

TIRUMANGAI ĀḶVĀR

TIRUK-KURUN-TĀṆḶAKAM

In the present article is attempted an elucidation of his initiation, progress and staff of help on the path. The divine is the Ācārya, the means and the support of Yoga or realisation or liberation. This is the central truth sung in the Tāṇḍakas. A *daṇḍaka* is a small staff which is used by mountaineers and old or decrepit or sickly persons as a help to walk or ascend. That the Divine is a veritable support to the individual, though He is the being on whom all beings depend is what all philosophies of religion teach. But the āḷvār emphasises that this support is true, is loving and not a mere material stick but a most powerful supreme Being whose whole being is one of love for the creatures. God is love, a supporting love. Once one has found this love-staff one cannot leave it or live apart from it.

Thus the āḷvār opines

"I, who am His slave cannot leave Him, who is the treasure, one likened to pillar of coral, who is the gradually attainable goal of all those who remember Him, who ended the life of Kaṁsa, who is the ruler of the universe, who remembers His devotees, Who loving me has come and entered my mind so that it could humble itself and praise Him." (Tiruk-kurun-tāṇḍa-kam 1).

The world's support is He, so is He called the self of all the world with all its elements. It is indeed He who saves the world from the activities of the evil forces. In one word, He is the saviour being the Self of all. Thus He is one who has all auspicious qualities, the qualities that are the ideals on man which man deems to be intrinsic to the core of real being which he seeks to know.

He is the Self of all and has to be meditated upon as such. Meditate on Him with all His auspicious attributes, Him who is the Self of the world composed of earth, water, fire and air. Who is like the Bull who destroyed the terrible Rākṣasa-king of Laṅkā with his hosts, who like god is agreeable, whose jewel-light-likeness grants ecstasy and is sweet like nectar, who is the protector who slew Hiraṇyakaśipu.

Having meditated on the Lord in this manner on getting the first glimpse of the Lord one offers the prayer or salutation. The āḷvār thus saluted the Lord:

My lord, My father who churned the vast deep ocean of milk with the big mountain (Mandara) for getting nectar for the Devas, (Him) I bowed to the beautiful Lord of *Tirumāl-Irum śōḷai malai* surrounded by thick bamboo -woods detracting the Sun's course.

The āḷvār describes his experience of divine absorption:

I seek one thing (alone); When I experienced in dream the Lord of the dark-colour of the Kāya flower, who in his boar-form carried the earth, coming to me and consuming my mind, speech, acts, and faith, exceedingly i Became one who had lost all attraction to other things.

By this conversion of the consciousness which in fact is the event of greatest significance when the Divine has taken up the *sādhana*, so to speak by filling the mind, body, acts and faith of the individual, a fact significantly mentioned by Tondar-adip-podi āḷvār in the opening verse of his *Tirumālai* there arises a new love:

I have begun to live anew by placing my love in Him who is Lord of all, assuming absolute servitude to Him out of love which was even like the waters which merge as the red hot iron furiously devours them. To me who am enjoying the coming rain-cloud in my mind even like the sugar-cane juice, would it be sweet.

The āḷvār thus enjoys the unique experience of consuming love of God and asks himself how people who are consumed by such love speak or pray and live.

Those slaves who praise Him, the all-lord, head-ornament of the Eternals, the Great One Being among the three, who got the world (as gift), the ruler who is residing at *Tiruk-Kuṇḍanḍai*, who is like the blue-stone heap, who listens to the musical poems of Āḷvār!, who is like honey to taste, who is beautiful like yellow-gold, what shall they say and how live?

And he seems to answer it by mentioning that the only duty is to keep their feet on one's head, remember constantly the supreme qualities of the Lord who is supporting them, for, by this is got the delight of self-knowledge here and transcendent knowledge in the higher worlds, or rather the highest world.

Fit indeed to be on my head are the feet of those who having sought refuge in Him, remember His supreme quality of supporting them; (in Him); who grant the delight of self-knowledge (here) and of the transcendent (there), who is the truth of liberation, who resides in *Tiruvarāṅgam*, and who in each Yuga taking an appropriate Form resides eminently at Tiru- Veṅgaḍam.

The āḷvār through this realisation of the Lord who resides in Tiruvēṅgaḍam speaks of a life devoted to Him and refuge in Him as true living. This is real birth and real life, not the human birth, the birth in the perishable body, of uncertain knowledge.

Seeking refuge in Him who has the colour of the rain-cloud, who, being in love, is enjoyable like the honey that flows from the hives in the Mountain, the All-supreme, there is no such thing as non-living.

You think that human birth is good. Ponder! Alas, each person seeks to preserve

his life in the body without possessing any fixed knowledge.

Just as the cloud attains the unsupported sky, so also hast Thou supported me who has no other way.

The Lord is the unsupported supporter. He is the independent on whom all can depend or do depend. The human mind is unsteady and the knowledge of the previous births vouchsafed to the āṣṭvār now makes him languish like the ant set upon the burning fire which eats away the wood without noise. God is the only companion in such a consuming experience. The soul becomes aware of the one 'superior companion' the unneating one of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣada*, as the constant presence through lives, the inseparable friend, and guide. It is the recognition of the Supreme Oversoul that is got when one transcends the present bodily experience and knows the inward immortality of the soul through births. Śrī Kṛṣṇa indeed told Arjuna about this: *bahūni mē vyatitāni jammāni tava cārjuna: tānya aham vēda sarvāṇi na tvaṃ vēttha parantapa.* Gītā IV.5. Surrender to the Lord and getting support from the Lord lead to the dissolution of the egoism of the present life and restore the continuity-consciousness of lives lived, and more, the supreme knowledge and experience of the Divine Lord, the eternal inseparable (*apṛthaksiddha*) Companion (*sakhā*) and Lord, as the one unpassing friend while every one else, everything else has left. One recognises the lustrous person in all states. One is almost in the direct presence of the Inner Self (Vāmana), the lustrous person in all states.

Thus says the āṣṭvār:

My mind is steady in nothing. My mind languishes like the ant set upon the burning fire which eats away the wood without noise.

Therefore O omniscient Lord of all gods, who assume sovereignty of the Universe (as Vāmana Trivikrama) lustrous person in all states, am I without any companion.

Again

My sinful-soul's mind refuses to be concentrated. What shall I do? O Lord, grant me devotion for Thee; Cool like pearl, luminous supremely like the greenstone, whose colour is like that of the rain-cloud illumined by lightning, I know naught else but the feet of my Master.

The only way to get rid of the possible causes of the mental distresses is to praise the lotus-feet of the Lord. There seems to be no other method or means. If doubt subsists about its efficacy the only way to get rid of doubt is to put the matter to the test as it has been counselled by all those who had trodden the path to faith and purity and peace.

Is it possible for one to get rid of one's mental distress after knowing the manner of praising Thee and prostrating at Thy feet?

I shall praise Thee alone who art spoken of as the unfailing wealth and supreme light.

Mental distresses are caused by lack of wealth or the loss of wealth and darkness or relative darkness. The light of lesser luminosity becomes dark looking before the light of higher luminosity. Before this *param jyōtis* all the lights of lesser luminosity like the Sun lose brilliance and appear to be shadows of that supreme light. To one therefore who has consecrated oneself to the worship and praise of that unfailing wealth and supreme light, the distress arising from the twin-causes of wealth and darkness can never remain. For the praise is the sole and complete means for the response of the divine Lord:

When I who am in a dirty body became sinful, through praises of others with my foul tongue,
(Then) the supreme Lord residing in Śrīraṅgaṃ out of love spoke the eternal Name to me
who was afraid caught up in the senses, and displayed kindness and coming to my place appeared within my eyes.

The Lord's kindness represented here is extraordinary even for Gods. He gave the teaching of eternal Name—the redeeming word—He came out of His own accord and revealed Himself in the inner eye or vision. An outer object could be dismissed or avoided from being looked at: but an inner vision is an eternal possession. God's *nirhetuka*-grace is the supreme quality of Divine Love.

By this Vision, granted out of the grace of the Divine of Himself, there has occurred purification. Even like the other ālvārs, especially Tiruppān ālvār, Tirumangai after this experience-Vision refuses to see anything else. All else have become as if non-existent to the eye:

Perceiving unceasingly the Lord residing at the great Śrīraṅgaṃ surrounded by gardens full of trees, who is sweet like sugar-cane juice, my eyes refuse to see any thing else.

This is the one cause of the soul's ceasing to scoff at the Lord or speak with atheism in their minds about His greatness, this vision of the Divine is the true beginning of the faith that is the raft to cross over the oceanic expanse of saṃsāra. Not Yoga nor steady seat nor prāṇāyāma grants this fixity of mind but His grace that cuts our sins, touches and cleanses our tongues and grants the Vision of the most nectar-dyed, attractive form alone can salvage man and his soul. Worship of God, to chant His name, to sing His praise, to all forms of His, are the ways and the means to this intimacy of Vision, and the Kingdom Eternal, the resplendent abode of Bliss.