

# EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

## “GURU AND DISCIPLE”

BY SWAMI ABISHIKTANANDA

### INTRODUCTION:

Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux OSB), a French Benedictine monk met Sadguru Gnanananda in December 1955 and later spent a few weeks with him in February / March 1956. He recognised in the sage a true Guru. He recorded the experience of the stay with him in a book in French titled “Gnanananda” published in 1970. Its English translation titled “Guru and disciple” was published by the Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge, London in the same year. A new edition of the English translation has been published by the Indian Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge (Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi 110 006) in 1990

The following excerpts from the book are included with the permission of Abhishiktananda Society.

In the book, Swami has adopted a pseudonym "Vanya" (forest dweller).

1. The two questions of Swami Abhishiktananda :  
about  
(a) The Ultimate Reality and  
(b) Initiation (*Diksha*)
2. On meeting a true Guru :  
Inspired reflections of Swami Abhishiktananda on his darsan of Sadguru Gnanananda and on the mystery of the Guru.
3. On Sri Gnanananda's age:  
Thoughts on Gnani's non-identification with his physical body and his transcendence of time and space.
4. On Siva Linga:  
Swami Abhishiktananda spends a night alone in the temple in Agaram village near Tapovanam. His reflections on Siva Linga are profound.
5. On Meditation (Dhyana) - The One Essential :  
Sadguru Gnanananda's clarifications to Swami Abishiktananda on various aspects of spiritual *sadhana, dhyana, pranayama*, etc.
6. On Guru:  
Swami Abishiktananda describes Sadguru Gnanananda as an embodiment of love. The master expounds *Guru Tattwa* - the principle of the Guru. Guru Darsan is at the time of Self-realisation, and the Guru-murti, the visible Guru shows the way. After pointing out four types of bhaktas, Sri Gnanananda describes the characteristics of a Gnani who is the best amongst the bhaktas (devotees).
7. “Drop the bundle, I shall take you over”:  
The concluding pages of the book contain the conversations of Swami Abhishiktananda with Sadguru Gnanananda. After describing how to stay in the awareness of Atman, the Guru emphasises the importance of detachment and renunciation

## 1. The two questions of Swami Abhishiktananda :

### (a) The Ultimate Reality

Vanya soon joined in the conversation, first through the medium of English and then directly in Tamil. His Tamil was no doubt very elementary and his pronunciation lamentable. Yet, soon there developed an inward understanding between him and the Master, which went beyond the words being uttered or heard.

After a little while he asked, 'What is Swami-ji's position concerning supreme reality? Is it *dvaita or advaita*? When all is said and done, does any difference remain between God and creatures? Is there at least some possibility for man to enjoy God and to realize this enjoyment in eternity? - or is there in the last resort nothing but Being itself, non-dual (*advaita*) and indivisible, in its infinite fullness?

'What is the use of such questions?' replied Sri Gnanananda at once. 'The answer is within you. Seek it in the depths of your being. Devote yourself to *dhyana*, meditation, beyond all forms, and the solution will be given you directly.'

### (b) Initiation (Diksha)

The visitor went on to ask, 'Does Swami-ji perform rites of initiation?'

To Vanya's mind this was something of a test question. The eagerness of Hindus-and not only Hindus-for such practices, is well known. In the course of more or less elaborate ceremonies the disciple places himself under the Guru's protection. The latter then secretly imparts to him some *mantra* which he will have to repeat faithfully, and sometimes adds some ritual that has to be performed. It is thought that the disciple is bound to make marvelous progress as a result of the almost 'magical' power of this 'sacrament', and to derive superlative benefits, both spiritual and material, from the recitation of the mantra and the performance of the ritual. And indeed the disciple's faith, if not the guru's grace, often does cause the initiation (*diksha*) that he has received to be effective. But very often also the Swamis for motives that vary greatly, as some only want to help their disciples, while others hope to extort a generous offering (*gurudakshina*) -show an anxiety to impart mantras which is only equalled by that of the devotees in asking for them. Even Sri Ramana's great disciple, Ganapati Sastri, regretted that his master would not agree to give mantras at least to beginners, and actually offered to do so in his place. For this reason Vanya awaited Gnanananda's reply with special interest.

'Initiations-what is the use of them?' was again the reply. 'Either the disciple is not ready, in which case the so-called initiation is no more than empty words; or else the disciple is ready, and then neither words nor signs are needed. The initiation takes place by itself.'

He went on: 'So long as you perceive the world, it is ignorance, not-knowing, *a-jnana*. When nothing of the world is any more perceived, it is wisdom, *jnana*, the only true knowledge.'

## 2. The Meeting

One hour, or may be two, had passed since Vanya had sat down before the Swami, but he had scarcely noticed the time. He had not even felt the strain of sitting cross-legged, which normally troubled him greatly when he had to remain in this position for a long time without moving.

When he stood up again, everything seemed to have changed. He had come here out of curiosity, but found that the few words which this old man had said to him had gone home directly to his heart. There they seemed to have opened abysses of which till then he had no idea, to have released in his heart a spring of living water of incomparable sweetness. And yet all that had been said to him here was

already familiar to him; he had read it, heard it, and pondered it at length. He had learned nothing new at the level of words or ideas. But it was just that it had been repeated in such a way that a communication beyond words was established between the master and himself at the deepest level in each of them. All that the guru was saying to him seemed to Vanya to be welling up directly from the inmost recesses of his own heart.

In the course of his travels through India, Vanya had met with those pedlers of wisdom whose disciples, Indian and European alike, vied with each other in boosting their guru's reputation. Here and there he had also come across some truly spiritual people, or at least some who were searching in complete sincerity for wisdom and realization. But now it seemed clear to him that he was in direct contact with the definitive experience of realization. And no one can have such a contact without paying the price. It is like a burn which marks you for life, whose scar can never be healed. It is a fire which never ceases to burn so long as there is anything left to be consumed, so long as this whole world, in its 'separateness' is not reduced to ashes.

As for this man whom he had approached almost as a tourist, Vanya felt that he had virtually taken possession of his very being. He realized that the allegiance which he had never in his life freely yielded to anyone, was now given without a second thought to Gnanananda. He had often heard tell of gurus, of the unreasoning devotion of their disciples, of the way in which they surrender themselves totally to their guru-which to him, as a European with a mind shaped by Greek culture, seemed utterly senseless. Yet, now, all of a sudden, that had become for him simple truth, plain fact, an experience that took him right out of himself. This man with short legs and unkempt beard, scantily clad in a loincloth, who had so suddenly burst into his life, could now ask him to do no matter what, even to set out like Sadashiva to wander on the roads, for ever naked and silent - and he, Vanya, would not even think of asking him for the slightest explanation.

And then, without even considering the matter, Vanya and Harold found themselves side by side on the floor, pressing the master's feet with fervent hands.

Vanya had had the darshana of the great Ramana during the year preceding his disappearance from this world. But in those days the Maharshi was only visible from the midst of the crowd and for the few moments allowed by the ashram authorities. Then too Sri Ramana was seated on the magnificent granite couch, like a throne, which had been carved to the order of his Bengali disciple Bose, in the main mandapa of the temple of the Mother...

Vanya had indeed gazed into those eyes which, like Gnanananda's were so full of love and deep peace. He had sensed something of that call to the Within, which seemed to sound from the very depth of that man's awareness, now merged in the primordial mystery. It was surely that call which so often brought him back to the foot of the blessed mountain, to live in those same caves in which Sri Ramana had, as it were, been swallowed up by Arunachala, the implacable. However, no words had been exchanged between the Sage and the man from beyond the seas. The Maharshi remained too *distant* for him to reach. He was separated from the crowd and from the enthusiasm of the devotees by the sanctuary with its oil lamps and dishes of incense, not to mention the privileged disciples who took turns to serve him and remained constantly at his side. At that time Vanya was still too fresh from Europe. He did not know the language, and above all he had not yet sufficiently penetrated the inner world to be capable of directly understanding the mysterious language of silence.

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Beyond the experience of things and places, of watching or participating in worship, of reading, or meditating on the Scriptures, of listening to lectures, there is the experience of meeting those in whose hearts, the Invisible has been disclosed, and through whom the glory shines in all its brightness which is the mystery of the *guru*.

The honourable title of 'guru' is unfortunately too often debased by being used inappropriately, if not sacrilegiously. No one should utter this word, let alone call someone his guru, if he himself does not yet have the heart and soul of a *disciple*.

It is in fact as unusual to meet a real disciple as it is to meet a real guru. Hindu tradition is right in saying that when the disciple is ready, the guru automatically appears, and only those who are not yet worthy of it spend their time, in running after gurus. Guru and disciple form a dyad, a pair, whose two components call for each other and belong together. No more than the two poles (of a magnet) can they exist without being related to each other. On the way towards unity they are a dyad. In the ultimate realisation they are a non-dual reciprocity.

The guru is certainly not any kind of teacher, not a professor, nor a preacher, nor an ordinary spiritual guide or director of souls, one who has learnt from books or perhaps from someone else that which he in turn passes on to others. The guru is one who in the first place has himself attained to the Real, and who knows by personal experience the path that leads there; one who is capable of giving the disciple the essential introduction to this path, and causing the immediate and ineffable experience, which he himself has, to spring up directly from and in the disciple's heart - the lucid and transparent awareness that *he is*.

We may say that the mystery of the guru is actually the mystery of the spirit's own depth. To come face to face with the guru is to come face to face with the 'self' at that level of oneself that is at once real and most hidden.

The meeting with the guru is the essential meeting, the decisive turning point in a person's life. But it is a meeting that can only happen when once you have passed beyond the spheres of sense and intellect. Its place lies Beyond, in the 'fine point of the soul', as the mystics say.

In human encounters duality is still left intact. At their best we may say that a fusion takes place and that the two *become* one in love and desire; but in the meeting of guru and disciple there is not even a fusion, for we are in the sphere of the original non-duality. Advaita remains for ever incomprehensible to anyone who has not first lived it existentially in his meeting with the guru.

That which the guru says springs up from the very heart of the disciple. It is not someone else who is speaking to him. He is not receiving in his mind thoughts which have come from elsewhere and have been transmitted by sensible means. When the vibrations of the master's voice reach the disciple's ear and the master's eyes look deep into his own, then it is from within his own self, from the cave of his own heart, now at last discovered, that the thoughts proceed which reveal him to himself.

It therefore matters little what words the guru uses. Their whole power lies in the inward echoes which they cause. In seeing or hearing the guru, the disciple attains to the revelation of his own self, taking place at that deep level of himself for which everyone is essentially seeking, even if unconsciously.

The real guru is within us. Without the sound of words, he causes the attentive spirit to hear the 'Thou art That', '*tat-tvam-asi*', of the Vedic rishis; and this real guru projects himself in some outward form or other at the very moment when his help is needed for taking the final step. It was in this sense that Ramana's guru was Arunachala.

The only means of authentic spiritual communication is the *Atmabhasha*, the language of the Atman, the interior speech which is uttered in the silence from which the Word emerged, and which is only heard in the silence.

All of a sudden Vanya's mood changed. 'Now one can understand,' he reflected sadly, 'why the words spoken by the preachers who come from the West so rarely succeed in touching the heart of Hindus. And yet the Christ whom they proclaim is the supreme Guru. His voice resounds throughout the world

for those who have ears to hear and, more truly still, he never ceases to reveal himself in the secret place of the heart. But when will their words and their life give convincing witness that they have not merely heard tell of this Guru, but that they have, themselves met him in the deepest centre of their spirit?

'This meeting is what here we call *'darshana.'* he said to himself. *'Darshana'* literally means 'vision'. It is the coming face to face with the Real, appearing in a form that our human frailty can manage. There are the philosophical darshanas, the systems of thinkers which seek to approach the Real conceptually. There is the darshana of sacred places, *kshetra*, of temples, of holy images, *murti*, points where God, who transcends all forms, consents to appear under the manifold forms under which our human imagination, stimulated by faith, pictures him. Above all there is the darshana of the saints, which for those whose hearts are open is far more true.

'The darshana of the guru is the final step towards the ultimate darshana in which the last veil is lifted and all duality transcended.

That's the essential darshana which India has pursued since *the* beginning –in which also India reveals her own secret and 'in revealing herself to you, reveals to you your own most hidden depths".

Long ago the rishis of the Upanishads had celebrated the mystery of the guru:

Without learning it from another, how could anyone know That?  
But to hear it from just anyone is not enough,  
even if he repeats it a hundred, a thousand times...  
More subtle than the most subtle is that;  
it cannot be obtained by any discussion...  
Neither by reasoning, nor by ideas,  
nor even by the simple recitation of the Vedas,  
can it be known...  
Wonderful is he who can utter it,  
wonderful he who can hear it,  
wonderful he who knows it, having been well taught...

*(Katha Upanishad, 2)*

The brahmin who has examined the secret of the worlds  
that are reached by (performing) the Law and the Rites,  
loses all desire...  
Nothing transient can lead to the intransient...  
Renouncing the world and full of faith,  
he departs in search of the master  
who will reveal to him the secret of Brahman.  
With thoughts controlled and his heart at peace,  
he receives from him the ultimate knowledge,  
which reveals to him the True, the Imperishable,  
the Man (*purusha*) within;

*(Mundaka Upanishad, 1.2)*

Narada came before Sanatkumara and said: 'Master, teach me.'  
'First tell me what you know; then I shall know what to add.'

'I know the Vedas, the Puranas and all the sciences. I have mastered the mantras, *mantravid*, but I am not *Atmavid*, I do not know the Atman. I do not know *myself*. I have been told, sir, that those who came to know *themselves* were set free from sorrow. I suffer and am restless-, help me to pass beyond sorrow.'

'All that You have so far learnt is only words.' Then Sanatkumara led Narada to know the mystery of the self, the infinite fullness which exists only in the self, and is itself present everywhere.

He made known to him the further shore, which lies beyond the darkness.

'All that I know, I have told you;  
There is nothing beyond that.'  
'Thanks be to you, Pippalada, thanks be to you!  
You have enabled us to reach the further shore,  
beyond ignorance.'

(Prasna Upanishad 6,7,8)\*

### 3. Sri Gnanananda's age

Sri Gnanananda himself was always very reserved when speaking of his former life. When someone asked for exact information, he invariably replied that he would give it to him later. When someone wanted an exact date, he would say 'Oh that happened a long time ago, a very long time ago!' However his place of birth was known or thought to be known Mangalagiri in the Kannada country. His father was Venkatapati Rao, his mother Chandasikla Bai. He ran away from home at the age of eleven or twelve, after a quarrel with his elder brother who had beaten him. He then met a sadhu and accompanied him to the Himalayas. But others said that he came first to Vellanatham and went to Kashmir from there. There is no doubt that the visit to Kashmir marked a very important stage in his life; he never referred to it without a certain nostalgia, though he never gave any details of what had taken place there. After that he traveled all over India, and also Ceylon and Burma, as sadhus often used to do during the days of the British Empire. One day he confided to Vanya that he had met Sai Baba, the Maharashtrian Saint. In addition to all this he had a very detailed knowledge of places in Tamilnadu.

It was apparently only after about forty years of wandering or solitary ascetic life that he officially took sannyasa. As he had given the name of the guru who initiated him, his *vamsha*, or genealogy as a sannyasi, could be drawn up from guru to guru. His disciples had had it printed, and it can be seen in a frame which hangs in the darshan hall beside the Tamil and Sanskrit tributes, which people sent to him on his birthday.

'Then what about his age? Many people said that he was a hundred and twenty years old. Others, calculating by astrology, have made him out to be a hundred and fifty-three. But how could he possibly be so old? He was still so agile, walked so briskly, and himself drew the water from the well for his morning bath. He also enjoyed excellent health, directed every smallest detail in the life of the Ashram and supervised all the new building projects. On his face there was no sign of a wrinkle. Certainly, anyone looking at him would find it difficult to believe that he had reached seventy.

Murugan Das then spoke: 'The guru is at least two hundred years old. I have heard him say that one day he was seated in *samadhi* near his hermitage at Anangur in the forest of Perambalur, when prince Navalu came there to hunt deer, but on catching sight of him, the prince was terror-struck and fled. How could that have happened, if he was only born in the last century?'

'He also knew Auveyar, the poetess of the Sangham, the sister of Tiruvalluvar.' But Auveyar lived twenty centuries ago!

However, in all this, on what level are we operating? When a jnani speaks to us, do we ever know the level from which he is speaking.? No more than the prophet's vision of the future, can the sage's view of the past be pinned down to the chronology which measures the world of external events. He may be speaking at the level of the atman, which alone is real; or again, he may be using the language of

ordinary experience, so that his words may be within the grasp of his hearers. The atman is not-born, it is everywhere transcending time and space.

This particular form which we call the body of such and such a jnani, does not seem to him to be any more *his own* than all the other forms, human or whatever, in the created world. The very term *jnani* itself is misleading, because by definition it implies particularisation, and therefore a distinction between the jnani and the so-called ajnani- and that, in the light of the atman makes no sense.

In truth, the one who has realized the atman is in every place and every time. He is the young Ramana running away to Arunachala, and he is the priest who gave him food on his way. He is the hermit meditating in the forest in the time of the rajahs, and he is the sannyasi who met Auveyar. He is Yajnavalkya who revealed to king Janaka the upanishad of being, and he is the rishi who in the first age heard the Vedas. Indeed, he is Shiva himself, seated under the banyan in the jungle, wearing his tiger skin and with his third eye annihilating Kama, Love the Tempter, who sought to divert his attention- Shiva who on another day, as Dakshinamurti, taught through his silence the four sons of Brahma in their ignorance of the highest wisdom. He is the Formless, the Not-Born, who in every form reveals something of himself and in every birth appears afresh.

Vanya then said: 'what does it matter to us to know if Swamiji is fifty, two hundred, or even four hundred years old? Will knowing that, give us *Moksha*, salvation, the vision of the One who Is? What use is it to us to know what he was yesterday or what he will be tomorrow, to know where he was sixty years ago, or where he will be in a hundred years' time? Even when he speaks to us in human terms, appearing to us as he does at this time and on this day, for us he is first and foremost the one through whom we receive the word of liberation, the Lord's summons to what is within. Surely the essential thing for us are the words that he speaks to us and his look which penetrates our hearts? And as for the obscurity, which he allows to veil everything that does not belong to the present moment, that after all seems to be his way of impressing upon us his supreme lesson, which is that the only moment that matters is that in which we become "aware of our self.'

#### **4. On Shiva Linga:**

When you enter the inner Sanctuary that, of the Shiva Linga you can scarcely fail to be deeply impressed and to feel yourself carried off to the secret place of your heart. There is that bare dark chamber, separated by a long corridor, and sometimes by several ante-chambers from the mandapa where the faithful gather, and in the middle of it, the simple cylindrical stone with a rounded top which is intended to represent with the minimum of form the mystery of the Formless.

The further anyone penetrates within the symbolical sanctuary of stone, the deeper he is taken into the sanctuary of his own being. There, indeed, at the heart of his own mystery is revealed in the essential darkness the mystery of God himself, and at the same time, the ultimate and original mystery of all that is.

'This is of course the mystery of God the Creator and of God who is Love, of God as he appears to us in his marvellous self-revelation in the cosmos and in his saving acts; but much more beyond all that we can say, know or feel of God, beyond our own personal vision of God, beyond all 'recollection' even of ourselves, it is the very mystery of God in himself, of God in his true deity, his unoriginate being, his ineffable nature. This no word proceeding from the mind can tell, no sound capable of reaching the ear can "express, no form visible to human eyes can reveal.

In the sphere of what can be heard, the sign of God's ineffability is the *Pranava* (OM), the inarticulate vowel O(AU), the flattening of the primary vowel A- expressing at once the holy fear and the ecstatic joy prompted by entry into the mystery-which comes to an end in an indeterminate nasal after-sound. This is the OM, the final sound through which an attempt is made still to say something about God,

once all the words and ideas conceived by the human mind have been discarded, before entering the definitive silence in which nothing more is said, apart from the eternal OM which no creature left to himself could ever hear.

In the sphere of what can be seen and touched, the Shivalinga is similarly the final sign of the One whom no form is capable of signifying: still less of embodying. The *Linga* is at the same time 'with' and 'without form'. as is taught by the Tamilian Shaivite, catechisms. It stands at the boundary between the Manifested and Non-manifested, the last threshold, that can be discerned through sight or touch by anyone who has sensed the presence of the essential Beyond, Parama Shiva-just as he was revealed in the appearance of the linga of fire on the summit of Arunachala.

The chamber in which the Shivalinga stands is called in Sanskrit *moolasthan* or *garbhagriha*. *Moola* means source or origin, *garbha* the maternal womb, *Sthana* means place, dwelling; *griha* is house. So the shrine of Shivalinga, we may truly say, at the level of symbol and cultic myth, is the supreme place of divine rebirth, or in terms of the Greek Mysteries, of the final initiation.

When the Hindu following the path opened up by the ancient rishis, sets out to discover the inner world-beyond every sound, every form, every word and every thought, and also beyond the necessary experience and taste of death and nothingness –he finally comes at the last frontier of time to the moment of that total renewal which for Christians is signified and realized in the resurrection of the Lord on the other side of his passing through death and hell. Man's definitive meeting with God is birth beyond death. No one can see God without dying to self. No more can he attain to his own self in its supreme and final truth without dying, and therefore without being reborn-in the very realm of God. That is surely what in their own way the Shivalinga and the shrine in which it is hidden are intended to convey and symbolize. The dwelling place of God on earth of which every temple is meant to be a symbol-must necessarily be the place of man's rebirth a mystic womb from which he issues as it were for the second time, reborn in the very depth of the divine Love--now as a son, beloved and chosen from-eternity, as the Christian would say, taught by the 'inward anointing' of the Spirit.

Europeans often sneer at the supposedly phallic character of the 'sacred linga'. The word *linga* does indeed have this sense, both in Tamil and in Sanskrit, but it is only one of many other meanings, all related to its fundamental sense as *sign*. Modern Shaivite writers generally object to this interpretation, and explain the crudely phallic forms of the linga which are found here and there as due to the degeneracy of certain sects. In any case we have no right to think that the Shivalinga, even if it was originally a phallic symbol, ever had the obscene connotation ascribed to it by those who disparage it-except of course in deviant examples. At all events, to its true worshippers it does not suggest anything indecent either in feeling, or imagination. After all, the origin of life is essentially 'sacred' - however much it may have been profaned by mankind, especially in the so-called civilised world. Therefore, in a religious context, is there any reason why the sign of procreation should not also be that of rebirth, and besides that, a reminder to us of the high dignity of our flesh-which God not only created, but also assumed.

So Vanya remained for a long time, standing quietly all alone. in the gloom, beside the symbol of stone. The darkness and silence of the evening made that inner chamber even more numinous. It was a powerful reminder of the 'cave' of the heart, the *guha* which is so dear to the Indian mystical tradition, the true place (if it can rightly be called a 'place') of the unseen divine rebirth,of which the stone symbol is a sign and for which the symbol of worship is an appeal.

Under the influence of an almost magical enchantment, it seemed to Vanya as if he was being led continually a little further into his inner sanctum as each moment passed. Here everything seemed most wonderfully to express and release the archetypes that are hidden in the depth of the human heart. Indeed India's religious genius is such that, through its worship and the very structure of its temples, through its myths and equally through every aspect of human life, it constantly recalls you to what is



essential, and ceaselessly- invites you to discover in the depth of your being the ultimate mystery of your own self.

As the minutes passed peacefully, happily, Vanya's mind was unable to grasp or think about what was going on in its hidden depths, he simply allowed himself to be carried along, letting everything go, only longing for that death which brings new birth.

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All that night Vanya remained in the temple, alone - alone, but enveloped in the mystery of the presence. As Kailasanadar had said to him, it may not be fitting for a worldly person to eat or sleep in the temple, Ishwara's abode-, but on the other hand it is surely the true home of those who, while still living in the body, have already passed over from this world to God.

Stretched out between the pillars of the mandapa, throughout the night Vanya was at the same time sleeping and yet awake. What he afterwards remembered, what came to the surface of his mind, seemed to him to come from a very deep experience. Was it a dream? Was it conscious meditation Who could say? He was as if possessed by an intense awareness of the Presence. Everything appeared to him as a *murti*. manifestation, aspect of God- all the forms which being assumes, and also all the forms, rites, hymns and sacred formulas by which mankind tries as it were to reach and tie down the mystery of the divine Presence, all were coming together and converging, in the Hindu myth, on the supreme symbol of the Shivalinga.

Everything on earth is indeed the sign, the linga of the Lord, of the One who fills all and yet is always infinitely beyond all. 'As in the first I am myself!' thought Vanya. The hymns of the Veda, that is the Shivalinga; everything that is said, seen, thought or heard, is simply the sign of the One who is beyond all signs.

But is it possible to separate the Lord, from what is his sign? No one will ever be able to make a clear and certain distinction within creation between what is God in himself and what is purely a manifestation of God. The least grain of sand contains in its very definition the eternity and self-originate nature of God. It would not exist, if God were not in the first place the Eternal and Unique One. The linga is a sign, and this is its very essence. There is no sign apart from the giver of the sign and that which is signified. There is no son, unless there is someone to have been his father. There is nothing material which does not proclaim the presence of spirit; it is in fact its sign, that which gradually prepares for its awakening and is thereafter its support, remaining inseparable, from it. Shiva is everywhere present in his linga, wholly present in each point of the linga.

At the level of thought, nothing can divide Shiva from the linga in which he manifests himself For this, *advaita*, non-duality, is the only appropriate word. Not monism, not dualism; but that sheer mystery in which man, without understanding it at all, rediscovers himself in the depth of the heart of God.

Shiva is wholly present in the Shivalinga, in the linga that stands in the temple, in the linga constituted by the universe, in the linga which every living creature is. He is there at its heart, he is its heart, but a 'heart' which is not one particular part of his linga, either spatially, dialectically or ontologically ... a heart which is totally 'beyond', and at the same time and for that very reason most profoundly 'within', being at once absolutely transcendent and absolutely immanent.

When once you have reached the heart of the sign, you realise that everything is essentially an epiphany.-a manifestation of the Lord. Thereafter what is important are not the differences and disparities between the manifold manifestations, but the quality common to all of them – and to each of them in a unique manner -of being a sign of God. This extends from yourself to every conscious being that ever has existed or will exist from the atom or the smallest living creature to the galaxies. In

everything now the heart has been discovered-the heart in which all is discovered, all is seen, all is known. There is nowhere anything but God in himself.

Only then can the taste of Being be appreciated. And thereafter that taste-that, and no other-is recognised in every being.

The Shivalinga is a symbol of God's having passed into his creation, and equally, of the creature's having passed, passed away, into God...The Shivalinga stands at the frontier between form and formlessness, *rupa-arupa*, between what is manifested and what can never be manifested.

God is at once the object of vision and the mystery of non-vision. But in reality, he is not attained either by our seeing or by our not seeing, either by our acting or by our ceasing to act God is the beyond.

God is also the Infinitely Near -  
further than all,  
nearer than all,  
within all,  
outside all.

And everywhere God is Fullness and infinity:  
Fullness here, Fullness there:  
from Fullness Fullness proceeds  
Take Fullness from Fullness,  
Fullness ever remains. (*Isa Upanishad*)

It is Precisely in the vision of this Fullness that anyone attains to it, and at the same time attains to his own self. This is the essential mystery of the world, of all that my senses experience of all that my mind conceives-my own mystery, in that which in me is most inward and most personal, that which is un-manifested and cannot be manifested of myself and of all things that which is beyond the reach of my awareness, and yet which is awareness itself at its very source.

What then does it mean – to go beyond the world of signs, the world of the linga, of the *linga* which however is entirely Shiva, and in which Shiva is all?

Beyond anyone's reflection upon his own thought and upon his consciousness itself, there can be nothing else except the direct apprehension of the self in the self and by the self, passing from the Shivalinga to Shiva in his essential solitude, which at the same time is all-embracing, fullness....

For one who has entered this solitude there is no more any 'without' or 'within', but only Being. For one who has crossed to the further shore, as said Buddha, the Awakened One, there is no more a shore that has been left behind or a shore that has been reached, no ford that has been crossed or raft that has made the crossing, or anyone who might have passed over.. only the eternal mystery of Being, unattainable by what comes into being, and yet wholly present in what comes into being, in which it is manifested.

No one has understood the secret of the Shivalinga, so long as he has not entered into Shiva himself, who is the heart, the beyond and also the whole of the Shivalinga-indeed, into that same mystery which everyone bears in the depth of his being and which torments him so long as it cannot reveal its secret.

In the Shivalinga, Shiva is at the same time *a-sparsa and a-khanda*, at once 'not touchable', absolutely apart, and 'not divisible'.

He fills all, he is everywhere, yet everywhere he is *a-dvaita, a-khanda*, having no division or parts within himself, and not divided from anything whatever that reason tries to imagine as outside him.

At the same time he is *a-sparsa*; he touches nothing and nothing can touch him. He is entirely apart totally incommunicable and yet communicating himself totally.

Shiva is completely present in himself and completely present in his linga, his sign, his manifestation. He is not distinct from his sign, and yet remains sovereignly free- the mystery of creation, which resides in God, but in which God does not reside.

As for me, in my essential being I am completely apart and yet completely radiant, self-communicating. Everything in me exists in separateness, and yet everything in me is given, poured out - mind, senses and body- and through their means is extended to the cosmic boundaries of space and time....

The Gnani is one who has penetrated to the source of his being and has realised in the hidden centre of himself the mystery of God in his self-revelation. He alone in truth is in possession of himself and he alone can truly give himself-, he alone can love completely. Nothing can ever give itself out, unless it is distinct, separate. God's transcendence is the very source of his immanence, 'transcendence' and 'immanence' being in the end only two human words which endeavour to indicate that the supreme is at once beyond and within, that Being is at the same time *rupa* and *arupa*, Form and Formless.

Vanya thought about the faithful whom he had watched that evening, as they prostrated before the sacred stone. It seemed to him that these faithful themselves constituted the Shivalinga, and perhaps with greater truth than the stone in the visible sanctuary. Who prostrates, and to whom does he prostrate?

If this body is allowed to die and this mind lets itself disappear, it is precisely in order that there may finally emerge, all alone, out of the original matrix now at last attained, the 'pure sign' which is symbolised by the stone standing at the centre of the 'place of rebirth' -with every joy surpassed, and all peace transcended, as long ago the Buddha taught. For, in order that the sacred linga may be revealed standing in the centre of the cave of the heart, it is necessary that all should have been given up and transcended,

peace, the feeling of peace, and even the thought of peace,  
joy and the thought of joy and every feeling of joy,  
all thought and taste for what is within,  
the thought and the taste of being oneself, myself,  
and the thought of having renounced all thought,  
and the taste of having renounced every taste...

Then only the lotus springs up and blooms, its leaves in contact with the water, yet never wetted and then the bees come to drink deeply of its nectar.

Vanya went on to think of all the devotees who had so often prostrated before him, including that very evening in the mandapa of the temple-as if the robe which he wore made himself the very sign, linga, of the mystery expressed both in the glorious linga of fire on the crest of Arunachala and in the humble stone linga hidden in the sanctuary of this village temple:

Shiva prostrate before Shiva,  
Shiva holding out his gracious hands to Shiva,  
all the lila of Shiva...  
and equally the galaxies revolving about each other in infinite space,  
and the electrons which dance, disperse and reunite, at the heart of the atom,  
and the protons in the nucleus which split and explode,  
and the people who blow up the earth by reuniting them-  
all that, the lila of Shiva and his linga –  
and the fathers and the mothers and the children,  
and all the different nations,

and man become one with woman, Shiva-Parvati..

He then dreamt that someone was asking his name, that he was refusing to tell it, that the other insisted. and that finally he said:

Who are you that ask my name?

Who am I, of whom you ask it?

What is the meaning of this request?

Is not everything the lila of the Lord-  
you and I, and all that we say?

the mystery of his appearing

in the very depth of the Self,

Shivalinga..

OMI

## 5. On Meditation - Dhyana - The One Essential

For Sri Gnanananda, *dhyana*, meditation, was the one essential spiritual practice. For him it was the royal road, the only effective way of arriving at the realisation of the Presence in one's own depths. One who truly wishes to attain to that has to sacrifice everything for silent meditation - depending naturally on how far he is free from family or social responsibilities. Having once provided for the elementary needs of the body, food, hygiene and sleep, he should only have a single goal and a single occupation - to practice meditation in the very depth of his being.

When Gnanananda was pressed to explain in rather greater detail what he meant by *dhyana*, he readily did so by means of short rhythmical verses in Tamil which he never tired of repeating and adding to.

Enter into yourself  
to the place where there is nothing,  
and take care that nothing enters there.  
Penetrate within yourself  
to the place where there is no more any thought,  
and take care that no thought arises there!

There where there is nothing-  
Fullness!  
There where nothing is seen-  
the Vision of Being!  
There where nothing more appears-  
behold, the Self!

That is *dhyana*!

A young Tamilian arrived one day at Thapovanarn. He had come from quite far off, and his plan was to find a room in the town, to come at set times to receive the guru's teaching and to apply himself to meditation under his direction. He explained his programme to the Swami, and added that he would take advantage of his free time to learn Sanskrit. Sri Gnanananda at once interrupted him:

“There is no need for you to worry about finding a room or a hotel. You can perfectly well stay here and have your meals here. You will then be completely free to meditate as long as you like. As for learning Sanskrit, listen to me. They say there are fifteen hundred languages throughout the world. You will begin by learning Sanskrit, then you will want to learn Marathi, Bengali, then Chinese and so on. Your mother-tongue is Tamil, isn't it? You must have read the Tirukkural. Well then, do not such and such verses (which he quoted) contain everything necessary for the spiritual life? And besides you also have in Tamil the Tevaram, the Tiruvagam. and so many other works left to us by the saints of days

gone by. The Vedanta itself has been translated into Tamil. You have in your own language all that you need to teach you about the true knowledge. Why waste your time in learning a mass of useless things: when only one thing is really necessary? If you truly want to attain to *dhyana*, far from trying to learn anything new whatever, what you need is just the opposite - that everything you may have learnt in the past should leave you and vanish, never to return.'

One day Vanya asked him whether a certain amount of *tapas, austerity*, was not essential, at least as providing support, for the authentic practice of *dhyana*. 'Take your own life,' he said, 'your solitude, fasting and so forth while you were living in the mountains of Kashmir, and later on, your time as wanderer, going from one end of India to the other. And surely, at least for one who has taken sannyasa it is a duty to live in the poverty and total non-possession which tradition has to his calling?'

'Dhvana alone matters' replied Sri Gnanananda. 'Everything else, whatever it may be - *tapas*, solitude, vigils, fasts, non-possession - is secondary, and has no direct connection with "realisation". The only thing that counts is to free yourself from everything that prevents you from devoting yourself exclusively and -completely to this silent interior meditation. Even sannyasa itself is not essential. This ochre robe that we wear is much less for ourselves than for other people. The kavi colour acts as a direct witness and reminder to everyone that he who has taken it is one set apart, and that therefore they should not divert his attention with worldly talk, but rather assist him in every way in his life of solitude and close converse with God. A uniform is worn for others, not for oneself. The door keeper or the bus conductor would do their work just as well if they wore a white dhoti like everyone else. But their special dress shows everyone that they are the people to approach for certain things. It is the same with the dress of the sannyasi to whom people come to ask for help in spiritual matters. As for the policemen's uniform, it serves to keep anyone who feels like committing a crime at a respectful distance and to make him stop and think. Does not the robe of a sadhu have something of the same effect?'

Another time, when a party had come to have his darshana, Sri Gnanananda was repeating his favourite verse, 'There where there is nothing...!' Some of the visitors started to comment on it in Tamil and English with varying degrees of pedantry. One of them proposed translating 'nothing' as 'void'. It was explained to Gnanananda that 'void' in English corresponds to *sunya* in Sanskrit. 'But why, he asked, do you want at all costs to give a name to what, by its very definition, is devoid of all possibility of being named? As soon as you give a name to *not-being*, that which is not, you automatically make it into some thing. As soon as you give the place where there is nothing the name of "void", you are putting something there- and so you have to start all over again.'

Later on, when Vanya recalled this conversation, he admitted that he had never previously understood as he then did, the Buddha's teaching about the need for our meditation to be successively purified. We have to leave behind the place of thinking, then that of joy, then that of peace; next, in more advanced meditations, we have to leave behind in their turn all the negations which have acted as supports in leaving behind one stage after another, until we have passed beyond every affirmation and equally every negation, and have entered the total silence, in which one who has reached so far is no longer aware of being silent - since he has passed into the *akasha* of the heart, the 'super-space', which can no longer be circumscribed or localised.

Someone asked Sri Gnanananda if breath-control, *pranayama*, is a useful practice. He agreed that it is, as do most people, but would not identify pranayama with the technical exercises for holding the breath. These are only useful as a preparation, by quietening and giving a rhythm to the bodily movements, and then as a result of that, to the 'waves' of the mind. He took the view, as also did Ramana Maharshi, that breath control consists above all in a very simple but steady attention to the breath itself, as it is drawn in and expelled.

He explained this by saying: 'The place from which breathing comes is in fact identical with the place from which thoughts come. The important thing is to hold yourself in this place which is the source of your being, and to keep careful watch to see that its silence and parity are never contaminated, and that

you never allow yourself to be diverted or drawn away from it. Then when thoughts make their appearance-as they never cease to do-, in order to avoid being carried away by them, you only have to follow each one to its source, plunging into the very heart of the wave which is taking you to the shore, to find *who* is thinking this, for that is the fundamental thought at the source of all thought. In this way you come back to the place of your origin, the place in which all place has disappeared, the Self in which all self(ego) has vanished. Concentration on breathing helps towards interiorization. When you follow your breath as it returns to its source, you are also returning to your own source.

There where the I springs up,  
springs up the breath  
There where the Self springs up,  
springs up the thought of self.  
The place which is the source of the breath,  
the same place is the of the I.  
At the very point where the self thinks itself,  
the Self shines forth'

Among the day's visitors there was a seeker after wisdom who had already 'done' a good number of ashrams and swamis. He was absolutely sincere and also had an absolute faith in the teaching of his present guru. However when this guru insisted that he should make a final decision to devote himself at least for several years to meditation in silence and solitude, it was too much for him. Would it not be much simpler if the guru were to introduce him directly, as if by waving a magic wand, to that place of the heart of which he so much, by using those marvellous powers (*siddhi*) which a guru must surely possess? After all, as an Indian example, there was the case of Vivekananda to whom Ramakrishna gave illumination in a single moment; and in his own tradition (he was originally a Christian) there was the case of Paul of Tarsus who was overmastered by the grace at the gates of Damascus. But of course with them, it was a case of being already totally surrendered to God in the depth of their souls, so that they were not held back by pride or sloth; once the veil was removed which alone hid reality from their eyes, then with all the force of their being they sped towards the Real.

That disciple, gradually brought the conversation round to the grace of *Isvara*, the Lord, and of his representative the guru. Very readily Gnanananda took him up:

The guru appears when the place of the heart has been found. In order to reach it personal effort and perseverance are needed. Underlying this effort there has to be one single intention which focuses all the strength of your being in a single direction. Singleness of intention, singleness of aim, the, single-minded search for the atman- this is the one essential condition of spiritual realisation.

'You must have seen those young divers at the sea-ports who wait for the passengers to throw down small coins from the deck. The atman is like a coin which has fallen to the bottom of the sea. In order to recover it, you have to dive straight down, holding your breath, and with your body held straight as an arrow. The sea is the mind, *manas*. The waves are the *vritti*, the ceaseless movements of our mind, the eddies of our thoughts. To see where to dive, you have to still the waves.. To discover the place of the atman, you have to still your thoughts. To still the waves you have to find what is causing them, to know where they are coming from. In the same way we have to seek within ourselves the place in which our thoughts are born and from which they fly out in all directions. When the water has become calm and clear, it is a simple matter to find the coin. And he added with a smile, the mind can even become so calm and motionless that it is as if the water had been frozen solid!

'The grace of the guru, the grace of the Lord, is the seed sown in the ground. No one, whoever he be, is ever deprived of this seed. But is it enough simply to place the seed in the ground? Does not the soil have to be prepared, manured and watered? Otherwise, what is the use of sowing the seed? And once the seed has germinated don't you have to continue watering, hoeing, pulling out the weeds? All that is the *effort*, which no one can shirk and without which grace cannot do its work in you.'

'Do you make a fire with green wood? You have to cut down the branch and let it dry. Only After that it will burn. So the fire is grace; the preparation of the wood is the *sadhana*, the effort made by one who really wants to succeed.'

'You should have only one goal You. Make inquiries about the goals but once it is sighted, you don't waste your time in inquiring all over again. You go straight ahead in the direction that you have decided to go.'

'What is the use of running about from master to master? What good does it do to spend your time reading and inquiring about different methods? Reading and making inquiries are like studying the map and the timetable. If you want to arrive at the place shown on the map and in the timetable, you have eventually to decide to take the train. It is the train that will take you to Madras or Bombay, not the timetable. A plan has to be put into operation, otherwise it is useless. When you go to the station or the market, do you ask the way from every passer-by? Do you stop at every signpost to find which way to go? If you do, you are likely to reach the station after the train has left, or the market, after the shops are closed.'

'Whoever truly desires something, desires it with his whole being and gives up everything in order to obtain it. You know the parable in the Vedanta: If your clothes catch fire and there is a pond nearby, you rush towards it without stopping to think, and plunge head first into the water. The same is true of anyone who really wants to discover the pearl hidden in the depth of his heart He does not waste time talking about it.'

'What is the use of feeling all the fruit on a tree? This one is too ripe, that one is not ripe enough. This teaching appeals to me, but there is one point in it that bothers me. That teaching does not have that drawback, but there is something else... Anyone who is really hungry does not take long to choose one of the mangoes one the mangoes on the tree and get his teeth into it.'

The disciple at whom this was aimed, reacted with: 'It sometimes happens that people who devote themselves to mental concentration go off their heads!'

'If my neighbour's child has died, is that a reason for me not to get married?' was Gnanananda's pointed reply.

I have a field. I need a well to irrigate it. I start digging one, and come to solid rock. Am I going to stop and fold my arms? If I want to eat, I need rice, and so a field in which to grow it, and so water with which to irrigate it. In one way or another I shall take no rest until I have found water.'

The disciple continued to argue 'Could not one not simply wait for "that" to happen? When you put fruit in the sun, it ripens on its own.'

The guru was quick to reply: 'There is still the need to put it in the sun. That precisely is your *sadhana*'

Another time someone asked: 'What value is there in ritual and prayer-in hymns, or in the repetition of the divine name, *japa*? Are they necessary or even useful, for attaining to spiritual realisation?' ,

'Far from being useful or necessary, they are on the contrary obstacles for anyone who is following the way of *jnana*. They should be firmly put aside. *Dhyana* is the one thing necessary, and it is absolutely essential. Puja, japa, ritual, litanies and the rest, they all fall within the sphere of externals, they belong to the world of appearances and have nothing to do with the ReaL To be attached to them and delight in them, to practice them assiduously with the idea that they are an effective way of coming to spiritual realisation is a fundamental mistake, which will prevent the *sadhaka* from reaching his goal. Their only value is for beginners, for those who have not yet heard the call of what is within, for those who are married, who have responsibilities in the world and are incapable of persevering in meditation.

Remember the biting irony of the Mundaka Upanishad on the subject of those who multiply prayers and sacrifices with the object of reaching "heaven". They no doubt do go there, but sooner or later they have to return to earth, so that finally they may find *brahman*, who has nothing to do with any heaven whatever.'

'But supposing I have to perform them,' went on the inquirer, 'for example, on account of my social or professional duties?'

'Then do so, simply and without being attached to them, as the Gita teaches. You are doing them for other people, not for yourself. For you, they are part of the world of *appearance*, but people ask you for them, and those who ask for them really need them because of their spiritual and material condition. Perform all the rites that they desire, offer all the pujas and chant all the mantras that will make them happy. But you yourself should not be personally involved; and in any case, that would surely be quite impossible for you. Is the magician taken in by his tricks? He very well knows that there is nothing in them and that all his turns are pure deception. And so, when you are with people who live at the level of appearance, you have to speak to them in their own language. Anyone who dreams that he is hungry has to eat in his dream, even if he went to bed with a full stomach. See how children play in the street; they build houses, buy and sell, cook, hold weddings. But once they enter the school, they forget all about their house, their business, their wedding. A picture is shown on a screen; does the screen afterwards retain any trace or memory of it? So it is with one who knows, when he has to act at the level of appearance and has to help, according to their capacity, those who are bound to that level and have not yet received the revelation of what is Real.

'Only dhyana matters. When once the call of what is within, the call of the real, has made itself heard, every possible moment should be kept for the practice of meditation. Only when you are firmly established within is it safe for you to come back into daily contact with the world.'

Someone else raised another question: 'Should one fast or do without sleep?'

Gnanananda once again replied that it did not matter in the least. 'In spiritual practice nothing has any value in itself. You simply have to see what in fact helps or hinders your meditation. Adjust your food and your sleep solely with that in view, though it is certainly true that the night hours are the best for contemplation.'

He was asked about the different kinds of *samadhi*. According to the Indian spiritual tradition, *samadhi* is the final stage of the practice of *dhyana*-ecstasy which is enstasis, and enstasis which is ecstasy; for, at that level, there is no 'outer' (ek-stasis) which is not fulfilled and completed in what is 'inward', and no 'inward' (en-stasis) whose inwardness does not include the whole of being.

Gnanananda explained that there are three kinds of *samadhi*:

'The first is *savikalpa samadhi*, in which there remains a certain awareness of oneself as distinct, some "memory" of oneself.

'The second is *nirvikalpa samadhi*. In this there no longer remains either outward or inward, either self or other. Nothing any more makes an impact on either the physical senses or the mind. You can no longer think or feel. People can touch you, move you about, lift you up, but you remain totally unaware of it. It is fullness, it is bliss; fullness of joy, fullness and joy inseparably, encompassing everything; the bliss of brahman, the bliss of the Self, the bliss of the atman; utterly pure bliss and joy, total bliss and joy - purnam, anandam, purnanandam, atmanandam, brahmanandam, akhandanandam... ' You should have seen how the Swami mimed his words, beating time with his whole body, as his voice stressed each 'anandam'!



Even more exalted, however, is *sahaja samadhi*, when finally you have reached the original state, or rather original point of the self-original, because born-with-the-self (connate, *saha-ja*), or better still, "not-born", for in truth does 'being' have an origin? Here you have passed beyond both enstasis and ecstasy. Differences are no longer perceived anywhere. The jnani lives in the world like every one else; he eats, drinks, sleeps and walks about, just like everyone else. However, while others are primarily aware of the diversity of things, the jnani sees them in their unity. In finding the Self, he finds himself and the self in everything. The *ego has* disappeared, which formerly came between "him", "himself", and the other people, indeed, between his awareness of himself and his real being. Nothing henceforth obstructs the perception reality in itself.'

The jnani strides across the waters,  
his head always high above the waves,  
his gaze overpassing the horizon,  
plunging into the limitless...  
He traverses all that-passes away,  
His gaze fixed on what does not pass away;  
In everything he sees  
that which is beyond all,  
the end of all, the source of all,  
the depth of all,  
unique in all,  
with no end and no beginning,  
the eternal...  
He has discovered himself and has discovered all,  
beyond death  
and beyond time in which at every moment we are dying...

'Bring me a fig, Svetaketu.'  
'Here you are, Swami.'  
'Cut it in half-, what do you see?'  
'The seeds, Swami.'  
'Cut one of the seeds; what do you see?'  
'Nothing at all, Swami.'

'So, my child, what you are unable even to see, from that very thing arises this great tree. Similarly, the Imperceptible, which is the life of all that exists, is the Self, the Real. You yourself are that, *tat tvam asi*, Svetaketu.'

'Pour this salt into this jug of water.'  
'It is done, Swami.'  
'Now give me back that salt.'  
'That is impossible, Swami; the salt has gone.'  
'Drink some of the water; what does it taste of?'  
'Salt, Swami.'  
'Take some from the middle, then some from the bottom; what does it taste of?'  
'It is still salt, Swami.'

'You see, child, you cannot find the salt in the water, yet it is there. Similarly you are not able to perceive Being, yet is here. This Imperceptible, which is the life of all that exists, this indeed is the Self, the real.

You yourself are that, Svetaketu' (Chandogya Upanishad 6.12,13)

'That,O Gargi,' said Yajnavalkya, 'the knowers of brahman call the Imperishable, the Unchanging, *a-kshara*... It is the unseen seer, the unheard Hearer, the un-thought Thinker. Apart from it nothing sees,

nothing hears or understands. By whom would the unique Thinker be thought? or the unique Seer be seen?... This is the One who breathes in your breathing, this self of yours which is the Self of all things...'

*(Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad 3.8)*

'He who sees all things in the self  
and has found himself in all things,  
from what would he recoil?  
He who has discovered Unity,  
what sorrow, what illusion  
can still touch him?  
It moves, it does not move;  
it is very close, and it is far away,  
within all,  
outside of all.  
Thought itself can not catch up with it,  
nor can any of the devas;  
without moving, it runs faster than all.  
Knowing and not-knowing, both alike it has gone beyond;  
having passed through death,  
it has attained to immortality.' *(Isha Upanishad)*

The mathematics teacher who was mentioned above returned one Sunday. She confided to the guru that she had been disturbed by the spatial symbols which he often used.

'They are all,' he replied, 'simply pictures from which we cannot expect more than some temporary assistance, mere pointers or signposts. They have no value in themselves. When a child asks you where the moon is, you point it out with your finger or stick. But where you are pointing is not the real place. So the *akasha* or space in your heart is an infinite space, which does not allow itself to be limited or localised in any way. So also in the sphere of the audible, you can begin with sounds or words which are uttered or heard, and from there go on to the OM which underlies every sound, and then pass from the audible OM to the OM which no ear, even the most spiritual, can perceive. The important thing is to have a starting-point, something which the mind can use as a support for its inward quest a spring-board from which to launch out and pass beyond the superficial self. In addition it will help the mind to free itself from wandering thoughts. Breathing, a sound, a single point, awareness of the self made as pure as possible-all these are aids, but only for the time being, towards obtaining the vision of being.

'However you set about doing it, you have to settle yourself permanently within, even if finally the very idea of this "within" has itself to be abandoned; on that you should gaze, there you should enter and establish yourself, diving ever deeper until at last you disappear, as the Tamil lyric goes:

Thou who hast entered the depth of my heart,  
enable me to give my whole attention  
to this depth of my heart!

Thou who art my guest in the depth of my heart,  
enable me to enter myself  
into this depth of my heart!

Thou who makest thy home in the depth of my heart,  
enable me to be seated in peace  
in this depth of my heart

Thou who alone dwellest in the depth of my heart,

enable me to plunge deep and lose myself  
in this depth of my heart

Thou who art all alone in the depth of my heart,  
enable me to disappear in thee  
in this depth of my heart!

Sri Gnanananda went on: "If thoughts still make their appearance, they should be like the birds and other flying creatures which glide and move to and fro in the air; they should float in the *akasha*, the space of your heart, without settling on the solid ground where you take your stand."

'The essential thing, you see, is to make within Yourself a solid, immovable dwelling place where no one can possibly enter, no one can find or disturb you. Let your "inner room" be closed to absolutely everyone. Keep it as out of bounds as are our kitchens in Tamilnadu. As you know by experience, the place where the fire is lit and food is prepared is the most sacred, the most set apart, in the whole house. No one may set foot in it except members of the family or, in some cases, of the same caste. No stranger, even your dearest friend, is allowed to enter. He will take his meal on the verandah or in the courtyard. You should protect your heart from contact with anything that could defile it with the same care as you protect the family hearth.'

Vanya then took the opportunity to remind the guru of a verse in the Chandogya Upanishad which meant much to him:

That which is at the centre of the space in my heart,  
it is the very same which is in the sun,  
which is in the earth,  
in the heart of every man,  
at the heart of every being.

'God is everywhere present indivisibly, *a-kanda*,' Sri Gnanananda continued. The heart is the mirror in which he is seen. When he is seen in the universe, then his form is diversified, multiple - *bheda*, *dvaita*. When he is seen in the mirror of the heart, he is seen just as he is in himself, undivided, *a-kanda*, without any limitation or otherness, in the non-duality of being.

'Enter into yourself and contemplate, in the mirror of the heart.'

Here is a meditation which Gnanananda gave to Vanya:

'The I first of all is perceived in its relationship, to the world outside, to what is not-myself. So long as anyone only knows himself in this fashion, that is, by means of outward things, and with reference to them, it cannot be said that he really knows himself. At that stage, what I call "myself" simply consists of the ceaseless reactions, sensory and mental, of that biological and psychological centre which I am, in response to external stimuli. It was on account of this instability that the Buddha would not attribute substantial existence to the person, which according to his terminology he identified with the atman. Whoever wishes to know himself once for all and to arrive at his true being, should aim at reaching his "I" in its unchangeable identity and sovereign freedom. This "I" no doubt expresses itself in its acts of perception, both outward and inward, but it transcends all these and, in its inmost essence-the "imperceptible" of the Chandogya Upanishad-it is totally independent of them. It IS, just as truly in the absence of all perception as when its influence is extended and manifested through such activity-as is clearly proved by the experience of deep sleep, in which there is no longer the awareness of anything, and yet the person obviously continues to exist. To quote a saying of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, All things reside in me, but I myself reside in nothing.

'The "I" is not truly known, so long as it is not known in itself; no more can God be truly known, so long as he is not known in himself. Otherwise I would not exist apart from my relation to the universe,

nor would God exist apart from the relation that the world has to him. This is indeed the metaphysical problem of the one and the many, of the same and the other, of the manifested and what cannot be manifested, which can never be reduced to any mental category whatever, for precisely, "who can think the Thinker?". Even reflex thought itself only apprehends the thinker and his thought in the form of an idea, and so indirectly. What is needed is to break through the shell of these successive abstractions and come to the central point, which refuses to be either localized or reduced to an idea.

'No one will ever reach his own self except through himself and in the very depth of himself, as the Gita says: *atmani atmanam atmana*, the self sees the self in the self through the self. No creature, whatever it may be, can ever do more than lead you to the door of the sanctuary, invite you to enter, and then bow and disappear. Nothing changeable can change into that which does not change. No inductive knowledge, not even purely reflex knowledge can attain to Being in its majesty.

What is Full rests on nothing else;  
it is established in itself, on its own greatness;  
there nothing else can be seen or heard,  
there nothing else can be thought.  
That alone is immortal,  
that alone is free and unbounded in all the worlds.  
such is he who knows the *atman*,  
he who has realised himself. (*Chandogya Upanishad*, 7)

'There is no question that the most effective way of approach to what is within is to go by the "inward path". Even so the path vanishes, once the goal is reached. When you travel by the inward road, this "inwardness" is still an idea, and every idea implies duality and distinction. Its effect is inevitably to distance me from my goal, since it still distinguishes between the "I" which seeks and the "self" which is sought. So long as I distinguish within me the I which is within, I am not yet truly "within"... When at last that has been realized, then that which seeks and that which is sought vanish together-or, more precisely, what has vanished is the perception of them as different and separated. Nothing remains but *self*, being, pure  *jyoti*, undivided and infinite light, essential light, the glory of Being, the inherent radiance of self, the vision in the self of Being in itself, the fullness of all joy, the bliss of the one who IS (the *Be-ing*).

'The final task in the spiritual quest is to resolve this ultimate distinction, that between the goal and the path, between the goal and him who is moving towards it. We have to overcome the dread which seizes the one who is in search of the self when he arrives at what seems to him, from his point of view, the last bend in the, road. He then realizes that he must henceforth renounce finally and irrevocably everything in which until then it had seemed to him that he had his existence, his being, his idea of himself, and his self-awareness linked to that idea of himself. In the abyss of his heart, into which he feels himself irresistibly drawn, there is no longer anything anywhere to which he could cling and save himself from falling, no solid ground on which he could set his foot, no fresh air with which he could recover his breath. There is only the *akasha*, the infinite space in which there are no longer any distinguishable points of reference, which is not limited by any horizon, which is everywhere the same; it is no longer even an environment in which one could keep his place-rather, it has carried off into its boundless infinity and solitude the one who tried to keep his place in it... As the Upanishads often say, we have relentlessly to cut that "last knot of the heart", *hridaya-granthi*, that attachment which binds the Self to temporal and material conditioning and prevents it from attaining its nature as supremely free.' This was precisely the most characteristic teaching of Ramana Maharshi: It is the very thought of the I, of the I as distinct from the self, even if only provisionally accepted, that has to be relentlessly pursued, in order to make it flee from the light and finally disappear, just as a thief, when caught in the act, takes to his heels and runs away at top speed – as Gnanananda, following Ramana, liked to repeat.

'This does not of course mean that we should pursue this idea with another idea - that would merely be to play the game of this specious and fleeting I. It is not a question of trying to persuade oneself that

differences do not exist, that no one is ever bound by anything, that the atman is the inner dimension of every being. All that is merely a matter of thought and imagination. When we take that line, it is like walking indefinitely round and round the mountain, instead of taking the steep path which alone will lead to the summit. The popular manuals of Vedanta often advise the sadhaka to think: "I am the eternal, the non-born, the non-dual, unlimited awareness, infinite bliss." But all that is quite beside the point; indeed, it is absolutely false at the level of awareness which the sadhaka has reached. Setting aside any idea of the "I", he should be reaching towards the intuition of the eternal, the non-born and the rest, and no idea will ever lead to this intuition. Reflection will never yield this truth, add yet only this truth gives salvation. The truth cannot come from outside or from within through mental effort. It quite simply springs up from the depth of one's being. It is the dawning of Light in the Glory of Being arising in the heart'.

'However that is only perceived as dawning in the moment of experiencing it; for, in the very experience of this dawn it becomes clear that there never was and never will be the dawning of Being, either in the Self or in beings. In the Self, as indeed in everything, at every point of space and at every point of time, and equally beyond space and beyond time, Being simply IS. The sun too only rises for those who go to meet it'.

The sun has reached its zenith,  
it will never again set or rise,  
all alone it stands at the centre of all...  
It has never set and never risen  
for him who knows...  
Night is the same as day in the world of Brahman,  
light unending...  
Between this world and the other  
the atman is the dam,  
the bridge which leads to immortality,  
but nothing from this world crosses over it,  
neither death nor evil nor good nor sorrow,  
nor anything that is transitory...  
(Chandogya Upanishad, 3.11; 8.4)

'The direct method of realising this is the practice of *dhyana*, based on the faith in the guru, in deeper and deeper silence of mind and the senses'.

'I have to abandon the thought that it is "I" who experiences the Self and has the darshana of the atman'.

'I have to abandon the thought that it is "I" who have the joy of seeing and possessing God'.

'There is no longer a joy of his own for anyone who has come to the vision of being and who contemplates the inner light. For there is no more an "I" to enjoy and rejoice in - or equally to suffer from - anything whatever. There is only a single joy, the Joy of Being, the joy of Being in Itself, "God all in all" in himself.'

One day Gnanananda summed all this up for Vanya in a verse of his own:

When I entered into Thy depth,  
Oh! what happened to me?  
Oh! what happened to Thee?

When I entered into Thy depth,  
there remained no longer either Thou or I!

## 6. On Guru

There were certainly a good many aspects of Sri Gnanananda's style of life which Vanya found hard to understand. His idea of the true jnani was naturally derived from Ramana Maharishi, whose darshana he had once or twice during the last year of his life. In those days Ramana usually sat without moving on his couch, apparently indifferent to what was happening around him, enveloped in a kind of liturgical atmosphere. Gnanananda, on the other hand seemed incapable of remaining still. He concerned himself directly – too directly, in Vanya's opinion - with the construction work that was going on at that time in the ashram. He allowed people to chatter as much as they liked in his presence, and gave every sign of being interested in what they said. There were also plenty of other things which jarred on our European sadhu. Moreover, not all the visitors were as favourably impressed as he was. There were some who thought they could discern on the guru's face at least a trace of satisfaction when a car turned in and stopped at the gate, especially if someone with a white face got down from it. Others also criticized him for accepting without protest the various legends about his age, his past life, and so on.

Nevertheless, whatever may have been the thoughts at opportune or inopportune moments which passed through Vanya's head, even so when he came, morning and evening, to pay his respects to the Master, and above all when, alone with him, he listened to his words, he could not help feeling convinced that this man was truly the guru of whom he had for so long dreamed, the one who would enable him to clear the crest, if only he was ready to surrender himself to him with unquestioning faith. It was as if they were communicating with each other at a very deep level. The guru's words aroused echoes within him as no other man's words had ever done. It was as if, deep in Vanya's heart, profound secrets were then coming into view, secrets which seemed to be buried in hitherto undiscovered depths. What the guru said vibrated throughout his whole being and set off overtones which were quite wonderful.

In addition, Gnanananda's whole personality radiated a wonderfully pure and tender love, a love which was totally given to each and yet was the same for all. So the joy of feeling loved by him carried with it a high degree of detachment; for we all dream of being loved with a distinct and preferential love. But his love enveloped each one at the same time as if uniquely. You felt that for him all distinction, *bheda*, was annulled and had vanished. In each disciple it was as if he directly perceived his truest personality, the Self alone, the atman.

All this will doubtless seem pure paradox to those who do not know the secret of his highest wisdom, *jnana*, and even more to those - European and Indian alike - whose minds are cluttered up with readymade ideas of which they are naively proud. No philosophy indeed will ever succeed in explaining or understanding the continued existence of personality at the very heart of the experience of non-duality or in the non-reflex awareness of being and the self. Indian *janis* themselves, being prisoners of their own mental categories, will often deny it theoretically in the expressions they use. However, their whole life, and especially the gift of their disinterested love, clearly shows that the personality - or whatever else it is called - has lost nothing essential in attaining to the absolute. Deeper than any awareness that he may have of it, the *jnani* marvelously reflects in himself, as in a mirror that nothing any longer can dull, the very mystery of being, the mystery of *himself*, the mystery of God; and the Spirit, now given free play, realizes through him in the world the secret works known to him alone. Many times Vanya questioned Gnanananda about the role of the guru. But his replies always referred only to the definitive guru, the one who appears at the moment of the darshana of the atman, of the guru who is the very light which shines from the atman when it is finally discovered. 'The guru is *akhanda*, indivisible. He is *advaita*, non-dual. It is only this guru that can make you take the plunge; he appears and is manifested only at the moment when you do plunge. The other kind is the *guru-murti*, the guru in a visible form, the one who can only show the way.'

And that is why disciples never got what they wanted when they asked the guru for the kind of help that would spare them the need for personal effort. The self is only visible to the self, and the true guru is only 'yourself' within your own self.

Vanya one day asked Gnanananda, to whom one could or should communicate this teaching on dhyana.

'Certainly not to everyone,' the Swami replied. 'You have to start from the beginning: prayer, ritual worship, *japa* or continual repetition of the divine name - in a word, *bhakti*. You can only introduce people to the royal road of dhyana when they are capable of it.

'Yes indeed,' said Vanya: 'but my question is just this: Who are capable of it? What are the signs by which you can recognize those who should be invited to commit themselves to that path?'

'The shopkeeper must be able to recognize the things he is selling. If he cannot distinguish pepper corns from mustard seeds, or rice from millet, what is the use of his having a shop? Both salesman and customer would be bound to suffer. It is the same with the guru. He must be capable of discerning what is suitable for each disciple. If not, why does he meddle in such things?'

'Now I am going to explain to you what a guru is,' he continued. 'Suppose you are following a road, going straight ahead beside a river. Suddenly you find yourself face to face with a sheer cliff. No way out. On either side the road is blocked. There is nothing for it but to start climbing. But the cliff is so steep that you are unable to do this. You try and try, but every time you fall back. Then you shout and call for help: *appa, amma, appa, amma*, Daddy, Mummy! just like children do. That is *bhakti* the way of devotion, when you call upon the Lord who can do everything. Then, while you are crying out and bemoaning your fate, you suddenly realize that something has brushed past you. You look round. It is a rope, which has been let down to you from the top of the cliff. There is someone up above you, someone who has already reached the top. He is holding one end of the rope. He shouts down: "Hang on to it, hold tight!" He is the guru. All you have to do is take a good grip and, whatever happens do not let go -*sraddha*, faith... But the guru must have sturdy arms and a strong back, or else the disciple's weight will drag him down, and both will come a cropper,' he added with a smile.

Vanya interrupted him, saying: 'But, Swamiji, you are always telling me that the guru only appears at the moment when the atman has finally been discerned.'

'Yes, of course; that is the *jnana-guru*, the *atma-guru*, who then reveals everything. He says, Look, see! - and then all is seen, and there no longer remains either disciple or guru... only the one who deep down utters the *tat tvam asi*, Thou art That. The other guru of whom we are speaking is the *karana-guru*, the instrumental guru, in whom the real guru begins to take shape as the disciple becomes awake.'

Another time he said 'God has four kinds of client. The first are those who from time to time wake up from their sleep, think about him for a moment, murmur "Lord, Lord", and in no time forget about him and fall asleep again.

The second are genuinely pious. They visit temples, offer pujas, take part in pilgrimage after pilgrimage, sing hymns, practice japa, minister to sadhus - but it is all done with a view to obtaining material blessing, like health, wealth, or social position.

'The third kind are the true bhaktas. They do all that the second kind do, but they do it purely in the hope of obtaining spiritual blessings. Nothing else in this world is of interest to them. They only want God, and God alone.'

'Finally there are those who no longer pray or ask God for anything - not even for God himself. They have no concern even for God himself. These are the jnanis.'

'But if that is so, Swami,' asked Vanya, 'then what difference is there between the *jnani* and the *nasthika*, an atheist or materialist? He also has no desire or need for God.'

'There is none the less a difference, and an important one,' he replied. 'The difference is that the *Jnani* has no desire, either for God or for anything else at all while the *nasthika* wants everything except God!'

'There are the people, who want everything except God, others who want everything and also God, others who want only God, and yet others who, having recognized themselves in God, are no longer capable of any desire, even for god.'

Those who no longer have any desire,  
who are freed from all desire,  
whose every desire has been fulfilled,  
whose sole desire is for the Self;

those whose hearts have been set free  
from all the desires which dwell there,  
who have become immortal,  
who have attained to brahman;

those in whom have been cut  
all the knots of the heart here on earth!

(*Brihad-aranyaka-upanishad* 4.4.6,7; *Katha Up.*6.14,15)

The desires referred to here are by no means abstract or imaginary, but the very concrete and particular desires which at every moment beset the human heart: the desire for a caress or for a good meal, the desire to meet a friend or read a book, the desire to enjoy a marvelous 'heaven'...

Another of Vanya's questions was whether the *jnani* still has an awareness of his *sharira*. The Indian word *sharira* refers to everything in us which is not the *atman* (at least as a preliminary definition, and to avoid falling into the western distinction between the material body and a spiritual mind). *Sharira* includes both body and mind together, the mental faculties as well as the bodily senses. As for the Tamil word, here translated as 'awareness', its precise meaning is 'memory', 'recollection'.

'Yes, he does have that awareness,' replied Gnanananda, 'but in the *atman*, whereas other people have the *recollection* of themselves in their mind, their *manas*. In addition, the *jnani*'s recollection in the *atman* is of all beings. In fact his *sharira* is no longer peculiarly his own. Nothing belongs to him - but at the same time there is nothing that is not his.'

'The same *prana*, breath of life, permeates all beings, In the same way the *atman* is everywhere, and everywhere it is uniquely itself. The *jnani* breathes this "breath", inhaling and exhaling it in each created being. Nowhere is there any difference. Everything is felt by him as "his own".'

Vanya then raised the difficult question: 'Why does the *jnani* always act well?'

No sooner had he asked the question than his mind clearly told him the answer. The reason is that in the *jnani* all *ahamkara*, all centering-on-oneself-in-isolation, all egotism, has disappeared. And egotism is truly the root of all sin.

However, the guru replied with the traditional paradox: 'For the *jnani* there is no longer virtue or sin, good deeds or evil deeds. Sin, virtue, good, evil, are all matters which concern the *sharira*, the *ahamkara*, the consciousness of oneself-in-isolation. Differences and contradictions only appear to those who see duality. Whereas the *jnani* is aware of things only in the non-duality of the *atman*. So in an awareness like his, on what could the perception of good or of evil be based?'



## 7. “Drop the bundle, I shall take you over”

Vanya only had two days left of his stay at Tapovanam. In one of his last conversations with Sri Gnanananda he told him that he sometimes experienced that condition of which the Swami had several times spoken, which he called in Tamil a 'sleep without sleeping', and in English could be called 'waking sleep'. As regards the body it is a similar state to that of ordinary sleep; the same rhythm as in sleep has taken possession of the physical organism, but the consciousness remains amazingly lucid, a simple 'awareness', a simple state of 'being awake', but without any focal point to which this awareness is attached. If any thoughts or mental pictures do occur at this time, they appear and disappear as objects which have absolutely no connection with this deep and essential awareness, in fact rather like dreams.

'That is excellent,' replied the guru. 'But at that moment you still retain the idea, of yourself. Now, that is what at all costs must go. Always penetrate and deeper within, until nothing more is left except pure awareness without any "memory" of yourself. Then the light will shine, the atman will appear. The idea of yourself will be no more than a shadow. What is a shadow? Does it have a real existence? It is the same with all created things, the same with the world. In the light of the atman, all that only appears as consisting of shadow'.

'The atman is within you the ground of all that your body does and perceives, of all that your mind thinks and understands. And you, who are the atman, you are that which nothing can affect.

'It is in the atman and not in the mind that you should be conscious of everything. In the atman we should do our eating, drinking, walking, hearing, reading, writing; all should be done in the light of the atman. In all things the only reality is the atman. All that exists derives its reality from the reality of this atman. All that is seen is seen in its light. All that is heard is heard in the *pranava*, the OM, which is the name of the atman.

'Not to know the atman is the most serious of all illnesses. Ignorance of what is Real is a fever that is more dangerous for the spirit than malaria is for the body. But there is a remedy for this fever, one that is within the reach of everyone. It is available for everyone, I mean, *jnana*, true knowledge, the knowledge of the self, the darshana, vision, of being. This medicine is provided by *dhyana*, silent contemplation within.'

Vanya then said: 'if the cure is so simple, how is it that so few people make use of it?'

'Just see what children do,' replied Gnanananda. 'When they are ill, their mothers prepare a suitable concoction and give it them to drink. But the children don't like the taste. They wave their arms, kick their legs in the air, turn their face away and refuse to open their mouth. If the mother manages somehow to get the into their mouth, they just spit it all out. It is the same with ignorant people who reject wisdom.'

'Wisdom, true knowledge, will never find entrance into anyone against his will. You have to want it, and to want it with your whole heart.'

'Supposing one day you hear that on the other side of the river there is a swami whom everyone praises to the skies. So you want at all costs to have his darshana. You set off - but the river is in the way. There is no way to ford it, and swimming is too dangerous. Then beside the bank you see a ferryman with his boat. You ask him to take you across to the other side.

' "O.K.," he says. "But first, you must drop that bundle. I only take men, not their luggage."

' "Oh no, my bundle! I can't possibly leave it behind. How could I manage without my things? In it there is my food for the journey, my bedding for the night. I have brought flowers and fruit to offer to the

Swami. I have got my holy books which I read every day. After all, my bundle is not so heavy. Look here, ferryman, be reasonable! Take me across just as I am, with what I am carrying. I will pay the full fare."

"Whichever you prefer," replies the ferryman. "The choice is yours. Without your bundle, I take You over; with your bundle you stay here. Which do you want? - the darshana of the Swami, or your old rubbish?"

'So then, when we have dropped our load, we pass over and have the darshana of the atman.'

'Tell me, who can run  
with a load on his head?

What the guru expects of you  
is yourself-  
not what you bought,  
as you went through the market!

Naked you were born;  
only naked can you be reborn  
in the glory of the atman!

He who loses himself finds himself,  
he who loses all finds all!  
He who saves himself loses all,  
and himself into the bargain!'

Finally Gnanananda repeated his favourite sIoka:

'Where there is nothing,  
there indeed is everything.  
Enter into this secret  
and yourself vanish from your own sight;  
then only, in truth, YOU ARE!'