigal's *urai*, which says: *as the river of devotion surges, rising up and overflowing its banks*. The idea that the inner bliss being experienced by the disciple will well up irrepressibly and manifest in their outer conduct is expressed by the image of a river overflowing its banks.

Through his touch, thought and glance, the guru will drive out all the three *malams, anavam, mayai* and *kanmam*. Then, bestowing his wisdom through his word, he will remove the illusion of personal consciousness – which leads to involvement in *cariyai* and the other three paths – whereupon that personal consciousness will be no more. (76)

The commentary states that the guru, in touching the disciple with his hands and feet, is like a bird which uses its feathers to hatch out its eggs; in dwelling upon the disciple as his own divine form, he is like the turtle, which protects its eggs with its thoughts; and in looking upon the disciple with his glance of grace, he is like the fish, which watches over its eggs with its eyes. It further states that all six forms of initiation are meant in this verse, *yoga* being considered to be included in *thought*, and *holy scripture* in *word*.

To some disciples the secret of the master's teaching will only be revealed at the appropriate time or in the appropriate situation; or it will require experience, like that of an expert in recognising a gemstone. Others will grasp the truth that



is being transmitted like the swan, which drinks the milk, leaving the water with which it is mixed; like the oyster, which waits for raindrops to fall into it then closes up; like a heron, which remains motionless, waiting for a fish to pass; like water that vanishes instantly on falling onto red-hot iron, or in the manner of those who can correctly appraise a coin that is presented to them in the space of a flash of lightning. (77)

For some disciples the meaning of the master's teachings will remain hidden from them at first, but will later dawn upon them. Some disciples will not grasp the teaching when presented in a given form, but will be able to do so when presented in another form. Yet others will require the help of fellow disciples to understand that which they have so far been unable to grasp, just as a gemstone might look like a worthless stone to someone until he has received training in the company of those who are skilled in distinguishing them.

The way in which the mature disciple will be able to grasp the guru's teaching is illustrated by means of a series of similes. Like the swan's fabled ability to separate milk from water and drink only the milk, ripe disciples have the ability to grasp the *jnana* essence of the master's teaching, without being caught up in all the paraphernalia which encumber the seeker on the first three paths of *cariyai*; like the oyster, which waits for nourishing rain to fall then closes up immediately, they maintain themselves in an open and receptive state, waiting for a word from the master, and when it does come, they make sure to absorb and internalise it, not letting it go to waste; like the heron or stork which remains absolutely motionless, ready to pounce when its prey comes near, they keep absolutely still, waiting for a word from the master, ready to snap it up eagerly when it comes; just as water falling onto red-hot iron evaporates and cannot be recovered, they will absorb the master's teaching instantly the moment they hear it, not letting it escape them; and just as an expert, due to his vast experience, might be able to appraise a coin, even if it were illuminated only for a brief moment by a single flash of lightning, they will be able to grasp the master's teaching in an instant. ▲

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

The way in which the disciple is killed [by the word of the master], yet still lives, may be compared to a wife dying on merely hearing of the death of her husband; to milk [which boils over in an instant]; to a deeply devoted wife, immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre; to a loving widow [who remains faithful to her husband even after he dies], or to the generosity of Karna at the time of his death. (78)

**I**n this verse the woman who has lost her husband is used three times as a term of comparison. In the first two instances, the widow stands

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for the ego, the personal self, which is annihilated immediately on the mature disciple hearing the words of the guru. In the third, the widow stands for the disciple himself, who on hearing the word of the guru abandons all ideas of 'I' and 'mine', just as the faithful widow gives up her previous worldly existence on the death of her husband.

In the reference to milk it is not clear which property of milk is being referred to. One possibility is that it is a reference to the way in which a tiny amount of curd is sufficient to 'seed' a whole dish of milk, leaving nothing of the original milk, just as a word from the guru is sufficient to entirely transform the consciousness of the ripe disciple in an absolute and irreversible fashion.

The reference to Karna at the end of the verse requires some explanation. Karna is a major character in the *Mahabharata* who fought on the side of Dhritarastra against the sons of Pandu. Karna had been born to Kunti by the sun god Surya, before her marriage to Pandu. Abandoned at birth, he had been adopted by Adhiratha, a great comrade of Dhritarastra, and thus came to fight against his own half-brothers, the sons of Pandu, in the Kurukshetra battle.

Different accounts of Karna's act of generosity at the time of his death are given in the Sanskrit *Mahabharata* of Vyasa and in the Tamil *Villiparatam* of Villiputtur. In the latter Krishna approaches Karna in the guise of a Brahmin, asking for alms. Being on the battlefield Karna has nothing to offer. The Brahmin reminds him that he can give him the mountain-like punya which he has accumulated throughout his life with his matchless generosity. Karna agrees. Krishna then reveals his true identity and leaves, having rendered Karna capable of being killed by Arjuna through the loss of the merit which had previously protected him. In the Sanskrit *Mahabharata*, in which Karna's vulnerability to Arjuna is established very early on in his life, a much lesser degree of generosity is involved. In order to resolve a dispute over whose son is the greater, Karna's father, Surya and Arjuna's father, Indra appear as Brahmins on the battlefield. Karna, having nothing to offer, breaks off his gold teeth and gives them to the Brahmins, thus establishing his superiority. Chidambara swamigal

assumes that the former account is being referred to here as he glosses: *like the generosity of Karna, through which, at the time of his death, being mindful of his next birth, he gave up to a Brahmin all the merit he had accumulated.*

Just as the gold which the goldsmith melts down in his crucible is of various degrees of purity, the results of the master's teaching, though taken from the Siva Agamas and clearly conveyed, will vary, depending upon the degree of ripeness of the disciple. Know that all do not share the same degree of maturity. (79)

The Tamil word used in this verse is *marru*, which is the technical term for *the degree of fineness of gold*, which was determined by the touchstone. See v. 68 for information on the use of the touchstone. To refine gold, the goldsmith would place gold of various degrees of purity in a crucible and melt it down, skimming off the impurities that rose to the surface. If the gold contained a lot of impurities it would take longer to refine and might need to be smelted a number of times, getting gradually purer. However, whatever the degree of purity, there was only the one process for refining it. In the same way the master's teachings, though derived from the Saiva Agamas and the same for all, will take more or less time to bear fruit, depending upon the maturity of the disciple.

The true reality of the life of the householder will become clear [to those of low spiritual maturity] only very slowly. It can be compared to carving a statue by gradually chipping away the stone, or to the process of purifying muddy water with clearing nut. In the end this ancient world will be as repulsive to him as rice vomited up. Like the stem of a plantain tree placed on the fire, [very slow to burn], true knowledge (*jnana*) will arise in him only very slowly. (80)

## MOUNTAIN PATH

The subjects of this verse are the aspirants who possess the lowest grade of spiritual maturity, those who are *mantataram* – *exceedingly slow* to respond to the teachings of the guru. The *Clearing-nut tree*, *Strychnos potatorum* is a deciduous tree which grows up to forty feet in height. Its Tamil name is *cillam* and its Hindi name is *nirmali*. The seeds of the tree are commonly used in traditional medicine as well as in purifying water in India and Myanmar. The state of being in which one is involved in worldly attachments is compared to murky water; just as the clearing-nut slowly causes the clear water to separate out from the muddy sediment, the teaching of the guru will gradually purify the consciousness of the disciple, eliminating those attachments.

For those whose nature can be moulded as one would forge an image in iron, true knowledge will be won [more swiftly], as fire will burn green firewood. Then, like a drop of rain sliding from the leaf of a lotus, their worldly life will fall away. Divorced from them, the entire world will appear like a mirage. (81)

The devotees of the next to lowest degree of attainment will gain *jnana* in the manner of green wood, which will burn well enough along with a few pieces of dry firewood. Chidambara swamigal sums up the meaning of the verse as follows: *Just as green wood will burn with the help of a few pieces of firewood, jnana will arise in them through a few words of instruction.*

The lotus leaf possesses a complex composition which repels water from its surface, reducing it to tiny droplets and causing it to run off the leaf if it is tilted; not only that, any dirt particles on the leaf adhere to the droplets of water which thus cleanse the leaf. Hence those who are able to live in the world without being contaminated by it are compared to the lotus leaf, which remains dry and clean, even whilst living in a wet, muddy environment.

[For the next highest class], to remove the body's inherited dispositions [and bestow *jnana*] will be like [carving] a wooden doll. [*Jnana* will arise in them swiftly], as fire consumes charcoal. They will be indifferent to the household they had previously cherished. It will be like a place of general assembly to them. Even the life of the gods will seem like an insubstantial dream. (82)

This first part of this verse is extremely elliptical, but the intended meaning is reasonably clear from what precedes it. Since the two preceding verses dealt with the two lowest grades of seeker, it can be assumed that the next to highest grade, *tivira paccuvar*, are being described here. Since the first two verses referred, respectively, to the shaping of stone and iron, this phrase may be assumed to be referring to the carving or shaping of wood, and that what is being compared to fire burning charcoal is the action of *jnana* in swiftly consuming the conditional awareness of the disciple.

The significance of the phrase *the body's inherited dispositions* is that aspirants of this degree of maturity will no longer have any need to remove their *bodha vathanai* – *inherited dispositions related to sensual desire*, since these will already have been transcended.

The idea expressed in the final line seems to be that, although we cannot experience the life of the gods, we feel assured that it is vastly more pleasurable than this earthly life. However even such pleasures, as we might imagine them, will seem ephemeral and insubstantial to the *tivira paccuvar*.

For [those whose nature is easily moulded, like] dolls made out of butter, the acquisition of *jnana* will be swift, like squirrel fur or cotton falling into the flame of a lamp. For them there are no desires. Tears will pour down from their eyes; oblivious to time, sobbing and melting inwardly, they will laugh and cry by turns, and the hair of their bodies will stand on end. (83)

[In those of the highest degree of maturity] the in-dwelling *anavam* and the outer *kanmam* and *mayai* have become separated [from their true self], just as the fruit of the tamarind becomes separate from its shell when ripe, and the seeds of future *kanmam* have been thus annihilated, just as an eyeless needle cannot be threaded. For such as these this freedom from desire is the bliss of the Self. (84)

The text simply says *that which sprouts within along with that which is exterior*. Chidambara swamikal identifies *that which sprouts within* as *anavam*, the principle of egoity that is intimately associated with the *jiva* in an inward sense, yet eternally separate from it, and that which is outside as the other two *malams*, *mayai* and *kanmam*, the *world illusion* and the self-perpetuating deeds and their fruits, which affect the *jiva* in an outward sense, and must be eradicated before the inwardly dwelling *anavam* can be tackled. For those preferring an interpretation more in line with Advaita Vedanta we might say *that that which sprouts within* is the mind and *that which is exterior* is the senses and their activity.

*The fruit of the puli – tamarind tree* is a long, green pod. When it ripens, the outer shell becomes brown and brittle, at which point the brown pulp containing the seeds becomes detached from the shell and is quite easy to extract. Just as the brittle shell of the ripe tamarind fruit will fall away easily, the conditional awareness of the ripe disciple will be easily eradicated by the word of the guru. At this point the ego, the sense of a personal self, has died, and the disciple cannot create any further *kanmam* for himself, since there is no longer an ‘himself’ to perform that *kanmam* or experience its effects. The actions of his physical body are now those of the Self, Sivam.

Towards the end of the verse there is a play on the word *pacam* which means *thread* as well as having the familiar meaning *worldly bondage*. Just as thread (*pacam*) cannot follow a needle without an eye, *kanmam – actions and their fruits* cannot become associated with those who have abandoned worldly attachments (*pacam*). ▲

(To be continued)

# TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

[The attainment of *jnana*] will be like the rising of the sun; like the overwhelming desire of the lover for his beloved; like a ship sighting shore after surviving the perils of the ocean; it will be like being freed from prison or being cured of an incurable disease; it will be like witnessing a miracle. (85)

The sun is here referred to as *arunan*, from Sanskrit *aruna* meaning reddish-brown, tawny, red, ruddy, (the colour of the morning opposed to the darkness of night). It is therefore a word well suited to symbolise the coming of the dawn of realisation, before which the darkness of *anava malam*, the ego and the false world of duality which is founded upon it, fades and ceases to be. The all-consuming bliss of the Self is

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then compared to the desire of the lover for the beloved, which grows ever greater, eclipsing any other thoughts and desires.

As the body, senses, mental faculties, the three *gunas* (principles of nature), and the ten vital airs fall away one after the other, [mature disciples will attain] the liberation which lies beyond nada, the highest of the *tattvas*; then the personal self, which stands in the middle ground [between the world and the Self], will be eradicated, and they will enter the ocean of supreme bliss. Finally, becoming free of all divisions, how will they not be amazed, knowing now that which they have never known? (86)

In this verse the thirty-six *tattvas* are referred to once more, with the addition of the three universal principles – *rajas*, *tamas* and *sattva*, and the ten vital airs – *vayu*, the principal one of which is *prana*. The thirty-six *tattvas* are a subset of a total of ninety-six, which include, in addition to the thirty-six which are the main focus of Siddhanta, the *gunas*, the *vital airs*, the *bodily sheaths*, the *nerves*, and so on. Four stages, leading to the disciple's realisation of his unity with the Self, are described. First he grasps the nature of the world around him, (described in Siddhanta terms as consisting of the thirty-six *tattvas*), and, realising that it is none other than the Self, becomes free of it, resulting in *vedu* – liberation [from the *tattvas*]; next the 'I' which stands between the Self and the world of the *tattvas*, subsides, a process here described as *tan ozhivu* – the loss of oneself, the duality which it had previously mediated having now ceased; at that point the disciple is enveloped in the ocean of supreme bliss. Finally even this state is transcended and the disciples attain the state of oneness with the Self, becoming *canthu azhivar* – those who are free of all divisions. See also v. 41 which expresses the same fourfold progression.

What obstacle remains for those who have realised the nature of knowledge, the knower, and ignorance? Will they be parted

[from the Self]? It is impossible, just as it would be impossible for the heavens, fearing they might be robbed, to go and hide in the kitchen. (87)

Chidambara swamigal equates these three entities, *knowledge, the knower and ignorance* with the Siddhanta triad, *pati, pacu and pacam – the Lord, the soul and (worldly) bondage*. In terms of Advaita Vedanta we could call them the Self, the ego and the world, or *maya*.

Since the disciple has become one with Sivam, the Self, it is impossible for him even to entertain the idea that he might become separated from it, and to take measures to prevent that happening. In the same way it is impossible for the heavens, since they provide the space in which all things subsist, to be robbed of anything, or even to entertain that fear, since all things, wherever they are, are always contained within it.

For those experiencing blissful union [with the Self], having come to know the true reality as surely as they had once known the false, there is no longer any connection with anything whatsoever. What a wonder is the destruction of oneself, like the spreading rays of the sun, rising in the vision of a clear-sighted eye [and blotting it out completely]. (88)

Before he sets out on his spiritual quest, the disciple identifies himself with the body, senses etc., but it is not a conscious identification. Rather is it an underlying assumption regarding his being in the world, one that most people instinctively make, and which is never called into question. Even such a great *jnani* as Sri Ramana Maharshi, ripe for liberation though he was, had never questioned his bodily identity until he underwent a death-like experience at the age of sixteen. Later on the disciple is told that he is not the body and begins to investigate his true nature. Finally, usually after many struggles, he realises his true nature and becomes established in the Self. The point being made here is that the enlightened *jnani* will not, cannot, question

his identity as the Self. It is as natural to him as identification with the body is to those in the unenlightened state.

The rise of the Self eradicates all distinctions, such as the triad of knower, knowledge and the thing known, just as the triad of seer, sight and the thing seen is obliterated in a vision overpowered by the brilliance of the sun.

For those whose personal consciousness has been annihilated, what association with anything whatsoever remains? For them, the whole universe has been destroyed. Where might they go and hide? Like the tale of the man who once went in search of a tiger, [was mauled by it and devoured], the Self will hold them in its unblinking gaze, and bring them to complete stillness. (89)

Since the *jnani* is one with the non-dual Self, the reality beyond being and non-being which transcends all limitation, nothing 'other' exists with which he might have some form of relationship, connection or attachment. Upon the loss of the ego, the personal self, the universe is seen by the *jnani* to be unreal in itself, existing only as an appearance within the Self. Thus it is effectively destroyed. Moreover, since he is no longer part of that illusion, and dwells beyond time and space, being and non-being, as the Self, there will be no personal self to fear that it too will be annihilated, and to attempt to preserve itself by seeking a hiding place. Hence it is said *enge olittu irukkalaam?* – *where might he go and hide?*

Sadhu Om, in his commentary on Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Ulladu Narpadu*, v. 19, records that Bhagavan was known to tell the story of the man who set out to look for a tiger, to illustrate the point that, for the seeker to realise the Self, the seeker that initiated the search must himself be annihilated, offered up as a prey to the Self. The story is as follows: A man who has never seen a tiger becomes obsessed with the idea of seeing one. Wandering in the forest he hears that there is a tiger in a cave at the foot of a mountain and goes there. The cave is dark and he is not able to see the tiger, so he crawls inside, whereupon

the tiger takes him in its jaws, kills and eats him. (Paraphrased from *Shri Ramanopadeca Nunmalai*, 1987 edition, p. 156). The fact that the story is alluded to only briefly here suggests that even at the time of Kannudaiya Vallalar the illustration was already widely known.

Having realised the Self, they abide as That; for them, having perceived the nature of ignorance, there is neither knowing nor absence of knowledge. If one were to attempt to describe the bliss which flourishes in the pure emptiness of the Self, where they live without living, it would be like trying to calculate the volume of the heavens with a pint pot. (90)

The Tamil words translated as pure emptiness are *verum pazh*, which mean *an empty void*, but this should not be taken literally. The words refer to the nature of the Self, as transcending both being and non-being, and possessing an infinite potential for creation and manifestation. Envisaged from the point of view of objectifying consciousness, it appears as a void. The verse as a whole is reminiscent of v.12 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, each standing as kind of commentary to, or gloss on, the other:

That in which knowledge and ignorance do not exist is [true] knowledge. That which knows [the world] is not true knowledge. Since it shines without anything other which it knows, or makes known, the Self is [true] knowledge. It is not a void.

The words pint pot at the end of the verse translated the Tamil word *padi*, which is *a small measure of volume for liquid or grain*. The translation uses the words *pint pot* as a rough equivalent. The mind and all the other faculties, which exist only in the bliss of the Self, could no more measure it than the pot could measure the space within which it exists, and with which it is always filled.

The Agamas speak of Sivam as ‘the consciousness of consciousness’, whilst Vedanta speaks of ‘pure consciousness.’ Both statements are appropriate when referring to the state in

which there is no separation [from Sivam or Brahman]. Those who claim ‘You are That’ or ‘I am Brahman’ will try the patience even of Hari and Brahma. (91)

Once the personal consciousness is lost, the paths of Vedanta and Siddhanta, which appear opposed and contradictory to those of lesser attainment, will be seen to be equally valid means of achieving the same goal. TCS glosses: *the declarations made by those Vedas and Agamas will apply equally to the state of union with Sivam upon the loss of the ego consciousness, and the state of union with Brahman upon the loss of the personal self.*

The two best known of the *mahavakyas* – *great sayings of the Upanishads* are referred to here, *tat tvam asi* – *You are That*, and *aham Brahmasmi* – *I am Brahman*. According to Chidambara swamigal the first is associated with the Agamas and the latter, with Vedanta. The sentiment expressed here is similar to that of v. 32 of Sri Ramana Maharshi’s *Ulladu Narpadu*:

The Vedas may proclaim in thunderous tones, ‘You are That’, but to think ‘I am That. I am not this’, — instead of knowing oneself through enquiry and remaining in that state,— is due to lack of strength of mind, since That ever abides as oneself.

Bhagavan himself was always eager to point out that all disagreements as the ultimate nature of reality are based on the ego-mind only, and cease when it ceases. This verse is one of the few that Bhagavan actually referred to directly to in his conversations. See *Day by Day with Bhagavan, 27-3-46 Afternoon*, in which he paraphrases the verse, which is then read out before the assembled group.

*In the next chapter Kannudaiya Vallalar devotes an entire separate chapter to each of the subsidiary spiritual paths, cariyai, kiriyai and yogam, explaining how in the final analysis they are unsuitable for the gaining of true realisation, nanam. The paths are dealt with in reverse order, beginning with the highest of the three, yogam. ▲*

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

## Chapter 3: Transcending [the path of] yoga

Dismissing *cariyai* and *kiriyai* as worthless, the *yogis* perform *kriya yoga* to ward off physical death. It is difficult indeed to dissuade them from it. They do not realise that what appears to them as real whilst they are experiencing it is actually false. Will they ever escape from this fixed mindset? (92)

Although the text speaks of *karuma yogam*, Sanskrit *karma yoga*, which is the discipline of acting in the world without attachment, it is clearly

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has 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>.

*kriya yoga* that the author is referring to, as evinced by the commentary of Chidambara swamikal. The practices of yoga are many and varied, both in principle and detail. However to give the reader some idea of what kind of practices are at issue in this chapter, we can quote a brief summary of *kriya yoga*, as described by Paramahansa Yogananda in Chapter 26 of his book *Autobiography of a Yogi*:

“The Kriya Yogi mentally directs his life energy to revolve, upward and downward, around the six spinal centres (medullary, cervical, dorsal, lumbar, sacral, and coccygeal plexuses) which correspond to the twelve astral signs of the zodiac, the symbolic Cosmic Man. One half-minute of revolution of energy around the sensitive spinal cord of man effects subtle progress in his evolution; that half-minute of Kriya equals one year of natural spiritual unfoldment.”

This directing of the life energy is achieved by a number of means including meditation and concentration exercises, breath control, yogic exercises, mantras and so forth.

The point being made in this and the following verse is that the *yogi*, as he meditates upon each *chakra* – *energy centre* and its resident deity – takes them to be real at that point, yet when he proceeds to the next centre and its deity, he also takes that to be real, without realising that the previous object of his meditation must necessarily now be deemed unreal. Thus each new level of ‘reality’ is actually as unreal as the one which preceded it. All his attempts at transcending a given level and passing to the next higher one are based on the personal, discriminating ego consciousness, and can give him only the temporary illusion of liberation as he explores these various levels of ‘truth’.

They may gain the eight *siddhis*, and have the gods of the six paths manifest before them [in the six energy centres of the body], but in achieving that, a great sin will be committed, as they move up and down from one centre to another, going on and on, suffering and dying. (93)

The eight siddhis are the powers ascribed to Lord Siva which the ascetic is supposed to be able to acquire through his austerities. They are *anima* – the ability to shrink oneself, or anything else, to the size of an atom; *makima* – the ability to increase one’s bulk without limit; *ilakima* – the power to make oneself or other things light, overcoming gravity; *karima* – the faculty of increasing weight, solidity; *piratti* (Skt. *prapti*) – the power of attaining everything desired; *pirakamiyam* – the power to overcome natural obstacles and go anywhere; *icattuvam* or *icitai* (Skt. *ishatva*) – supreme domination over animate or inanimate nature; *vacittuvam* or *vicitai* (Skt. *vashitva*) – the power of enchanting, changing the course of nature or assuming any form.

The six paths to liberation were mentioned earlier, in v. 43. Each of the paths has its own presiding deity, located in one of the *chakras* – energy centres of the body – upon whom the disciple meditates. When he has practised one path to the guru’s satisfaction, he is initiated into the next path and so on.

The true *jnani* understands that in the unenlightened individual the ego dies and is reborn from moment to moment, and that the true death is the death of the ego, not the physical body. The failure to understand this continual process of dying and being reborn is seen by the *jnani* as the cause of all suffering, and his goal is to eradicate the mechanism of the discriminating consciousness which is at the root of it. By contrast the *kriya yogi*, by deliberately engaging with the mind, and even expanding its illusory powers to the utmost through the development of supernatural abilities, condemns himself to this continuous round of suffering, as the ego continually dies and is reborn in a new guise, each as unsatisfactory, incomplete and unreal as the last. In sharp contrast the approach to spiritual practice, *sadhana*, described in this book is that pointed to by Nisargdatta Maharaj in *I am That*, Talk 33:

“Both mind and body are intermittent states. The sum total of these flashes creates the illusion of existence. Enquire what is permanent in the transient, real in the unreal. This is *sadhana*.”

Conversely, the *sadhana* of the *yogi*, being principally focussed on the body-mind complex, does not afford the aspirant the opportunity



to focus on the unitive, underlying background of Sivam, the Self, which underlies his entire being.

To attain the state of *samadhi*, remaining motionless like a wooden post through control of the breath, which is not [naturally] under conscious control, is comparable to the fate of a dumb blind man who has consumed poison, and who, in walking to a certain place, stumbles into a deep pit in a desolate area. (94)

The word *samadhi* is here to be understood as the state in which the sadhaka becomes one with the object of meditation, as all mental activity is repressed. It does not refer to the final state of non-dual realisation. The first state is known as *manolaya* – *subsiding of the mind*, and the second as *manonasa* – *destruction of the mind*. Sri Ramana Maharshi describes the difference between the two states in v. 13 of *Upadesha Unthiyar*:

“Cessation [of the mind] is of two kinds: in *manolaya* the mind is in abeyance, but in *manonasa* the mind has died. A mind that is in abeyance, but still exists, can spring forth again, but if its form has been annihilated, it cannot arise again.”

The phrase *arivu adanga* – *which should not or does not subside through conscious control* may also be taken to refer to the *yogi* himself rather to his breath, in which case it would mean *not subsiding consciously*, i.e. the *yogi* is not consciously entering the Heart, rather is he subsiding into the temporary state of *laya*. Thus he is undergoing a diminution in consciousness, not the ultimate expansion of it, as in realisation.

In the latter part of the verse the yogic aspirant is called *blind* and *dumb* because he cannot see or communicate the real truth. He wanders into a desolate area, far from his true home in the Self, having consumed the poison, which are his yogic breathing techniques, and falls into a pit, which represents the state of *manolaya*, subsidence of the mind, which is the fruit of those yogic practices. Since he entered into this course of action voluntarily, his plight is even more

to be deplored than that of the dumb, blind man, which is not of his choosing.

With your spiritual jargon, yogic postures and staring gaze, you act out a ludicrous pantomime of spiritual practice. Give up these worthless habits and remain motionless, as the pure consciousness which is all-embracing like the heavens, and in which there is neither knowing nor absence of knowing. (95)

Chidambara swamigal says in his commentary that *staring gaze* refers to the yogi fixing his gaze firmly on the tip of his nose or between his eyebrows. To do all this, the author says, is to act out a ludicrous travesty of spiritual austerities .

The yogi practises *samadhi*, burying himself beneath the *tattvas*. Could we blame anyone for calling him an ego-obsessed fool? Devoid of all common sense he is like someone who proposes to strip the bark off a stone to tie up an elephant, which even a tethering post cannot restrain, or someone who runs about trying to grasp the ether. (96)

The *kriya yogi* employs breathing techniques devised by the mind to control the breath, a process which in turn causes the mind to subside. It is this state of *manolaya* – *subsiding of the mind*, referred to previously in the notes to v. 94, that he mistakes for realisation. Thus in using the *tattvas* to create this illusion of realisation, he is using them as a *mattangu* – *cloak* to mask his real, underlying state, which is one of ignorance, thus perpetuating that ignorance.

The yogi is termed *car potha piththan* – *a madman [who relies on] objective consciousness*. The discriminating, objectivising consciousness is synonymous with the ego, the *jiva*, since in the Self there is no 'self' and 'other'. The division of 'knower' and 'thing known' can only exist in this limited and illusory form of awareness. The verb *car* means *to depend on, repose on, adhere to*, therefore *car potham* is the objective, discriminating awareness that is characteristic of the ego, and which

exists only by grasping onto that which it perceives as exterior to itself. The *yogi* is called a madman because not only does he employ this form of consciousness, but in taking it to be real, he develops it to the point where he convinces himself that this illusion is in fact the reality of the Self, just as the madman has no idea that he is mad.

To attempt to realise the Self using the mind is doubly ridiculous; in the first place it is impossible, like trying to strip the bark of a stone, which does not have bark, and secondly, even if it were possible, it would be totally inadequate for the purpose, just as a strip of bark would be useless to restrain a full-grown elephant.

To undergo modifications of consciousness in the false world, which is like seeing one's reflection in ghee, or like seeing a person in the sky in the form of that reflection; to become one with lights or sounds and then to withdraw from those states – these are the activities of those who do not know their true Self. (97)

The world of the *tattvas* is compared to ghee. The image one sees in it is simply a distorted reflection of one's own personal consciousness, just as the face one sees in ghee is a distorted reflection of one's own face.

The technique of meditation on the shadow person is described in the notes to v.10. Having seen his own reflection in the *ghee* of the *tattvas*, the *yogi* then projects that reflection in the form of the deity on which he is meditating, just as the person performing the 'shadow person' meditation projects his own image onto the heavens.

Light is associated with *shakti tattva*, also known as *vinthu*, Sanskrit *bindu*, and sound with *siva tattva*, also known as *natha*, Sanskrit *nada*. These are the highest of the five pure *tattvas*, the source of all the other *tattvas*. The *yogi* is here described as reaching these lofty regions of consciousness through his concentration and meditation practices, only to fall back again into the lower states of consciousness.

The *jnani* rejects and eradicates the *tattvas* in order to merge into the absolute even in the waking state; the *kriya yogi* attempts to emulate him by enveloping himself in the *tattvas*, taking his perceptions to be real, just as the monkey who looks into a mirror sees his reflection as another real-life monkey. Since he has eliminated the *tattvas* and knows the true state, the *jnani* will reject the *kriya yogi's* practices as worthless. (98)

The idea is that the *kriya yogi* is like the *jnani* in what he is attempting to do, which is to transcend the *tattvas* and attain the state of liberation, but quite unlike him in his methodology, which leads him to get ever more entangled in the *tattvas* through his very attempts to transcend them.

Like the monkey who, when he looks into a mirror, thinks he is seeing another real monkey rather than his own reflection, the *kriya yogi* takes the results of his mind-based practices to be real, whilst they are in truth mere reflections of his own discriminating consciousness.

You so-called *tapasvin!* You are a fool whose thinking is like that of someone who seeks a cover to mask the heavens, rather than just closing his eyes! Is this madness due to the way you have been taught, or to illustrations drawn from the *shastras*, or to your own perversity of mind, or to your habitual mode of thinking, or to something else altogether? What kind of yoga is this? (99)

In the simile employed in this verse the *eye* is the *discriminating consciousness*, the *cover* is the *mind-based yogic practices*, and the *sky* is the *objective world of the tattvas*. Not realising that this discriminating mind, the ego-self, is itself a part of that perceived external world, he attempts to use it to blot out that world, expecting thus to merge with the Real, whilst all he needs to do is to close that eye, by turning his attention away from the world and dwelling upon the Self. In attempting to blot out the world he is merely trying to mask one unreality with another.

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Like someone who mounts an elephant facing its tail in order to travel to his destination, will your ego consciousness ever be able to reach [the Self]? This (your attempt to know the Self as separate from yourself) is an occasion for much hilarity, like someone who attempts to seek out the demon which possesses and animates him, even though it is already clearly known to him. (100)

Someone who mounts an elephant facing its tail will never reach the desired destination, just as someone who tries to reach the Self using his personal, ego awareness will never reach it, since he will be travelling in the opposite direction, towards the world of the mind and senses.

Building on the sentiment of the first part of the verse, in the last part of the verse the very idea of ‘reaching’ the Self is dismissed as ridiculous. We are always the Self, whether we realise it or not, so it is ludicrous to attempt to communicate with it objectively, just as it would be ludicrous for a man possessed by a demon to attempt to seek out that demon, since the demon, possessing him and controlling his actions, is necessarily already clearly known to him.

Will sleep come to you if you summon it, rubbing your thighs, making snoring noises, and pretending to be unaware of your body? You complete good-for-nothings, if you try to mentally grasp the being-consciousness-bliss that manifests only after destroying your ego consciousness, will it not conceal itself from you? (101)

If one actively attempts to induce sleep by thinking about it, it will not come. In order for sleep to come, one needs to be in a relaxed state in which thoughts can subside and the state of sleep can supervene. Similarly, the state of the Self can only supervene when all objective thought ceases and one subsides into that Self.

Since oneself is not alone [as a primal entity in one's own right], and since the Absolute is the all-embracing perfection, which is not different from oneself, then what good does it do to torment oneself in mind, word and deed, loudly proclaiming, 'The Self is beyond all measure!' (102)

Individual consciousness is not some primal entity, possessing an inherent reality of its own. Therefore reality must be sought by looking within, to discover the real primal entity, the Self, from which one can never be separate, described here as *neekam arra puranam – the all-embracing perfection which is not separate from oneself*. The words *loudly proclaiming* translate, albeit rather weakly, the Tamil words *vaay paraiyaraiyil [en aam] – [what good is there] in proclaiming with the drum of the mouth*. Literally the verb *paraiyarai* means to publish by beat of the drum. The *parai* is a drum beaten to gain the attention of the populace in preparation for a public proclamation. The verb is prefaced with the word *vaay – mouth* in order to suggest the self-important and portentous utterances of those who falsely ascribe to themselves the most lofty spiritual attainments, having merely deluded themselves through their yogic practices. Since the Self is beyond the mind and senses, it is idle to pontificate about it in a way which subtly implies that one can convey the very knowledge of the Self, which one has just said, is impossible to communicate verbally.

Can it be reasonable that, having controlled your breath, mind and sight, so that they are entirely still, and buried yourself in that state so that you are entirely submerged in it, you should expect to be able to merge with That which exists both within and without your body as your very Self, as being and non-being, and that which is beyond both of these? (103)

All categories known or imagined by the mind, even being and non-being, are entirely transcended by the Self. Mere suppression of the activity of the mind and senses is worse than useless for the task of seeking the Self that lies beyond them. See also v. 94, where this point

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is forcefully expressed. In the latter part of the verse we are reminded of the line from the *Kandar Anubhuti* of Arunagirinathar, describing the nature of Lord Murugan: *uruvaay aruvaay; ulathaay ilathaay – as that which has form, as that which is without form; as that which is, as that which is not*. In the state of realisation all things have no existence in themselves but they do have an existence in the Self; therefore they partake, in a sense, of the nature of both being and non-being, appearing within the Self, which is beyond both.

Should you propose to remain free [of all the mental faculties], you will find that it is not possible, and that a sleep-like state supervenes; and should you attempt to remain [aware but] without any objective perception, you will experience [such phenomena as] flashing lights. Your aim is to establish the vital breath along with the errant mind in the *brahmarandhra chakra* within the skull! What kind of state is this! (104)

If the mind is suppressed completely the result is *manolaya – the subsiding of the mind*. See v. 94 and notes. This state is here called *urakkam – sleep* because in essence it is no different from dreamless sleep. Once it ends the mind springs forth again as before. Alternatively, if one allows the mind to remain active but free of any object, it will simply create its own phenomena, such as flashing lights, sounds, bodily sensations, and so on. The word *mantai – skull* is here used to refer to the *brahmarandhra* centre, which is said to be located in the hollow space between the two hemispheres of the brain; *pirama-rantiram*, Sanskrit *brahma randhra* means *fontanelle, the aperture in the crown of the head*; it is closely associated with the highest of the *chakras, the sahasrara, the thousand-petalled lotus*. It is a major goal of yogic practice to raise the energy of the physical and subtle bodies through the lower *chakras* and concentrate it in this region. Vallalar ends the verse with a contemptuous dismissal of such practices, with the words *itu enna nilai – What kind of state is this!* In other words such a state is anything but liberation. ▲

(To be continued)

## TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN

AND ROBERT BUTLER

The mind is like a caged monkey or the grotesque dance of a shadow puppet. Who could hope to subdue it, grasping it and bringing it under control? Even if one remains still, free of any objective perception, it will keep moving by itself, like a whirling rocket that moves under its own impulsion, the balls in a game of *ammanai*, or a spinning top. (105)

The nature of the monkey is extremely active and restless. How much more so when it is restrained in a cage from which it wants to escape? The image of a monkey kept in a cage is therefore a fitting image for the attempt to control the mind by restraining it with bodily means, such as breath control, and so on, whose principal effect is to spur the mind into ever greater activity. The movements of the mind are next compared to images in a puppet show consisting solely of shadows cast against a screen, which can be observed, but

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cannot be held or restrained in any way. *A whirling rocket, [the balls in a game of] ammanai, and a [spinning] top* are all given as things which, having been set in motion, continue with a momentum of their own. In contrast to the monkey and the shadow puppet, which represent the gross, outer activity of the mind, these three items represent the mind in its subtle aspect, acting without any outside stimulus, as when it is not consciously directed outwards, yet still continues to generate its own inner activity. TCS glosses, *like a rocket that whirls round on its own, without anyone holding it and causing it to move.* The game of *ammanai* is a girls' game, described in Tam. Lex. as follows, 'Girls' game of keeping a number of balls in the air, some rising while others are falling.'

It is the habitual nature of the mind to be active even when it is not directed towards any object. If you try to understand this nature, how will you not be confused? At the slightest contact with it, there will be birth and death for you, but if it dies, you will become Sivam. (106)

The nature of the mind is activity, and it will do anything to prolong and preserve its own existence. The moment it begins to subside, and we begin to get a sense of the peace which this might bring, it springs back into existence, generating numerous thoughts about how, using this very mind, we might determine the nature of this peace, make it our permanent state, and so on. Therefore the wise course is to ignore the mind and put one's attention wholly on the Self, Sivam, by dwelling on the 'I' sense.

Abide simply as pure consciousness. Then delusion will not arise. If there is the slightest movement in consciousness, will not the world of diversity shoot forth like a sky rocket? This state of *samadhi* can be compared to the perfect alignment of the pointers on a pair of scales. If that state arises, you will be a king of *jnana*. Who will be your equal? (107)

TCS explains the image as follows: our consciousness is like a pair of scales with stones in one pan and gold in the other; the stones are the state of *kevalam* – *unconsciousness* and the gold is *cakalam* – *the waking state*. The scale has two pointers: the lower pointer is the *anma* – *jiva or soul*, which moves as the arm of the scales moves, and the upper pointer is *arul* – *grace* which does not move. When the two pans are in perfect balance, and the two pointers are therefore perfectly aligned, this denotes the state of *samadhi*, when the consciousness is perfectly aligned with grace, and in which therefore the delusion of the world and its modifications does not appear. The word *arul* is simply another way of referring to the Self, especially when thought of in its dynamic aspect, as conferring or facilitating realisation. The term *cakalam* denotes the state in which the *jiva* is active, under the influence of the *tattvas*, and *kevalam*, the state of unconsciousness, as in deep sleep. The state which is being described here is a state of vigilant awareness, in which awareness is neither wandering lost amidst sense objects under the influence of the mind and senses, nor is it sunk in the blankness of the unconscious state.

“That is the state of the *jnani*. It is neither sleep nor waking but intermediate between the two. There is the awareness of the waking state and the stillness of sleep. It is called *jagrat sushupti*....Go to the root of thoughts and you reach the stillness of sleep. But you reach it in the full vigour of search, that is, with perfect awareness.”<sup>1</sup>

Who taught water to be cool, fire to burn and the air to stir and be agitated? Whoever you are, the mind and the other faculties will not simply go away. To attempt to remove them is like trying to bury a shadow. You should see as the heavens see. Only then will they be eliminated. (108)

If one heaps earth upon a shadow, the shadow will of course not be buried but will reappear on top of the pile. In a similar way, if we try to use the mind to eliminate the mind, that mental process will continue to propagate itself *ad infinitum*. The heavens, as pure space,

<sup>1</sup> Venkataramiah, M., (compl), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §609.

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possess an infinite capacity for containing and permeating all things, yet are not in contact with, or affected by, any of them. In the same way, when we see the mind and its activity with the eye of the Self, we will cease to be affected by it, just as the cinema screen is not affected by the images that appear upon it. Therefore in the final part of the verse Vallalar enjoins us to 'see as the heavens see.'

When you think of it, is it feasible to measure and know the extent of the earth and the heavens, the weight of the mountains and the volume of the surging ocean? Similarly, when you say that you are the Real, these are only words, [since it cannot be measured or known] without encompassing the destruction of your own ego-self. If you try to know it [otherwise], it will remain quite alien from you. (109)

There are a number of ways of interpreting the latter part of this verse, but the overall sense is as follows: the discriminating consciousness can affirm, 'I am the Real', but it cannot know that reality objectively, since the Real is only revealed upon the destruction of the discriminating consciousness that is attempting to know it. Should one make that attempt, the Real will seem alien and unobtainable.

The world of *maya*, arising and subsiding by turns, is unreal like the clouds in the sky. If we do not realise this, and attempt to suppress the world that rises up using the mind that rises with it, will this not be like a ball, bouncing back again each time we hit it to the ground? Therefore observe it as the witness only. It will be like a tree dug up by the root, yielding neither flowers nor fruits. (110)

The literal meaning in the second sentence here is, 'if [one] suppresses that which rises up (*uthippu*) with that which rises up (*uthippu*). *uthippu* is a noun from the verb *uti*, which means to *spring up, arise, come into existence*. Since the world and the mind arise together in consciousness, the word is suited to conveying both meanings. The

repetition of the word prefigures the idea of bouncing back and forth, as of the ball in the metaphor which follows, and also lends weight to the idea being presented here that the world and the mind are not in essence different, that they are the two sides of the same coin, as it were. Thus any attempt on the part of the mind to suppress the world will cause the world 'to bounce back' as it were, prompting further mental activity in never-ending vicious circle. The alternative to engaging in the fruitless activity described in the first part of the verse is simply to remain as the witness. If the mind, the discriminating consciousness, is eliminated, there will be no world of the mind and senses, just as, if the root of a tree is ripped out, it will produce neither flowers nor fruits.

Should you succeed even for a split second in reaching the state of absorption in the Self (*nishṭa*), which, as the pure state (*cuttam*) in which the discriminating consciousness has fallen away, is free of all limitation, ah! I am at a loss to describe it! Is the bliss that rises up then a thing of little account? It would be as if one accessed the [vast] ocean of milk through the tiny hole in a teat! (111)

*cuttam* is the pure state is the state of *jagrat-sushupti* – waking sleep, a state which is neither sleep nor waking but one of total freedom which transcends both of these states. See the notes to v. 106.

The bliss of the Self is compared to the ocean of milk, churned by the gods and *asuras* to obtain divine ambrosia; the experience of the infinite bliss of the Self whilst still in the body upon the loss of the discriminating consciousness is compared to gaining access to the Puranic ocean of milk through the tiny hole of a teat.

Being totally identified with the body, you torment yourself saying, 'When will the time come that this body is no more, and divine grace will be mine?' What is the use of this? Do not the myriad phenomena that appear in the ether eventually subside again? Similarly, in the absolute fullness of Reality, which is beyond duality, there is nothing other than yourself. (112)

*puranam* – the absolute fullness of Reality is said here to be *ethir arra*, which means literally *without that which is opposite to, in front of, over against [it]*. In other words, in that *puranam* there exists no ‘other’ which it could take as its object. *ethir arra* has therefore been translated as *beyond duality*.

Know that habit is pernicious. A fowl will scratch even at a bare rock, and dig around even in a heap of paddy. The blind man who recovers his sight will feel threatened by the light, recoil from it and refuse to give up his walking stick. Similarly the *jiva* will persist in perceiving distinctions in the grace of the Self [even after realising its non-dual nature]. (113)

Verses 113-116 demonstrate how, due to ingrained habit, the discriminating ego-consciousness will have the tendency to reassert itself at the first opportunity until it is finally eradicated.

The phrase *anma arulai pakukkum* means literally the *jiva* will divide grace. The verb *paku* in its transitive form means *to divide, distribute, apportion, allot*. The *jiva* will not be able to hold onto the Self if it attempts to divide it, i.e. analyse it with the discriminating mind. The expression *pakuttarivu* is commonly used in the sense of *discriminating knowledge, rationality*. In this verse *arul* – grace is equated with the Self or Sivam. As mentioned previously, in Siddhanta *arul* is nothing other than the *shakti* of Sivam itself, in its active role of removing the three *malams* and conferring enlightenment.

Unless you slap it and drive it outside, a young calf will not leave its tethering post, even if you untie the rope. Likewise, even if you tell the *jiva* to abide as Sivam, so that it remains free of attachment like Sivam itself, thus removing its separate identity and bringing it to a state of oneness, it will revert to its dualistic mode of thought.

A young calf may be so used to being tied up that it does not know what to do when its tether is removed. The farmer has to slap it to drive it outside, where it will find its mother and be able to enjoy her milk. Similarly the unripe disciple, having been guided toward the state of the Self by the guru, will, out of

sheer habit, return to his habitual dualistic state of mind, trying to analyse the state he is in, and will therefore be unable to enjoy the bliss of the Self. TCS glosses: 'Although it has been made one with Sivam, the *jiva*, which became one with it through the cessation of the [ego-]consciousness, will become two [again] through the movement of that [ego-] consciousness.' (114)

If someone tells you to abide as Sivam, you torment yourself thinking, 'I am that Sivam,' thus falling from that very state. This is like the story of the man who, on being told not to think of a monkey, was unable to stop thinking about it. Is this not the work of the ego, *anava malam?* (115)

Sri Ramana Maharshi also alludes to the story of the man who is told not to think of a monkey, supposedly saying that it is mentioned by Tayumanavar.

"D: When we attempt to cease from activity the very attempt is action. So activity seems to be inevitable.

"M: True. Thayumanavar has also alluded to it. A doctor advises a patient to take the prescribed medicine with only one condition. That condition is not to think of a monkey when he takes the medicine. Can the patient ever take the medicine? Will he not think of the monkey whenever he tries not to do so? So also, when people try to give up thoughts their object is frustrated by their very attempt."<sup>2</sup>

**Translator's note:** The attribution by Sri Ramana of this anecdote to Tayumanavar is probably due to an error on the part of the recorder, as no such anecdote appears in the known works of Tayumanavar, and Ramana himself is not likely to have made such a misattribution.

Although the nature of the ego-consciousness has been pointed out to them, they still seek Sivam, just as the serpent with a jewel on its head continues to seek out darkness, even when it is already enveloped by it. Such behaviour is akin to someone digging a well in a lake to find water, or fighting with his own

<sup>2</sup> See *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §601.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

shadow to be free of it. Who are they that have the power to remove this ego-consciousness and abide as Sivam? (116)

In this comparison it is assumed that the jewel on the head of the serpent emits its own light. Therefore however deep it burrows, the darkness in which it would otherwise be enveloped (the undifferentiated Self) will always be dissipated by the light of that jewel (the discriminating consciousness). Similarly, Sivam will always evade those who seek it using their own ego-consciousness. If the serpent swallows the jewel, the natural darkness will reassert itself, and there will be no need to seek it, just as, when the ego-consciousness is turned inward and subsides, there is no need to seek Sivam.

Abandoning formal worship, both inner and outer, *yogic samadhis* and those sleep-like states, in which the *kriya yogis* mimic the true *jnanis* who are free of the discriminating consciousness, the true *jnanis* abide in the Self, so that worldly bondage disappears, like the flame of a lighted lamp in daylight or the rays from a crystal at midday. Who can compare to them? (117)

The verse begins with another reference to meditation on the six energy centres of the body, each with its resident deity, the *aaru aathaaram*. The yogi becomes identified with each of these in turn, using intensive concentration and visualisation techniques. See also v. 94 and notes.

The aim of such practices is to raise up the energies of the gross and subtle bodies along the spinal column, and to concentrate them in the *brahmarandhra* centre, located in the brain, at which point the mind becomes totally dormant as in deep sleep. This state is condemned by the *jnani* as worse than useless because the mind and mental faculties resume their former activities once it is ended, but and because the individual, in such a state, is deprived of any further opportunity to seek the true goal of merging definitively with the Self or Sivam. He may give up that search, mistakenly regarding this state as the ultimate goal.

In the state of realisation the individual ego, which was so prominent in its former state of ignorance, is subsumed in the Self,

losing its individual identity. Similarly the flame of a lighted lamp, although shining brightly in the darkness of night, becomes invisible during the day, being entirely subsumed in the bright light of the sun. Also, in the state of realisation, all the mental faculties (here referred to as *pacam – the worldly bond*) subside into the Self and become inactive. In a similar way, a crystal or prism will emit coloured rays in all directions when the light strikes it at various angles during the morning and evening, but will remain clear when the rays of the sun fall from directly overhead at midday.

The Self now awakens the *jiva* from the darkness of absolute nescience, [unites it with the mind and senses], and [finally] abolishes the objective delusion of waking and sleep, gradually consuming the ego-consciousness as the flame consumes the wick of a lamp. Therefore the only recourse is to give oneself up as a prey to the Self], the one who devours one's [ego] consciousness. The very act of thinking about it will drive it away from you. (118)

In Saiva Siddhanta the soul is pictured as being initially sunk in a state of total nescience. It is only Sivam that, by bringing it into contact with the thirty-six *tattvas*, causing it to experience the three *malams*, and finally eradicating those defilements through the power of its grace, can lead it to the state of oneness with itself. Once it becomes united with the *tattvas*, the *jiva* alternates between *cakalam* (waking and dreaming, in which a manifold objective world appears, in gross and subtle form respectively), and *kevalam* (deep sleep), which, although a state of non-differentiation in which no world appears, is not the state of absolute nescience referred to previously.

Since it is impossible for the mind to seek the Self, it can only present itself in a condition of submission, where it can easily be subsumed in the Self. It therefore must offer itself up as prey, as it were, to be devoured by the Self.

Even the Advaitins, who assert that all that they know objectively is false, cannot escape being trapped in an empty



void. Like them you will be destined to repeated births and deaths. However, having experienced the loss of your ego-consciousness, and the bliss that arises thereafter, if you transcend even these, birth and death will end for you. (119)

The danger, even for the Advaitin, is that, having realised the essential emptiness of all phenomena, if he does not then eradicate the consciousness that formerly perceived the world and now perceives an empty void, he will remain trapped in that empty void, unable to grasp the dynamic reality of the non-dual Self. Bhagavan said:

“In all books on Vedanta you will find this question of a void or of nothing being left, raised by the disciple and answered by the Guru. It is the mind that sees objects and has experiences and that finds a void when it ceases to see and experience, but that is not ‘you’. You are the constant illumination that lights up both the experiences and the void. It is like a theatre light that enables you to see the theatre, the actors and the play while the play is going on but also remains alight and enables you to say that there is no play when it is all finished.”<sup>3</sup>

The falling away of the individual consciousness is succeeded by one of deep bliss. However, since there is still some trace of a consciousness experiencing these states, they too cannot be the final state, and they too are transcended in the final state of union with the Self.

Sivam is the fullness of perfection which abides as the consciousness of consciousness itself; as that which is entirely without divisions. For those who presume to create and destroy Sivam in their minds, meditating on it sporadically, and in such a way that it is limited by their own imperfection, how can birth be avoided? (120)

The text says *arivukku arivu*, literally *the consciousness of consciousness itself*. This is the pure consciousness, pure being, that remains as the sustaining core of the relative or discriminating consciousness, *cuttarivu* in Tamil.

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<sup>3</sup>Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2006. p.278. 21st July, 1946.

Having gained some intuitive sense of the greater reality that is the background to their existence, people will try to grasp that intuitive knowledge mentally; having failed in one approach, they will abandon it and adopt other strategies, also based on the mind. And so they will carry on, creating and destroying their false conception of Sivam. The latter part of the verses describes the manner in which the *creation and destruction* of Sivam takes place. It is done in a manner which does no justice at all to its all-embracing, absolute nature, and Sivam is thus limited, restricted (or rather appears to be so), by the very attempt to think about it. However elevated the concept, the mind is unable to maintain it without straying and forgetting what it was thinking about previously. Thus it is done *maravaiyumay – with forgetfulness*, punctuated by periods of forgetfulness, here translated as *sporadically*.

Even as I revelled ceaselessly in the alternating states of remembering (waking and dream) and forgetting (deep sleep), the mind's delusion, the appearance of a world of diversity and the consequent desire and aversion, Jnanasambandar transformed me through his gaze and through his touch into his own likeness, as the sun dispels the darkness, and the philosopher's stone transforms base metal into gold. (121)

Forgetting and remembering are glossed by TCS as equivalent to *kevalam – deep sleep* and *cakalam – waking and dream*. In the states of relative consciousness, *marappum ninaippum – forgetting (deep sleep)*, and *remembering (waking)*, the *jiva* suffers from *mayakku – delusion* as to its true nature, and becomes identified with the body. From this identification arises *vikarpu, vikaarpam – the world of diversity*, which in turn engenders attachment in the form of *veruppu* and *viruppu – aversion and desire*, which are the source of the deeds whose fruits give rise to the cycle of births.

Saivite initiation, *diksha*, is performed by the threefold agency of sight, touch and thought. TCS points out that the latter is to be understood as included here, as the first two could not take place without the third.

(To be continued) ▲

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

## Chapter 4 Transcending [the Path of] *Kiriyai*

*In this chapter the author explains how addiction to the path of ritual activity, performed without true insight, constitutes in the end a barrier to realisation, in a similar way that yoga was shown to do in the previous chapter.*

Instead of remaining still, realising that the world of the *tattvas* is inert, and remaining free of all contact with it, [seeing nothing] like the eye of a dead ram, they invoke [the presence of the gods], perform worship to them, call upon them as ‘The Absolute Perfection’, seek them out [in holy *sthalas*], and, [when they cannot find them], roll on the ground [in despair]

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and weep. Their actions are akin to the grotesque dance of a  
band of demons. (122)

In the first part of the verse, the Tamil says literally ‘placing and raising up’, referring to the setting up of images of the gods, and the invoking of their presence in those images. This is glossed by TCS as follows: *Using the personal consciousness to invoke in an image the presence of the absolute perfection of Sivam, which remains on the destruction of that very personal consciousness, to meditate upon it repeatedly, and in this manner perform puja to it.* In other words, since Sivam, the Real, is revealed only upon the destruction of the personal consciousness, it is entirely self-defeating to employ that personal consciousness in an attempt to invoke that Reality through ritual practices.

The *jnani* is entirely free of the discriminating consciousness and is therefore not aware of the world of people and objects that others see: “...the eyes of the jnani are likened to the eyes of a dead goat; they are always open, never closed. They glitter but they see nothing, though it seems to others that they see everything.” [Ramana Maharshi quoted by Suri Nagamma in *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 26th October, 1947.]

In those who, wearied by ritual activities, come to him asking for instruction, the illustrious One fosters the bliss of the Self, so that they dwell in silence. He is the true guru. As for the rest, know that, in so far as they cause the slightest movement in the minds of their disciples, they will be like Brahma, the creator of worlds, and the Lord of Death. (123)

‘The Illustrious One’ is a translation of the *ceemaan*, which is a Tamil form, based on the nominative *shrimaan* of the Sanskrit word *shrimat*, meaning (*one who is*) *possessed of fortune, fortunate, auspicious, wealthy, prosperous, eminent, illustrious, venerable*. Here the guru is meant, as possessing the greatest wealth of all, the knowledge of Sivam.

When the mind arises, the world arises with it, and when the mind subsides, the world is no more. Therefore the false teacher will be like Brahma, the creator of the worlds, in so far as his instruction causes movement in the minds of his disciples, and he will be like Death, in that he condemns them to the repeated death and birth of the illusory mind-body complex, as the mind continually arises and subsides by turns at the prompting of the false guru's instruction.

Imagine the devotees of the god of Fire, grinding up ginger to ease the god's indigestion, covering him with straw [to keep him warm], and agonising [over their previous neglect] as if buried under a mountain of sorrow. To whom might we compare such people? To those who would try to wash water, bury their own shadow, or measure it [using their own foot]? (124)

In Indian medical systems such as Ayurveda, the element fire, personified in the god Agni, is seen as the force at work in the process of digestion, causing the food to be broken down and digested. Ginger has been recognised as a cure for indigestion in many cultures since ancient times.

These actions and their fanciful motives – trying to cure Agni's indigestion with ground ginger, and trying to keep him warm with straw – are given to emphasise the ironic nature of ritual acts, in which the Supreme Reality is imagined to be suffering from some kind of need or lack, to which the person performing the ritual or puja arrogates himself the role of providing the remedy. Since, as far as we know, the motives ascribed to these actions here are not the actual motives of the persons who perform those rituals and *pujas*, the first sentence has been prefaced by the words, 'Imagine that...'

Those stupid teachers [of ritual worship] do not realise that when we have to cross a river in spate or make a long journey on foot, there is no suffering for the water, nor for the road, but only for those who swim that water and walk that road.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

They might as well tell you to stop up the mouth of a river in spate, raise a ladder to reach the heavens or grab the feet of the wind. (125)

The teachers who purport to offer salvation by means of ritual worship are called *murkkar* – *the foolish, the ignorant*. Just as a river in spate cannot be stopped up with earth, Sivam, the infinite all-embracing reality, cannot be contained by any form, such as an idol or statue; to try to reach it through form-based meditation and so on is pointless because it exists already within and without as the very ground of our being, just as it is futile to try to use a ladder to reach the ether, which already contains all things within itself. Since it transcends all forms, there is no use trying to grasp it by performing rituals of various kinds, just as it would be no use ascribing form to the wind and then trying to grasp a part of that form.

Will even those who travel the heavens at will require a support? Are the heavens like the deep ocean to them, that they need to navigate it like a helmsman on a ship? What work do time and space perform? Similarly, can there be deeds performed by a perfected *Siva yogi*? (126)

One who has mastered the eight *siddhis* can travel to wherever he wishes in space through the power of his mind. He would have no need of any support to aid him. Similarly the *Siva yogi* who has attained oneness with the Self has no need for aids such as rituals and puja to attain that which is already his.

Expanding on the previous analogy, unlike the captain of a ship upon the ocean, the siddha yogi would have no need to plot a course through the heavens and use a set of instruments to get to his destination. Similarly the *Siva yogi* has no need to form some concept of Sivam and then set about trying to attain That which he already is. In any case he no longer requires, nor possesses, the instruments furnished by the *tattvas* in the relative world, the senses, and the organs of thought and action, which are the attributes of the ego consciousness.

Just as time and space provide the unmoving ground for all the phenomena that unfold in the manifest world, the *jnani*, as the Self, provides the unmoving ground for the whole of the apparent creation, including time and space. TCS glosses: *The faculties operate in the mere presence of that Siva yogi, who is united with the fullness of reality. He himself does not engage with any of the faculties to perform any kind of work.*

In fire itself there is nothing of the firewood, and in ghee there is no longer any milk. Similarly, *jnana* abolishes delusion as surely as the sun dispels darkness. Therefore it is given the name ‘Destroyer of Actions’. This being so, can there be any performing of degrading actions by *janis*? (127)

In this verse *jnana* is called ‘Destroyer of *kriya*.’ The word *kiriyai*, Sanskrit *kriya*, has the meaning *act, action* in a general sense, in addition to the specific sense of *religious practices and rituals*, which are the subject of this chapter. The word is intended to be understood in both senses here. Just as firewood is annihilated in the process of burning and milk is annihilated in the making of ghee, all actions are annihilated in the arising of *jnana*. The sense of doership is an illusion of the ego-consciousness, the *jiva*. The *jnani*, freed from that ego-consciousness upon the attainment of *jnana*, is no longer affected by this delusion, and remains as one with the unmoving screen of the Self upon which the world-appearance unfolds.

Even if *jnana* is attained through actions, it will not endure, just as all things that are born from a womb are destined for destruction. Your thoughts of grasping the Cause of all things [through your actions] is like trying to roll up ten million suns in a blanket of darkness. (128)

Here it is stated that, even if a degree of *jnana* is obtained through ritual actions, it will not be permanent and will disappear again in time. Thus it is suggested that, though the paths of *cariyai*, *kiriyai*

## MOUNTAIN PATH

and *yokam* are necessary for the disciple to attain sufficient maturity to be able to find a teacher who can bestow *jnana*, they cannot by themselves bestow that *jnana*. The *jnana* that arises through actions must necessarily pass away, just as all creatures born from the womb are destined to die.

If, desiring the state beyond even bliss, you say you will engage in actions to attain it, will the true *jnanis* not ridicule you? Will anyone choose walking as a means of getting to sleep? Your holy scriptures, *pujas* and *samadhis* are an aberration to true *jnanis*; they are no more than a collection of conditioned mental states, *maya's* cohorts. (129)

The expression 'state beyond bliss' is a translation of the word *cukathitam*, which is the Tamil form of Sanskrit *sukhatita* (*sukha* – bliss + *atita* – beyond). The bliss experienced on the loss of the ego consciousness is transcended in the final state of liberation, which is therefore the state beyond bliss.

The words 'a collection of conditioned mental states' translate the expression *caar potha kottiram*. *Kottiram*, Sanskrit *gotra* has as its root meaning *a protection or shelter for cows, a cow-shed, cow-pen* (*go* – cow + *tra*). This meaning is expanded to mean family, race, lineage, and, amongst other things, genus, class, species. The verb *caar* means to lean upon, rest in or on, be attached to, be connected to, and *potham*, Sanskrit *bodha*, means *knowledge, understanding, intelligence*; therefore *caar botham* is *knowledge that is attached to, dependent on* something else, in this case, the mental faculties and the organs of sense and action. There is only one consciousness, which, when pure, merges with the Self, but when contaminated by *maya*, flaunts itself as a separate ego-consciousness.

If it be said that bliss is in the ending of all actions, then we shall hardly need to assert that suffering is in the arising of actions. Whatever actions we do perform, we should perform them according to the example of those whose only concern is



to feed and clothe the body, taking no pleasure in them, like a barren woman [with no prospect of bearing children]. (130)

The great ones, the realised sages, see the world as false and therefore seek nothing from it other than the bare essentials required for their physical survival in the world, namely food, clothing and shelter. They have no attachments in the present, and therefore create no *karma* to bind them in the future. In this sense they are like a barren woman who, deprived of the ability to have children (the main reason for her existence), has no offspring to care for in the present, nor any expectation of having any to care for in the future. ▲

*(To be continued)*

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
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To proclaim amidst tears and sobs the holy scriptures, which are the means expressly designed to make us still; to perform religious rituals; to sit in meditation with the body stretched and contorted in postures designed by the mind – all these things are a comedy show designed for the entertainment of *jnanis*.  
(131)

Who has attained liberation by studying and learning the holy texts, which themselves are insufficient to contain all the religious systems with their commentaries and interpretations? To do so is like going to the lengths of covering the sky with a

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canopy and the earth with leather when setting out on a journey, instead of simply wearing sandals and taking an umbrella. (132)

The words ‘holy texts, which themselves are insufficient to contain all the religious systems with their commentaries and interpretations’ translate the Tamil, *camaya vatham manam pothata cattiram*. The word *camayam* means religion, and *cattiram*, Sanskrit *shastra* means, in this context, *sacred book* or *composition of divine authority*. Each religion, be it Buddhist, Jaina, Saivite or whatever, has its own set of these sacred books, which contain *vatham*, Sanskrit *vada – thesis, proposition, argument, doctrine*. These in turn become the subject of commentaries and discussions as to their true meaning by learned scholars and holy men, often over many centuries. These exegeses are known as *yutti*, Sanskrit *yukti – reasoning, argument, proof, inference, induction*. Here the word *manam – mind* is used to signify the latter, a case of metonymy, (*akupeyar* in Tamil), figurative use of a word, with the source of the reasoning (the mind) being used for the reasoning itself.

The task of someone who tries to fathom all the arguments of all the different religions in the hope that such a process will finally lead him to liberation is as hopeless as that of someone who, instead of carrying an umbrella on his journey, tries to mask the entire sky with a canopy, and instead of wearing sandals, tries to cover his entire path with leather. The wise disciple adheres strictly to his guru’s teaching, using it in the same way that the traveller employs sandals to protect himself from thorns and stones, and an umbrella to shield himself from the heat of the sun.

The supreme reality is not known [objectively], since, when you become pure consciousness, and then become the One that makes this consciousness known, both of these come to an end. Wicked wretches! How then can you hope to experience that reality through the false understanding in which you grasp it for a while with the ego-consciousness, then let it go again? (133)

When the disciple comes to realise that his nature is pure consciousness, the realisation arises within him that he is also the source of that consciousness, that the two are not different. At this point the house of cards which is the triad of *knower, known and knowledge* collapses, discriminating knowledge ends and he remains as the non-dual Self. How then can the concept of the Self or Sivam remain? Therefore, if even those who have realised the Self are themselves quite incapable of experiencing that state as something separate from themselves, how ludicrous is it that those who have not known the Self should claim to be able to do so?

In the latter part of the verse, what is being referred to are the phenomena experienced sometimes as a result of prolonged spiritual practices, and sometimes spontaneously, in the form of visions of gods and saints, heightened visual, mental and emotional experiences and so on. Such experiences are never permanent, in spite of attempts to prolong them and regain them after they are lost. On these grounds alone they are therefore known not to be the experience of reality which is being sought.

Since the destruction of your ego-consciousness is His wish, you should consider its loss to be your own goal also. Know that *ajnana*, ignorance, consists in not knowing how to achieve this loss. False one, hear then the means of the destruction of your ego-consciousness! (134)

The 'He' in the first line is of course Sivam, the Self, the supreme reality. Although one cannot talk of the Self as possessing desire in a literal sense, it is a way of expressing the innate sense that it is in the nature of the Self to manifest itself in the individual consciousness, overcoming whatever barriers it finds in its way, transcending it and annihilating it. It is this innate sense that inspires the spiritual quest in the first place. The problem for the individual is that, having sensed that the loss of the ego-consciousness is the desired end, he is at a loss as to how to achieve his goal, since the only tool at his disposal is the very ego-consciousness he is trying to destroy.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

When a stick of firewood is burnt up completely there is no more smoke or flame, and when a disease is cured, the medicine that was taken to cure it disappears with it. Similarly your ever-ramifying actions are at the level of the mind [and will end when the mind ends]. Why then do you attempt to unite [with the Self by means of those actions]? Simply remain as pure subject, without a second, just as a smaller shadow is subsumed in a greater one. (135)

In the first comparison the log of wood is compared to the actions of the individual, and the smoke and fire to the mental faculties and ego-consciousness of the individual. When actions cease there will be no more mental activity and ego, just as when the log is consumed there will be no more smoke and fire. In the second comparison, the disease is compared to the ego, and the actions of the individual to the medicine. When the ego subsides into the Self there will be no further actions, just as when a disease is cured there will be no further need for the medicine that cured it. In Siddhanta actions with their fruits are the consequence of succumbing to the illusion of the ego, and they are also ultimately a means for the removal of that illusion.

Translated literally, the last sentence means, 'Remain (*nil*) with that which is opposite (*ethir*) having gone (*poj*), as a shadow is hidden.' In other words, remain without the duality of *knower and thing known*, which is the habitual mode of the mind. Since the mind arises out of the Self, and is fundamentally no different from it, all it needs to do to realise its unity with that Self is to cease its discriminating activity, at which point it will be no different from the Self, so long as it does not resume its discriminating activity, just as a smaller shadow is subsumed in a larger one until such time as it moves beyond the boundary of the greater shadow.

You are the consciousness that perceives, and I, the Real, am the consciousness through which you perceive. Once you begin to investigate these, they will begin to loosen their hold. When they finally fall away, you should feel a degree of shame and

not attempt to look back at me, thinking 'I'. Rather should you remain still, like a pot sunk in the ocean. (136)

In the state of ignorance the ego, though possessing no reality of its own, attempts to usurp all the powers of the Self, ascribing them to itself, saying, *I did this, I did that*, and so on. When the individual *jiva* begins finally to gain some insight into its own nature, it is revealed as an imposter and disappears. It is often therefore described figuratively as 'feeling shame' and 'hanging its head' when its duplicitous game is revealed. See v. 30 of Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Ulladu Narpadu*, for example:

As the mind, seeking inwardly through the enquiry 'Who am I', reaches the Heart, and as the one known as 'I' bows its head in shame, the One appears spontaneously as 'I – I'.

When the disciple begins to sense the illusory nature of the ego and the world view it generates, and these begin to fade in the light of the Self, the remnant of the ego-self feels a natural temptation to move its attention to the Self instead, attempting, as it were, to bring it into focus, as though it were a mental creation like itself, and to grasp it as formerly it had grasped the false. In this verse the ego is being advised to know its place, show some humility and allow itself to be subsumed in the Self, *amizttu karakam pol* – *like a pot sunk in the ocean*. A pot on the bottom of the ocean no longer has any function; it can no longer be used to hold, dispense, or divide up water or any other liquid. Similarly the mind, when subsumed in the Self, can no longer function other than as the Self. The *jnani* is like the pot in the ocean; his body and mind, if they can still be called that, function as the Self only, and have no reality or function apart from the Self. ▲

(To be continued)

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

[To think that the performance of rituals] will pass for the bliss of Sivam is very strange, like a new bride mistaking the wedding rites for sexual intercourse! Just as, unmoving, the oil in a lamp spreads [through the wick and is consumed] by the flame, the true state is to give yourself up to be consumed [by the Self]. (137)

Just as a naive young girl might be imagined to mistake the marriage rites for the act of physical union, the immature disciple mistakes the outward forms of religion, which lead up to union with Sivam, for the union itself.

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Chapter 5  
Transcending [the path of] cariyai

*According to its title, in this short chapter the author explains how a preoccupation with cariyai, the lower of the four paths, that of service to the deity, is antagonistic to the goal of realisation of Sivam, the Self. However in fact most of the verses are of a general nature, whilst three pillory the bogus jnani, who feigns enlightenment in his conduct and appearance (vv. 141-143).*

When will there be happiness for those who do not subside inwardly, but instead, thinking these activities to be the means of liberation, torment their bodies with pilgrimages, bathing in holy tanks and observing fasts on days which they deem auspicious? Their present lot is suffering only. When will their objective consciousness be lost and bliss arise in them? (138)

You lost souls, it seems you never asked if, the personal consciousness having died, you should not go about in the world as if your body were a walking corpse! Where have you heard that the body can be got rid of through the efforts of the body itself? (139)

If you ask us what place we have come from just now, and if we have forgotten what place it is, when you ask us the way to that place, all roads will seem the same, as if the seven worlds had merged into one. (140)

If someone, who does not remember the place from which he has come, gives directions to that place to someone who asks for them, the information given will be entirely useless. Since the person giving the directions does not know them himself, the person following those directions will have no hope of finding the correct path. In a similar way enlightenment cannot be gained by someone who receives instruction from a guru who has not experienced that state himself.



The meaning is not entirely clear but as the next three verses (141-3) lampoon the false teacher, this is probably the correct interpretation. Though the exact meaning is not clear, it seems to be that all roads taken by one following the wrong directions will be the same, in that they are not the right road and will not lead to the correct destination. In the same way all courses of action taken by one acting on the instructions of a false guru will be the same, in that all will be fruitless, and will not lead to union with Sivam.

Displays of ochre robes, long strings of *rudraksha* beads, white ash, and white teeth [from abstaining from chewing betel] constitute the counterfeiting of *jnana*. To those who know the nature of the all-pervading Sivam, the One who is free of all desire (*pathi*), the *jiva*, the one of limited, worldly knowledge (*pacu*), and the worldly bond (*pacam*), which is unreal, will there be such things as word or form? (141)

The Saiva *sannyasi* traditionally wears robes dyed with *kavi* – red ochre, and long strings of *rudraksha* beads, here referred to simply as *tazh vadam* – necklaces which hangs low. The exposed parts of the body are usually liberally smeared with *tiru neeru* – holy ash, which is made from cow dung rendered to a powder in a kiln. The ascetic is forbidden to chew betel, therefore his teeth are white, unlike those of the householder, which are stained a reddish colour from its juices.

The wearing of the insignia of a *jnani* by one who is not qualified by his spiritual attainment to do so is called *jnana kalavu*, literally, *the stealing of jnana*. These insignia belong to *jnana*, true knowledge, only; the wearing of them by anyone else, therefore, constitutes robbing *jnana* of what rightfully belongs to it. In the translation, the idea has been turned around somewhat to say the *counterfeiting of jnana*, the idea of the false *jnani* faking *jnana* being more understandable in English than that of him, as it were, stealing its intellectual property.

The reference in the latter part of the verse is to the Siddhanta triad of *pathi* – god, *pacu* – the soul and *pacam* – the worldly bond. Here God is referred to as *Puranan* as the one who constitutes the

fullness of Reality, other than which nothing is or can be. The *jiva* is referred to as *cirrarivan*, as *possessing imperfect, limited, (ciru)*, i.e. *worldly, knowledge (arivu)*.

They flash their white teeth, which are well suited to the dispensation of limited, worldly knowledge; they display their erudition, flourishing weighty tomes; they wear ochre robes and earrings; they wear a *rudraksha* bead in a golden locket around their necks; they sit in meditation with their eyeballs rolled upwards, as if they have transcended the thirty-six *tattvas*. Yet all this is but the work of great *maya*, that whirls [like a toy windmill]. (142)

The inferior teachers, though they try to impress by their clothing and demeanour, are not capable of conveying the higher truths relating to *jnana*. Therefore their teaching is restricted to matters of ritual, yoga postures, meditation techniques and so on. Because these concern only the limited ego-consciousness, they are called *pacu markkam* – *the path of the jiva*, rendered in the translation as [*the dispensation of*] *worldly knowledge*.

The text does not specifically mention *a golden locket*, but says simply *kattu*, which means a *tie, fastening, knot, ligature*, in this case, *something tied around the neck*, specifically a *kevudu* or *kevudam*, which the Tamil Lexicon glosses as, ‘*rudraksha* bead enclosed in a gold or silver case and tied on the arm or neck, as a badge, amulet or charm.’

The words [*as if*] in the penultimate clause are not in the text, but are added to make it clear that the teachers in question are not actually in the transcendent state they claim to be. This is clear from the context of the verse; it is also clear from many of the preceding verses, which point out that the state of *manolaya* – *total subsidence of the mind induced by meditational practices*, is not the true transcendent state of realisation. The Tamil word employed here, *kancimittu*, which has been translated as *with their eyeballs rolled upwards* usually means *blinking or winking*. The translation here follows Tiruporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) who glosses, adopting yoga postures

with the eyes rolled upwards. The idea is to present a picture of the false teacher as both ludicrous in his deluded self-importance and unscrupulous in his deliberate attempt to deceive his disciples.

For those who merely act the part of the realised sage what enjoyment will there be, other than that of the daily offerings of food they receive? Can they know the bliss which is not known even to those whose consciousness is pure, who have cut away desire, renouncing both inwardly and outwardly? (143)

The text says *nana kiriyai nadippavar*, which means literally *those who act out the conduct of jnana*. Here the word *kiriyai* is used in the general sense of *action, conduct*. TCS glosses it as *nanacaram – the practices related to jnana*, the final stage on the Siddhanta spiritual path.

As described in a number of previous verses, bliss is a state which precedes the final state of liberation, and in which there is still a trace of discriminating consciousness. In the final state itself there is no longer any distinction between the bliss and the knower of it. In that state, the *jnani* is both the Self, and the bliss of the Self; he knows it by being it, since there is no other to know it objectively, hence it is called *ariyaa inbam – the bliss which is not known*. Sri Ramana has spoken of bliss in the following terms:

...*ananda* (bliss), is also called an obstacle, because in that state a feeling of separation from the source of *ananda*, enabling the enjoyer to say 'I am enjoying *ananda*' is present. Even this has to be surmounted. The final stage of *samadhana* or *samadhi* has to be reached in which one becomes *ananda* or one with reality, and the duality of enjoyer and enjoyment ceases in the ocean of *sat-chit-ananda* or the Self. (*Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 25-4-46, Morning).

At the end of the verse the Tamil text says *avaa aruttu turavu aay* – cutting away desire [and] practising renunciation. TCS glosses, '*turavu* is the ending of outward attachment. '*avaa aruttal*' is the ending of inner attachment. When both these forms of attachment fall away, the states of *cakalam* and *kevalam* fall away. When these fall away, true realisation appears.' The verse is an indirect reference to Tirukkural in

## MOUNTAIN PATH

which ch. 36, entitled Mey unarthal – *Knowledge of the True* is located between ch. 35, Turavu – *Renunciation* and ch. 37, Ava aruttal – *The Extirpation of Desire*.

Bliss is indeed the dwelling place of true knowledge. You are like the *acunam* bird, in that an atom of suffering in this world appears as great as a mountain, and through this virtuous quality a longing for supreme bliss has arisen in you. Listen now, and seeking supreme bliss [in the following manner], you shall obtain it. (144)

The word *pul* employed in the verse means a *bird* in general. Here the *acunam* bird is meant; it is described by the Tamil Lexicon as follows, 'A creature believed to be so susceptible to harmony that when it is fascinated by notes of music, a sudden loud beat of the drum causes its instantaneous death.' Similarly the mature disciple, in whom the desire for liberation has grown exceedingly strong, will suffer greatly from the least contact with the things of the world, if he allows himself to become identified with them.

Supreme bliss is not separate from you. It is your true being. That which arises with the sense objects is bliss also, but it is not the pure consciousness in which bliss itself is annihilated. In that state both kinds of bliss are annihilated. (145)

Since our true nature is bliss only, a degree of bliss will be experienced through contact with the objects of sense, but this bliss is not to be mistaken for the bliss which is experienced through transcending the senses entirely, and which precedes its own annihilation in the state of realisation. The meaning is not entirely clear. In this translation it has been taken to mean that the *jnani*, having freed himself from the bliss of the world of the senses, then experiences supreme bliss at the point of merging with the Self. However, for this merger to take place, even this supreme bliss, which still contains a trace of duality, must be lost. It could also mean that the first kind of bliss is lost because it is only

temporary, and when it passes away, the experiencer is returned once more to the sufferings of the phenomenal world, whilst the second kind of bliss, supreme bliss, is lost because the duality of experiencer and thing experienced cease on merging permanently with the Self.

The inferior bliss that arises with the objects of sense, lasts for some time, then disappears is of little worth; the superior bliss is that which is all-consuming and endures without intermission. Can it be gained by the discriminating mind? The bliss which appears and is subsequently lost is synonymous with the alternating states of pleasure and pain. Your true state is that of the bliss which neither appears nor subsides. (146)

The state referred to in the first part of the verse is that of those who try to experience bliss with the discriminating mind, it being understood that no such attempt on the part of the *jnani* would, or could, be made.

The state of being merged in the Self is one of pure bliss, yet it is not perceived as such, since there is no discriminating intelligence to perceive it. Being of the very nature of the Self, it neither appears nor disappears. This is rather like the state of deep sleep, which we recognise to have been blissful only on waking up from it. If we imagine therefore a state which is like deep sleep, but filled with undifferentiated awareness, then we have some idea of the state being alluded to here.

(*To be continued*) ▲

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

The scriptures declare that the all-embracing supreme reality is everywhere. When you say that it is to be found, not in one holy place, but in this or that other place, are you saying that it does not exist where you are? Witless fool, know that supreme bliss will only arise when you reach the firmament of true knowledge, upon the destruction of your defective, discriminating awareness. (147)

As long as there is identification with the body, the objects of sense will not subside. If they do subside [through control of the mind and senses], unconsciousness will result. [Therefore you should cultivate the awareness that the world does not exist

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apart from the Self]. Is the space of the heavens disturbed when a bird flies through it? When one realises the true nature of the worldly bond, [it will lose its hold on you], just as the heat of fire is annulled by the power of the *mantra*. (148)

Certain *mantras* are supposed to possess the power of annulling the heat of fire. See also v. 30, where the same simile is employed in the opposite sense, the power of *mantras* being compared to the veiling power of *anava malam*. Just as the *mantra* supposedly protects us from the heat of fire, the firm realisation that the world does not exist apart from the Self will enable us to remain unaffected by it. If we know ourselves as the underlying ‘screen’ of the Self, we will not be affected by anything that appears to occur on it, just as the sky is not affected by the bird that flies across it.

What does it matter if the body remains or if it goes? Endless are the workings of those [divine beings] who dwell with form, without form and both with and without form. Is it necessary to break up a clay pot to prove that it is made of earth? Your course now is to abide in that state of pure *maya*, fully aware [of your nature as the Self]. (149)

The Self, Sivam, is traditionally conceived in three aspects, that of *formlessness*, the undifferentiated supreme reality, that of *form*, the manifestation of that reality in the form of a living guru, and that which is *both with and without form*, which is the reality manifesting in the form of the Siva lingam. The general idea seems to be that it is futile for disciples to try to second-guess the working out of their spiritual destiny, regarding the body to be an obstacle to enlightenment and so on.

It is not necessary to crumble a clay pot into dust to prove that it is made of clay. We are not so confused by its pot-like form that we cease to realise that its basic essence is just common earth. In the same way, in order to realise that the body is but an empty form whose only true essence is the Self, we do not need to attempt to destroy and disaggregate that body. Indeed, any attempt to do so would be futile.

The words pure *maya* in the final sentence are a translation of the Tamil *maya vayinthavam*, Sanskrit *maya baidava*. *baidava* is

derived from the word *bindu*, which is synonymous with *shakti tattva*. It is shakti which, as *maya*, veils consciousness and creates the world experience. What seems to be meant here is a state in which, though still embodied, and therefore subject to some extent to *suddha (pure) maya*, the aspirant has perceived the world experience to be other than his true self and is therefore no longer subject to the ego illusion, the effect of *anava malam*, the world illusion of *asuddha (impure) maya* and the consequent cycle of deeds which lead to continued rebirth, *kanma malam*. Such being the case, it is of no interest to him whatsoever whether or for how long his bodily existence is prolonged.

The aim of Vedanta is to be free of the delusion of *maya*, [in which the world appears real], like the snake seen in the rope, and the thief seen in the wooden post, whilst the aim of Siddhanta is to dwell effortlessly in the state of transcendent bliss, just as those bound by the ego [dwell in the state of bondage]. To those who are free of the individual consciousness these two are one and the same. (150)

Just as *a coil of rope* or *a wooden post* can be perceived momentarily as a snake or a thief, due to light conditions or the mental and physical state of the observer, the world, which is just a momentary appearance in the substratum of the Self, is taken to be real by those under the sway of *maya*.

In the supreme state there is no longer a personal self which struggles to make sense of a world which it sees as alien to itself. Therefore the life of the *jnani* is literally *muyarci ketta* — *effort-less*, which we might also translate as *free of the sense of doership*.

The idea in comparing the state of transcendent bliss to the state of bondage appears to be that, just as those who are subject to the full force of the ego, *anava malam*, never for a moment question it, believing it to be their natural state, so do those who have transcended the ego dwell in the transcendent state beyond even bliss as their natural state, equally without questioning it. Hence their state is called *muyarci ketta anandatitam* — *the effortless state of transcendental bliss*.

*Those who are free of the individual consciousness* is a translation of the Tamil *taan nandinaarkku*. This is glossed by Tirupporur



Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) as *those who are free of the defective knowledge, which arises objectively as 'Oneself'*.

The teaching of Vedanta, whose key texts are the Upanishads, emphasises the eradication of illusion, the negative aspect of realisation, whilst Siddhanta, whose key texts are the Agamas, emphasises the positive aspect of realisation, that of uniting with Sivam, the true substratum of the illusory world appearance. For those who have attained the final state of realisation, when the individual consciousness merges inseparably with the Self and that individual consciousness is annihilated, there is no difference between the two.

Tirujnanasambandhar, he of the land of Sikazhi, he who rules us through his grace, he whose divine sport is *jnana*, spoke saying, 'Not speaking of One or Two, just be. Thrice do I swear [that this is the truth]!' (151)

## Chapter 6 An explanation of non-attachment

*The word virattti, Sanskrit virakti, which is translated as non-attachment in the title of this verse means freedom from attachment. TCS explains that it refers to inner renunciation, not outer renunciation, which is the subject of the next chapter, entitled turavu, which is the native Tamil word for renunciation. The two words are not essentially different in meaning, although the latter, being derived from the verb tura — to leave, relinquish, reject, discard has a more active sense, and is therefore probably more suited to express outward renunciation.*

The sage who drank the ambrosial milk of non-dual bliss from the breast of Parvati [in a cup of gold], said, 'In the state of true knowledge there is neither suffering nor happiness, and in the state in which that true knowledge is lost, suffering and happiness manifest, causing delusion. You are the knowledge which embraces both of these.' (152)

That the milk from Parvati's breast was served to the young Jnanasambandhar in a golden cup is attested by the saint himself in *Tevaram* 3.24.2: *My father grew angry saying that the food (milk) [served to me] in a flower-like golden cup was bad.*

*You are the knowledge which embraces both of these* — The Tamil text says *ali arivu nee*, which means literally *You are the androgynous knowledge*. The word *ali* can be used in the sense of neither male nor female, neuter, or possessing both male and female characteristics, hermaphrodite, androgyne. The Tamil Lexicon says, ‘Hermaphrodite, being which is neither man nor woman wholly.’ TCS glosses as follows: ‘He (the author) calls *jiva* (*pacu*) knowledge ‘androgynous knowledge’ because, unlike the knowledge of *god* (*pati*) — *male knowledge*, and knowledge of the *bond* (*paacam*) — *female knowledge*, it exists as *god-knowledge* when it unites with god-knowledge, and as *bond-knowledge* when it unites with bond-knowledge, in the same way that the hermaphrodite embraces both the male and female forms.’

Thus the *jiva*, the individual soul, possesses no inherent consciousness, and therefore no reality, in its own right. It comes into existence simply through its identification with the world, and since it has no existence in itself, it ceases to exist once that identification is ended. Thus the realised sage, in whom that identification has ended, is not other than Sivam itself.

It should be pointed out here that the ‘bond-knowledge’ spoken of above should not be taken to mean an entity existing in its own right, but only an appearance within the Self, Sivam, projected by the *jiva* out of its false understanding.

All six religions agree that the final goal is the pure state which results from renunciation and the cutting away of desire. Know that this is the state of liberation, free of the thirty-six *tattvas*, in which there is no more birth. It is the final state in which all effort comes to an end upon the annihilation of *karma*. (153)

The six religious systems which are considered to be Vedic, each being based on a deity of the Hindu pantheon, are: *Saivam* (*Siva*), *Vainavam* (*Vishnu*), *Shaktam* (*Shakti*), *Sauram* (*Sun*), *Kanapattiyam* (*Ganesha*), and *Kaumaram* (*Murugan*).

TCS says that the author is again (see v.143) quoting the names of two chapters from the *Tiru-k-kural* of Tiruvalluvar, Ch.35, *turavu* — *Renunciation*, and Ch.37, *avaa aruttal* — *The Extirpation of Desire*. He further states that, given the above, Ch. 36, *mey unartal* — *Knowledge of the True* is also included by implication. The word *kuudal* —

*agreement* can also mean *Madurai*, the home of the legendary Tamil Sangams. His commentary therefore indicates that the author is inviting us to imagine that these three chapters are being read out in Madurai from *the sanga palakai*, which according to the Tamil Lexicon is a ‘Miraculous seat capable of accommodating only deserving scholars, believed to have been granted by Siva at Madura to the Sangam poets.’

This book is for those who are free of desire, [and could not even bear to be accused of it], just as a warrior who is willing to die for a cause cannot bear to be accused of cowardice. It is for those who are like the camel, which will eat anything with relish as if it were well-cooked food. To those who are full of desires, and are accustomed to good food which bloats the body, it will seem flawed and unacceptable. (154)

If the worldly bond falls away, the *jiva* will automatically come to rest in the Lord, just as someone swinging on a swing will come to rest on the ground if the rope breaks. Verse [349 of the *Tiru-k-kural*], speaks of the ending of births upon the cutting-off of the attachments created by desire. Is this just your own understanding? Is it not also the understanding of all other religions everywhere? (155)

In this comparison the individual self, *jiva*, *pacu*, is compared to someone swinging on a swing; the ropes supporting it are the worldly bonds, *paacam*, consisting of the mind and senses, and the solid earth is *pati*, Sivam, the Self. As long as these ropes are in place, the *jiva* will swing endlessly forwards and backwards, oscillating between desire and fear, attraction and revulsion. However, if the ropes are cut away, it will come to rest on the solid ground of the Self.

The words *pattru atra kanne pirappu arukkum – births will end upon the ending of attachments* are a direct quotation from v. 349 of the *Tiru-k-kural*: ‘When attachments are ended, rebirth will be cut off. Otherwise the impermanent state [of birth and death] will manifest [over and over again].’ ▲

(To be continued)

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

The world appears to you as real, but annihilates you when it subsides. Even when you are told that it is inert, a mere consequence of actions, it still whirls you about in delusion, like someone who has taken poison. However, the real impediment to true knowledge is your own defective understanding, the failure to know your true Self. (156)

When the individual self regards the world it perceives as real, and predicates its entire being upon that reality, as, for example, when it believes that its consciousness resides in the physical brain, it is entirely at the mercy of that fickle pseudo-reality, which can do away with it at any moment through its myriad forms of transformation,

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decay and death. Until it is established in the Self, the *jiva* will view the absence of the world-illusion as a terrifying void.

In your state of limited, conditional awareness, your nature is veiled by the obscuration of the ego. However, like a bright, clear crystal, which holds the reflection of objects but is not affected by them, your essential nature is not affected. We have now explained to you your nature as the *jiva*, the form that the *jiva* takes, and your nature as the Self. Reflect carefully upon these matters. (157)

Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) explains the three terms mentioned at the end of the verse along the following lines: *cupaavam*, Sanskrit *svabhaava* – *own condition or state of being*, refers to the nature of the individual soul or *jiva*, as being inherently subject to the principle of egoity, *aanava malam*, just as the inherent nature of the crystal is to take on the colours of the things placed next to it. *uruvam*, Sanskrit *rupa* – *form, outward appearance*, refers to the form or appearance of the *jiva*, as being affected by the mind, senses, etc. whilst under the influence of *aanava malam*, just as the crystal is coloured in various ways when under the influence of the objects placed next to it. *corupam*, Sanskrit *svarupa* – *nature, self-nature* refers to the Self or Shivam, the reality that underlies the individual self, but which cannot be known until the veiling of *aanava malam* is removed, just as the crystal, although intrinsically bright and clear, will not be known as such as long as it is coloured by the objects standing next to it.

When the veiling is removed, the *jiva* is no more, and its substratum, the Self, remains, shining alone in its immaculate, non-dual self-nature, just as when the objects are removed, the crystal remains, shining clear and bright, unaffected by anything.

It [your true Self] is free of the states of awareness and forgetting, abiding as all-embracing pure consciousness. Like the ether, it contains all things [yet is not touched by them]. Granting its grace to the *jiva*, it is like sugar, feeding it with the sweetness of its own bliss. To such a one do these three,

(i.e. nature as *the jiva*, form as the *jiva*, and form as the Self, mentioned in the previous verse) belong. (158)

The Self is compared to sugar, because the nature of sugar is itself sweetness. Just as all things made out of sugar taste sweet, all experiences are founded upon the bliss of the Self, whose nature is bliss. Thus the Self imparts its bliss to itself, in the form of the *jiva*.

You make all kinds of sweets of various ingredients and in various shapes and they all taste sweet because there is sugar in all of them and sweetness is the nature of sugar. In the same way all experiences and the absence of them contain the illumination which is the nature of the Self. Without the Self they cannot be experienced, just as without sugar not one of the articles you make can taste sweet.<sup>1</sup>

Having perceived and grasped [the world through the mind and senses], remaining entirely submerged in them, and having come to realise the nature of this defective, discriminating awareness, to then remain in [unattached] purity as pure consciousness, untouched by the five divine operations, the first of which is creation, just as Shivam remains untouched by these, is true renunciation. (159)

The five divine operations *creation, maintenance, destruction or involution, veiling and the granting of grace*, correspond to the operations of the individual consciousness. Creation is the arising of the world in conjunction with the mind and senses, and so on. See the notes to v. 33.

In the same way that Shivam provides the ground for all manifestation, but is totally unaffected by, and uninvolved in it, the task of the *jiva* is to realise that the appearance of the world that comes and goes in its consciousness is totally other than itself, and to remain untouched by it. In doing so, it will transcend that *jiva* nature and realise its true nature as Shivam.

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<sup>1</sup> Osborne, Arthur (ed.), *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, 2002. p.134.

Who [amongst *jnanis*] will be cognisant of the world in which *jivas* live like a swarm of fireflies in the darkness? Know that to them the dawn of true knowledge is like [the rising of] the sun. [The great ones] have taught the five pure *avasthas* so that your defilement may be destroyed, just as the sun annihilates your shadow as it reaches the zenith of the heavens. (160)

The darkness is the darkness of ignorance, *aanava malam*, the principle of egoity, and the fireflies are the activities of the *jiva* in the world of *maya*. Both this darkness and the feeble, flickering illumination of the *jiva* consciousness will be invisible to the consciousness of the *jnani*, which bathes in the full light of the sun of the Self. The world of *maya*, full of *jivas* all trying to make sense of it with the feeble illumination of the intellect, simply does not exist for the *jnani*. It exists only from the point of view of those who labour under the delusion that they are subject to it.

TCS describes in detail how, in the realised sage, each of the five *avasthaas* – *states of the soul* – has been purified and transcended, being transformed into what he calls *cuttavattai*, Sanskrit *shuddha avasthaa* – *pure avasthaas*. The five *avasthaas* – *states of the soul* are *caakkiram*, Sanskrit, *jagrat* – *the waking state*; *coppanam*, Sanskrit *svapna* – *the dreaming state*; *cuzhutti*, Sanskrit *sushupti* – *the state of deep sleep, complete unconsciousness*; *turiyam*, Sanskrit *turya* – *the fourth state*, and *turiyaatitam*, Sanskrit *turyaatita* – *the state beyond the fourth state*. (See the note to v. 33 for information on the latter two states).

In the purified soul these are called *cuttaavattai*, Sanskrit *shuddhaavasthaa*, and are termed *ninmalacaakkiram* – *pure waking state*, *ninmalacoppanam* – *pure dreaming state*, and so on. The individual soul, or *jiva*, acquires this purity by freeing itself from the *tattvas* which limit it in each of these states of being, at which point it merges with Sivam, the Self, the universal consciousness.

Just as no shadow is cast when the sun is directly overhead, the consciousness of the *jiva* which is established in the heart centre, fully illuminated by the light of the Self, does not become caught up in the illusory nature of the ‘shadow’ states of consciousness, waking, dream and deep sleep.

The false appears to be real, but if one enquires into it, it will disappear, as when what appears to be a snake turns out to be just an image painted on a wall. Otherwise, Sir, if you perform rituals and austerities [to discover the real], it will be as if you mistook a post for a thief, and beat a drum to scare it away. (161)  
 On being informed that the world and the body, which are of the nature of *maya*, are unreal like a mirage, you should try to comprehend their true nature. Rather than that, do you expect to be able to eliminate them, shaking them off and obliterating them completely? Similarly the way to escape from a fire that surrounds you in a dream, is simply to wake up. (162)

You say that it is the incontrovertible truth that the world is false. [If you fully realise the truth of your words], is it necessary still to go looking for ‘the real’? Why do you cast doubt upon this, repeatedly looking at the sun [of true knowledge] that banished the black darkness [of ignorance], then blinking and turning away? (163)

Here it is being stated that the aspirant must validate the fact that the world is unreal in itself from his own experience. TCS notes in his summary of the verse’s meaning: *jnana is the true realisation that all the faculties [of body and mind] are unreal.*

The image evoked in the latter part of the verse is that of someone who is not satisfied that the absence of darkness and the full illumination of his surroundings is sufficient proof of the existence of the sun, but insists instead on trying to look directly at it, to make sure that it is there. Unable to see it by looking at it directly, he nevertheless perseveres in his attempts to do so, repeatedly turning his head to look at it, then blinking and turning away, and so forth. In the same way the ignorant person is unable to seek assurance of the existence of the Self in the blissful serenity of his own being, but is driven to continually seek objective proof of its existence through the mind and senses.

[True *jnanis* and false *jnanis* alike] proclaim that birth is to be abhorred. However will you not recognise those who subside



inwardly as their external attachments subside, knowing that the body is an unnecessary affliction, and that true penance is the absence of all attachment, by the simple fact that they demonstrate their lack of attachment to the body [and senses] in their actual conduct? This is the trait by which you will know them. (164)

Many go about preaching that attachment to the body is the source of suffering, and that they possess the means to remove it, but these may be only words. The author therefore advises us to scrutinise the conduct of those who profess to be teachers of the truth, to ascertain that their words are borne out by their actual behaviour. To clarify the point being made, TCS adds the words true *jnanis* and false *jnanis* in his gloss.

*Those who subside inwardly as their external attachments subside* – the less one identifies with external things, thinking in terms of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, the more one can subside into the inner peace of the Self, and the more one subsides into that peace, the less one is tempted to identify with those external things.

The word *mikai*, here translated as *affliction*, means *abundance, excess, that which is unnecessary, superfluous* and hence *arrogance, evil, fault, affliction, error, defect* and so on. In the non-dual continuum of the Self there is no body, therefore it is superfluous and unnecessary, and since it causes suffering to those who identify with its illusory existence, it is also an affliction. Compare *Tiru-k-kural* 345: *To those who have taken up the severing of the ties of birth, the body itself is an affliction. What then of other attachments?*

The phrase *onru ilaamaiye nonpu* – *true penance is the absence of all attachment* is an echo of *Tiru-k-kural* 344: The nature of penance is to be free of possessions. Possessions bring back delusion once more.

TCS notes that since the body and the senses are united as one, the word *mey* – *body*, is used figuratively to signify the senses, a figure of speech which is called *aakupeyar* in Tamil, *metonymy* in English. The use of the word *body* also reinforces the overall meaning of the verse, in emphasising the fact that we should pay attention to what the *body (mey)* does, as well as the *words (vaarttai)* it speaks. This verse

forms a link to the following chapter as, having dealt with the topic of non-attachment, the author now moves onto the topic of practical, physical renunciation. ▲

*(To be continued)*

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

## Chapter 7 Renunciation

*The subject of this chapter is tuṛavu – renunciation, in the sense of giving up the world entirely, including marriage and social life, to wander as a homeless ascetic, depending entirely on the charity of others. In contrast, the subject of the previous chapter was viratti (Sanskrit virakti) – indifference to worldly objects, in the sense of being free of attachment to the things of the world, whether they are abandoned entirely in the physical, practical sense, or not.*

Those who are caught up in delusion, thriftily hiding away their accumulated wealth, vainly waste the days of a life which cannot

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be extended by a single minute, even if they expend ten million gold coins in the attempt. Those who are free of delusion will renounce those things, knowing them to be unreal. (165)

Having observed [the way in which the friendship of] a brood of sparrows and a litter of kittens, reared in the same house, [soon turns to enmity], it is a wonder that we remain so attached [to our wife, children, family, and so on]. What fools we are! Will those who reflect that even the lives of Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Indra do not last forever, and question whether their own existence amounts to anything at all, fail [to renounce the world]? (166)

Even though they praise Pattinattu Pillaiyar and Bhadragiri, those poor fools will not renounce [their family and possessions]. Need we cite the case of the dog who was gnawing on an old dry bone, and growled at the king on seeing him pass by? (167)

Pattinattu Pillaiyar was a famous Tamil saint and poet of *Kāvīrippūmpaṭṭiṇam* whose poems are well-known and much loved in Tamil Nadu. He gave up great riches to renounce the world. At one time he was falsely accused of stealing a necklace belonging to King Patrakiri (Sanskrit: Bhadragiri) and was sentenced to be impaled. However, as the sentence was about to be carried out, the stake burst into flames, whereupon the king became the saint's devotee and eventually renounced the world also to follow him. These laudable devotees are contrasted with those who, whilst paying lip-service to them, are unwilling to follow them and renounce the world, even though they have much less to give up than these two, who were formerly a rich merchant and a king respectively.

For those who here and now contrive to be free of their entanglement with the nets and nooses which bind them – country, town, home, wife, mother, friends and relations, cattle, caste, wealth and the attachments of the body – what birth can there be henceforth? (168)

If someone consumes poison whilst in an altered state of mind, the effects will take hold of him, run their course and eventually subside. But the mere thought of gold will not admit of any cure. It is a great evil which, [if one succumbs to it] cannot thereafter be dispelled by medicines or the recitation of mantras. It is a greater evil, even, than the desire for women. (169)

Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) prefaces this verse with a note at the end of v.168 in which he says that the current verse is in answer to the question of what would happen if someone renounced his household and everything else apart from gold or money. The answer of course is that the need to take care of the gold would inevitably lead to the ruin of his austerities and he would end up losing the benefits both of renunciation and of leading the life of the householder which he had previously enjoyed.

The words *unbalanced state of mind* translate the Tamil word *timir*. The basic meaning of *timir* is *numbness, stiffness, paralysis, palsy*. In Sanskrit it means darkness. According to Winslow's dictionary it also has the sense of 'partial suspension of the bodily and mental powers from consternation, taking sweets to excess, etc.' It therefore indicates, in this context, a state in which the balance of the mind is disturbed through intense emotions, such as anger and grief.

If one takes poison, assuming one survives it, it will run its course and eventually subside with or without the aid of medicines or other aids. The desire for gold, however, is a much more dangerous poison, which does not need to be touched or swallowed, but will take effect merely upon the subject thinking about it, and cannot be easily cured once it takes hold.

What need is there to point out that wealth, youth, the body itself, are a mere mirage? It is plain for all to see [that they are impermanent]. Those who are swift to renounce the world, as their discriminating awareness falls away, will not return to the round of birth and death. Or if they do return, will [those attachments] affect [those who are as] Siva? No, they will not affect them. (170)

The last sentence, literally translated, says, *If they return will [those attachments] touch Siva? [No,] they will not touch [Him].* TCS explains, *If they do return due to some defect of jñāna, they will remain in a state of transcendence over those attachments on account of the [pure] vāsanās resulting from their past renunciation and austerities. Will they (those attachments) take hold of and affect them? No they will not... Since, like Siva, they are free from attachment to anything at all, they will not be affected.*

Do we not know, from the way in which trifling pleasures arise and then just as quickly fade away, that supreme bliss is simply the eradication of desire? If we enquire into it and clearly understand that it is like the bamboo container into which insects enter, get stuck and die, desire for the pleasures of the five senses will end. (171)

According to TCS the word *nalikai* is a *ticai-c-col* – provincial word, in other words, a word peculiar to one of the Tamil provinces, a dialect word. The *nalikai* is a hollow bamboo tube, used for dispensing liquids like oil, ghee or honey. It is blocked up at both ends, leaving just a small hole through which insects, such as the *maravaṭṭai* – millipede, might enter. Stuck in this sticky substance and unable to find the way out, the insects are unable to escape.

For those who perform worship to the rising sun, the sun's light shines, effacing all that is within and all that is without. Similarly, is not renunciation to remain free of all association, as when one sees a devoted wife offer herself up on the funeral pyre? (172)

[The most ripe devotees] are like a bell without a clapper, which makes no sound even when you shake it. It will be hard indeed [for those of lesser attainment] to remain in that state. [For them] it will be like measuring with a grain measure, and throwing out, so that they are destroyed, all those unreal movements of consciousness that have [in the past] manifested and grown up [within them]. (173)

The commentary by TCS makes it clear that two grades of seekers are being referred to in this verse. In the first part, those who possess the highest level of ripeness, *tīvirataram*, are compared to a bell without a clapper. Their practice is effortless, since discriminating awareness cannot arise in a consciousness that is entirely still, there being no trace of desire to cause movement in it, just as no sound can come from a bell without a clapper. The consciousness of a renunciant who is unaffected by desire will not be disturbed, however much it is assailed by the mind and senses. It is therefore compared to an *ūmai maṇi* – a dumb bell, a bell which can make no noise even when it is shaken because it doesn't have a clapper inside it.

The other grades of seeker, in whom the discriminating consciousness is still strong, will find it very difficult to attain this state, but they may on occasion do so, employing various forms of spiritual practice, in which they recognise the false with the aid of the divine grace earned through their practice and reject it each time it arises. A *marakkāl* is a grain measure equivalent to eight *paḍi*, 400 cubic inches. The point being made seems to be that, whilst, for the advanced seeker, no effort will be required to abide as the Self, those of lesser attainment will need to be extremely vigilant, rejecting the onslaught of the world on the mind and senses repeatedly as it arises, just as, when measuring a heap of grain, the same measure is filled, emptied out, then filled again many, many times.

Can there be any attachment to house and home if one remains at rest with no thoughts whatsoever arising, free of attachment to the body and all the rest (sensory pleasures, the external world, and the physical, sensory and mental faculties)? [This state] is [one of stillness], like an iron needle placed inside a magnetised pot, or a lighted lamp in a windless place. All the *tattvas* will be alien [to such a one]. (174)

According to the commentary what is meant by 'all the rest' are, in addition to the body itself, *pokam* – enjoyment, pleasure, *puvanam* – the world and *karanam* – the organs of sense and action and the mental faculties, which are all to be rejected as *nān andru* – It is not 'I'.

In the *magnetic pot* metaphor, a needle made out of a magnetic metal such as iron or steel is clearly meant. It is not clear what is meant by a magnetised or magnetic pot. However the main idea is clear: a metal needle on the outside of such a pot would be attracted towards it just as consciousness, when it is outward-turned, is drawn to the world of the mind and senses. Placed inside such a pot, however, it would not be subject to attraction by any outer object at all, just as the inward-turned consciousness is not attracted by the objects of sense.

Once the impure *tattvas*, the organs of sense and action, the mental faculties etc., cease to function, their cause, the pure-impure *tattvas*, will cease to operate, along with their own cause, the pure *tattvas*.

To enjoy the body of woman is akin to a dog greedily licking ghee smeared on a sharp blade, or someone drinking sweet *pāyacam* mixed with poison. It is like trying to quench a thirst with the water of an entirely unreal mirage. Who would not renounce the world, having seen the evidence provided by the *acuna* bird, elephant, moth, fish and flying insect, [each being lured to its death by one or other of the senses]? (175)

The author gives five examples of creatures, each of which is undone by one of the five senses: the *acunam* bird by sound (see v. 144 and note); the elephant by *touch*, being lured into the hunters' pit by its desire for union with a female elephant which has been set up as a lure; the moth by *sight*, being lured into a flame by its bright form; the fish by taste, being unable to resist the bait on the fisherman's hook, and the flying insect by *smell*, being eaten by a predator after alighting on a flower, attracted by its scent.

The life of the family is a boat laden with misery, which as its reward transports its occupants, who are blinded by the defect of the ego, to the seven hells. Will the wise not tremble with fear at the sight of it? When the one source of the five senses performs the six kinds of labour, reality itself is transformed into unreality. (176)



Through attachment to wife and family not only will all kinds of mental and physical suffering be incurred, but also, through the actions performed with attachment in that birth, a never ending cycle of births will follow, leading the householder into the seven hells. Ironically the *kalam – ship* to which he entrusted his salvation will be his undoing.

In order to maintain his household the householder will need to exert himself in some form of work, an endeavour which will keep him from the practice of Siva yoga, which alone can lead him to the Real. The six forms of labour appropriate to the land of India are given as *uzhavu – agriculture, tozhil – manufacture, vanikam – trade, varaivu – marriage, viccai, vittai – arts, sciences, literature, and cirpam – sculpture, architecture.*

Will the wise find family life acceptable? To them it will be like a bear coupling with its mate on a great heap of dirt, surrounded by a tribe of quarrelsome monkeys. Like the Lord of death [trapping him in its noose], like fire [surrounding him on all sides], like the ocean [to a shipwrecked sailor] or like a great mountain [heaped on his shoulders], it will consign him to the hell of future births. (177)

TCS says that *kālan – the Lord of Death* is like the family because, just as Death snares his victims with his *pācam – rope or noose*, the family of a would-be renunciant will follow him, grabbing onto his hands and feet and weeping and wailing until he gives in and returns to them.

The renunciant will leave [his home and family] without any warning, just as a cuckoo, which has been reared with crows, will suddenly fly off. Like Karna, [who was unaware of his true parentage], will he have any awareness of his social identity? Know that such a one will also be the teacher for others who strive to cut off birth. (178)

The Tamil word for *cuckoo* here is *kuyil*, the Indian cuckoo, *Cuculus micropterus*. Like the other members of the cuckoo family it is a brood parasite, laying its single egg mostly in the nests of drongos

and crows. The sense here is that the fledgling cuckoo will leave the host nest before the other crows or drongos hear its distinctive call and attack it, just as the earnest renunciant will leave the family home without speaking to anyone, for fear his family members may attempt to prevent him from leaving.

Karna is an important character in the *Mahābhārata*. He was the divinely born son of the solar deity Surya and of Kunti, before her marriage to prince Pandu. She abandoned him, setting him afloat in a basket on a tributary of the river Ganges, and he was found and raised by Adhiratha, the chief charioteer of king Dhritarashtra, and he thus came to fight against the Pāndavas in the battle of Kurukshetra. The key point here is that he was raised not knowing his true parentage, just as the renunciant, on realising the illusory nature of the world and renouncing it, loses all attachment to parents, family, caste etc. See also v. 78, where the disciple's willingness to abandon the ego is compared to Karna's legendary generosity.

Were someone to wake up in the night, find himself surrounded by fire, or under attack from a great army, and make a dash for the courtyard of his house, would he hesitate for a second, even if someone shouted 'stop'? That would be the action of a madman. The nature of those who do not renounce household life is not other than this. (179)

One who sees the world as it truly is will not give up on his decision to renounce, even if members of his household and others beg him to do so, just as no one in his right mind would stop in the act of fleeing a burning house, simply because someone told him to do so.

Those who renounce will leave swiftly, like a thief whom someone has released from his bonds and set free, like people who run away in fear from a ghost in the dark, or from a battlefield, or like those who escape with their lives from a pursuing army which is trying to kill them. (180)

Will those who are not even aware of what they are wearing know the difference between the town and the forest? Possessed by the

demon [of the Self], will they know anyone, whether relatives and friends, or complete strangers? For those who have let go of everything, just as people will immediately drop anything red-hot placed in their hands, is there any point in their continuing to live where they lived formerly? (181)

To someone living in society and conforming to its rules, the outlandish appearance and behaviour of the renunciant may make him seem like a demon. In other words, he will seem mad, or possessed, but this is only the misperception of those who fail to realise that the ‘madness’ which possesses him is only his true realisation of the illusory nature of the world.

For those who are free of the discriminating awareness, in which pain ever alternates with pleasure, is any place different from any other? Everywhere is the temple of Lord Siva. To appease their hunger, there are alms. [To provide shelter and quench their thirst], there are public places and water sources. It will not even occur to them to speak of such things. Their only desire is to dwell in total solitude. (182)

*tikku unṭō* means, literally – *are there any directions?* *tikku* means *region, quarter, point of the compass, direction*. Here it is used in the general sense of any one place, as opposed to any other, as reflected in the translation.

The word *akkini*, Sanskrit *agni* – *fire* is used to mean *hunger*. As noted previously, in relation to v. 124, in Indian medicinal systems such as Ayurveda, the element fire, personified in the god Agni, is seen as the force at work in the process of digestion, causing the food to be broken down and consumed. Hence *akkini* – *fire* is used as a synonym for hunger.

The behaviour of worldly society is like the antics of an actor in a masquerade; they are like people who consume poison and find it tasty, or like prisoners who enjoy being in chains. Those who have renounced will have nothing do with this mentality, avoiding it like the plague. They have died whilst still in the body. Thus do they conduct themselves. (183)

To invite those who have gone beyond the *nada tattva* to one's house and so forth is to be like a *hari* (frog) who calls out to Hari (Viṣṇu), who dwells in the Ocean of Milk, saying, 'Come and join me!' To the *jñāni*, the *ajñāni* will appear as do the people of the earth to those who traverse the heavens about the summit of golden Mount Meru. (184)

As mentioned previously *nāda tattva* is synonymous with *siva tattva*. It is the highest of the *tattvas*, and the one from which all the other 35 originate. See also vv 32, 39, 48 and elsewhere.

There is a play on the word *ari*, Sanskrit *hari*, which is a name of Lord Viṣṇu and can also mean frog. In the text the author uses another Sanskrit word, *maṇḍūka*, for frog, assuming presumably that his Sanskrit educated readership will make the connection. Just as the frog erroneously assumes that Viṣṇu is a frog like itself on account of his name, the *ajñāni* falsely assumes a kinship with the *jñāni* since they are both men and ostensibly the same as each other.

Mount Meru is a fabulous mountain said to be situated in the centre of the earth. It is also used in yoga as a metaphor for the six *cakras* – *energy centres of the body*. See v. 1, note 6. To someone flying high above a mountain, the people of the earth will be indiscernible, just as, in the enlightened perspective of someone who has transcended the thirty-six *tattvas*, there will no longer be any individual *jīvas* for him to interact with.

Will the *jñānis* expect anything from the path of devotion, upon which they are worshipped, praised and ensnared in the net of endless bizarre ritual acts of homage? [If you were to suggest that they could at least accept food and other such essentials from devotees, we would reply that] their very greatness, in which they have cut off all desire for food and all the rest, which are only the source of troubles, will cause these things to come to them automatically, even though they don't want them. (185)

The true *jñāni* has no desire to be escorted to the home of a devotee and treated like a god. In fact such things are nothing but a *valai* – *net* to trap him, and draw him back into the worldly existence from

which he has now escaped. The word *upacāram* is used to refer to the external honours done to a deity or holy person, such as burning incense, lighting lamps, offering betel and nut, strewing flowers etc.

The words in square brackets are a rough paraphrase of those inserted by TCS in his commentary, to complete the thought implied by this verse, but not explicitly stated. In the first part of the verse it is said that the *jñāni* will not accept the elaborate honours that devotees would pay to him under the guise of *bhakti*, devotion. This raises the thought, unexpressed in the verse, that perhaps the *jñāni*, even though rejecting all these external honours, might at least go to a devotee's house to accept whatever essentials, such as food and clothing, that he might require for his daily existence. The second part of the verse rejects this implied suggestion, saying that the exalted nature of the *jñāni*'s desire-free existence will of itself draw to him all manner of goods such as food, clothing etc., which he does not even need or want. Why then would he go to a devotee's house to receive such things?

When the fetters of *karma* [*āṇavam* and *māyā*] fall away through the threefold agency [of the guru], his body will seem like a snake, and he a frog gripped in its jaws, or like a firebrand, burning at both ends, and he an ant trapped upon it. It will be as death itself to him. This being so, what [will he think of] those who propose [to pay homage to that body], and [of] the places [that give it shelter]? (186)

According to TCS, the reference to a threefold agency is to initiation by the guru through his look, touch and word. These are three of the six means of initiation, three inner and three outer, mentioned in vv. 75, 76 and notes.

Having taken birth in so many forms, first non-human and later human, and then, having come to know the knowledge which transcends knowledge itself, through the enquiry, 'Who is the "I" who knows everything?' they have now taken birth in the manner of a young hawk hatching from the egg of a fish! Will such as these see the world [that others see]? (187)

The words *ariyā arivai arintu* meaning literally *knowing the knowledge that is not known* have been translated as *having come to know the knowledge which transcends knowledge itself*. This is the pure consciousness of the Absolute, which cannot be known because there is no ‘other’ to know it. Through the enquiry ‘Who am I?’ the enquirer destroys the would-be ‘other’, the ego, by steadfastly turning it inwards towards the Self. Its final destruction signals the loss of ignorance, not some new and improved ‘knowledge’. All that remains is pure knowing, with no knower and nothing known. Hence it is the knowledge which cannot be known.

The image of a fish’s egg hatching into a hawk, and, as one would imagine, leaving the water and flying through the skies is a metaphor for the *jīva* that has spend eons in the ocean of birth, until, transformed by the realisation of the true reality, it takes one final birth in which it merges as one with the open skies of the Self.

Just as, for a king, greatness consists in the amassing of possessions without limit, for these [*jñānis*] greatness now consists in reducing to an atom and eliminating completely all attachment to any existence, even one which surpassed that enjoyed by Viṣṇu and Brahma.

The state beyond the *tattvas* is one of bliss, exceeding even that enjoyed by the gods themselves. However, in the final stage of realisation, the *jñāni* must abandon even this, the last vestige of his personal consciousness. (188)

*cariyai* is to feel revulsion for the body; *kiriyai* is [the discipline of] knowing oneself; *yoga* is non-attachment [to the mind and senses]; divine *jñāna* is that which cannot be conveyed in words; it is the state of being nothing other [than the Self], the state in which there is no enjoyment even of the lofty state in which supreme bliss neither arises nor departs. (189)

At the start of this verse Vallalar gives alternative, esoteric meanings to the first three stages on the spiritual journey. In the exoteric sense *cariyai* is understood as service to the deity, cleaning the temple precincts, lighting lamps and so on. Here it is stated that for the *jñāni* the greatest service he can do is to reject the body as

the source of all suffering. *Kiriyai* in the outer sense is understood as the performance of rituals in accordance with the rules laid down in the scriptures. Here it is stated that for the *jñāni*, the highest ritual is to know himself through enquiry into the nature of the 'I'. *Yokam* is generally understood as the act of controlling and suppressing the mind and senses through breath control, meditation and so forth. Here it is stated that for the *jñāni*, *yokam* is the practice of non-attachment to the world of the mind and senses.

When the *jñāni* discovers the illusory nature of the mind and senses, their existence ends; he ceases to know objectively, and becomes simply the knowledge which has no 'other' to know; this is *vēru iṇmai* – *nothing other [than the Self]*. It is described as *the lofty state in which supreme bliss neither departs nor arises*. Even unalloyed bliss must have a knower to know it, but the *jñāni* transcends even this, entering the state which is *pēru iṇmai* – *without the enjoyment* of the state of bliss which preceded it. This *jñāna* is not a state as such; it is all that is, and hence is not described by the author, other than to say that it is *kēḷā* – *not heard*, i.e. cannot be described in words.



*(To be continued)*

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

## Chapter 8

### The Nature of the [pure] *avasthā*

The subject of this chapter is the state of the *jīva* which has passed through the preparatory stages of *cariyai*, *kiriyai* and *yokam*, transcended the 36 *tattvas*, and is preparing for its final union with Sivam. Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) notes, ‘Since it tells of the state of those who are established in the pure *avasthā*, this chapter is entitled, ‘The nature of the *avasthā*.’ Thus it deals with the state of consciousness which lies beyond the states of waking, dream and deep sleep.

Taking on a body, they experience and exhaust the fruits of their former actions, and go on to seek another body. Starting

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in this world and going even beyond the realm of the gods, they go on experiencing through the five senses until they finally become disillusioned. It is only then that grace will arise in them, so that former pleasures are seen as suffering. What a wonder is this! I am helpless to describe it! (190)

The meaning of the verb *uṇ*, here translated as *experience*, is to *eat, drink, take food*. In metaphysical terms it means to *experience, consume the fruits of actions performed in a former birth*, until one has *ozhittu – exhausted them*. However, in the process of doing so, unless the individual is free of the personal consciousness, the ego and its source, *āṇava malam*, the acts performed in that birth will only generate further fruits to be experienced in subsequent births, and so on *ad infinitum*, through all the realms of men and gods.

The verb *mazhungu*, here translated as *disillusioned*, means to *be blunt or dull*, as an edge or point. Hence it comes to mean to *be obscured, deprived of lustre, to fade as the lustre of a jewel or the glory of a state*. Here it seems to indicate those for whom worldly pleasures have lost their savour, hence *disillusioned*.

Grace is nothing other than our natural state, our true being, which arises when we turn away from the lure of the mind and the senses. However, since it is beyond the mind and senses, it cannot be sought by those means, as earlier verses have shown. It is always there waiting when we turn away from that which prevents us from seeing it. It will appear precisely at the moment we stop seeking it and give ourselves up to it. Hence it is sudden and unexpected, a source of wonder to the recipient.

Featured in the compositions [of the Sangam and other poets], which are spoken of as gems, and the *kovai* compositions [of Māṇikkavācakar and others], countless love situations are described. In these there are two kinds of love: the mutual and the one-sided. Of these, one-sided love is comparable to renunciation, is it not? (191)

*Love situations* translates the words *ācai turai*. *turai* is the technical term for a short piece of prose which precedes a section of verse,

setting the theme for those lines by giving such details as who is speaking and to whom, and the events that led up to, and might follow, the situation being described. This is often referred to as a *colophon*.

The earliest Tamil poetry is secular, one of its principal subjects being the love between a *hero* – *talaivaṇ*, and a *heroine* – *talaivi*. Eventually a genre developed called the *kōvai* – *necklace*, things strung together, which was an attempt to arrange the entire context of love poetry into a continuously developing story. With the arrival of the Vedic religion in southern India and the rise of the *bhakti* movement and its poetical tradition, the hero and heroine began to be used as metaphors for the soul and god. The *Tirukōvaiyār*, or, to give it its full title, the *Tiruccitrambala-k-kōvai* of Māṇikkavācakar, which constitutes the eighth *Tirumuṟai* along with the *Tiruvāchakam*, is the greatest and best known example of this kind of mystical *kōvai*.

Just as the faithful heroine will never desire another, but will remain true to the hero even if her love is not reciprocated by him, the true renunciant will never abandon his devotion to the Lord but will continue to trust in his grace, even if his devotion appears not to be reciprocated. Eventually the Lord will soften towards him and reward his devotion, just as the hero, moved by the heroine's chaste devotion, will eventually show compassion towards her.

The renunciant, exhibiting the eight *sattvic* qualities, [freedom from desire and so on], and the ten states [a one-pointed mind and so forth], discards the personal consciousness, remaining alone as himself, before becoming [immersed in] the love [of the Self]. However all these subtle experiences only serve to demonstrate the instability of those pure states. For those established in the non-dual state which is without defect, no such experiences whatsoever will arise. (192)

TCS lists the eight *sattvic* qualities as follows: *nirācai* – *freedom from desire*; *tavam* – *austerities*; *porumai* – *patience*; *kirupai* – *compassion*; *cantōḍam* – *cheerfulness*; *vāymai* – *truth*; *aṟivuḍaimai* – *wisdom* and *aḍakkam uḍaimai* – *reserve*.

TCS lists thee ten states referred to in the verse as follows:

- a one-pointed mind in which he sees the world, not as the form of *māyā*, but as the form of divine grace.
- determination to cast off the habits of the mental and physical faculties.
- sighing with grief at the thought of the sufferings endured in previous lives.
- a gentle heat suffusing the body as he is overcome by grace.
- giving up food and all the rest.
- reluctance to engage in verbal disputes with others.
- keeping silence.
- exhibiting no awareness of worldly distinctions, as if he were insane.
- falling into a faint, as the vital air (*prāna vāyu*) deserts him.
- remaining still with no conscious awareness.

All these subtle experiences translates the words *kūrththathu ellam*, literally – *all that is subtle*. The verb *kūr* has, as one of its primary meanings, *to be keen, acute, penetrating, as the intellect*. Until he reaches the final non-dual state of union with the Self, the renunciant, although he has realised the illusory nature of the world of the *tattvas*, will continue to experience the aforementioned *cuttāvattai* – *subtle states* until that final union occurs. However even these states will fluctuate, succeeding each other as they wax and wane in various degrees.

When speech ends, the mind continues to operate; when that ceases, that is the experience of grace; when that comes to an end, that is the motionless state in which the individual consciousness is lost (*parai yokam*), and when that ends, that is the state beyond bliss (*cukātitam*). For those who possess the merit of attaining that state, the unreal does not manifest. For the rest, it is manifold. (193)

Even when we are not speaking, or consciously formulating thought internally, there remains a constant mental chatter which goes on automatically unless we are vigilant, asking ‘Who is it to whom these thoughts arise?’ and so on.

Since our true nature is only the Self, the Self is always seeking, through the simple fact of its existence as the true reality, an opportunity to reveal itself to us. This opportunity will arise most easily when the mind is inward-turned, not grasping at external phenomena. The irresistible power of the Self, in its dynamic aspect of its revealing itself, is called *aruḷ* – *grace*. Ramanananda Saraswati, in his unpublished translation, translates the word *aruḷ* as *intuition*, which is quite a good description of grace seen from the viewpoint of the recipient. Few are they who do not at some point in their existence experience the powerful sense that the world around them is not what it seems, and that the true reality dwells somehow beyond its compass.

The state of *parai yokam* mentioned in the text is described in the Madras Tamil Lexicon as ‘the state of the individual soul in which it loses its self-consciousness expecting grace from Siva.’ It may equate to the state of pure witnessing, referred to by Sri Ramana as *ātma sphuranā*, the ‘I [am] I’ state.

“Again *sphuranā* is the foretaste of Realisation. It is pure. The subject and object proceed from it. If the man mistakes himself for the subject, objects must necessarily appear different from him. They are periodically withdrawn and projected, creating the world and the subject’s enjoyment of the same. If, on the other hand, the man feels himself to be the screen on which the subject and object are projected there can be no confusion and he can remain watching their appearance and disappearance without any perturbation to the Self.”<sup>1</sup>

TCS notes that since *parai yokam* and *cukātitam* are mentioned in sequence, a term intermediate between them is implied, *cuka-p-peru* – *the attainment of bliss*, i.e. when *parai yokam* ends that is *cukam* – *bliss*, and when *cukam* ends, that is *cukātitam* – *the state beyond bliss*. It is not easy to differentiate clearly between these preliminary states, *aruḷ*, *parai yokam* and *cuka-p-peru*, which may perhaps best be thought of as aspects of the same state, the state which immediately precedes *cukātitam*, and follows upon the loss of the ego, the individual consciousness. What is clear, however, is that only *cukātitam* denotes the inalterable state of *mukti* – *final liberation*.

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<sup>1</sup> Venkatramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 06-07-1935. Talk§62.

The assertion made in the final sentence, that for those who have reached the highest state, the unreal does not manifest, whereas for the rest, it is manifold, is explained by Sri Ramana:

“The aspirant starts with the definition that the Real exists always, then he eliminates the world as unreal because it is changing, and hence cannot be Real. Ultimately he reaches the Self and there finds unity. Then that which was originally rejected as being unreal, is found to be part of the unity. Being absorbed in the reality, the world is also real. There is only existence in realisation and nothing but that.”<sup>2</sup>

In other words the world is not unreal, but at the same time it is not anything which exists separately from the unity of the Self, *sat-chit*, existence-consciousness, other than which nothing is.

When the [physical, sensory and mental] faculties fall away, [the world will seem tiny and insignificant,] as if viewed from [the top of a high] mountain. And when the individual consciousness becomes detached from those faculties, the mere thought [of what he has suffered] will bring forth sighs of grief. As grace overtakes him, his body will grow feverish and will cause him fear, and as bliss arises and a divine madness takes hold within him, he will forsake speech and cease to care what others might think of him. (194)

As the hold of the sensory and other faculties on the consciousness of the disciple weakens, the phenomena that they convey will gradually fade into the background of the Self until they are no longer distinguishable, just as for someone climbing a mountain the world at ground level will gradually fade and cease to be visible. [See also v. 43 and note and v. 184, where a similar idea is expressed.]

TCS says that the words ‘and he comes to know himself’ are implied as a corollary to becoming detached from the body-related faculties. Focusing the attention on the Self is the exact counterpart of turning it away from the world of the senses. The commentator gives the following graphic illustration of the renunciant’s feelings on realising how much he has suffered due to the dominion of the

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<sup>2</sup> Brunton, P., *Conscious Immortality*, Ch. 11, ‘The Illusion of the World’, 2013. p.73.

mind and senses: ‘there are deep sighs of grief at the thought of how for time without measure he has been gnawed at by those faculties, as an earthworm is gnawed at by ants.’

The final words of the verse *nāṇum oḍuṅgum* mean literally, *modesty will subside, cease*. Fearing the body and its attachment to the world and swept up in the bliss of the Self, the renunciant will no longer have any fear of the offending society by not performing *pujas*, not taking ritual baths and so on.

He will perspire; his eyes will overflow with tears; upon perceiving the unreality of the world, his body will grow feverish; he will cry out and then freeze as if paralysed. As grace arises, speech and thought will desert him, and as that grace becomes his whole reality, ecstasy will boil up within him like the roiling clouds, and the hairs of his body will stand up on end. (195)

On the day that grace overwhelms him, his mind will die, and his delusion will be banished; womankind will seem like the very devil, gold will seem of less worth even than brass, and he will eat what food is given, knowing it to be an illusion. The very fear [of association with those things] will make him seem insane, his very sanity appearing as delusion to others. (196)

TCS says that the implication is that gold will seem, not just equal in worth only to brass, but actually more worthless even than that, saying that they will see [it as] shell tokens or small pebbles.

The author speaks of the renunciant *eating delusion-food, food in delusion – māyattu ūṇ uṇḍu*, Realising the impermanent and fundamentally illusory nature of the senses, and that even his desire for food is part of that illusion, he will not seek out food of choice, but will eat only what is given, and of that, only enough to sustain his body.

The reaction of the renunciant on realising the true nature of worldly appetites such as lust for women, desire for money and craving for food, whilst in reality being a manifestation of clear-mindedness

and sanity, will appear as madness to those who are still under the sway of those illusions.

Picture a mother who, having remained barren for many years, finally bears a son, who subsequently leaves home. Just as she will rejoice, grasping him to her breast and weeping when she finally sees him return, so will the renunciant laugh and weep with joy at the thought of the limitless ages spent in futile births, and the absence of any sign of grace till now. (197)

The ills of birth do not exist for those possessed by the madness [of divine grace]. In them there is no separation; they walk with a measured gait, unmindful of the body, and not caring about the opinion of others; they speak softly and are frail of body, having no craving for food; [desiring only divine grace, they are like a spurned lover], mounting the palmyra branch; hearing and the other senses do not affect them, nor does the mind touch them. (198)

In the love poetry of the Sangam era the last recourse of the spurned lover is to threaten to dress up a *maḍal* – *palmyra branch as a horse* and ride it through the town or village, holding a portrait of his beloved and proclaiming her cruelty towards him. The *jñāni* resembles him in that he cares only for the Self, having no concern for what people might think of his conduct.

Occasional snatches of song; the hint of a smile; a sharp, unblinking gaze; a distracted air of amazement even when objects of worthless pleasure are heaped upon them; a quiver of revulsion [at the sight of such objects], and a complete insensibility to them; total impassivity [in the face of danger]; a tendency to leap up [in transports of bliss], followed by a return to clear awareness – [such are the traits of those who have attained the state of bliss]. (199)

Whereas the previous verse describes a renunciant acting under the influence of divine grace, this verse describes one who has passed from the state of *aruḷ* – *grace* and *parai yokam* into the blissful state

which immediately precedes divine liberation. See v. 193 and notes, which describe the states leading up to final liberation, *cukātitam* – *the state beyond bliss*.

Who can comprehend their amazement at the blissful joy that overwhelms them? They will be like the lame who regain the use of their legs; or those who master a difficult skill after much effort; or those who sing out loud in the throes of lustful infatuation. The world will view their behaviour as pure madness. (200)

TCS prefaces this verse by saying that it answers the question as to why those who have attained *puraṇānantam* – *unalloyed bliss*, should dance about and sing in such a fashion.

The word *unam* means *defect, want, degradation, meanness, vileness*. Following TCS it has been translated as madness. We might say something like the *degrading behaviour of a madman*. Clearly, to sing and dance for the reasons stated in this verse would seem, at the least, immodest, and at the worst degrading to the person engaged in it. Similarly people at large, having no comprehension whatsoever of the reason for the sage's conduct, would invariably see it as reprehensible.

Surrendering your consciousness [to the bliss of the Self], exchanging the 'I am the body' idea [for grace], so that it is no more, abide in true knowledge through the divine madness in which even the concepts of gain and loss [of the Self] do not arise. Does an unmanned ship on a perfectly still ocean pitch and roll, or remain perfectly still? [So let it be with you]. (201)

Fundamentally the body and the world we take to be real are identical. Seen from the standpoint of the Self, they are merely the interplay of the sensory, mental and physical faculties. Once identification with these is ended, there is no more body and world as such. They are simply a picture which appears fleetingly upon the unchanging screen of the Self.

TCS notes that in the comparison in the latter part of the verse, the waveless ocean represents the state of *silence-bliss* – *maunānantam*,



*the absence of any crew represents the cessation of the operation of the faculties – karuvikaḷ iranthu nitral, and the unmoving vessel, the consciousness of the jnānis who are free of the personal self – potham irantha nāṇikaḷathu arivu.*

When people laugh at him, he laughs back at them; if they drive him away, saying, ‘Fie on you, you devil!’ he makes the cremation ground his home; as he wanders as a naked ascetic, he rejects nothing as ‘unclean’; celebrating the death of the ego in song, he dwells in the firmament of pure consciousness; he dances the devil dance, clapping his hands in accompaniment; his dance is the dance of bliss. (202)

[*Wandering*] as a naked ascetic translates the words *tikampari āy*. Sanskrit *digambari* means a naked mendicant. A *digambari* is one whose *clothing – ambara*, is the four directions, the sky – *dish (dig, in combination)*. The word is probably used in a figurative sense, as Hindu ascetics, unlike the *digambar* sect of Jains, for example, rarely go completely naked.

Since to him all is the Self, every place is like every other; nothing can defile him by its contact, and he remains impervious to any reproach of defilement from others due to his dwelling in places that are stigmatised as defiled by society, eating food that is deemed unclean, etc.

The words *devil dance* translate the Tamil word *tuṅṅkai*, a form of dance, referenced in the earliest Sangam anthologies, performed on the battlefield in imitation of flesh-eating she-devils, feasting on the carcasses of the dead, and in mock battles in village festivals. Winslow’s dictionary says, ‘Dancing of devils, or persons imitating them, striking the elbows on the sides, the hands being raised upright.’

Only the Lord of Chidambaram could know the hearts of those who look bizarre with their excessive ornaments, [holy ash], and strange clothing; who affect true knowledge in their speech; who dance and prance about, performing rituals in the guise of austerities, and affecting a feigned air of wonder. (203)

The translation has been somewhat expanded to bring out the meaning. The verse itself simply says, ‘Only the Lord of Chidambaram might know the strange ornaments, clothes, speech,’ etc. The idea is that the performance they put on is so good that only the Lord himself, or another *jñāni*, could possibly know that they are fakes. The ornaments would have consisted mainly of *rudrāksha* beads, worn to excess on the head, ears, arms, chest and throat. TCS says that the wearing of much holy ash is also implied.

The words *the affectation [of true knowledge]* in their speech translate the Tamil phrase *viḷiyāl apimāṇam*. – *apimāṇam*, Sanskrit *abhimāna*, has, according to the Tamil dictionaries, the meanings *self-respect, sense of honour, greatness of mind, nobility of soul*, whilst in Sanskrit it has the meanings *high opinion of oneself, self-conceit, pride, haughtiness, conception (especially an erroneous one regarding oneself)*. Taken in the Tamil sense the phrase means *affecting nobility of soul in speech only*, whilst in the Sanskrit sense it would mean *revealing their self-conceit in their speech*, which amounts to the same thing. The false guru fools everyone including himself regarding his spiritual attainment, or rather, lack of it. The Tamil word for word, speech used here is *viḷi*. It has the general meaning of *sound*, and is also the technical term in Tamil for the *vocative case*, the case of address.

Observing the profound delusion in which even the gods, Vishnu, Brahma and Indra, flourish, [believing themselves immortal], then pass away, the *jñānis* shake their heads in disbelief; and seeing the frenzied contortions visited upon the people of the world by the same delusion, they cry out, ‘Alas for them!’ As for the *jñānis*, seeing themselves only as the Self, they dance to the rhythm ‘*tām tām*’.

(204)

According to Puranic and other sources, the universe, including all the gods, are reabsorbed into the absolute Reality, Parashivam, at the end of each age. As the new age begins, a new Vishnu evolves, who creates a new Brahmā as the creator of the worlds. When even the gods are not eternal, what folly is it then for mankind to act as if their paltry existences are enduring and significant?

## MOUNTAIN PATH

For them, all that has its root in desire has gone; the idea ‘I am That’ is no more; infused with the divine love in which there is neither knowing nor absence of knowledge, they dance the silent dance of blissful joy; they move about with the playful innocence of children. (205)

The organs of sense, cognition and action are all driven by desire for the objects of sense; without desire, these will cease to operate.

The *jñāni* and small child are similar to the extent that they both possess an innocence and naivety, the former because the world and its convoluted workings no longer affect him, and the latter, because they have not yet begun to do so. Therefore the toddler, innocently pottering about, is in one regard a good metaphor for the realised sage.

Do not view them simply as enjoying the bliss that is gained after transcending everything that gives rise to pain and pleasure. See them as people [who see both the suffering of the world and the bliss of liberation], like the eyes of the cat, which people ridicule; or a man standing on the bund of a large irrigation reservoir or on the top of a mountain; or as the sun at the zenith. (206)

This verse gives a series of similes illustrating the state of someone who has become liberated whilst still in the body; who remains fully aware of the body and the world, and of the final state of liberation without having any attachment to either state, just as a cat can see equally well by day or night.

An *ēri* is a *large lake or reservoir*, often created by building a high dyke or bund at the lower end of a large, gently sloping area of ground. On one side of the bund therefore is a vast expanse of water, and on the other, a large area of irrigated farmland. Only someone standing on top of the bund can see both of these simultaneously, just as only the gaze of the *jñāni* can encompass both the bondage of the world and his own state of liberation.

Only when the sun is at the zenith can it see both the place of its rising and the place of its setting. Similarly, only the *jñāni* can simultaneously be aware of the suffering of birth and the bliss of liberation.

(To be continued)



TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
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Just as people who are mentally deranged or are suffering from a painful disease naturally assume that others see things exactly as they do, those whose perception is masked by primal ignorance will say to those whose consciousness is informed by divine grace, ‘What kind of behaviour is this?’ (207)

The text say, *pēy piṭittu – a devil, fiend, ghost having seized [them]*. In the translation some license has been used in taking it as the equivalent of *mental illness*. What today we would class as schizophrenia or some other form of mental illness would regularly be ascribed in earlier centuries to demonic possession.

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*Cūlai*, here translated as *painful disease* is a term applied to a class of diseases covering a wide range of conditions from arthritis and rheumatism to gout and colic. *cūlai nōy* was famously the disease which afflicted the *Tēvāram* poet-saint Appar before his conversion to Saivism. In Appar's case the disease was clearly some form of intestinal colic, as evidenced in the first *padikam* of volume 4 of *Tirumurai*: '[My malady] hides within me knotting up my intestines, twisting my innards till my limbs are convulsed, so that I, your devotee, can find no repose.' (4.1.1)

The *primal ignorance* referred to in this verse is *āṇava malam*, which in Siddhānta terms is the principle of egoity which is inherent in the soul, as verdigris is in copper. The nature of normal consciousness is one of forgetting its true nature as the Self and becoming enmired in the activity of the mind and senses.

Are those who are insane and incapable of speech somehow able to accept good advice? Worldly people will remain convinced that the very darkness of delusion is the light of true knowledge. Will they not say that those who are possessed only by the power of grace are the very devil? Milk is anathema to the tongue of the bilious, as is the sun to creatures that see only in the dark. (208)

The words tongue of the bilious translate the Tamil words *pitta nā – a tongue [affected by] bile*. *pittam – bile* is one of the four humours. It is secreted by the liver into the intestines for the purpose of digesting fat. It is therefore likely that someone suffering from a disorder related to bile will be averse to foods with a high fat content, like milk. The condition of being averse to food is called *aruci-p-pittam* in Tamil, *aruci* having the meaning of *aversion to, absence of relish for*. Just as milk only appears unpleasant to those who suffer from some disorder of the body, the quest for the Self will cause aversion in worldly people, who are only interested in ego-driven worldly pursuits.

Clad only in the four directions they wander at large; they are like a bird sitting on her eggs, or a tortoise when someone comes near. Who are their countrymen? Like walking corpses, or madmen bereft of speech they may be, yet even the hosts of

the gods raise a cry to invoke their help, and Indras accompany them, wielding sceptres of protection. (209)

The comparison with *a bird sitting on her eggs* could be taken to refer to the manner in which the *jñāni* is firmly established in the state of the Self, as the bird settled on the nest, intent on hatching her brood, or to the manner in which the *jñāni* embraces all the worlds, just as the hen embraces her brood in the protective cover of her feathers.

Just as the tortoise or turtle will draw back its limbs into its shell as a mechanism of protection, the *jñāni* keeps his senses withdrawn, so as to remain unaffected by the objects of sense.

The words *sceptres of protection* translate the Tamil words *cēma kōl*. *cēmam* can mean *protection, safety, preservation* or *happiness, well-being, welfare*, and a *kōl* is a *staff* or *sceptre*. A *cēma kōl* is either a sceptre or staff which confers protection, or, as Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) thinks, a sceptre which is glorious on account of its being used in the service of a *jñāni*.

Some liberated ones will leave the place they are in never to return, just as life never returns to a dead body; others will remain where they are, regarding all places as only one. All they know is that the body is but a temporary dwelling place for the soul, and the world, the stage upon which they act. (210)

The words *just as life never returns to a dead body* are an expansion of the text, which simply says *cettavarai pōla – like those who have died*. TCS explains this in his commentary as follows: ‘just as the life which has departed from a body does not return and enter it again.’

The words *muttar tamakku* – for the liberated, occurring in the middle of the verse, form both the last two words of the first statement in the verse and the first two of the second. This literary device is called *tāppicai*; the word *tāpp(u)* represents the word *tāmpu* – *swing*, used in combination; *tāppicai* is one of eight *poruḷ kōḷ* – *modes of constructing a verse*.

When the pleasures of the body [are seen to be unreal and] fall away, the enemy of the soul (the ego, *āṇava malam*) dies. Then, as bliss itself dies away, discriminating awareness, along with

the idea of a personal self disappears. For those who are thus established in the all-embracing fullness of reality, moving about will be like measuring the ether. Will there be any place where they may not go? (211)

The word translated as bliss here is the Tamil word *pēru*, which means *good or benefit*, that is to say, the good gained from the loss of *āṇava malam*, which, whilst in operation, causes the individual to perceive worldly experience as pleasure, whilst in reality its nature is suffering. Bliss, has been identified in previous verses as the state which immediately precedes final liberation, but this is not the final state, as Bhagavan himself makes clear:

“...*ananda* (bliss), is also called an obstacle, because in that state a feeling of separation from the source of *ananda*, enabling the enjoyer to say ‘I am enjoying *ananda*’ is present. Even this has to be surmounted. The final stage of *samadhana* or *samadhi* has to be reached in which one becomes *ananda* or one with reality, and the duality of enjoyer and enjoyment ceases in the ocean of sat-chit-ananda or the Self.”<sup>1</sup>

The word *measuring* translates the Tamil expression *cāṇ iṭal* – [*the act of*] *measuring*, literally, *applying the cāṇ*, a measure of 9 inches. ‘A span of twelve fingers’ breadth, or from the end of the thumb to the end of the little finger extended.’ (Winslow’s dictionary). Since the ether is infinite and the same everywhere, to measure it, or to cease to measure it, has no effect on it whatsoever. Whether *jñānis* go to one place or another, or stay where they are, it has no significance, just as to go about measuring the sky with a ruler would be a meaningless, random activity.

What does it matter if they live in a dense forest, or a place inhabited by men with royal palanquins, umbrellas and fans? What does it matter if their dwelling place is high, low or middling? They are like Lord Siva himself, having no contact with anything whatsoever, or like his grace, which does not [leave Him to perform the divine operations and then] return to Him again. For them, all places are one and the same. (212)

<sup>1</sup> Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 25-4-46, Morning.

The Tamil word translated as *palanquin* is *taṇṭu* – *stick, cudgel, bludgeon, staff*, but it can also mean *the pole of a palanquin*, and therefore by synecdoche, a palanquin. (Synecdoche is the figure of speech in which the part is put to describe the whole; in Tamil this figure of speech is called *ciṇai ākupeyar*.)

In the latter part of the verse, the *jñāni* is compared first to Lord Śiva, in the sense that, although all phenomena exist in and through Him, he is entirely separate from them. Then he is compared to *aruḷ* – *grace*, the creative energy of Lord Siva, which, though causing all things to occur, does not in itself interact with anything else, nor become separate from the reality which is Śivam.

To those who have known themselves through grace, and then transcended entirely even that knowledge, attaining thus to the greater life of realisation in this lifetime, the very destruction of that consciousness, in which they acted in and experienced [the world objectively], is their dwelling place. For them there is no saying, ‘this is a cremation ground,’ [or ‘this place is pure’].

(213)

To those who have abandoned lust and all the rest, whose hands are their only food vessel, who sleep on the bare ground with only their arms and legs as a cover, who are untouched by even the idea of name, reputation, caste or occupation, what religion might we ascribe?

(214)

*Lust and all the rest* references what are known in Tamil as the *uḷpakai* – *the [six] inner enemies: kāmam – lust; kurōtam – anger; ulōpam – avarice; mōkam – sensuality; matam – pride and māccariyam – envy, malice.*

The Tamil word translated in the last line by *idea* is *vāṭaṇai* also written *vācaṇai*, Sanskrit *vāsanā*. It is defined in Monier-Williams’ dictionary as ‘The impression of anything remaining unconsciously in the mind, the present consciousness of past perceptions.’ All actions performed with the sense of doership, the ego, either in this life or previous ones, leave traces in consciousness which bind the *jīva* and precondition its subsequent behaviour. This is the mechanism by which it is bound to an indefinitely extended series of incarnations,



until it can free itself and attain liberation. The point here is that the *jñāni* has freed himself from all such conditioning and therefore not only is he not concerned with social status, caste and so on, but he is quite unaware of their existence, even as concepts.

This verse carries with it strong echoes of Sri Ramana's own life after his arrival at Aruṇācala. He himself describes how he abandoned name, caste and any specific religious adherence, throwing his sacred thread into a tank; how, when begging for food, he was content to use only his cupped hands for a plate, and how in winter he would be content merely to cross his arms over his bare chest to keep warm.

If we compare the life of the *jñāni* to that of the world in general, the former will be like a lamp [which is the source of illumination], and the latter, a pair of glasses [which require illumination to be of any use]. To the rest of the world he will appear to have strayed from the path. But does that world affect him? He knows only that forgetfulness [in which one forgets the world]. He does not know [that forgetfulness in which one forgets the Self]. (215)

The Tamil word *cīṇa-k-kannādi* is taken here to mean *pair of glasses, spectacles*; it also has the meaning *looking glass*, as from China. Someone looking for an object in total darkness will easily find it with a lamp, as opposed to someone looking for it with a pair of glasses, who will not be able to see anything but darkness. Similarly the *jñāni*, who partakes of the self-luminous quality of the Self, will be able to dispel the darkness of ignorance and know the truth. Conversely, for the worldly person, the only aid against ignorance is the mind, which, without the illumination of the Self, can see only that ignorance. Just as a pair of glasses is useless in the dark, so the mind is useless as an aid to seek the Real in the state of ignorance, without the illumination of the Self.

The word *vipiraṭṭam*, here translated as *straying from the path*, is the Tamil form of Sanskrit *vibhraṣṭa*; it occurred previously in v. 51. It has the sense of *that which is fallen, cast away, or should be cast away*. The *jñāni*, in failing to comply with the shastraic injunctions relating to worship, personal conduct, ritual cleanliness and so on, is

likely to appear quite reprehensible to the orthodox Hindu, whether householder or renunciant.

The words ‘But does that world affect him?’ translate the word *vikāriyō* – *Is he one who is subject to change (i.e. affected by the world)?* Sanskrit *vikārin* means *a thing or person that is liable to change, variable*. The *jñāni*, having realised his oneness with the unchanging non-dual background of the Self, upon which all worldly phenomena appear to play themselves out, perceives nothing as other than the Self. He is therefore a *nirvikāri*, as opposed to the worldly person, who is a *vikāri*.

The last two sentences are a translation of just three Tamil words, *a-p-parāṅku aṅṅi ariyāṅ* – *he knows nothing other than that forgetfulness (i.e. that of the world)*. The word translated as forgetfulness is *parāṅku*, the Tamil form of Sanskrit *parāṅ*, which in Tamil has the meanings *inattention, heedlessness, forgetfulness, absent-mindedness*. This translation follows the *urai* of TCS who glosses as follows: ‘They know only the forgetfulness of the unchanging condition. They know nothing of the forgetfulness of this changeful [worldly] state.’ In other words the *jñāni* is aware only of the unchanging condition of the Self, in which he ‘forgets’ the world, whereas the worldly person is aware only of the changing condition of the world, in which he ‘forgets’ the Self.

Some will say of the *jñāni* that he is a fool, one who is improper in his conduct, or a complete ignoramus; others will call him a great scholar, the scion of a noble family, or the seed from which virtuous conduct springs. However, when we think about it, the clear understanding of the *jñāni* cannot be comprehended, for he is the very measure of that which is set as a measure [by the holy scriptures], and even beyond all that. How wonderful is this!

(216)

The words *one who is improper in his conduct* translate the word *anācāri*. *Ācāram* has the sense of *conduct, manner of action, behaviour* in the general sense, and in the specific sense, *of adherence to custom, practice, usage, adherence to prescribed rites and sacred rules etc.*; conversely the word *anācāram* has the opposite sense. An

*anācāri*, Sanskrit *anācārin* is therefore one whose conduct is improper, or who does not adhere to established social or religious codes.

The goal of the holy scriptures is only to convey the state of enlightenment, the state enjoyed by the *jñāni*. However, since his state cannot be conveyed in words but can only be known through actual experience, he is truly beyond all such attempts to measure or describe his state. He is the measure, itself unmeasurable, that is set up as the measure of reality by the holy scriptures, which themselves can give only the merest hint of his state.

When grace overwhelms him, the *jñāni* will be like someone who has rubbed magic ointment into his eyes and is able to see hidden treasure; or like someone who now feels ashamed of what he did under the influence of poison or demonic possession; or like someone who has been released from a cruel curse. However, to those [whose vision is limited] like frogs in a well, his conduct will appear fraudulent. (217)

*añcaṇam* is *black pigment for the eyelashes, collyrium*. It is also used in combination to mean *magic black pigment*, which is of three kinds: *pātālāñcaṇam* – *magical black pigment or collyrium used in discovering treasures buried underground*, (which is the meaning here); *pūtāñcaṇam* – *magical ointment for discovering whether a person is possessed or not*, and *cōrāñcaṇam* – *magic pigment used for tracing stolen property*. Just as the magic ointment renders the earth transparent, so that the treasure hidden under it becomes visible, the power of grace dissipates the obscuration of *āṇava malam* to reveal the bliss of the Self.

The *jñāni* who remains a householder will be like one who has renounced the world as far as his spiritual knowledge is concerned, but will differ from him in his outward conduct. Conversely the householder who is not a *jñāni* will resemble the householder who is a *jñāni* in his conduct only but not in his spiritual knowledge. If we must draw a comparison, the *jñāni* who is a householder is like a whore; like wealth; like the sun; like a *vina*; like the ether; like a fan, and like someone who gives blessings [to people without judging them]. (218)

The interpretation of the first two lines of this verse offered in the translation is based on the *urai* of TCS. The general idea is that it is not possible to recognise a *jñāni* based on his conduct, as he may appear outwardly to be fully involved in the affairs of the world whilst inwardly he is as much a renunciant as one who has totally renounced the world.

Some of the terms of comparison used to describe the householder *jñāni* will be familiar from earlier verses: *veyyōṇ* – *the sun*, as fostering all activities but taking no part in any of them; *veḷi* – *the ether, space*, as containing all phenomena but remaining untouched by them. These terms could equally apply to the *jñāni* who has renounced the world.

The remaining terms apply specifically to the householder *jñāni*, as one who masks his enlightened state with the persona of the householder.

A *vēci*, Sanskrit *veśya* – *whore, prostitute* is compared to the *jñāni* in that the prostitute appears to be fond of her client, but in reality desires only his wealth, just as the householder *jñāni* appears to be attached to his householder life, but in reality desires only the riches of the Self.

*paṇam* – *wealth, money* has no feelings towards the people who desire it, just as the householder *jñāni* has no attachment to the wife and family who lavish their affection on him.

The *vīṇai* – *Indian lute*, like all musical instruments, remains inert until it is played, and when it is played, produces sounds only as elicited by the person playing it. Similarly the householder *jñāni* will respond appropriately but without attachment in his dealings with others, and when the interaction is over, will subside again into his former state of detachment.

Like the *vicīri* – *fan*, which performs a service to others but confers no benefit upon itself, the *jñāni* serves others with no desire for, or expectation of reward.

*āciyār*, Sanskrit *āśis* – *blessing, benediction*, are people who give blessings, such as priests, who deliver their blessings regardless of the worth, or lack of it, of the people upon whom they confer them, just as the *jñāni* householder acts with total equanimity and freedom from bias in his dealings with his household.

Though they prosper as great kings, leading an army with its four divisions, possessing [the trappings of royalty such as] palanquins and royal parasols, and praised by a host of servants and retainers, do the pure ones feel any pleasure in experiencing those things? They are like the flame of a lamp [that transforms oil into radiant light], transmuted false pleasures into the welling-up of the Real, or like someone who is about to die accepting repayment of debt, [accepting the fruits of his karma without attachment]. (219)

The word for army used in this verse is *cāturaṅkam*, Sanskrit *caturāṅga*. Literally it means *four parts* or *limbs*, referring to the four elements that make up an army, elephants, horses, chariots and infantry.

Just as the flame of a lamp transforms the oil that feeds it into radiant light, the *jñāni*, by remaining detached and offering up the dross of everyday experience up to the Self, transforms that experience into the reality that is the pure light of the Self.

The *jñāni* accepts the fruits of his past karma with equanimity, knowing it to be inevitable, but taking no pleasure in it, rather as someone who is about to die might accept what is due to him out of duty, knowing that he will not live to enjoy it. The *jñāni's karma*, continually being amassed up to the point of his realisation, is likely to have been very good, and therefore liable to bring him a pleasurable return. Although he takes no pleasure in these things, he cannot refuse what *karma* brings, just as the dying man cannot refuse to accept the discharge of a debt which is due to him from his kinsmen and others, even though, being about to die, he has no interest in it, or use for it.

Since it is the case that the body is the source of great ills, indulging in its pleasures will cause them (the non-*jñānis*) to experience the torments of the seven hells. Their *karma* will not bring them enjoyment unless the ego dies and they remain in the body simply as the Self. As for the *karma* of the devotees of the holy feet, it will be like a prison guard or a set of manacles to them. (220)

In verse 190 the verb *uṇ* – *to eat, consume* was used in a ‘technical’ sense to describe the process of how we *consume, experience* the

fruits of our former actions. In this verse the causative form of the verb *ūṭṭu* – *to cause to eat, feed* is used to describe how those actions *feed us with, cause us to experience those fruits*.

This verse illustrates the difference in the manner in which *karma* is deemed to operate in the non-*jñāni* and *jñāni* respectively. The term *prārabdha* refers specifically to the part of one's *karma* which is to be worked out in the current birth. For the *ajñānis* their *karma* can be taken to include all *karma*, including that from previous lives waiting to be worked out – *saṁcita*, and any new *karma* created by actions in the current life, the cause of continuing births – *āgamyā*. For the *jñāni*, however, there is only *prārabdha*, since, upon realisation all *saṁcita karma* is annulled and *āgamyā karma* ceases to be created. This *prārabdha karma* does not bind him in any way, but it must be lived out before the final incarnation can be ended and the body dropped.

The verse goes on to say that the only true pleasure is the bliss of the Self. If the experiences that come through one's past *karma* are accepted with equanimity, without any idea of 'I' or 'mine', and thus offered up to the Self, then the bliss of the Self may be enjoyed. Otherwise *karma* can only bring the rollercoaster of pleasure and pain, ending inevitably in suffering, disease and death.

Finally the verse describes *karma* as it relates to the *jñāni*. It is only the *prārabdha karma* of the *jñāni* that is being referred to. Since, as stated above, all his previous *karma* has been expended and no *karma* for the future has accumulated, there will be no future birth for him. However he has to wait until the *karma* of his current birth, now inoperative due to his realised state, has been expended, in order to attain final liberation. He is therefore compared to a prisoner in chains, awaiting the expiry of his sentence in order to be free. ▲

(To be continued)

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

For those whose form is bliss there is no suffering. To them the cremation ground is as heaven itself. Within themselves also they have discerned heaven and hell. There is no body [and therefore no experiencing of the fruits of their *karma*] for those experiencing non-dual bliss. It is to those that practise devotion towards them that the fruits of actions will accrue. (221)

*cuki*, Sanskrit *sukhin* means *one who is enjoying happiness or pleasure*, in this case, the bliss of the Self. Once the attachment to the body and ego is ended, there is only the bliss of the Self. Therefore he is said to be of *the very form of bliss*. Since all worlds are a mental projection, the only hell is to be identified with that world through the

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ego-mind, and the only heaven is to be free of any such identification through merging with the Self, reality.

The final part of the verse relates to the effects of *karma* specifically, therefore the words ‘[and therefore no experiencing of the fruits of their *karma*]’ have been added to make the sense clear. The body exists only for the purpose of the working out of *karma*, therefore in this sense, the words *karma* and body are synonyms. Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) glosses: ‘for those experiencing non-dual bliss there will be no experiencing of fruits from their actions in their current birth.’ In other words the actions of the *jñāni* in the current birth belong to the Self only, and will not give rise to any *āgamyā* (future) *karma*, nor any further birth in which it must be experienced. However even those non-*jñānis* who practice devotion towards such a one will necessarily incur a karmic debt therefrom.

If we are to speak of the bliss of that renunciant, it would be exact to say that it equals the bliss of Vishnu, Brahma, Indra and the rest of the gods, all combined; or that it equals the bliss of the supreme Lord Siva himself. To take it further, we might say that his bliss has no equal but itself. Even the Vedas cannot know the bliss of those who stand apart [from all things, including bliss]. (222)

In the original Tamil *inpam* – *bliss* is mentioned only in relation to the *virattāṇ* – *renunciant*. However it is to be understood with the three terms of comparison also, i.e. [the bliss of] the gods, [the bliss of] Lord Siva and [the bliss of] himself.

The superior seeker is one who pays homage to an adept of Saiva Siddhanta, a teacher of the four paths beginning with ‘dwelling in the realm of god,’ in order to learn from him the state of Oneness. Can there be any greatness which exceeds that of those who, with melting heart, dedicate their service to his divine essence? (223)

*ciththānti*, Sanskrit *siddhāntin*, is one who follows the religion of Saiva Siddhānta. The primary meaning of the word is one who



*establishes or proves his arguments logically.* Here, in view of the non-sectarian stance of the majority of the verses, the word has been taken to mean a suitably qualified teacher, i.e. a realised sage.

*cālokam*, Sanskrit *sāloka* – *dwelling in the realm of god* is the lowest of the four degrees of spiritual ripeness. See the notes to verse 64 at the start of chapter 2.

Just as life leaves the body when the head is severed, when the personal self is no more, the *jnani* will be free of the constraints of [auspicious or inauspicious] times, places, directions, actions, bodily attire, religions and the knowledge of their peculiar characteristics, and considerations of proper conduct. Such a one is none other than Lord Siva. (224)

Once the personal self, the ego-consciousness, is eliminated, all concepts relating to exoteric worship, such as auspicious times and places, rituals and appropriate dress and the proper forms of worship to be practised in the various sects and religions, cease to exist, just as life leaves the body the moment the head is severed. Whether or not a *jnāni* appears to keep up the observance of any such practices after realisation will depend upon his *prārabdha*, his *karma* from his current, and final, birth.

The words *proper conduct* translate *cilam*, Sanskrit *śīla* – *moral conduct, integrity, morality, piety, virtue*. In this case the outward show of socially sanctioned moral conduct and piety is meant.

The true *jñānis* dwell in the non-dual state, taking the death of the ego as the greatest of penances. If even the Vedas and Āgamas are at a loss to say whether for them there can be chanting of *Tēvāram* hymns, observance of holy occasions, meditation practices, virtuous and sinful acts and proper and improper behaviour, who else then is qualified to say? (225)

The text simply says *cāvu* – *death*, but it is the death of the ego, the personal self, that is meant.

*Tēvāram* is the name for the corpus of the vernacular hymns composed by the three Tamil saints, Appar, Sundarar and

Jñānasambandhar, who has been mentioned previously as the author's guru. Together their works constitute the first seven books of the *Tirumurai*, the collection of Tamil Saiva devotional texts, commonly regarded by Saivites as the Tamil Veda.

The love which he bestows upon silent ascetics as he looks upon them with his unblinking gaze; his divine form, which no artist could picture, and which resembles the white moon, [shining with holy ash] – these images come to me unbidden even in dream, like the sun arising before the eight eyes, set in glorious array, in the four heads of the lotus-seated Brahma. (226)

The *jñāni*'s body is compared to the white moon because it is smeared liberally with white holy ash, *vibhūti* in Sanskrit, *tiru nīru* in Tamil.

The image of the four heads of Brahmā turning in unison towards the rising sun, so that its light is reflected in their eight eyes, aligned as in an array, is an arresting one. *Pathumāthanaṇ*, a proper name derived from the Sanskrit *padma-āsana* – *lotus seat*, is a name of Brahmā. He is closely associated with the lotus. In the Hindu creation myth he is said to have emerged from the lotus in Viṣṇu's navel, and then proceeded to give birth to sons who created the universe and everything in it. He is therefore usually depicted as sitting or standing on the lotus blossom.

The joyous gaze which melts the heart in supreme bliss; the beatific countenance; the radiance of his gentle smile; the holy ashes – these are merely incidental marks of beauty which adorn a body in which the personal consciousness has died. (227)

The idea being conveyed is that the outward characteristics of the true *jñāni*, beautiful and awe inspiring as they may be, are merely the outward manifestation of his inner state. Far from cultivating them or adopting them consciously, having lost his ego consciousness, he is not even aware of them. TCS glosses: *Since his joyous look and so on are not intentional but manifest in him naturally he (the author) says, 'Merely empty [marks off] beauty.'* As indicated by the gloss, an

exact translation would be *entirely empty [marks off] beauty*. They are *empty, worthless* not for any bad reason, but simply because they are irrelevant or incidental. Hence the translation has been modified in this sense.

Dwelling detached from a body weakened through its effortless rejection of worldly desires; the last residue of spent *karma* lingering about him like the scent of faded flowers; his gaze where ever dwells the joyous bliss which is not dependent upon the objects of sense; his divine countenance – these images shall never leave my heart. (228)

The words *scent of faded flowers* translate the Tamil *vāḍal maṇam*. The verb *vāḍu* means to *wither, fade* as of a plant or flower; *vāḍal* therefore means *withering, fading*, and can also be used alone, as here, as a noun meaning *faded flower(s)*. The phrase as a whole refers to the *jñāni's prārabdha karma*, the *karma* of the present incarnation, which though now inoperative, lingers on until the death of the body in this his final incarnation, just as the scent of flowers, though now dead and withered, may still retain their perfume for a time. See also the notes to verse 220.

The *jñāni* knows only the pure, intrinsic bliss of the Self, *niruvīḍaya ānantam*, free of contact with the objects of sense, which stands in sharp contrast to *viḍaya ānantam*, the temporary bliss which the *ajñāni* derives from contact with the objects of sense.

You shall speak of the one who has cast off the cloak of the thirty-six tattvas, and is clothed in the four directions, by the names of ‘Non-Dual One,’ ‘Solitary One,’ ‘Pure One,’ ‘Blissful One,’ ‘One who dwells in the fourth state [beyond waking, dream and deep sleep],’ ‘Avadhuta,’ ‘Forswearer of the world,’ ‘Siva Yogi,’ ‘Nirvani,’ and ‘Renunciant.’ (229)

Here a number of names used to describe the *jñāni* are given. *tikampari*, Sanskrit *digambari* is one *who is clothed in the four directions*, the sky, empty space. Again the word is used in a metaphorical sense (see verse 202 and note) to suggest his nature as

one who is not touched by the world. *ĕkānti*, Sanskrit *ĕkāntin* (*ĕka* – one + *anta* – limit) means *one who is solitary, alone* by virtue of the fact that, having merged with the supreme Reality, there is no longer anything other than himself. *A turiyaᅇ* is one *who dwells in the fourth state* [beyond waking, dream and deep sleep]. The *avatūtaᅇ* is one *who has freed himself from the world*. This is the Tamil form of Sanskrit *avadhuta*, which is the past participle of the verb *ava-dhu*, meaning *to shake off, cast off, disregard, refuse* and is used of one who has cast off, rejected the taint of the world. *niruvāᅇi* – *emancipated one* is a personal noun from the word *niruvāᅇam*, Sanskrit *nirvāᅇa*, which literally means *put out, blown out, extinguished, calmed, quieted*. In Hindu texts it has the sense of *perfect calm or repose, happiness, highest bliss, beatitude*. It therefore refers to one who is at peace, having eliminated worldly bondage.

Oho! There are those who, feigning to be free of desire, have outwardly renounced all, [and those who have truly renounced all]. Yet can we not distinguish them [one from the other] by the signs of spiritual ripeness, [or the lack of it]? [The former] seek out *maths* where the best alms may be got; they whisper in corners like a [newly-wed] girl [in her mother in-law's house]; when people come [with offerings], they stretch out their own hands towards theirs in anticipation of gifts. (230)

TCS notes that the mention of ‘those who only feign total renunciation’ implies the idea of ‘those who are not feigning thus, but have renounced in their true nature’.

Just as a newly married girl might hesitate to voice her wishes openly in her mother-in-law's house, but rather choose to speak of them to her husband in private in the belief that this is the best way to get what she wants, the false renunciant will target only certain devotees – who are convinced of his spiritual purity – with his selfish requests, whilst maintaining the appearance of a selfless renunciant with others.

Just as the waves will rock a ship when it comes close to the shore, the false personal consciousness will reappear when you

come into contact with the objects of sense. Like a warrior who has taken a vow [to defeat his enemy], or someone who accepts a challenge to jump [over a deep well], you should stand firm in your determination to renounce. Otherwise that which you have renounced will return to grip you once more. (231)

The warrior who has taken a vow to defeat the enemy must do so or die in the attempt, just as the renunciant must stake his life on the defeat of his own enemy, the thirty-six *tattvas*.

The phrase *someone who accepts a challenge to jump [over a deep well]* is a translation of the Tamil *verri kuti kutittōṇ* – literally one *who leaps a leap for victory*. TCS glosses: ‘If someone who sets out to jump across a sixty foot well jumps sixty one feet, that is victory; if he fails, victory is lost and he falls into the well. Similarly for someone who sets out to renounce the objects of sense, renunciation is to renounce those objects of sense along with his personal consciousness. If he does not do so, and those objects of sense grip him, he will lose the glory that comes from that renunciation, and fall back again into birth.’

(*To be continued*) ▲

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

## Chapter 9

**The nature of those in whom attachment [to the life of the householder] has died**

*Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) notes:— Since the subject of this chapter is the nature of those who have attained jñāna even whilst living the life of the householder, and are established in the state in which the inherited propensities (vātanai) relating to the household have died, this chapter has been called, ‘The nature of those in whom the [household] vātanai has died.’*

Renunciation without true knowledge is worthless. What good does it do for jungle tribesmen, robbers and the chronically

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sick? What does it matter [to the *jñāni*] what station in life he occupies, or what sense objects he comes into contact with? The loss of his personal self is his true home, which itself is bliss. (232)

Someone who has renounced outwardly but not inwardly has not truly renounced, albeit his behaviour may make it appear so. Otherwise we should say that the harsh existence of jungle tribesmen, the rejection of worldly pleasures by the chronically sick, or the lack of regard for personal safety of a robber are also forms of renunciation, rather than just traits which bear an accidental resemblance to those evinced by the *jñāni*.

What good does it do to give up the life of the householder, which all religions praise? Whatever they give up, what is the good of it? If they attain true understanding, so that worthless discriminating knowledge is removed, and become free of attachment even to Śivam itself, only then will there be an end to birth. (233)

TCS glosses: ‘Whatever else they renounce (deeming it to be consonant with this renunciation), what of it? (Will it be possible to cut off birth through this renunciation?)’

The expression *pullarivu*, here translated as *discriminating knowledge*, commonly means simply *ignorance*, but here it is used in the sense of all discriminating knowledge which pertains to the mind and ego. It therefore means the opposite of *jñāna*, which is *ajñāna*. Sri Ramana Maharshi says in v. 13 of *Uḷḷadu Naṛpadu*: *ñāṇam ām tāṇē mey, nāṇā ām ñāṇam aññāṇam ām – The Self that is knowledge (jñāna) is real. Knowledge of a multifarious nature is ignorance (ajñāna)*.

It is not renunciation simply to give up the life of the householder, when the mind [that is attached to it] has not changed. [Nor is it renunciation to control the mind, since the ego consciousness] that controlled it [still remains]. Even if the ego consciousness is eliminated, the experience of bliss upon uniting with Śivam still remains, and even if that goes, the [thought, ‘I am] the

all-embracing fullness [of Śivam]’ will persist. Who are those who can know the state in which even that thought does not arise? (234)

The words in square brackets are implied by the text. It is first stated that it is not renunciation to give up the life of the householder, because the underlying mind remains. It is then stated that it is not renunciation if the ego, which controls the mind, is destroyed, because the feeling of bliss arises. It therefore completes the logic to introduce an intermediate term, to the effect that it is not renunciation to control the mind, because the ego remains.

Only they have truly renounced who, even though they live like kings amongst worldly pleasures, are quite untouched by them, like a ruby [which imparts its colour to other objects but is not affected by them]. Should they become contaminated by those things, they will return to the body the moment they are freed from it, just as [a new shoot grows up where] a seed falls to the ground. This is *karma*, the one root of all births. (235)

Like a ruby, which does not take on the colours of the things which are close to it, but rather imparts its own lustre to them, the *jñāni*, whilst remaining unaffected by the sense objects with which he comes into contact, in the words of TCS, ‘stands casting the lustre of his *jñāna* over those things’. The verb *tōy*, here translated as *be contaminated* means *to dip, immerse, soak, drench, steep, dye, tinge, stain, imbue*. It is a defining trait of normal discriminating consciousness that it is strongly affected by the mental and sensory phenomena with which it comes into contact, rather as a white piece of cloth is impregnated with, and coloured by a dye. Conversely the consciousness of the *jñāni* is not only not affected by them, but transforms them through its own radiance, a point that is further emphasised in verse 236.

It is our *karma*, our actions committed under the influence of the ego and their fruits, which determine future births. Just as a plant produces seeds, which guarantee its existence after it dies, our actions and their fruits are the seeds from which spring those future births. Another way of looking at *karma* is that it is like the roots of a tree,



which, whilst hidden underground, grow into a tree which ramifies into numerous branches, just as our store of unexhausted *karma* ramifies into innumerable births.

For those who dwell in the world under the authority of a single king, will there be any village in that kingdom that seeks to do them harm? Similarly, if the consciousness of the *jñāni* becomes involved with the mind and senses, what harm can that do? [Will his consciousness be usurped by them] as dust is absorbed by mud? Not at all. It will pass over and leave them, just as the shadow of a kite passes over the ground. (236)

The verse says, literally *oru kuḍai kīl – under one umbrella*; the word *kuḍai – umbrella, parasol*, being one of the twenty-one symbols of royalty, is often used as a symbol for the rule and authority of kings.

In the previous verse the consciousness of the *jñāni* was compared to a ruby, which affects the things around it rather than being affected by them. In this verse the Self, the transcendent reality, is compared to a king, whose power and authority protect all his subjects, whoever and wherever they are, and the various people and places in his kingdom are compared to the mind and senses. Once the *jñāni* has become the ‘subject’ of the Self, the world, mind and senses will be seen to be of the nature of the Self, and thus be powerless to harm him.

Again here it is clearly implied that the path to realisation lies not in attempting to annihilate the mind but in holding onto the Self. Once the Self, the ‘single king’ in the analogy, is held, then mental activity or absence of it will not be in question, as pointed out in the following dialogue between Sri Ramana and a devotee in *Conscious Immortality*:

Q. But the mind does not sink into *samadhi* even for a second?

A. A strong conviction is necessary that ‘I am the Self’, transcending the mind and the phenomena.

Q. Nevertheless, the mind proves to be like a cork at my attempts to sink it.

A. What does it matter if the mind is active? It is so, after all, on the substratum of the Self. Hold onto the Self even during the mental activities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brunton, Paul, *Conscious Immortality*, p. 39.

If the Self is realised, then the mind and its related phenomena can no more affect the *jñāni* than the earth can be affected by the shadow of a bird passing over it.

In his life as a householder the *jñāni* can be compared to a dog which has eaten ghee, [and vomits it up, unable to digest it]; he is like the reflection of trees, seen in water, [giving the appearance of being upside-down]; he is like eyes decorated with eye-paint, [looking beautiful to others, but knowing themselves to be blackened]. [The *jñāni* is not masked by the householder life, but shines more brightly because of it], just as darkness makes a precious, pure ruby appear brighter, unlike all other things [which fade into obscurity]. (237)

In this verse four similes illustrating the condition of the householder who has inwardly renounced are given, two relating to the way he perceives himself and two suggesting how he might be perceived by others.

Just as a dog will vomit up food which is too rich for it, the householder *jñāni* will not become attached to, and will automatically reject, all worldly pleasures.

Trees seen across the expanse of water in a lake or tank will appear to be upside-down. Similarly the householder *jñāni* will appear to be fully immersed in worldly activities, whilst in reality he is united with the Self.

Just as eyes decorated with black paint would, if they had awareness of their own, feel dirtied by the black paint that renders them beautiful to others, the householder *jñāni* will be admired by others for the exemplary manner in which he appears to be engaging in family life, whereas, from his own point of view, he will feel defiled by it, and will long for the time when he is free of it, and can devote himself uniquely to the Self.

Most objects will remain dull and be hard to see in the darkness, but a pure gemstone like a ruby will gather in any ambient light and reflect it, even in near-darkness, making it appear even more brilliant than it does in daylight. In the same way, the householder *jñāni* will appear more illustrious when standing

against the dark background of worldly life than he would as a renunciant living in solitude.

The single expedient of patting the thighs is equally useful both for putting a child to sleep and for waking it up. Will darkness affect a ruby as it affects a crystal [filling it with darkness]? Since the *jnāni* is merely playing the role of the householder without any attachment to it, like a thief who joins in with the chase, following his own footprints, why should there be for him any birth henceforth? (239)

Just as patting the thighs can be used to put a baby to sleep or to wake it up, depending on the situation, the presence of a wife, family, children and relations will cause the *jnāni* householder to turn inward, in rejection of those things, but it will have the effect on the *ajnāni* householder of drawing him ever deeper into the world of the sensual pleasures they represent.

Next, as in verse 237, the ruby is again contrasted with the clear crystal, which is incapable of rejecting the darkness which surrounds it, unlike the ruby, which, in picking up what ambient light there is, appears to shine with its own inner brightness.

Finally, just as the best way for a thief to allay suspicion might be to join in the chase for himself, the householder *jñāni*, in his desire to avoid drawing attention to himself, will be like an actor, outwardly sharing the joys and sorrows experienced by his household, but inwardly detached from them.

As it grasps the objects of sense and then lets go of them, the consciousness of the *jñāni* operates like a whirlwind, which draws up dust and later lets go of it. However, also like that whirlwind, which plays about [and finally subsides] without leaving the space of the sky, the consciousness of the one-pointed *jñāni*, [having discarded the objects of sense] subsides [into the expanse of the Self without ever having left it]. What does it matter whether he is a householder or an ascetic?

Just as the whirling wind, even though it is carrying along particles of dust, never leaves the ether, the pure space of the sky, the *jnāni*, though in contact with the objects of sense, never

leaves the space of grace, the space of the Self, and is therefore not contaminated by those things. The point being made is the same as that made in verse 236. (240)

Many are those who have achieved the state of desirelessness through knowledge: there is Sundaramūrti Nāyaṅār, there is the Cēraṅ king, [Cēramāṅ Perumāṅ Nāyaṅār]; there are the Cōḷa kings, [Ceṅkaṅ Cōḷa Nāyaṅār and Pukaḷ Cōḷa Nāyaṅār]; there are petty chieftains [like Meypporuḷ Nāyaṅār and Kaḷaḷ Ciṅka Nāyaṅār]; there are those who have wounded their own body, [like Kaṅṅappa Nāyaṅār], and those who have afflicted the body of their own son, [like Ciṅru Toṅḍa Nāyaṅār]; there is the eternally illustrious Atipatta Nāyaṅār. Yet for all, [whether householders or ascetics], the achievement is the same, the elimination of discriminating awareness.

All those mentioned in this verse number among the 63 Tamil saints, *nāyanmār*, whose stories are told in a work called the *Periya Purāṅam*, or *Tiru-t-toṅḍar Purāṅam* (*toṅḍar* means *servants, devotees*), composed in the 12th century by Cēkkiḷār, the chief minister of a Cōḷa king called Kulōttuṅka Cōḷaṅ. His work is included as the 12th and final section of the *Tirumuṅṅai*. In each of the stories the devotion of a Saivite devotee, often an ordinary pious householder, is tested by Lord Śiva in a variety of ways, some of them extreme and even gruesome.

Sundaramūrti Nāyaṅār is one of the three major Tamil saints whose works constitute the collection of Tamil hymns called the *Tēvāram*. His hymns constitute the seventh section of the *Tirumuṅṅai*. See the note to verse 225. Ciṅru Toṅḍa Nāyaṅār, who is referred to indirectly in line two, had his own son butchered and cooked to satisfy the appetite of a flesh-eating Saivite ascetic, who was in fact Lord Śiva in disguise. Well pleased with his devotee's devotion, he restored the child to life and granted him and his family a place in heaven. Kaṅṅappa Nāyaṅār, referred to in the same line, tore out his own eye to staunch the flow of blood from the eye on a Śiva lingam, and was about to tear out the second, to staunch the flow of blood from the other eye, when Lord Śiva intervened and granted him a place by his side in the heavenly realm.

## Chapter 10

### The nature of being established [in the state of reality]

People who do not know the way to a certain place will enquire of others and find it out. But later, as they walk along, they will forget that this knowledge originally came from someone else. [So it is with seekers and divine grace]. They are like those who launch themselves into a heavy rainstorm, forgetting they are carrying an umbrella, jumping and leaping about [in a vain attempt to dodge the rain]. (241)

Since the Self is our true nature, the quest to realise it will arise naturally in all beings, sooner or later, whether we call it grace, intuition or whatever. Here it is being pointed out that the danger for the seekers who embark on this journey is that they will begin to feel at some point that their quest is somehow under their conscious control, and that they can realise the Self through an effort of mind or will, rather than surrendering that mind and will to the Self. The second part of the verse illustrates the same point in an entirely different, but equally effective, manner. To attempt to control thoughts is as futile as trying to dodge raindrops. However if we take up the umbrella of grace, those thoughts will be powerless to touch our real nature.

You should dwell in the pure consciousness of grace, so that the states of dark unconsciousness and discriminating consciousness that occupy your awareness are removed. Why instead do you wander about, dying and being reborn, all the time outwardly seeking, in your confused state, the means of avoiding death and rebirth. (242)

In normal consciousness, the *jīva* is either totally without self-awareness, as in deep sleep or unconsciousness; this is the *kevala avasthā*; or it is engaged in contact with the world through the mind, senses and organs of action in the states of waking and dream; this is the *sakala avasthā* (in Sanskrit *sakala* means *possessing parts*, i.e. *multifarious*, *divisible*); however, whether we are unconscious or totally wrapped up in discriminating consciousness, there is a

state of pure being which underlies these states; this is the *suddha avasthā* – the pure state. Those who, with the help of divine grace, have rejected the first two impermanent and mutable states and realised their oneness with this immutable underlying substratum of being are therefore called *arul pōtar* – those dwelling in the pure consciousness of grace.

The text says literally *seeking [the means of] not dying and being reborn*. The words [*the means of*] are added in square brackets to give the correct sense, the literal meaning without them, seeking without dying or being reborn is nonsense or at least, quite the wrong sense. TCS glosses: *(Now) seeking (the liberation which transcends both birth and death) without (henceforth) dying and being reborn...* ‘Birth and death’ are not just events which occur between bodily incarnations, and between deep sleep and returning to the waking state, they are a process which continues through every moment of each incarnation, as the hapless *jīva* is continually ‘born’ into the state of discriminating awareness, only to ‘die’ once more when that phase of consciousness ends; this is why the state is called one of *tirikai* – wandering. To attempt to put an end to this wandering by dint of one’s own mental efforts is futile and self-defeating. TCS continues his gloss as follows: *...as your mind whirls about (inwardly engaging in mental conceptions and so on), you yourself will whirl about, dying (in the kevala avasthā) and being born (in the sakala avasthā). What state is this?* ▲

*(To be continued)*

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

‘Will the disciple himself be able to ward off the onslaught of the states of unconsciousness and discriminating consciousness? It is we who will bring you to a fit condition, dispense to you your deeds and their fruits, and lull you to sleep, [so that your ego consciousness will disappear], like the flame of a lamp in full daylight, or like the colours in a prism when the sun is at the zenith. You should abandon any attempt at union with Ourselves.’ Thus did [Jñānasambandhar] graciously decree. (243)

The words dispensing [your] *karma* [to you] translate the Tamil – *ūl ūṭṭi*. *ūl* has the basic meaning of *antiquity*, *oldness*, and comes to have the meaning, as here, of destiny, *karma*, both in terms of the deeds and their fruits of the actions performed by the *jīva* in former

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lives. For the verb *ūṭṭu* see the notes to verse 220. The point here is that the *jīva* is powerless to avoid the *karma* which has been meted out to it by divine grace for its own salvation. Its only valid option is to remain still in the grace of the Self and accept that *karma* without attachment. Thus it will be able to evade the *onslaught* – *tākkū* of that karma, and avoid the creation of any further karmic debt. All mental striving, even the search for the Self, must in the end be abandoned. Hence Jñānasambandhar’s instruction to his disciple Vaḷḷalār ends with the terse expression, *nammul kalappu nāṭṭam oli* – *Abandon any attempt at union with Ourselves!*

Those who in the waking state transmute all the agitation of discriminating consciousness, treating it as a dream, will come to possess the pure consciousness of grace. They will become *parai yōgis*, who transcend [even that grace]; pure ones; ones who are experiencing the bliss which is pure enjoyment; ones who have gone beyond even bliss to dwell in the fourth state [of union with Śivam]. (244)

The state of *parai yōkam* was first mentioned in verse 41. The author views it as a state which is experienced when the discriminating consciousness has been almost eliminated, but before the final stages of bliss and union with Śivam. See also the notes to verse 193, in which it is suggested that this state may correspond to the *ātma sphurāṇa*, which Sri Ramana himself has described as *the foretaste of realisation*.

In this verse the stages of progress in the disciple’s spiritual development are reprised as stated previously: grace manifests in the ripe devotee, by which he is able to realise the false nature of his worldly consciousness; he then enters a stage in which the work of grace is complete, and the hold of this consciousness has been almost entirely broken, the state of *parai yōkam*; this is followed by the state of bliss, which precedes the final state of union with Śivam. It is only this final state that is regarded as liberation.

Once the thirty-six *tattvas* and the state of unconsciousness [in which one remains unaware of them] have gone, the ego [which knows those states] subsides. When the grace [which



arises thereafter] falls away, one remains in the pure state of readiness for Lord Śiva's grace (*parai yōkam*). Then when [the last vestige of] individual consciousness has gone, and the work of Lord Śiva's grace (*para sakti*) has come to an end, one is annihilated in the One, other than which nothing is, (the non-dual reality). This is the [supreme] state beyond bliss. (245)

The words *one's independent awareness having gone* translate the words *taṅ cutantaram pōy*. It was stated earlier in the verse that upon the arising of grace, the ego, the personal consciousness, subsides along with the world of the *tattvas*, (which is perceived in the waking and dream states, and masked in the state of unconsciousness). Therefore *taṅ cutantaram* (from Sanskrit *svatantra* – *self-dependence, independence, self-will*), presumably refers to the last vestige of consciousness which we call *the witness*, which is the state in which the world is simply witnessed without any form of discrimination, the seer and the thing seen being merged in the single act of seeing. Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) glosses: 'The independent awareness in which one perceives oneself as the seer and the thing seen.' See also the notes to verse 244 regarding the state of *parai yōkam*.

The words *oṅru ākā oṅru*, here translated as *the One, other than which nothing is, might also be translated as the One that is not, or does not become, One or the One in which nothing is, or comes to be*. The Self is neither one nor many; it contains and transcends both. 'One' and 'many' are merely mental concepts, which arise within the Self, therefore neither can describe it. When we examine elements of the apparent external reality, each, on analysis, resolves *ad infinitum* into ever smaller component parts, as we seek the final 'irreducible' sub-atomic particles, which, in the course of time, will, having been named and classified, inevitably be found to divide yet further in an infinite regression. The external world is seen therefore to consist entirely of names and forms at each level of analysis, without any actual substance, other than the consciousness within which they manifest. The only 'substance', if we can call it that, is this consciousness which enables the mind, along with its object, the world, to manifest. It is this idea which is conveyed by the term 'non-dual'.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

As it rides in state through the avenues of the five senses, mounted upon the steed of the ego, consciousness is like a whirling rocket, [as it engages with the objects of sense]. But if the steed is consciousness and its rider grace, supreme bliss will arise, in which nothing is gained or lost. Know this, my disciple! (246)

The activity of the mind was compared to a rocket in an earlier verse; see v.105 and note. A rocket, once ignited, will be impossible to control, flying off in random directions, shooting out fire and sparks. Similarly the mind, once ignited by the desire for the objects of sense, will rush off towards them along the paths of five senses.

Any attempt on the part of consciousness to control the ego and use it as its vehicle is doomed to failure, as it will only be carried further and further into involvement with the mind and senses. However, if consciousness abandons itself to divine grace, becoming its vehicle, the ego will not arise, and the bliss of the Self will be gained.

Disciple, [know that] true renunciation is the ending of all conflict upon the elimination of the activity of the discriminating consciousness, [in which you are deluded], as you investigate [the objects of sense], examining them inwardly and outwardly [through the mind and senses], knowing them, [grasping and] becoming immersed in them before forgetting them again, and mistaking them for yourself, so that you are wracked by pleasure and pain, as [by turns] you [gain and] lose them. (247)

TCS notes that between knowing the objects of sense through the senses and being immersed in them through the mental faculties, the intermediate stage of grasping them through the organs of action is also implied.

All that occurs [and is known through the physical, sensory and mental faculties] is yourself (your own consciousness) only. But if you think, therefore, that to remain in the state where all those faculties are eliminated is Śivam, [you should know that] when [those faculties] subside, the [defilement of *āṇava malam*] will

delude and overwhelm you. The state of union with Śivam will only occur through grace, in which the *māyā* [of the faculties] and the forgetfulness [of *āṇavam*] do not arise. (248)

In this verse it is stated that the mere ending of *cakalam* – the waking state, in which the *jīva* is immersed in *māyai* – the world appearance, will not result in liberation. It will only be replaced by the state of total forgetfulness *kēvalam*, as in deep sleep, here equated with *āṇavam*, the impurity which obscures the *jīva*. It is further stated that only the intervention of divine grace can bring about the ending of these alternating states.

The state of grace and the actionless state beyond grace are like the sun and moon. The place in which the day of the former and the night of the latter are no more, is the state of supreme bliss. The pure state which arises on the elimination of the experience of that bliss, which is of the nature of being-consciousness-bliss, is the state in which you are not. (249)

The active state, in which the *jīva* becomes aware of the power of grace and surrenders to it, is compared to daylight and the fiery sun, and the passive state, in which the *jīva*, having become established in grace, transcends it and awaits the final union with Śivam is compared to night and the cool moon.

In this verse it is made clear that the states which precede this *cutta nilai* – state of purity, however subtle they may be, all contain some trace of the personal consciousness, some sense of separation from Śivam. It is only in the final state, which is beyond even bliss, that the final trace of egoity is finally expunged.

Know this, O disciple! One should offer oneself up to be consumed by Śivam, just as food is consumed to support the body; then having transmuted one's experience of the world through the medium of grace, one should become established in the state of *parai*, [in which grace is eclipsed]; then as one's own self is annihilated, the aggregation of the five defilements will be destroyed. [If this is not possible, this state may be gained]

if one pays homage to the devotees of Lord Śiva, worshipping through the agency of the five holy syllables. (250)

This verse begins by describing the process of seeing all experience as the workings of grace, so that all that one experiences becomes a part of the divine process, the will of the divine, which leads to union with itself. The verse then goes on to state that this process culminates in the state of *parai*, in which the entire experience of one's being in, and experiencing the world is subsumed in divine grace so that one becomes established entirely in the field of grace. In this state the individual consciousness, which experiences that grace, is entirely eclipsed, as the light of the stars is eclipsed in the light of day. This is the state in which the subject-object nexus is transcended, the state of pure witnessing, which we have earlier tentatively identified with the *ātma sphuraṇa* as described by Sri Ramana.

TCS lists the *pañca mala kottu* – the aggregate of the five defilements as *āṇavam*, *māyai*, *kāmiyam*, *tirōtai*, and *māmāyai*. *tirōtai* is the particular energy of Śivam that binds the first three *malams* to the *jīva*, and *māmāyai* is the pure *māyā* of Śiva, in which the five divine operations take place.

Meditating on and repeating the five holy syllables *si-vā-ya-na-ma* whilst submitting oneself to the authority of a guru is recommended as an alternative for those unable to immediately grasp the higher truths. In the five syllable mantra *si-vā-ya-na-ma*, *si* represents Śivam; *vā* represents *his energy of grace* – *aruḷ shakti*; *ya* represents the *jīva*; *na* represents *māyā* or *tirōtham*, the energetic whirl of impurity in itself, and *ma* represents *āṇavam*, that impurity as operating within the *jīva*. The symbolism of the mantra is described in the Siddhānta text *Tiru Aruḷ Payaṇ* – *The Fruit of Divine Grace* by Umāpati Sivācāriyār, a guru in the lineage of Mēykaṇṭa Tēvar:

*See on one side, the dance of defilement,  
on the other the dance of true knowledge,  
and oneself (the jīva) in the middle.*

*As 'ma' and 'na' unfold, uniting with the consciousness (of the jīva)  
they do not permit it to return (to the Lord).*

*If its powerful deeds are cancelled out, it will succeed in returning.*

Tiru Aruḷ Payaṇ vv. 83-84.

Thus the *jīva* comes into its limited being and suffers when it is associated with impurity, but merges with Śivam when it frees itself and realises its true identity.

When your faculties were in operation, we revealed to you the nature of the states of *cakalam* (waking consciousness) and *kēvalam* (unconsciousness). Then when grace arose [as a consequence of that], we placed you in the states [of grace and *parai yōkam*], in the same way [that we had previously shown you the states of *cakalam* and *kēvalam*]. And now it is our responsibility to establish you in the condition of purity, which is untouched by the day and night [of those aforementioned states], [just as it is your duty] not to bring into play [your personal consciousness]. (251)

The *jīva* is endowed with the powers of the mind and senses and immersed in the world of the *tattvas*, in order that it can, through experience, come to realise the illusory nature of the existence which plays out in the states of waking, dream and sleep.

When the *jīva*, through its experience of the states of *cakalam* and *kēvalam*, reaches a certain point of ripeness in its spiritual growth, the veiling power of Śivam, turns to one of bestowing *aruḷ – grace*. Then, as mentioned previously (see verse 250 and note), when the *jīva* becomes entirely immersed in grace, the individual consciousness which experiences that grace is entirely eclipsed, and this state is called *parai*, or *parai yōkam*. It is implied in this verse that, just as the *cakalam* world of the *tattvas* is entirely blotted out in the state of *kēvalam*, *aruḷ – grace*, in entirely overwhelming the discriminating consciousness, is entirely eclipsed in the state of *parai*.

[Grace] will establish [the ripe devotee in the state of liberation], like sugar appearing fortuitously in the mouths of those who go about biting the bare ground of a sugarcane field [in the hope of finding sweetness]. If, like those of low intelligence [who think they can achieve anything they want without help], you claim that [the gaining of liberation] is due to your own excellence, you will be in the state where the greatness of your true Self is lost. (252)

The text simply says *irutti vidum* – *will cause to be, place, establish*. The author leaves us to infer from the content and tenor of the preceding verses that what is doing the establishing is grace, the persons being established in it are the mature devotees mentioned in the following note, and what they are being established in is the state of liberation.

Those who practice the lower paths, *cariyai* and so on, are fancifully compared to those who bite the earth of a sugarcane field in the hope of finding sweetness. When they attain a degree of spiritual maturity, they will give up their futile quest and abandon themselves to divine grace, which will come to them fortuitously, as sugar might be imagined to appear fortuitously in the mouths of those who bite the earth of a sugarcane field looking for sweetness.

As I pay homage to him, my unspoken words offer praises to the one who suddenly turned his gaze upon me, like a painted picture which had come to life revealing to me the truth, ‘You are reality itself, [which is merged with you] just as the radiance of the heavens is merged with the pupil of the eye!’ (253)

Since the realised guru is free of any trace of a personal consciousness, and is permanently merged with the Self, he simply becomes a part of that ephemeral, dream-like image that is projected, as it were, upon the screen of that Self. The sound of his voice, therefore, would seem to emanate mysteriously from the image of the guru, which would be as if painted on that screen like a painted portrait.

Just as the eye can only function using the light that emanates from the sun, and is otherwise inert, the *jīva* can only function using the consciousness that emanates from the Self. Also, just as the eye can only function in the reflected light of the sun, and is incapable of seeing anything if it looks directly at the sun’s disc, the *jīva* is only able to function in the reflected consciousness of the world of the tattvas. If it turns to look at the Self, it will be entirely effaced, merging and becoming one with that Self. ▲

(Concluded)