

# Upadesa Tiruvahaval

By Sri Muruganar

*Sri Muruganar composed most of Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai, a work that praises Bhagavan in a series of long poems, in the late 1920s and early 1930s. 'Upadesa Tiruvahaval', the ninth poem of this sequence, is a single continuous verse of just under 200 lines in which Muruganar includes both the story of how he came to Bhagavan and many key teachings that Bhagavan gave him. 'Ahaval' is the Tamil metrical form in which the poem was written, so the title can be translated as 'The Holy Ahaval of Teachings'.*

*The translation and the annotations are the work of Robert Butler, T. V. Venkatasubramanian and David Godman. The line numbers of the original poem appear above the translation and editorial comments are in italics.*

## 1-6

Nowhere upon this earth, composed of continents that the oceans surround, was there anyone possessed of such a dark and deadly understanding as mine. I took the first prize, not even knowing my [real] Self. My wicked mind was stuffed full of habits baser than those of an ignorant beast, and thus I remained.

## 7-15

A mahatma took birth to nurture and cultivate the dignity of man. He has earned deep respect by his adherence to the truth and brings joy to all humanity. It is as if divine love had manifested in human form. He lends strength equally to the motherland [in its search for freedom] and to the individual in his quest for liberation. Such is his greatness. Those who hear the fair name of Gandhi turn in his direction in transports of great joy, prostrate and worship him.

## 16-32

Under the leadership of this great and worthy soul, many, many good people suffered indescribable agony for the sake of the motherland. Yet, though I was aware of this, in my foolishness, I did not renounce all my comforts and volunteer to help their cause. I did not realise that, amongst all the many spiritual disciplines that are worthy of practice, truthfulness is that which most benefits the soul. I spoke contrary to the thoughts I harboured within my mind and thus frittered away my ordained life to no good end. I showed my love solely with words but never knew the joy of offering love through my deeds. I hoarded suffering as if it were wealth, piling it up in the boat [that is the body]. Then, as I lay drifting on the sorrowful ocean of bitter birth, you drew me to you and bound me to your golden feet with the rope of divine grace whose nature is to bestow itself entirely without desire or intention. You watched over me, banishing my slumbers in the differentiated world brought about by *maya*.

*As these introductory lines indicate, prior to coming to Bhagavan, Muruganar was an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi. In the first poem that Muruganar presented to Bhagavan, composed on his way to Ramanasramam in 1923, he even asked why Bhagavan was not working for the country in the way that Gandhi was. Though his respect for Gandhi continued, once Muruganar came to Bhagavan, he took a vow that he would only write about Bhagavan and his teachings.*

## 33-42

However many despicable and disgraceful things I did, you tolerated and forgave them all, consoling me with your love. Though my conduct was baser than that of a dog, you did not reject me with contempt but like an attentive mother you showed me love, and like a father you counselled me with terse and pithy teachings. Alas, is it possible for a fool such as I to grasp in his mind and accurately convey in words those teachings, one who, lacking discrimination, regards as permanent those things that are impermanent, and thus wanders in dread, like a ghost, amongst them?

### 43-48

My Lord, cur that I was, none of my entreaties went in vain as you composed at my request many verses in various meters, according to classical rules, with such ease, as if you were playing a game. Moreover, to fulfil my wish you also composed a song called *Atma Vidya Keerthanam* [*The Song of Self Knowledge*]. Praise be to you!

### 49-56

The company of *rishis* [in the Dharuka forest] had become blind, like owls in the daylight, in the presence of the non-dual sun of true knowledge. With their inner eye of grace obscured, they followed the path shown by the dark ego [declaring that there was no God other than karma]. It was then that you appeared before them, destroyed their arrogance, and taught them how to know reality. These instructions that you gave them then, you later reiterated to us your devotees in the form of a series of explanatory verses [*Upadesa Undiyar*]. Praise be to you!

### 57-62

Not stopping at that, when I further asked you, 'Please tell me how the bondage of birth and death may be severed for me, your devotee,' you gave to us the divine work *Ulladu Narpadu* that clearly reveals the means by which the bond of the false ego may be severed and reality shine as the Self.

### 63-66

'Desire itself is birth, and desire's extinction is liberation, where bliss supreme surges ever unabated!' Praise be to you who, as my Guru, came to rule my entire clan, and from whose mouth these words of grace flowered!

*This is an idea that can be traced back to verse 361 of the Tirukkural, a work that Muruganar was particularly fond of: 'Desire, they say, is the seed that engenders unceasing birth to all jivas at all times.'*

*Muruganar himself expanded on this idea in lines 242-43 of 'Ramana Puranam', the first poem of Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai: '...desire became the seed that engendered the never-ending succession of births, bringing into existence the great and evil tree that is the illusion of birth [and death].'*

### 67-68

Praise be to you who declared: 'Cling firmly to That which clings to nothing, so that a firm attachment [to That] ensues.'

*This particular upadesa from Bhagavan was recorded in a more expanded form in Padamalai, p. 78:*

- 123** *Hold onto the path of holding onto the one who has no attachments. By holding onto this path of holding on, you rid yourself of [those attachments] that hold you to the world.*
- 124** *By holding tightly to the one who has no attachments, your attachment to the non-Self will go away. When that [attachment to the non-Self] has gone, holding on tightly to the one who has no attachments will also cease, and all attachments will come to an end.*

### 69-74

Praise be to you who merged me into consciousness' expanse with these golden words: 'Apart from you there is no world; those co-dependent entities, God and the *jiva*, both are not! Accordingly you are yourself the undivided reality!'

Praise be to you who stated: 'The world, the *jiva* and God, whilst apparently existing, are simply thought forms, nothing more!'

*Muruganar revised this poem after its first publication and the current version in the Tamil edition of Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai is not the final draft. In Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham, volume nine, p. 373, Muruganar wrote that lines seventy-five to ninety-eight of the published work should be replaced by the following lines. Since Muruganar asked that they be inserted at this point, we have numbered them 75a-101a to distinguish them from the lines that are printed in Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai.*

#### 75a-76a

‘The place where *ullal* [thought] arises and subsides is *ullam* [the Heart].’ Thus you gave out the meaning of *ullam*. Praise be to you!

*These two lines and the lines that follow are an expansion on and an explanation of the first invocatory verse of Ulladu Narpadu. Since this verse is an extensive play on the Tamil syllable ‘ul’, which is the root form of a verb meaning ‘to be’, the original Tamil words that contain this syllable have been retained.*

*This is what Prof. K. Swaminathan wrote about this invocatory verse:*

*The first stanza, woven out of pure Tamil words, is an emphatic assertion of the oneness of being, awareness and the Heart. It dwells lovingly on the Tamil root ul common to being, thinking, heart and inner space, all associated with indivisible oneness and wholeness. The verb ul (to be) which admits of no past or future tense, is repeated eight times, the word ullam (the heart) thrice, ullu (to think) thrice, and unarvu (feeling) twice; thus the venba as a whole, through sound, suggestion and explicit statement, pulls the mind inward to the very heart of being-awareness.<sup>1</sup>*

#### 77a-78a

You declared: ‘Since *ulladu* [reality] exists in *ullam* [the Heart] *ulladu* [reality] itself may be said to be *ullam* [the Heart].’ Praise be to you!

*Ulladu, translated here as ‘reality’, is a combination of the syllables ‘ulla’ meaning ‘is’ and ‘adu’ meaning ‘that’. A more literal translation would therefore be ‘that-which- is’. Ulladu Narpadu (‘narpadu’ means ‘forty’) could therefore be literally translated as ‘Forty [on] That-which-is’.*

#### 79a-80a

You also declared: ‘As the experience “*nam ullam*” [“we are”] exists [there], it can be termed *ullam* [the Heart].’

*In addition to meaning ‘the Heart’, ullam is also the first person plural form of the verb ‘to be’ – ‘we are’. Muruganar has commented on this combination of meanings in an explanatory note he wrote on verse 966 of Guru Vachaka Kovai:*

*The one reality, Atma-swarupa, exists and shines in the Heart, one without a second. Appearing as if it is many, it shines as ‘I-I’ in every individual being, who seem to be many because of upadhis [limiting ideas and associations]. Therefore, the plural term ullam [meaning] ‘we are’ is appropriate. Because the Heart is the place for the existing and shining of the Atma-swarupa, in Tamil the Heart is known as ullam. The word ullam here gives both meanings simultaneously.<sup>2</sup>*

*Though, in modern Tamil, the ‘am’ suffix in ullam indicates the first person plural (‘we are’), in older Tamil ullam could also be taken to be the singular form, ‘am’ or ‘I am’. Thus ullam, serendipitously, can be taken to be both ‘I am’ and ‘the Heart’. Sadhu Om made this connection in his*

---

<sup>1</sup> Ramana Maharshi, K. Swaminathan, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Padamalai, p. 31.

comment on verse 712 of Guru Vachaka Kovai: ‘Since the Tamil word “ullam”, which means “Heart”, also means “am” – the shining of the Reality, “I” – the Reality is called by the name “ullam”.’<sup>3</sup>

### 81a-82a

You declared: ‘Ullaporul [that which exists], which gets the name ‘ullam’, is not a thought form.’ Praise be to you!

*Here is a transliteration of the first benedictory verse, split into its component words, followed by an English translation. The ‘ul’ syllables have been highlighted in bold:*

**ulladu** aladu **ulla** unarvu **ulladu** o  
**ullaporul** **ullal** ara **ullatte** **ullataal** – **ullam** enum  
**ullaporul** **ullal** evan **ullatte** **ullapadi**  
**ullade** **ullal** unar

*Could there be a being-consciousness existing apart from that which [eternally] is? Since that reality exists in the Heart, free of thought, who could meditate upon that reality, called the Heart? Know that to remain within the Heart, as it is, is truly to meditate [upon the Heart].*

*The ‘ul’ sounds listed here are pronounced with the tongue bent back, with the underside of its tip touching the top of the palate, not the back of the teeth. This gives the sound a strong nasal component. When the verse is chanted, the repeated nasal ‘ul’ sounds punctuate the verse as a leitmotiv, repeatedly emphasising its principal theme that being is both the fundamental nature of the Self and the means by which it can be experienced.*

*With its elegant play on the syllable ‘ul’ and its strict metrical form, the first invocatory verse is now widely regarded as being a literary tour de force. The following appreciative comments, recorded by Kunju Swami, come from a distinguished Tamil scholar:*

*Once, while going on a pilgrimage, I [Kunju Swami] visited various maths before ending up at Peraiyur Santhalinga Math. At that time Veerasubbia Swamigal was resting there because he was not well. When I went and had his darshan, he made kind enquiries about the welfare of Sri Bhagavan and the ashram in general. He also looked into the notebook I had with me. Seeing in it the verses of Ulladu Narpadu written beautifully by Sri Bhagavan himself, he asked me to read them out to him. He appreciated the first benedictory verse so much, he asked me to read it three times.*

*After the third reading he remarked, ‘This is a very profound verse. Not only that, all the elegant features of prosody are in it. Until now I was under the impression that your swami was an adept only in “keeping still”, but now I discover that he is also a superb writer of fine poetry. The venba is itself a difficult metre that few poets dare attempt. Bhagavan has composed all forty-two verses in this metre and used them to convey the most abstruse philosophical ideas. Crowning them all, though, is this first invocatory verse.’<sup>4</sup>*

### 83a-92a

You declared: ‘Consciousness of reality and consciousness of the things around us do not exist apart from that reality.’ Praise be to you!

‘Therefore, the place where everything exists is the Heart.’ This you declared. Praise be to you!

You declared: ‘Since those who have [truly] seen see nothing other than their own Self, thinking [of something other than the Self] is inconsistent [with that state].’ Praise be to you!

You declared: ‘Unless one reaches the throne of the Heart, it is impossible to see the brilliant light of reality.’ Praise be to you!

<sup>3</sup> Sadhu Om’s translation was published for the first time in September 2005. The whole text can also be found at [www.davidgodman.org](http://www.davidgodman.org).

<sup>4</sup> *The Power of the Presence*, part two, 78-79.

You declared, 'If one dives within and reaches the place of its arising, thought, which is of the nature of the individual self, will cease to be'. Praise be to you!

### 93a-101a

Therefore, individual selves, who have no other form than thought, can only imagine with the false mind the reality that is free from thought forms, but they cannot think of it as it really is. Just as reality dwells within the Heart, free from thought forms, when the individual self dwells, in the same way, within the Heart, free from thought forms, that is meditation on reality. Thus did you explain it to us. Praise be to you!

*The next section comes from Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham, volume 9, p. 306. Muruganar wrote these lines (which we have numbered 'insert 1-16') after the original poem had been published in Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai. He left a note in his papers that stated they should be included at this point in the poem. While the preceding section records an explanation of the teachings expounded in the invocatory verse of Ulladu Narpadu, these new lines take up the subject matter of the second invocatory verse.*

*The verse itself says:*

*Those people who have a deep fear of death will, for their protection, take refuge at the holy feet of Lord Siva, he who is without both birth and death. In thus taking refuge [in Him] they suffered their own death. For them, in this deathless state, will the thought of death remain?*

### Insert 1-16

'Only those whose minds are extremely shaken by the fear of death are fit to undertake the path of crossing [the ocean of *samsara*]. They are the ripe and competent persons.' Out of love you declared this to me, my Father.

Those who cling as their supreme refuge to the feet, girt with warrior's anklets, of the Lord who is beyond birth and death, who chastised even the god of death for the sake of his devotee [Markandeya], will, as the fruit of that clinging, be brought under his power. Their inner attachment, consisting of the ego, will be destroyed, along with all the other attachments which depend on the ego. The seed of the ego will not be able to sprout within them as before. They will become absorbed in the Heart, and will abide as the truth of their own Self. It is inconsistent for the thought of death to arise in those whose ego is dead. Thus did you declare. Praise be to you!

Thus, declaring 'That is the state of immortality,' did you graciously impart in words this ambrosial teaching to the soul of myself, your devotee. Praise be to you!

*When Markandeya's father was childless, he prayed to Siva to give him a son. Siva appeared before him and offered him the choice of having either a dull-witted boy who would live a full span of life, or an intelligent, devoted son who would not survive past the age of sixteen. The father chose to have the intelligent, devoted son. When Markandeya was sixteen, Yama, the god of death, came to collect him and attempted to catch him by throwing a rope around him. The rope bound Markandeya to the lingam he was worshipping at the time. Siva, who took this to be a personal insult, appeared and killed Yama by kicking him. However, Siva later relented and brought Yama back to life. In order to keep Markandeya alive, without allowing the terms of the original boon to lapse, Siva ordained that he would remain as a sixteen-year-old for the rest of his life.*

*The teachings that Muruganar recorded in insert 1-16 are very similar to an explanation of the second benedictory verse that Bhagavan gave to David McIver:*

**Bhagavan:** *The second stanza [the second invocatory verse of Ulladu Narpadu] is in praise of God with attributes. In the foregoing [the first benedictory verse] to be as [the] one Self is mentioned; in the present one, surrender to the Lord of all.*

*Furthermore, the second indicates (1) the fit reader (2) the subject matter (3) the relationship and (4) the fruit. The fit reader is the one who is competent for it. Competence consists in non-attachment to the world and desire to be liberated.*

*All know that they must die at some time or other; but they do not think deeply about the matter. All have a fear of death; such fear is momentary. Why fear death? Because of the I-*

*am-the-body idea. All are fully aware of the death of the body and its cremation. That the body is lost in death is well known. Owing to the I-am-the-body notion, death is feared as being the loss of oneself. Birth and death pertain to the body only; but they are superimposed on the Self, giving rise to the delusion that birth and death relate to the Self.*

*In the effort to overcome birth and death man looks up to the Supreme Being to save him. Thus are born faith and devotion to the Lord. How to worship Him? The creature is powerless and the Creator is all-powerful. How to approach Him? To entrust oneself to His care is the only thing left for him; total surrender is the only way. Therefore he surrenders himself to God. Surrender consists in giving up oneself and one's possessions to the Lord of Mercy. Then what is left over for the man? Nothing – neither himself nor his possessions. The body, liable to be born and die, having been made over to the Lord, the man need no longer worry about it. Then birth and death cannot strike terror. The cause of fear was the body; it is no longer his; why should he fear now? Or where is the identity of the individual to be frightened?*

*Thus the Self is realised and bliss results. This is then the subject matter [of the verse]: freedom from misery and gain of happiness. This is the highest good to be gained. Surrender is synonymous with bliss itself. This is the relationship.*

*Fruit is to reflect on the subject matter and gain knowledge which is ever-present, here and now. The stanza ends with 'the immortal ones'.<sup>5</sup>*

*The remaining lines come from the original published version of 'Upadesa Tiruvahaval'.*

#### 99-108

*Maya is only the mind persisting vigorously in the form of thoughts. The destruction of the mind is the attainment of jnana. Thus did you declare to me, mean and pitiable as I was, giving me comfort and clear understanding. Praise be to you!*

*You taught: 'To enquire what the mind is with the mind is the means to destroy the mind.' Praise be to you!*

*You declared: 'Instead of directly realising the Self that lies within the five bodily sheaths, to search to the very end of the many scriptures, which only give good advice, is pointless and a waste.' Praise be to you!*

*This is probably a reference to an upadesa Bhagavan gave in Who Am I?*

**Question:** *Is it any use reading books for those who long for release?*

**Bhagavan:** *All the texts say that in order to attain release one should render the mind quiescent; therefore their conclusive teaching is that the mind should be rendered quiescent; once this has been understood there is no need for endless reading. In order to quieten the mind one has only to enquire within oneself what one's Self is; how could this search be done in books? One should know one's Self with one's own eye of wisdom. The Self is within the five sheaths; but books are outside them. Since the Self has to be enquired into by discarding the five sheaths, it is futile to search for it in books. There will come a time when one will have to forget all that one has learned.<sup>6</sup>*

#### 109-114

*'Bondage is merely the thought of the pairs of opposites,' you assured me, impressing it upon my mind. Praise be to you!*

*Father, you bade me, worthless as I was, to utter with a collected mind the words: 'Siva! Siva!' Praise be to you! [Adding], 'If you examine to whom those thoughts belong, bondage will cease.' Praise be to you!*

---

<sup>5</sup> Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 567.

<sup>6</sup> Who am I?, question and answer 23.

*Though Bhagavan rarely gave out mantras, when he did, he generally recommended 'Siva, Siva'. Muruganar himself was given this mantra by Bhagavan, as were several other devotees including Annamalai Swami, the brother of Rangan (who was one of Bhagavan's childhood friends) and an unknown harijan.*

### 115-118

You declared: 'If you investigate who is he that is in bondage, it will be found that there is no one in bondage. Thus bondage is not, and consequently, liberation also is not.' Praise be to you!

*The source of these four lines is probably Ulladu Narpadu verse 39:*

*Only so long as one thinks like a madman, 'I am a bound one,' will thoughts of bondage and liberation remain. But, seeing oneself, 'Who is this bound one?' the eternally liberated and ever-attained Self alone will exist. When the thought of bondage cannot remain, can the thought of liberation still remain?<sup>7</sup>*

### 119-122

'Realisation of the ever-present Self is the greatest attainment [*siddhi*],' you clearly told me. Praise be to you!

'That is the true attainment, that is liberation and that is *jnana*,' you declared. Praise be to you!

*This is a summary of some of the ideas that are contained in Ulladu Narpadu, verse 35. It should be remembered that the teachings contained in Ulladu Narpadu were originally given to Muruganar, generally in response to specific topics suggested by Muruganar himself.*

*To know and to be – with the mind subsided – the reality which is ever-attained, is the [true] *siddhi*. All other *siddhis* are *siddhis* that are acquired in a dream; when one wakes up from sleep, will they be real? Will they who, by abiding in the true state, are rid of the false [state], be deluded [by *siddhis*]? Know and be you [the reality].<sup>8</sup>*

### 123-134

You declared: 'As there is nothing whatsoever to cause fear [in the Self], it is foolish to get frightened.' Praise be to you!

'Those who have known this state will subside [in the Self], and will not become embroiled in and perplexed by this impermanent world.' Thus did you explain the state [of *jivan mukti*] and how it connects with the body. Praise be to you!

Ignorant as I was, this did I clearly grasp. Praise be to you!

You declared: 'When anger arises, vent your anger upon the anger itself, for it is your enemy, and destroy it.' Praise be to you!

'Do not associate [with others] simply because they praise you. Rather, value their abuse.' Praise be to you!

You declared: 'Value the very ones who vilify you as though they were your dearest friends.' Praise be to you!

*Bhagavan expounded on some of these ideas when he spoke to a visitor:*

*Yesterday a newly arrived Andhra youth told Bhagavan about the vagaries of his senses to which Bhagavan said, 'All that is due to the mind. Set it right.' 'That is all right, Swami, but however much I try to reduce this anger, it comes on again and again. What shall I do?' said the poor boy.*

---

<sup>7</sup> Ulladu Narpadu, verse 39.

<sup>8</sup> Ulladu Narpadu Kalivenba, tr. Sadhu Om. *The Mountain Path*, 1981, p. 222.

*'Oh, is that so? Then get angry with that anger; it will be all right,' said Bhagavan. All the people in the hall burst out laughing. A person who gets angry with everything in the world, if only he introspects and enquires why he does not get angry with his anger itself, will he really not overcome all anger?*

*Two or three years back a devotee who could freely approach Bhagavan came and told him five or six times that somebody had been abusing him. Bhagavan listened but said nothing. As there was no response from Bhagavan in spite of repeated and varied complaints and in a number of ways, this devotee could not contain himself any longer and so said, 'When I am abused so much unnecessarily, I also get angry. However much I try to restrain my anger, I am not able to do so. What shall I do?'*

*Bhagavan laughingly said, 'What should you do? You too join him and abuse yourself; then it will be all right.' All laughed.*

*That devotee, unable to understand anything, said, 'That is very good! Should I abuse myself?'*

*'Yes indeed! What they are abusing is your body, isn't it? What greater enemy is there than this body which is the abode of anger and similar feelings? It is necessary that we ourselves should hate it. Instead of that, when we are unguarded, if anybody abuses us, we should know that they are waking us up. We should realise at least then and join them in abusing the body, and crying it down. What is the use of counter-abuse? Those who abuse us that way should be looked upon as our friends. It is good for us to be among such people. If you are among people who praise you, you get deceived,' said Bhagavan.<sup>9</sup>*

### 135-136

*'The rights you have, others also have; the rights others do not have, you do not have either.'*

*Muruganar also recorded this particular teaching in Guru Vachaka Kovai, verse 817:*

*If others have some right, then only should one avail oneself of that right. If some right is denied to others, it would be wrong for one to avail oneself of it.*

### 137-140

Praise be to you, Lord of the Vedas, who declared on many occasions: 'The Heart where the "I" thought does not arise is the Self, the undivided supreme Reality', thus clearly revealing the nature of the middle state.

*'The middle state' is the one experienced between the waking and sleeping states. This is Bhagavan's description of it:*

***Bhagavan:*** *The ego in its purity is experienced in the intervals between two states or between two thoughts. The ego is like the worm which leaves hold only after it catches another. Its true nature is known when it is out of contact with objects or thoughts. You should realise the interval as the abiding unchanging reality, your true being, through the conviction gained by the study of the three states, jagrat [waking], swapna [dreaming] and sushupti [sleep].<sup>10</sup>*

### 141-154

*'Those who have seen their own Self do not see others; those who see others do not see their own Self.' Thus did you fully explain the glorious state of mauna, Glorious One, you who wear a warrior's noble anklets!*

*'Banish your harmful anxieties by entrusting everything to the all-powerful Lord,' you declared. Praise be to you!*

---

<sup>9</sup> *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam, 26th January 1946.*

<sup>10</sup> *Maharshi's Gospel, pp. 25-26.*

You declared: 'Those who understand the true meaning of the scriptures will describe the world of the senses and the beings within it as real, when viewed from the standpoint of cause, and unreal, when viewed from the standpoint of effect. There is really no contradiction here. Both these views, made by those of mature understanding, are consistent with each other.' Praise be to you!

You declared: 'As the mind [in following either of the views] does not become externalised, but abides as the Self, the end result is also the same.' Praise be to you!

*'Cause' in these lines refers to the unmanifest Self and 'effect' the world of names and forms. The world is real when it is known to be Self alone, and unreal when it is merely perceived as separate objects. Muruganar made the same point in verses nineteen and twenty of Guru Vachaka Kovai:*

### 19

*Since the cause itself [reality] appears as the effect [the world], and because consciousness – the cause of this vast world described by the sastras as being merely names and forms – is a truth as obvious as the nelli fruit on one's palm, it is proper to term this great world 'real'.<sup>11</sup>*

### 20

*The worlds that are described as being either three or fourteen are real when seen from the point of view of the primal cause [Brahman] because they have unceasing existence as their [real] nature. However, when attention is paid only to the names and forms, the effect, even the undecaying cause, the plenitude, will appear to be non-existent, a void.*

### 155-164

Demonstrating that freedom from desire is the virtuous path, you drove away all my evil desires. Praise be to you!

At the mere thought of you, you entered my Heart, becoming nectar for my mind. Praise be to you!

You revealed that the ambrosial essence of all learning is to know the state of the Self, the enduring substratum of all the worlds that appear as an illusion before the mass of beings, and the nature of whose phenomena cannot be ascertained even by the greatest minds. Praise be to you!

### 165-176

Glory to the teacher who confers the true attainment of *jnana* by destroying the infatuation that consists in the forgetting [of the Self]!

Glory to you who revealed clearly that true attainment as my own Self, the indivisible light!

Glory to you who appeared first as God, then as Guru in the middle stage, and who finally dwelt as my Self!

Glory to you who dwelt as my own Self, the ocean of bliss that is worthy of my devotion!

Glory to you, the teacher who, in an excess of love, took pity on me, worthless as I was, and explained to me in words the nature of the true reality, a teaching which you conveyed to the mature ones through the lofty state of *mauna*!

### 177-186

But did it end with this verbal teaching? No, you also bestowed your grace upon me, enabling me to abide in that state. Praise be to you!

You dragged me into the Heart, so that I expired in the Siva-ocean of true *jnana*. Praise be to you!

As I lie dying in that ocean, what fitting recompense can I offer to your holy feet? Praise be to you!

---

<sup>11</sup> 'Nelli' is the Tamil name for a small green fruit that physically resembles a gooseberry. It is known elsewhere in India as 'amla'. In many parts of India people say, 'It's as obvious as the amla on one's palm' when they mean that something is clear, easily perceived and irrefutable. In *Atma Vidya* Bhagavan wrote: 'Even for the most infirm, so real is the Self that compared with it the amla in one's hand appears a mere illusion.' (*Collected Works*, p. 132)

May you gladly accept as that recompense the merging of my unruly mind with your ankleted feet.  
Praise be to you!

May your golden feet flourish!  
May your golden grace flourish!  
Venkata, may your golden fame flourish!