

Rivulets of the
Absolute



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The remedies as well as all spiritual practices detailed are not intended for self application or self practice, without proper initiation.

To the GURU,
who is truly this book's author,
scribe of my life, and
redeemer of my spirit.

“Our very presence is reflected everywhere and in everything. And everywhere and everything resonates in us. Springing from Itself and falling back on Itself; Creation, Sustenance, and Destruction end. There is no self at all.”

—Siddha Healer Pal Pandian

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Blessings From the Master



Nowadays, not only is it hard to find a Master, but it is also hard to find a disciple. Even in Eastern countries, proper receptacles are scarce due to the modern-day lifestyle. This mechanical and acquisition-oriented approach shows itself in the many new-age trends. Steve is a rare disciple, gifted with humble receptivity and a genuine learning spirit. Ancient Tamil Siddha tradition is not commonly available even in its region of origin, as it demands a courageous mind, free of prejudice. Why would a courageous mind be required? In my Siddha lineage, we do not offer any theory before or alongside the practices we teach. The purpose of this is that the practitioner should arrive at the theory by way of his own insightful experiences during the journey of the practice. Of course, the mind is always afraid of treading in the dark, for the dark is an unknown path—as if one were traveling without a map. One should be aware of his

own proprioceptive language and learn to rely upon the inner guru. This is our way.

Steve's surrendering heart and his trust in me have allowed him to make this journey steadfastly. The vital principle of the Siddha system that differentiates it from other spiritual paths is the quality of feeling the divine in day-to-day life, what my lineage refers to as fusion of the Absolute in the Temporal. Most other spiritual paths teach how to dissolve into the Source, whereas the Siddhas speak of bringing the Breath of the Absolute into the Temporal. This is symbolized by the dancing Siva, Lord Natarajar, rather than the static depiction of Lord Siva in a meditative posture. For this the Siddhas have created many platforms, such as tantra, alchemy, martial arts, healing, and Vasi yogam.

Vasi yogam is the unique aspect of the Siddha tradition. Vasi is the breath of Existence, and Vasi yogam is about learning how that breath is in the temporal level and how it is in the unmanifested Absolute.

Even in Tamil Nadu, many Siddha teachers teach pranayama or kriya yoga, attempting to place them under the banner of Vasi yogam. However, even now, the authenticity of the teachings of Vasi yogam remain only within the oral lineage. All available yoga practices cultivate a motive for becoming, but the authentic Vasi yogam begins with the breath of Being-ness.

There is a popular saying in Tamil Nadu: "If your heart were a rose, then your thoughts would be fragrant." Steve's writings

fulfill this saying. And I am proud to say that he is the first disciple of the oral lineage who has carried these Siddha teachings beyond India by bringing them to the United States. I am even more glad to say that, in all the years through all of the various hardships, he has not wavered even once.

The Siddhas' blessings be ever with him.

ARUNACHALA SIVA
Pal Pandian

Preface



The first time that we fall in love, usually as a young teenager, we all feel its novelty. Consumed in the uniqueness of first love, we think of little else. We focus attention solely on the object of our affection. This same thrill of attentive, devoted passion enabled this book to come about. That it was awakened and sustained in me by my teacher is a testament to the grace of the guru.

When Siddha Healer Pal Pandian asked me to write this book and detail the tradition of the Tamil Siddhas, I had no idea how to begin. Looking back, it now seems rather funny. Even then, I knew that for all humankind's traditions that span medicine, healing, yoga, internal alchemy, external alchemy, astrology, martial arts, tantric knowledge, gnana yoga (the path of wisdom), and so forth, their common source and origin lies within the tradition of the Siddhas. Why the hesitancy, when all I had to do was start at the beginning? The reason lay not in

the content but rather in how to communicate this most ancient wisdom. Furthermore, the wisdom never, with one notable exception, had been written about with authority. The task of putting written form to an oral tradition that contained all of the fundamental secrets of existence overwhelmed me.

Only after I had completed or, more accurately, attempted a large portion of the writing, did Pal gently offer his guidance.

“It’s fine, what you have written. But I cannot feel you in the words. Please simply write what you have experienced. What you have come to know for yourself. A little theory, of course, will be necessary to explain our various aspects. But still, it should only be what you know and in your own words.”

Up to that point, I had been trying very hard to keep myself out of the writing, feeling that my experiences would be of little value to other people. However, from that point onward, the writing flowed with ease and gave me such joy that every day I was astounded to find its undiminished quality.

Western societies have developed a strong hunger for the practices of the East, especially yoga and meditation. When we gain what is thought of as success in the West, in those countries that are rich in possessions, our feeling of dissatisfaction propels some of us to seek something more. This alone shows that whatever is gained externally will never be enough to fully satisfy us. From this, we learn the beautifully valuable lesson that what is truly sought can only be found within. In order to achieve

the goal of the internal journey, one must be led by the most accurate map. This ensures that the quickest route is traversed.

Although the Siddhas represent the least known and most mysterious ancient tradition in all of India, They first discovered and mastered all of the various healing and spiritual methods. Throughout history, all who have practiced yoga, meditation, tantra, mantra, healing, and so forth have embarked on paths laid out by the Tamil Siddhas thousands of years earlier. Yet Their lineage and contributions are largely unknown. This is due to Their reflexive and deeply abiding humility. Nevertheless, the time has come for Their contributions to humanity to become better known by the world. I hope that the chapters that follow play a role in accomplishing that goal.

The path of the Tamil Siddhas is polymorphous. It is a multifaceted journey that ends in gnana, or enlightenment. Similarly, each individual has many dimensions. A policeman on the job appears in a certain light. Conversely, he has many other shades of existence: father, son, husband, friend, and so on. Each role that we play in our lives requires unique aspects of our being. Attempting to determine ourselves based on only one aspect is both unwise and futile. It is similar to judging a movie based on a single frame. What is actually a flow of millions of frames is condensed to a single frame. In no way does it represent the movie. It has lost its wholeness. The Siddha masters are They who feel the inner being of each aspect of existence in its natural

connection to the All. This book is written and will unfold itself only in the same manner. Should a sole aspect be singled out to the exclusion of the rest, its actual meaning will be lost. This writing is the journey of my life's quest, and so reading it in a sequential manner is recommended. Each chapter may appear as individual, but at the same time each contains the attributes of the entire book. Each chapter hides and holds the quintessence of all of the others. It cannot be otherwise. They who gave birth to all healing and spiritual paths have never attempted to separate them in any way. Stretching from antiquity to the present day and beyond, the Tamil Siddha tradition offers humanity the opportunity to know and live our integration in the Cosmos.

Introduction



His medicinal teacher's final request before leaving the planet was that he continue to serve humanity. The instruction was to continue to heal all those who sought him and to never accept payment. Tens of thousands have streamed to him from all corners of the globe to drink the nectar of divine healing, whether by herbal concoctions, tantric talismans, his healing touch, or even his glance of grace. Himself a student of electronics and communication in India, a land renowned for producing scholars, he forewent all possibilities of building a career and certainly all notions of worldly security. His healing spirit is infectious yet was born of incredibly devoted practice. At one point, he was directed to attend to all who came to him in the slum areas of Madurai, India. As many as three hundred people per day would await his compassionate healing. This he performed with his usual grace and humility and without any concern for financial or personal gain. He has lived like this for more than twenty

years, guided and nourished solely by the divine inspiration of unparalleled compassion and profound love for his guru. He has lived by relying solely on divine grace. He is Siddha Healer Pal Pandian of Tiruvannamalai, India. Hailing from the most ancient of all traditions, the Tamil Siddhas, he found me and took me into the deeply mysterious worlds of the most secret and rare of all of India's hidden treasures.

Just as when viewed from space all drops of water and grains of sand are known to be one source, called Earth, all of humanity's legends and traditions can be traced to a single origin. Hiding within all of the traditions of every culture that has ever existed are common themes that endure as reminders of our roots. That we are intimately intertwined with one another and with all existence is their incessant call. The heroes of our legends frequently display the range of humanity's emotions, motives, and trials. All the while, they possess what are usually thought of as supernatural powers, such as flying, supernormal strength, clairvoyance, and so forth. These archetypes, or models, have persisted in order to remind us of the hidden realms that contain humanity's latent potential. Buried deep within each one of us is our inseparable connection to everything else. This touchstone is our own undeniable origin. All feelings and experiences of disconnect that we encounter in life, whether felt as a slight strain or deep distress, exist to call us back to our original nature.

These sojourns into disconnected living exist on both the personal and societal levels. They tend to appear as conflict. When humanity is filled with too much conflict, we are apt to pause. Only then do we reflect on how we have become so lost, so out of tune with the unceasing rhythms of Nature¹ and one another. We often see societal reflection like this occur after a war. Looking back at our former foes, who now may be our allies, we wonder what could have led to such animosity. Even in personal relationships, one often looks back, at least near one's own death, and feels that all the negativity was such a waste of energy, of life—of ourselves. Having become spellbound by the modern approach of mechanical living, divorced from Nature, we spend our lives in a singular mode of acquiring. Then we wonder why we are never satisfied.

*The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away; a sordid boon! . . .*

(William Wordsworth, "The World Is Too Much with Us," in *Great Short Poems*, ed. Paul Negri [Mineola, NY: Dover, 2000])

¹ Our greater surroundings, normally confined to the natural setting of our immediate environment, are juxtaposed with Nature. Throughout this book, the word *Nature* is capitalized, for it denotes all of existence, having issued from the Mother aspect of the divine (Shakti, the Goddess). Often portrayed in the Western world as Mother Nature, She is that which is not created yet creates.

When we, as a society, exerted dominance in our relationship with Nature and lauded the analytical and scientific over the innately felt and known, we lost our primal senses of wonder and respect. The degree of respect that we feel for our greater surroundings is always reflected in how we relate with others and with ourselves. These are lessons that our common legends and myths have ached to remind us of throughout time. Once we hoist anchor from our origins within, we must sail the salty, stormy fortunes that we have laid out for ourselves. Accustomed to a collective society, an individual must have unusual courage and rebelliousness in order to set his or her own course and attempt to cross the ocean to the infinite. Such an individual must risk all in order to regain themselves.

Every one of us invariably has those moments when we ache to break ranks with the sailing fleet of humanity and seek the shores that call us to our origins. Perhaps we remember ourselves as little children and recall our lost innocence and vigor. The loss of that wonder and feeling of aliveness, which remain like a forgotten scent in the deep alleys of our mind, haunts us. Yearning for a fresh vision of ourselves, others, and our lives, we too often are willing to succumb to the pack mentality and surrender our deepest feelings only to trudge onward with the collective. This book is an attempt to aid those few who, against all convention and the greater number of their brethren, refuse to be tempted to stay the course any longer. First we sense,

then we feel, and finally we come to know in our very bones that we are much more than that to which the sheep in the herd confine themselves.

This book begins with a brief introduction to the basics of my life, and when writing it I was unconvinced that it would have any place in a work dedicated to the details of the Tamil Siddha masters. When I was instructed to include more first-person narrative, it became obvious that the basics of my life are a natural place for the reader to begin, because knowing a little about the author, his circumstances, and his motivations is helpful.

After providing the particulars about the author, this book delves into the Tamil Siddhas. This section was the most difficult to write. There is not only an oral tradition but also one of extreme secrecy, and it contains countless varieties of what the common-minded call “miracles.” The challenge was not one of ignorance or disbelief, for I had already been privy to numerous miracles and shown the inner workings of many realms of the Siddhas. Rather, the task that I faced was how to present such things so that a broader audience would not be inclined to dismiss them out of hand, considering them fanciful or thinking that I was simply boasting about accomplishments in which I am a mere spectator. As usual, Pal’s simple words of instruction guided me to write just what I have experienced and come to know personally. This exact manner easily flowed into chapter 6: “Siddha Tantra,” because that spiritual path into which he

initiated me was previously unknown to me. Yet once begun, my experiences did not merely speak to me. They shouted in an undeniably clear tone.

From there, the chapters deal with the Siddha masters' broad range of healing methods and the basics of health, disease, and treatment. A good deal of time is spent detailing the Siddhas' understanding of the human body (and mind) in terms of not just physical anatomy but also the body's subtle, or unseen nature. This deep wisdom born from Their insight and enlightened state is best illustrated by the knowledge of how life is formed in the womb, in all of its divine detail.

The final section of this book is a brief exposition of the more esoteric arts of the Tamil Siddhas. Beginning with Their yoga practice, called Vasi yoga, which is the most powerful and direct of spiritual initiations, it moves to the most mysterious of scientific practices, alchemy. Chapter 14: "The Bitter Truth" is particularly noteworthy, because Pal asked if I would be willing to include it. That chapter provides a direct, succinct look into what is meant by seeking the return to one's origins and what the purpose of it is. The appendix to the book encapsulates the current situation and what one can expect to find of these ancient masters. The focus is primarily on Their most well-known, accessible art—Siddha medicine.

The many forms of meditation, the general misunderstanding of the word *yoga*, and the inaccurate practice of yoga today

stand as prime examples of the necessity for this book. Words like *karma* have only recently come into vogue in the West, yet they have existed for thousands of years. This long-time usage has resulted in a general yet deeply distorted misunderstanding of many vital tenets. The notion of reincarnation is a prime example. Past-life regression has been utilized even in clinical settings and is, of itself, a fine practice. However, there exist some overriding principles that have long been unknown. In this very vein, legend says that a great sage of South India was sitting with a few of his disciples when one of them broached this very subject:

Several of the devotees were discussing among themselves the revelation that one man among them, who was sixty-three years of age, had recently learned that in his previous life he lived as a peasant boy in a nearby village and died at the age of six. When they told their master about this, the sage, who usually was silent on such subjects, merely stated that, yes, it was true. He continued on to state that the very boy who the older man was in his previous life was living right now in that very village and was three years old!

When we approach ancient wisdom with our linear, analytical, time-obsessed methods, we are doomed to unimaginable error. This is true of most attempts to utilize meditation, yoga, or tantra in today's societies. To say that there is a lack

of authenticity due to a monumental lack of true insight, understanding, and wisdom is a grand understatement. Yes, the old man had lived his “previous” life as a small village boy and met a tragic end at six years of age. Yes, that boy was alive and three years old in that village at the same time as he existed at sixty-three years old in that very room. Yet what is time and space to the infinite of which all is composed? Furthermore, how are we to evolve in any manner if we stubbornly continue to approach God with our self-confining notions, of which time, space, and causality are the very foundations? Ignorance, which is most succinctly grounded in innocence, is the most cherished quality that we can seek to embody. Knowing that we do not know is sufficient to open us to our lost sense of childish wonder, vitality, and innocence.

A man’s ignorance sometimes is not only useful, but beautiful—while his knowledge, so called, is oftentimes worse than useless, besides being ugly. Which is the best man to deal with—he who knows nothing about a subject, and, what is extremely rare, knows that he knows nothing, or he who really knows something about it, but thinks that he knows all?

(Henry David Thoreau, “Walking,” *Atlantic Monthly* [June 1862])

The title of this book (*Rivulets of the Absolute*) is an obvious play on words, pointing to the small streams of refreshment allowed to flow to the reader from the oceanic wisdom of the Tamil Siddha masters. Because rivulets seem the opposite of the Absolute, the title cautions the reader that this book will not reveal itself in a purely intellectual way. It is not intended to simply provide information, nor is it a how-to manual. Approaching it with the idea of gaining more information to fit within what one already knows will prove futile, and the chapters will appear nonsensical. The actual flow is reflective of how the darkly mysterious realms of the Tamil Siddhas opened up for me. Much of its deepest qualities lie within a more spontaneous adventure.

Within the chapters are tenets that have long been kept secret and unknown to any other tradition. They are touched upon here at the request of Siddha Healer Pal Pandian. The words chosen stem solely from my own experience of mysteries such as Vasi, alchemy, Amritha Kalai healing, and Siddha Tantra. While all other yogic, healing, and spiritual methods are based on the discoveries of the Siddha masters, the most vital aspects of Siddha have been kept hidden throughout time. Paradoxically, that which is most vital is, in turn, that which is most basic. The only other authoritative writing about the Tamil Siddhas is Healer Pal’s book, *Siddhas: Masters of the Basics*. Again, we see the play on words, contrasting masters and basics. He chose these two titles

purposely, as a reflection of their related nature. In truth, this book serves as an introduction to the much more voluminous, detailed one that he has authored.

Decoding the ancient manuscripts of the Tamil Siddhas is possible only for one who has been admitted into the deepest realms of their mysterious and graceful clan. Containing the countless healing applications and spiritual practices of antiquity, these mysteries invariably include details of humanity's history. The ones quoted here come solely from Healer Pal.

Over the years, I have never ceased to be amazed at how the wisdom hidden within the purposely ambiguous writings lay the foundations for all subsequent spiritual, religious, and scientific traditions throughout the world. Bits and pieces of the Tamil Siddhas' divine insight have been allowed to spread in order to aid the development of society throughout the ages. All the while, the masters themselves have remained hidden and allowed humanity to utilize these scraps of grace in their own way. Yet in our own modern, mechanical age, the time has come for the Tamil Siddha masters to step forth from the shadows of the ancient past. The purpose is not to seek the limelight but instead to breathe vitality, potency, and authenticity into those traditions that have always existed, for the sole purpose of serving the inhabitants of our now frenzied yet still beautiful planet.

Humanity and her needs are multifaceted. All aspects of our being require proper nourishment. This nourishment should be

capable of reaching us in all stages of our evolution. To be served most properly, an equally grand and polymorphous platform is necessary. The immense variety of dimensions of the Tamil Siddhas is brought forth in this book. The path of the Tamil Siddhas has reached within the recesses of my individual being and holds me now, for I walk my path within Her. It has colored all the various stages of life. The Siddhas' tradition is ancient, yet we can see its meaning in the wholeness of our experience, in all of our present life circumstances. This holding, this walking is possible only when the tradition Herself is alive, sees your entirety, and recognizes you from the "deepest before." From here, She picks you up in Her arms, and the journey begins. My own journey began long before I knew anything of such matters. My trials were preparation for the earnest adventure that was to follow. Thus, the stage was set in my early years.

Appointment With Life



The defining moment in life came when I was twelve years old. It was not something I had asked for. Perhaps because of this, I was entirely unprepared. As I was standing in the kitchen, with no noticeable thoughts, roasting a marshmallow over an open flame, it came to me in a flash: “We are all going to die.” That was it. That single, simple thought emerged from nowhere. The problem was that it stood completely alone, solid and terribly real in my awareness.

It seems funny now to recall the twelve-year-old me involved in a philosophical struggle. I was never a very good student. My parents would not allow me to attend kindergarten, because they thought that I lacked the necessary maturity. When the next year came and I was required to attend first grade, their reasoning was obvious. I did not just fail, but rather I failed spectacularly. Not even close to passing. Because it was the 1960s, and I was the last of six children in the family, my parents did not interfere

much. In today's world, the diagnosis of mild autism most likely would have been given. Somehow, I managed to escape first grade the second time around, but I have always wondered why my siblings never teased me about my early struggles at school.

The two themes that predominated in my early years—flying and dreaming—may explain the academic failures. For one, I was convinced that I could fly. Every night as I lay in bed, I would lift up and fly over our house, neighborhood, and the entire city. The wind and some unseen power would slowly lift and carry me. What really stood out was that, when I was awake, I knew what the roofs of the houses, community buildings, and the rest of the city looked like from above. Whenever the wind blew, I waited for it to lift and carry me away. Whether awake or asleep, I had no doubt that I could fly.

Awake or asleep? I asked myself that question daily. There was simply no way for me to tell the difference between the waking state and the dreaming state. The two overlapped so much that most of the time I was unsure which was which. To other people, such as my parents and teachers, I often appeared dull. Drifting off into daydreams, I was not bothered with results. Feeling that whatever I was experiencing was a dream, I was unconcerned with the outcomes of my actions or those of people around me.

I recall some of the consequences of my confusion. Standing at the top of the stairs in our house, wearing a towel around my neck as a cape, I waited for the breeze to carry me down to the

bottom of the stairs. Once, I actually tumbled down the stairs. The tears that sprang to my eyes then were not so much from pain but rather from disbelief and confusion at the inability to float and fly. I would like to take a moment now to apologize to all of my classmates who I unexpectedly punched or pinched. After I figured out that pinching myself while dreaming felt as real as it did doing it while awake, I pinched my classmates, thinking that their response would give me a better clue. However, I was not always cruel or stumbling around like a zombie. After recognizing my classmates' painful responses, I attempted to entertain them and regain their trust, usually by regaling them with comedic routines from the previous night's *Red Skelton Show*, mimicking Red's loony seagull character in particular. While we waited for our turn to play tether ball, I fancied myself the hilarious friend. Then again, five-year-old boys will laugh at anything.

As I have already taken the opportunity to apologize to my classmates for the odd behavior, my parents also deserve some attention. Although they had been strict in raising my five older siblings, I was fortunate. They interfered and demanded very little of me. The most likely reason for that, of course, is that I showed little promise of being normal. Whatever the reason, I am forever grateful to them for the way in which our lives mingled. Being spared the Catholic schools that my five older siblings attended is a fine example of the more relaxed and liberal upbringing that I received. Yet we did attend church every week. When I

was very young, my father held me during the service, and so I naturally drifted in and out of sleep. Gazing at the statues of Jesus as I did so seemed to have a strong, lasting influence on me. Even from the earliest age, I felt the most powerful, intimate, natural relationship with Jesus. The relationship was so real to me that I developed an extremely independent approach to all things religious. This approach has persisted throughout my life. Priests, the Bible, and exhortations of guilt and reward were both comical and meaningless to me.

I am not sure what it is about my twelfth year. Of course, I was entering puberty, and the carefree childhood of wandering barefoot in the woods was slipping away. Yet the experience that I had during the simple act of staring at a flame while roasting a marshmallow should have tipped me off that life was about to begin taking some unexpected turns. About the time I was slapped with the concrete fact of mortality, I had another uncomfortable experience. While riding my bike in aimless circles, I was suddenly struck by the most intense pain. My lower back locked. I do not recall how I made it home from that bike ride. Despite having gone through all of the usual broken bones, bleeding lips, and scars of boyhood, I had never before imagined such pain. Even breathing brought horrible distress. I swear to this day that blinking or moving my eyes brought spasms of pain. While I was the owner of a grand imagination, I have no doubt that what really stood out

for me was not only the physical pain. I also suffered intense mental pain, mainly confusion. It even spilled over to my emotions. I wondered, What is this? I knew that it was not an illness or accident. All I wanted to do was play. Instead, those two seminal experiences at the age of twelve defined my life. For the next thirty years, both my body and mind would be plagued by those experiences. The pain in my lower back and the concrete awareness of the fleeting nature of all things mingled with each other and stalked me. All avenues of escape were temporary. If the physical pain subsided, the mental pain asserted itself. These two seemingly unrelated events, one of the psyche and the other of the physical body, blended to become my personal crisis.

Nothing means anything. The faintest echo of that thought remained within. Knowing that everything and everyone turns to dust cast a pall of meaninglessness over all things human. Relationships, accomplishments, and adventures all rang as hollow. No matter what occurred for any of us, it would be merely temporary. For some inexplicable yet horribly pertinent reason, this thought threw me into deep dejection. Keeping it to myself always seemed best. I searched for distractions so that I would not examine it more deeply. I followed the usual routines in college, relationships, and jobs, all the while, aping the normal courses of society, and feeling like a great pretender, a bad impersonator of myself. I found some solace in the writings of great English

poets and Russian novelists. Those authors were tortured souls, for sure, but their clawing for beauty and the truth of existence thrilled me. Driven by inner strife, their expressions provided momentary glimpses of their innate aspirations.

When my daughter was still quite young, my marriage to her mother ended. That was not surprising, as I held little ambition for life. The existential crisis that had begun in childhood, while hidden, continued to haunt me from the darkness of the subconscious. Whatever was attained would not last. Therefore, nothing that I achieved would ever bring satisfaction. Without knowing why or how to proceed, I began to seek answers in earnest. I did not even know what I was searching for with any clarity. I was aware, however, that in some strange way, the search enabled me to begin to feel alive again. Searching in the dark for an unknown, unseen goal seemed much more natural than stumbling through life and vainly trying to accumulate money, power, and accolades. Life had already taught me that I would forever be unfulfilled by ordinary achievements. What I had achieved, acquired, and accomplished up to that point had done absolutely nothing to soothe the internal torment. I thought, What does it all mean? Why am I here? What is the purpose, the meaning, of life, of my life, of the world? Yet I knew with absolute clarity that the answers would never be found in social or scientific forums. The crisis was within my own being. Only I could feel its existential nature. I reached the conclusion that

I must strike out into the unknown if I were to have any hope of reaching resolution.

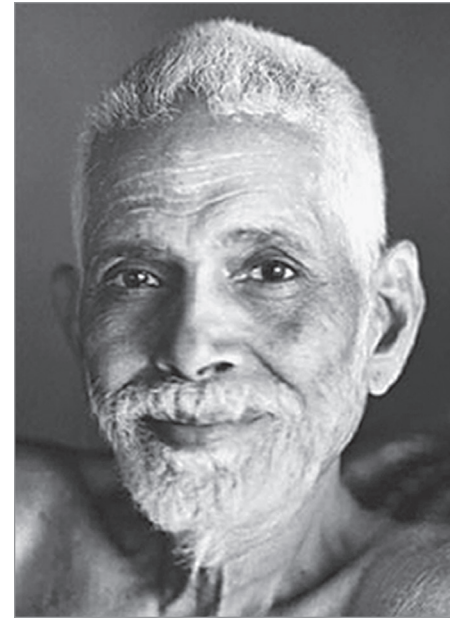
Having been raised in the Christian tradition, I naturally began my search by studying the Bible and its various versions for potential hidden meaning. Briefly, I read the religious texts of Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. Scouring those traditions, I searched for that which would resonate with my already known, yet somehow forgotten, connection with the Absolute. The words in those books were beautiful. I never doubted the experiences of the saints, prophets, and seers of any religion. Nevertheless, something in their approach to God bothered me. It left me feeling even more destitute and excluded from existence. My intimacy with the divine seemed contradictory to what the religionists spoke and preached. Because my bond with God had developed naturally when I was very young, I was incapable of intellectualizing it.

At the lowest point in the search, spending time in nature reminded me of my timeless bond with God. The affirmation came from the wind. The rustling of leaves or the invisible movement of the wind over water inevitably drew my attention to more subtle realms, which naturally calmed the aching, tense mind. When I was in this more sensitive state, the feeling of the breeze on my body brought forth my earliest memories. Again, as during my childhood, barely earthbound, I experienced the same scene as I had effortlessly throughout my life: an emerald-green

forest containing a flowing brook, beside which stretches a large fir tree, beneath which sits Jesus, my head on His lap and His hand stroking my head in the most loving, comforting, accepting manner imaginable.

I would never be satisfied feeling any distance from God. Thus, I continued, beginning with the book titled *A Course in Miracles*, Abraham-Hicks law of attraction, yoga postures, chakra meditations, and countless breathing, or *pranayama*, methods. From there, I tried meditation courses, joining an ashram, numerous new-age endeavors, and Sri Yogananda's *kriya yoga*, among many others. I walked every one of those paths with my usual intense, exhaustive approach, looking for answers. In each practice, a typical pattern occurred. At the beginning, I would experience immediate results. This was particularly true of all pranayama and yogic traditions. What should have taken months or even years of patience would inexplicably happen immediately. I never understood what was occurring. Keeping to myself, I had no one to consult. Thus, these experiences never seemed odd to me. Over time, however, the powerfully felt results would disappear, and I again would feel adrift and desperate.

The grand avenue finally opened when I found myself having a powerful attraction to the great Indian sage Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, whose ashram lies at the foot of the holy hill named Arunachala. There the cure for both my psychological and physical crises awaited.



Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi

BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi is widely recognized throughout India as the greatest sage of the twentieth century. He resided at the foot of Arunachala from 1896 to 1950. At the tender age of sixteen, He spontaneously achieved the highest state of enlightenment. This singularly rare occurrence was brought about by a sudden, inexplicable death experience. There was no reason for it to occur, for He was healthy and robust. The experience was forced upon Him by sheer fate. As it overcame Him, He felt no panic. Instead, in that very moment, He calmly

set out to solve the mystery of death itself. He allowed himself to fall completely into the shock and fear of the crisis with no inclination to consult doctors, family, or friends. He felt that He had to solve the problem himself, then and there.

When He inquired deeply as to “what is it that dies,” it was revealed to Him that death is for the body alone and that the true being is untouched by death. In that moment, His identity was totally consumed in the unchanging, deathless Supreme Consciousness of Being. When many years later, He was asked about the experience, Bhagavan emphasized that it was in no way intellectual and that it happened in a flash. In a moment, the schoolboy was completely and permanently transformed into a sage. There was neither quest nor striving nor conscious preparation. Years later, He described the realization as follows:

Though all the senses were benumbed, the aham sphurana (Self-awareness) was clearly evident. This Self-awareness never decays. It is unrelated to anything. It is Self-luminous. Even if this body is burnt, it will not be affected. Hence, I realized on that very day so clearly that that was “I.”

(Suri Nagamma, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*
[Tiruvannamalai, India: Sri Ramanasramam, 2006], 3)

A short time afterward, He stole away from home to make his way to His beloved Arunachala. Upon entering the inner

sanctum of the great Arunachalaswara temple, He embraced the Siva Lingam statue, which means *agni*, or fire, and said, “Father, I have come at thy bidding. Thy will be done.”



Arunachaleswara temple at the foothills of holy Arunachala

His life was unique in that He never claimed to be a teacher or that He gave initiation to anyone. He made no distinctions among people with regard to class, color, creed, or religion. Stating that self-inquiry, or *atma vichara*, was the surest path to self-realization, Bhagavan preferred to teach through His silent Presence. Whether a person was devoutly religious or an atheist made no difference to Him. He encouraged all to find the changeless Source through their own introspective effort. Of course, we all are aware of the mind only because of its

ever-changing nature and the constant, often disturbing, flow of thoughts. If, however, turned inward in the quest of its origin, this awareness of “I” disappears in its Source. The previously felt “I” consciousness is relative, fleeting, and finite. Identified with the body as “I,” this consciousness will die. But the Source, or God, is infinite and eternal. Self-inquiry is the quest for the Self, or Source, by following, rather than answering, the primordial question “Who am I?” When asked if one should practice self-inquiry by repeating the question “Who am I?” Bhagavan gave the following reply:

No, it is not repeating or meditating on “Who am I?” It is to dive deep into yourself and seek the place from which the “I” thought arises in you and to hold on to it firmly to the exclusion of any other thought. Continuous and persistent attempt will lead you to the Self.

(M.M. Menon, “M.M. Menon Was from Palghat Kerala,” In Laxmi Narain, *Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, [Hyderabad, India: Sri Ramana Kendram, 2005], 274)

Because He lived as a renunciate and spoke infrequently, many are tempted to ignore the profoundly tender and compassionate radiance that He showered on those who sought his company. Bhagavan was no idle statue. For many years, He arose at 3 a.m. and began the preparations for breakfast by

cutting vegetables and grinding rice and lentils. Although He never touched money, because He had no need for it, He kept to a punctual routine and was scrupulous about not wasting anything. He created hand-bound notebooks from the scraps of paper that others would throw away. He saved the normally unusable parts of vegetables and fruits and made them into tasty chutneys. He never spoke ill of anyone, even criminals and miscreants. When others complained to Him that He was not censuring some of the devotees for their conduct, He replied as follows:

Who is to correct them? Is it not the Lord alone who has the authority to correct everyone? All we can do is to correct ourselves. That itself is correcting others.

(Natesa Mudaliar [Sadhu Natanananda], “Sadhu Natanananda (Natesa Mudaliar) Was a Scholar Who Authored Many Books on Sri Ramana,” In Laxmi Narain, *Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, [Hyderabad, India: Sri Ramana Kendram, 2005], 130)

His love and deep affection toward animals was well documented, and, based on those accounts, one can only marvel at His ability to communicate with the animal kingdom. The animals returned His communication in equal parts wisdom, naturalness, and love. Indeed, animals of all sorts went to Him to settle quarrels among themselves and their quarrels with

humans in the area. Birds, dogs, cows, monkeys, squirrels, tigers, other animals, insects, and even plants were revered by Him as equal manifestations of the Supreme Consciousness. The animals knew that He was their friend and protector and sought His company and blessings on countless occasions, as in the following example:

Once a monkey with her baby stood at the window by the side of Bhagavan's sofa. As he was reading something, he did not notice her. After a while, the monkey screeched, and the attendants tried to drive her away, but she would not go.

Bhagavan then looked up and said, "Wait! She has come here to show us her baby. Don't people bring their children to show Bhagavan? For her, her child is equally dear. Look how tender the child is." So saying Bhagavan turned towards her and said in an endearing tone, "Hello! So you have brought your child? That is good! Come in. I will see that nobody harms you." Bhagavan then urged her to come in. The mother monkey came with the baby and gave her child to Bhagavan. After fondling the baby, Bhagavan gave the baby back to its mother. He gave some fruits to the mother and sent her away. The monkey was full of contentment and joy.

(Bhagavan Ramana: The Friend of All [Tiruvannamali, India: Sri Ramanasramam, 2008], 91)

Bhagavan's silent Presence was enough to answer the questions of those with any degree of ripeness and sincerity. Freed of the burden of constantly revolving thoughts, this very Presence penetrated deeply into the hearts of His devotees. Wolter Keers, a Dutch teacher, described his own experience of sitting with the Maharshi as follows:

There was a radiant power and energy in Bhagavan's presence that effortlessly swept through the mind and matter. . . . The light radiating from Bhagavan filled my being, sweeping away all my darkness in one stroke. Effort seemed redundant when his presence alone was enough to evaporate the usual mental flow of thoughts, ideas, and problems.

(Walter A. Keers, "Wolter A. Keers Was a Dutch Teacher and Writer Who Lectured on Yoga and Advaita in Europe," In Laxmi Narain, *Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, [Hyderabad, India: Sri Ramana Kendram, 2005], 198)

Although He transformed and gave liberation to many, Bhagavan never allowed any show of deference to be afforded Him. Whether food, medicine, or anything else, if it was good for Him, then it should be good enough for everyone. Countless incidents demonstrating His extreme humility abound. Never did He allow himself to be a burden of any kind on anyone else. He shared incredibly tender human interactions that are often

overlooked. Robert Adams, a nineteen-year-old American, described his arrival at Bhagavan's ashram:

The Maharshi guided me to a little shack that I might use while I was staying there. He came inside with me. I bet you think we spoke about profound subjects. On the contrary, he was a natural man. He was the Self of the universe. He asked how my trip was, where I was from and what made me come there. Then he said I should rest. . . . I was awakened at about five in the evening by Ramana himself, who had brought food for me. Can you imagine that?

(Robert Adams, "The Cow Lakshmi," In Laxmi Narain, *Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, [Hyderabad, India: Sri Ramana Kendram, 2005], 358–359)



Old Hall

There are many wonderful books on the life, and thus the teachings, of this most wonderful sage. The profoundly deep, healing quality of stillness is still felt today in His ashram, where the power of his silent Presence continues. Indeed, people from around the world flock to the town to imbibe of the nectar of the company of Bhagavan and Arunachala. I did so shortly after a friend gave me a magazine whose cover was a picture of Bhagavan. A few glances at that picture over the next few days were all it took to prompt me to examine it more closely. Sometime later, I saw my first picture of Arunachala. The mountain was beautiful and, in my mind, the word "Arunachala" appeared. Later I heard the actual pronunciation of the name and realized, to my delight, that the silent voice in my head had spoken it properly. At that moment, I knew that I must go to India to commune with both Bhagavan and Arunachala.

Up to that point, I had been seeking the elusive state of enlightenment while mainly ignoring the mundane aspects of life. Looking for ultimate transcendence from the paradox of life, I had failed to chart a life course that I could live in a daily manner in order to bring fulfillment to myself and those around me. In time, I would meet my teacher, Siddha Healer Pal Pandian, who would ever so patiently and lovingly initiate, teach, and guide me in the various paths of Siddha wisdom. From him, I would learn that such an exclusive approach as I had followed to what we call spirituality not only is inauthentic to the crisis

but also would be unsuccessful. In his profound compassion and wisdom, as my journey began under his watchful care, Healer Pal gave me the following words to guide me:

Like a seed, we, too, have the potential to grow and come to fruition if we can find the environment and conditions to nurture us. Just as a papaya seed requires conditions different from a rice seed, each of us is born with unique qualities and capabilities that require specific conditions and climate. Very few are lucky enough to identify and find the right soil, conditions, and nurturing to transform this potential into a reality. A majority, like a seed on concrete pavement, barely manage to go beyond the survival issues. However, if we follow the inner voice and sustain the urge for unfoldment, we can surely fulfill our life's purpose.

Prior to meeting my teacher, however, I first had to undergo years of seeking in various paths, including meditation, yoga, austerities, and others. I took my first trip to India in 1999. During this visit, a mysterious meeting took place, which, like a small plant that, lovingly embedded in the ground, would grow to eventually bear fruit and flower in the form and substance of meeting my Teacher, the ever perfect mirror, guide, and dearest form of Friend.

SHOCKING ENCOUNTER

In his younger days, Yogi Ram Surat Kumar, a *jnani*, or Fully enlightened being, known as the Divine Beggar of Tiruvannamalai, had been in the presence of Bhagavan. When I arrived in India in 1999, He was in his last days of his physical body. Two companions and I went to His ashram to pay our respects and receive his *darshan*, or divine sight. Returning from the ashram to our quarters, we passed a field where many *swamis* and *sadhus* had gathered. Saints, seekers, and many others had flooded the small town for the divine yogi's final hours. Trailing behind my friends, I gazed over the field and saw dozens of dignified men wearing orange robes. My eyes locked with the eyes of another man, one who was sitting in the dust against a wall at the back of the field. As I gazed into his eyes, I was dumbstruck. My mind went completely blank save for an overwhelming desire to walk toward him and meet him. His appearance was completely different from that of the orange-garbed men. He was wearing a robe that I could only assume once had been white. As I drew near him, I noticed that the robe was filthy, with brown and gray stains, his hair was disheveled, filled with dirt, and his beard was unkempt. His eyes! Yes, his eyes shone with a madness and yet a brilliance that I had never encountered. A smile covered his entire face and, as he directed his gaze to me, his head swayed in a wild and utterly mad manner. In that instant, I could not move a muscle. I could only stare and smile

back at him. I did not know what to do. Wanting to express the profound sense of love and respect that was welling up inside me, I finally was able to reach into my pocket, withdraw some rupees, and extend them to him. I wanted to give him all of the money I was carrying, but I did not do so as I felt it would be insulting to him in some strange way. He graciously accepted the rupees. He held his hands in Namaste to me, and I returned the gesture. In that moment, I knew two things with certainty: He did not care in the least for the money but accepted it only to please or, rather, to bless me in the act of giving, and I wanted more than anything to fall at his feet. Having been in India for only a few days, and on my first trip there, I felt awkward, such a clumsy Westerner and even a bit shy to make the customary sign of respect. I stood there frozen, my hands clasped, mind utterly still, and heart swelling with intense feelings of devotion. Suddenly, my mind restarted, and I felt that I must leave him and find my companions. As I left, I realized that while I had walked toward this unique being and stood with him, I had been unconscious of my surroundings, including all of the other people. From the moment I had locked eyes with him until my mind restarted, it was as if we were the only two people there, as if nothing else existed. I realized that no one else had noticed him or me while I was with him. I remembered this strange meeting for years to come. I recalled it with a feeling of some regret in that I yearned to have the opportunity to show my profound respect by honoring his presence in the proper fashion. It

was only some years later that I recognized what had occurred—I had come face to face with a Siddha.

*He is Dharma, birthless, kinless,
Resides in the wild, lives by alms,
He, seeing anybody who renounced,
Sunders their bonds of birth,
—you have seen a Divine Madman.*

(Siddha Thirumular, “Thirumanthiram,” Verse 1616,
In Pal Pandian, *Siddhas: Masters of the Basics* [Chennai,
India: Pal Pandian, 2008])

“A SIDDHA HEALER”

After the first several years of traveling to India, I broke away from all groups, encounters, and teachers. I had found several repeating patterns. Many of the people who flocked to the group meetings were very different from me. Most had little responsibility in life. Because they did not have the deep roots in society that are provided only by being a parent, having a solid career, and following a robust daily routine, their questions and company seemed trivial to me. Likewise, many of the teachers simply pronounced maxims, such as “We are all one” and “You are already what you are seeking.” I had already heard them countless times. Staring into the students’ eyes and holding their gaze seemed to be the extent of their teaching. I had learned that

feeling the energy of a person or place provided only a temporary experience. Anything fleeting like that would never suffice, because the crisis had lurked inside me since childhood. That lurking crisis was actually my saving grace, because it gifted me a feeling of intolerance with any path or pursuit that did not fully resolve the ultimate dilemma: death. It granted me the innate wisdom to recognize that even if these folks were doing good work, they could not provide what I was seeking.

After I broke away from the group approach, I spent time in meditation at the ashram of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, on the slopes and in the caves of Arunachala, and performing giri valam or pradakshina (circumambulation) of Arunachala. Keeping to myself, I spent time in silence. When I did interact, it was with the local inhabitants. In this way, the time was always refreshing and replenishing. I distinctly remember one day when I was walking down Arunachala, alone and silent as was my usual routine. When I reached the town, a young man ran up to me, said that he knew my name, and asked whether I remembered him. After some time, I recalled that he was a rickshaw driver from my very first trip to India.

We exchanged pleasantries and asked about each other's family, and then he said, "You must meet my guru. . . . I will take you to see him in few days."

I asked him who his guru was.

He simply replied, "A Siddha doctor."

Although I had fondly remembered meeting the radiant madman during my first trip to India, the world of the Siddhas had remained unknown to me. Having never heard the words "Siddha" and "doctor" used together, I was quite confused. But the rickshaw driver was an agreeable chap and truly enthusiastic that I should meet his teacher. Although I was not actually seeking a guru, I was perhaps not entirely averse to the idea. He agreed to pick me up in his rickshaw in a few days.

As promised, in a few days he picked me up. As we approached a small, humble house in the middle of a field, I noticed that it was surrounded by countless wild plants and herbs and enjoyed a spectacular view of Arunachala. When I stepped inside the house, I saw many pots and containers strewn about and was greeted warmly by Siddha Healer Pal Pandian. We sat on the floor facing each other. At the beginning of our meeting, there was little speaking, but eventually we spoke of various matters yet none that I could recall afterward. However, I do remember being extremely happy and at ease simply sitting with him in his small house. My driver friend had instructed me to feel free to ask Pal any questions that I wanted. Because I was aware that this was the purpose of my visit and Pal had been kind enough to make himself available, I searched for something meaningful to ask. Yet my mind was blank. I managed to come up with some lame question about health issues. Later that day, I wondered why I did not speak of my back pain. In recollection, I realized

that my body had been completely relaxed while I was with Pal. That was the reason that the question did not occur to me. We met for just over a half hour.

What struck me most were Pal's incessant yet completely natural smile and the gentle laughter which was interspersed between his sentences. He gazed at me only briefly and spent most of the time looking down at the floor, but I never felt his attention shift away from me for even a moment. Before taking my leave, I asked who his guru was. My friend quickly interceded, telling me that Pal would not reveal such a thing or that perhaps his guru did not have a name. I was unsure of which might be the case. Again, I had been a clumsy Westerner! Although asked innocently, I later became aware of how rude the question had been. It would be two years before I met Pal again and would be granted the gift of his divine friendship, guidance, and loving support. As we left his little house, I still had no better understanding of what a Siddha truly is. Yet I was convinced, beyond any doubt, that I had indeed been sitting face to face with one.

Sometime during the following two years, my friend mailed me a copy of Pal's new book, *Siddhas: Masters of the Basics*. As I read it, I was equally fascinated and mystified. I did learn that the Siddhas were not simply ancient yogis who meditated in caves and forests. Because they had developed entire arts and sciences that reached into all aspects of humanity's needs, their systems for healing and spiritual evolution resonated deeply within me.

That this book was the first authoritative writing by a member of the Tamil Siddha clan did not escape my notice.

THE TAMIL SIDDHAS



The 18 Tamil Siddhas—Lord Murugan is in the center

From the time my spiritual quest began, I had heard the term *Siddha* and its definition as a perfected being. The word *siddhi*, as I understood it, referred to the supernatural power possessed by a Siddha. In Tamil, the language of southeastern India, the root word of Siddha is *chit*, or consciousness, therefore Chittar, or Siddha, is one who abides as pure consciousness. This denotes one who is perfected. This perfected state encompasses all worldly and spiritual realms.

Existing since time immemorial, Siddhas are the wellspring and the masters of all forms of yoga, *tantra*, martial arts, science, alchemy, astrology, medicine, and healing. All of prehistoric India was the land of the *Dravidians*. South India is unique, because there the ancient spiritual scientists, or yogis, of ancient Tamil Nadu encoded their sacred works in both esoteric poetry and oral tradition. These yogis are known as the *Tamil Siddhas*.

The hallmark of the Siddhas is the combination of extreme secrecy and profound humility. It is impossible to separate these two attributes. They keep secrecy in order to ensure the purity of their wisdom. Humility? I had never encountered this quality until I met my teacher. I had thought that humility was the deflection of praise or a way of acting, but I found much more in its truest expression.

Over the years, I had searched for details about the Siddhas in books and by speaking with numerous people from throughout India. By the time I received Pal's book, I had discovered

that finding accurate information about the Siddhas was nearly impossible. As I pored through the pages of his book, I found direct, clearly communicated Siddha wisdom. It was unlike anything that I had ever heard or read, from any source. The quality of the words was uniquely capable of reaching into my being. Whether their medicinal system or their spiritual truths, learning about them thrilled me to my very core. Paradoxes that had long plagued me were confronted directly. I came to understand so much of what I had encountered in my spiritual quest, so much of what I had observed and experienced, in a new light.

When outsiders speak about or write about the Siddhas from beyond their lineage legends, superstitions, and even prejudices abound. The Siddhas themselves have done nothing to challenge or refute such things. Direct confrontation, notoriety, and praise have never been of interest to them. Indeed, they have long been referred to as the *Reluctant Masters*. They have always been notoriously difficult for the common-minded masses to find and relate to. Their preference is to simply abide, live, and share the truth of Existence. They do not teach, because they have never needed to do so or wanted to be viewed as teachers. Their very Being exudes Truth.

This lack of sermonizing, preaching, teaching, and trying to gain followers has maintained Siddha wisdom's purity and authenticity. The difference between the Siddhas and other traditions is that the Siddhas have remained practical, committed,

and creatively engaged with nature and all existence. Therefore, they are easily overlooked. Being overlooked, in turn, enhances their natural secrecy and lack of notoriety. The result is that their cherished wisdom has remained unchanged and their humility, that elusive trait, has continued its unhindered flow. Because their approach is unique, misunderstanding naturally occurs.

Although greatly misunderstood throughout the ages due to their intermingled tenets of humbleness and secrecy, their radiant life-giving Presence remains to this day. All that today's world knows of tantra, yoga, alchemy, medicine, and healing has come from the Siddhas. Yet the world remains ignorant of the origin of these arts. Sharing yet laying no claim to these arts (thus, allowing others to carry the burden), the Tamil Siddhas embody humility beyond common understanding. Their secrecy and humility are the reasons that it took me so long to find accurate information about them. What I finally found astounded me. Most surprising was that all of the spiritual paths that I had attempted, *all of them* are descendants from Siddha. My search for primal, authentic, complete, and shockingly powerful spiritual wisdom had finally found its mark.

THE GURU RELATIONSHIP

When I was able to return to India after having read Pal's book, the long flight left a single, strong impression on me: acute soreness in my back. Noticing this, my rickshaw-driving

friend insisted that I have a Varma nerve massage. This massage does not in any way resemble the relaxing type of session we ordinarily associate with the word "massage." It is perhaps better called nervous system manipulation or invigoration. The session lasted perhaps an hour and a half, and I was not overly impressed with the technique. It appeared simple, devoid of fancy hand movements and the like. Some aspects of it were rather uncomfortable for me. My driver friend, who has a slightly more sensitive constitution than I do, expressed a greater discomfort when his time came. From the time the session ended until I fell into my usual deep sleep that night, I had absolutely no back pain. Waking the next morning free of pain, I was literally shocked throughout the day by an amazing revelation. My mood had changed. Until that moment, I had no idea how living in chronic pain affected mental and emotional states. But the lightness that I felt would be short lived, because the following evening I was uncharacteristically incapable of falling asleep.

I spent the night not only without sleeping but also experiencing deeply dark moods and feelings of intense dread. When the morning broke, I became aware that my body had begun to swell and was highly sensitive, with an acute sensation of burning. The symptoms progressed to the point that the pain was so extreme that I felt as if my skin would burst into flames or I would explode. Soon I was visited by Pal. It was then that I learned that the young man who had given the Varma treatment

was, in fact, one of Pal's students. Pal's presence was soothing, and his obvious concern was so very tender. While he was visiting me, the pain diminished greatly, and I was no longer concerned with any physical or mental derangements. When I explained my situation, his first question was posed lovingly: "But why did you not call me earlier?"

The reaction that I experienced was due to latent physical and mental impurities in the nervous system. The purification process that I endured was simply necessary. When I asked what had happened to me, Pal explained in simple terms. In those early days, he would answer my questions, but he rarely offered any extra words. If I wished to know more, it seemed that it was my duty to dig further.

"The nervous system is the meeting place between the physical and non-physical bodies," Pal explained.

"Why should it be so polluted, Sir?" I prodded.

"Since it links the two bodies, at least on the physical level, it will tend to hold unresolved tendencies, thoughts and, of course, impurities of diet, too."

"Wow. OK. And these medicines, Sir, will they heal the nervous system fully?"

"Of course." He laughed. "It will take some time, so you will have to take certain medicines home with you. Over the next few months, it will return to balance, and you will be fine."

"Is there anything else I can do to help with the healing, Sir?"

"Yes. Please pay attention to four things: your attitude to life, daily routine, diet, and any medicines I provide. In this order of importance. Of course, the first two you easily address by coming here," he said, waving his hand toward Arunachala, "but you must keep your diet pure. This is of great benefit."

He gave me homemade Siddha medicine that not only soothed the symptoms but also provided authentic health to the nervous system and mental state. During the time that he attended to my ailments, he asked further questions about my health. I spoke to him about the dizziness and fatigue, and he assured me that these had been the beginning of the nervous system derangements manifesting as physical diseases. In time, the nervous system derangement surely would have solidified as perhaps multiple sclerosis or some other chronic disease. Next, I related to him that I had been diagnosed with benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) and was taking medication for it. He said not a word. With wide eyes, he gazed intently at my lower body for some time and then looked up at me and said, "It will be fine."

From that moment onward, I never again took the BPH medication and have remained completely free of all signs of BPH ever since.

The days passed, and my body regained its strength. At the same time, I gained a much more solid sense of being grounded and relaxed with myself. In those weeks, Pal visited me almost daily, and as our relationship grew, his manner of interacting with

and healing me evolved to finer and more astonishing heights. These healing sessions took on an esoteric feeling. He first sat opposite me, asked my full birth name, and had me place my hands on his. Instantly, he entered a semi-trance state, with his eyes alternately closed and gazing at the area above my head. Occasionally, he very gently touched my back or various areas of my head with soft motions. At other times, he blew gently on the crown of my skull or into my face. During these sessions, I naturally fell into a deep semiconscious state. My eyes closed, and my entire body and mind spontaneously relaxed. I had never felt such softness in the waking state. I treasured these healing sessions for the incredibly expansive and wonderfully relaxed state they provided. The feeling of release and newly discovered sense of freedom that I experienced in the days that followed astounded me. After each session, as I moved through the days and nights, I became increasingly aware of a heightened awareness, mental sharpness, and emotional or psychic grounding that I had never known before. Even my eyes saw people, trees, animals, and all movements in a new, brighter perspective. But one aspect of my psychic makeup was most affected and, in turn, provided the most immediate effects.

For years I had been on an exclusive search, of what I had assumed was a spiritual manner, and had subjected myself to various teachings, teachers, and austerities. The most notable experience while I practiced these various austerities was my

utter lack of interest and ability to form and maintain relationships with the opposite gender. On the surface, I was convinced that I was consciously practicing celibacy in order to reach some higher spiritual state. That, however, was a psychic derangement. During one healing session, Pal did something extremely subtle that produced the most astonishing results. I was never aware of what exactly he had performed, because it quickly placed me in the wonderfully relaxed state of semiconscious bliss. When I returned to ordinary awareness, I was shocked beyond my wildest imagination. Instantly and without the slightest doubt, I was aware that whatever had previously prevented me from relating to the opposite gender in an uplifting, intimate, loving manner had been completely eradicated! I even felt the elimination of the blockage physically, as a rush of pure energy or light emanating from the base of my body, flowing through every cell, and pouring out of my head. Every particle of my physical body was vibrating. These sensations were so powerful, but what was even more noticeable was my sight. It was as if, for the very first time, I could see everything in the room, as if a long-time blindness had been removed. After each of the previous healing sessions with Pal, my eyes and mind possessed a softer view of nature and humanity, but this was far beyond that. A dark veil had been removed from my being, body, and mind. Bursting into tears of relief, release, and sheer joy, I attempted to convey my profound gratitude and respect. When I had gained a semblance

of composure, I asked Pal what had occurred, or rather, what had been affecting me in such a way. He stated that an entity had taken root in me. Out of infinite, abounding compassion, he had released me from the entity's grip. From that day forward, I saw all beings—of both genders and indeed all of nature—in a new, increasingly clear, compassionate manner.

Of all that passed during that trip, the most surprising had yet to occur. Shortly before it was time for me to depart, I felt a strong urge to ask Pal if he would teach me this healing art called *Siddha Varma healing*. The urge was surprising to me, because I had never felt any inclination to join the healing profession. Even more relevant was that no Westerner had ever been instructed in the Siddhas' healing realm. I had no idea of the enormity of what I had innocently asked for, but somehow I felt that he would consent. The certainty sprang simply from the new yet intense bond that I felt with him coupled with my most sincere gratitude for the healing that he had blessed upon me. My joy when he gladly replied that I should return the following year to begin the healing journey only added to the already felt sense of lightness, invigoration, and soaring spirit.

Throughout the next year, the healing continued, and my relationship with Pal deepened. He was available to me at any hour of any day. Calling and emailing him regularly, I pestered him with countless questions. Absorbed in learning all that I could about the Siddhas and their traditions, I constantly asked

for clarifications of material from his book and other sources. Whenever I felt emotional distress, grace was present. One day while experiencing profound grief while lying on my side, I silently called out to Pal. Instantly, the mountain Arunachala appeared before my eyes. A jolt hit my forehead so powerfully that it pushed my head backward. Coursing into the middle of my skull, the jolt traveled down my spine, finally coming to rest in the base of my body. The strong emotion waned. Awe and gratitude took its place, and I simply sat up and resumed the work that I had to do. Based on such intimate encounters, I opened up to Pal and showed my vulnerability. In turn, he cared for every aspect of my health and life circumstances. This he communicated with a degree of sensitivity, wisdom, and love that words cannot convey.

Whenever I speak with him or am with him, it is as if I am with my own truest self. Nothing is unknown to Pal. No matter the circumstances, every interaction we have is as if there is one person rather than two people. The most startling aspect of it all is that this absence of "other" feels entirely natural. It is also the most refreshing, life-renewing experience of which I could ever dream. Never could I have imagined being so completely accepted and totally approved of without any conditions. Devoid of judgement and demands, his attentive and beautifully divine influence on me and my life course had only begun to bloom. From this flow of divine love, the natural response kindled in me

was and continues to be utter amazement and a yearning to find some offering worthy of such gifts. Never could I have imagined a person who possesses this degree of extreme humility, gentleness, patience, and overflowing spirit of kindness. Although the guru-disciple relationship may be a mystery to the Western mind, my experience is of the most profoundly deep, rich, intimately beautiful, and mysterious love affairs that this world can offer. Looking back at my life before I met Pal, this unique expression of divine grace, I wonder how I even lived. Here words truly fail me. This book is my best attempt to set down on paper what I have been fortunate enough to learn.

*My love for you has driven me insane
 I wander aimlessly the ruins of my life,
 my old self a stranger to me
 Because of your love I have broken with my past
 My longing for you keeps me in this moment
 My yearning for you gives me courage
 I look for you in my innermost being.*

(Molana Jalal-e-Din Mohammad Molavi Rumi, *Rumi's Love Poems*, ed. Maria-Magdalena Blidarus [2010])

The Siddhas worship all of creation, all of existence, as divine—meaning that each particle has its own inherent

intelligence—and deifies it as such. Nature, Existence, all of creation is known as the Mother Goddess, and is referred to in the feminine form, as She and Her, similar to the way in which the Western world refers to God as He and Him. Long before Hinduism, the ancient Dravidian culture (referred to by historians as the *Uma* cult) worshipped the divine as this feminine.