JNANASARAM – PRAMEYASARAM

Arulaala Perumal Emperumanar
This invocatory hymn by Kuratazhwan is a tribute to his teacher, Ramanujacharya. In the Sri Vaishnava school of thought a teacher, or guru, is given an exalted place. Says Kuratazhwan, 'He removes the ignorance of persons like myself (asmadh gurOho). Disregarding my mistakes, he showers his goodness on me (Bhagavathaha) and presents himself before me of his own accord (asya). He cannot tolerate another's suffering and to those who are in distress he is an ocean of compassion (dhayaikasindaHOho).'

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1 In transliterating the original Tamil and Sanskrit verses I have adhered to the phonetic rendering of the word. This may be at variance with the rules of transliteration as per the software used, namely Baraha for Indian languages.
2 Pronunciation: kUrathAzhwAn
3 Pronunciation: rAmAnujAchArya
4 From an initiation lesson in Tamil by Prof. V. T. Tirunarayana Iyengar (translation mine).
5 You can draw endlessly from an ocean without fear of it ever running dry (observation by V. T. Tirunarayana Iyengar, hereafter referred to as V.T.T).
Arulaala Perumal Emperumanar\(^6\),\(^7\), another direct disciple of that great ascetic, Ramanujacharya, has also composed several verses eulogising the guru:

‘To fail to treat as God incarnate the one who has shown the path and to erroneously vilify him instead will result in an endless cycle of birth, death and re-birth. Eternal paradise will accrue to those who sincerely venerate (such a guru),’ Arulaala declares with the authority of having learnt at the feet of Ramanuja\(^8\). In another verse, Arulaala asserts, ‘Even the Lord who is ever tender towards all will look away. If there is no love lost for the noble guru, such a devotee will face the fate of a lotus which the sun helps to bloom when in water but burns to a cinder when the same flower separates from the water in which it bloomed\(^9\).’

There are many more such verses in praise of the teacher in Arulaala Perumal Emperumanar’s prabandha-s (a literary composition, particularly a poetical one), namely JnanaSaram\(^10\) and Prameyasaram\(^11\), both in the Tamil language. The former composition is said to be an exposition of the Dvaya Mantram and the latter, of the Tirumantram\(^12\). These two mantras, together with the Charama Slokam, constitute what is called the Rahasyatrayam\(^13\), a foundational concept in the Sri Vaishnava school of thought\(^14\).

\(^6\) See Appendix 1 for a brief note on Arulaala.
\(^7\) Pronunciation: aruLALa perumAL emperumAnAr
\(^8\) See Prameyasaram commentary, Verse 9
\(^9\) See JnanaSaram commentary, Verse 35
\(^10\) Pronunciation: jnyAnasAram
\(^11\) Pronunciation: pramEyAsAram
\(^12\) This observation is made by Manavaala Maamuni(Pronunciation: maNavALa mAmuni) , who is deferentially referred to as the great seer (maamuni), in his commentary for the two compositions.
\(^13\) Our pUrvachAryA-s were seers blessed with knowledge that did not suffer from the blemishes of ignorance, delusion, illusion, and forgetfulness. They proclaimed that the essence of the Veda-s (scriptures, believed to be the source of ancient Indian philosophy, and various schools of Hindu thought) are contained in these Rahasya Mantras (deep secrets held in an aphoristic form).
Taken together, *Jnanasaram*, which has thirty verses and *Prameyasaram* which has ten verses expound on the nature of the seeker (*jivatma*\(^{15}\)), the nature of that which is to be sought (*Paramatma*\(^{16}\)), and the nature of the one who leads the seeker towards the goal (guru).

‘...The inborn desire for a state of peace and happiness inevitably moves towards a serious consideration of the nature of the self... The search for a solution takes us to experts in the field... to get at this foundation source of knowledge which furnishes the supreme equipment that we need...,’ says V. T. Tirunarayana Iyengar in a scholarly exposition titled ‘*What am I?*’ (See next chapter).

Though Prof. Iyengar did not intend it as an introduction to Arulaala’s compositions, I include an extract from ‘*What am I?*’ in this work in an attempt to provide a scholarly insight into the topics dealt with in Arulaala’s compositions, which this amateur has made a modest attempt to translate and explain based on my comprehension of the hallowed commentary left to posterity by the blessed Manavaala Maamuni\(^{17}\).

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Following is a brief note on the Veda from V.T.T’s initiation lesson in English titled ‘*The Acarya*’:

‘Indian *darsanika*-s are not original thinkers in the sense Western philosophers are. Their thought structure is based on experience. The book reflecting the thought structure is known as the Veda. It covers experience extending to eternity. The Veda is therefore treated as beyond the province of any producing agent. They are valid for all. On this assumption, Indian thinking is developed and schools of *darsana* have emerged. The great thinkers are regarded as participants in a cosmic symposium on experience on the platform of time.’

\(^{14}\) See Appendix 2: Dvaya Mantra and Tirumantra.

\(^{15}\) Pronunciation: jivAthmA

\(^{16}\) Pronunciation: paramAthmA

... Life in this world permits us moments of satisfaction and a feeling of happiness. More often we are faced with a circumstance quite disturbing, sometimes leading us to distress and despair. The inborn desire for a state of peace and happiness inevitably moves towards a serious consideration of the nature of the self and its true set up for and against its unquenchable thirst for this goal of undiluted and enduring happiness.

The search for a solution takes us to experts in the field. Their experience many times proves shaky and ineffective and eventually unworthy of our faith. Without faith progress in any walk of life is not possible. But mere faith is both deadly and dangerous. The sheet anchor of our enterprise therefore is faith which transcends faith. Belief and examination are no longer antagonistic but they function as complimentaries. Faith moves from strength to strength with each stage of examination till, at last, it reaches the pinnacle of firm faith resting on the first principle of all existence. Our initial attempt therefore is to get at this foundation source of knowledge which furnishes the supreme equipment that we need.

The Veda and the Upanishads in particular have come to be regarded as the reservoir of such equipment. The seers who visualised the whole truth have revealed the constitution of life and its function to the sincere seekers after knowledge and perfection, whatever the background be.
To begin with, the first note in the Upanishad is reference to an entity without an antecedent. It is found to be changeless, sentient and blissful. This Real termed Brahman, is described as the final heights of knowledge. The pupil is advised to reach and realise his goal employing the methods of empirical investigation (vide *Taittiriya*). The other method is the one recognised in the *Chandogya*. It is the rational style in which the pupil's function is not to investigate but to follow with attention the description of Brahman in respect of its nature and function. This up current activity and the follow-on procedure are thus equally employed in the Upanishads...

* Professor of Sanskrit and Philosophy at the Maharaja’s College Mysore, Vangipuram Tiruvaimozhi Tirunarayana Iyengar, or V.T.T as he was popularly known, also taught in leading mainstream colleges in Bangalore. He was also an acclaimed scholar of the traditional school who was trained both in the Sanskrit Veda and the Dravida (or Tamil) Veda by his father, Tiruvaimozhi Acharya Purusha, Tiruvengada Ramanujacharya.
Invocatory verse (*thaniyan*)

*Original verse (pAsuram)*

At all times, without end, think of and honour, O mortals,
The feet of the unpretentious ascetic Arulaala.
He lived in lush Pudupuliman with its wealth of gardens
And gave us the noble Prameyasaram, which rightly reveals.

*Transliteration*

nIngAmal enDRum ninaththuth thozhumingal nNilaththIr
pAngAga nalla pramEyasAram parindhaLikkum
pUngAvALaM pozhilsUzh puDaivAzhum pudhupuLiman
AngAramaTRa aruLALa mAmuuniyampadhamE.

*Free translation*

This invocatory verse is in praise of both the composition,
*Prameyasaram*\(^\text{18}\), and its composer, Arulaala Perumal Emperumanar.

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\(^\text{18}\) The true knowledge of things = *pramEyam*; Essence = *sAram*.
Manavaala Maamuni begins his commentary on Prameyasaram with this verse. The saint calls upon the people of the world to meditate on the great ascetic Arulaala who is humility personified, and who has presented the world with a composition that encapsulates the essence of that which is worth knowing.

Verse 1

pAsuram

அவ்வாைவர்க்குமவ்வாைவலரல்ொம்
uvvAnavarkku mavvAnavarellAm
உவ்வாைவரடினமலயன்று
uvvAnavar aDimai yenD Rurai
- ivvARu
kEttiruppArkku ALenDRu kanDiruppAr mLtchiyillA
nAttiruppAr enDRiruppen nAn.

Transliteration

avvAnavarkku mavvAnavarellAm
uvvAnavar aDimai yenD Rurai
- ivvARu
kEttiruppArkku ALenDRu kanDiruppAr mLtchiyillA
nAttiruppAr enDRiruppen nAn.

Free translation

Supplicants are all sentient beings to the Universal Spirit
proclaimed the preceptor –
Those who have heard and heed this precept,
Liberation is theirs, I assert.

thAthparyam (Meaning)
The sentient being (jivatma) is both knowledgeable and ignorant, self-confident and angst-ridden. The Supreme Real (Paramatma), in contrast, is omnipotent and the embodiment of eternal bliss. He is a repository of incomparable auspicious qualities, and completely lacking in vices. The wise seers who have understood the true identities of these two entities
reveal that the way to happiness for the jivatma is to recognise that he is subservient to and dependent on the Paramatma.

vyakhyAnam (Commentary)

(avvAnavarkku mavvAnavarellAm uvvAnavar aDimai)
All sentient beings are equally supplicants19 of that primordial being, the Supreme Real. [This entity is ‘the Absolute of philosophy who is the God of religion20].

(avvAnavarkku)
The one who is represented by the syllable ‘aa’. The Rig Veda declares21, ‘aa is Brahma’, equating the syllable ‘aa’ with the Original Cause.

A verse in the Vamana Purana states22:

The origin of all sounds is the syllable ‘aa’, it is said.
The origin of all meaning is Brahman, it is said.
The relationship between meanings and expressions is established by convention as a matter of course.

(mavvAnavarellAm)
Just as the syllable ‘aa’ is taken, by convention, to represent the primordial being (the Paramatma), the syllable ‘ma’ is said to represent the jivatma. Three categories of individuals are classified as jivatma, namely nityasuri-s (immortal celestial beings), mumukshu-s (spiritually advanced mortals who have attained moksha or emancipation) and samsari-s (ordinary mortals leading their everyday lives).

19 A supplicant must have two attributes: total dependence (pArathanthrya) and complete surrender (sEshathva).
20 V. T. Tirunarayana Iyengar in: Sruta Prakasika - The Sacred System of the Vedanta According to Sri Ramanuja – Revealed as Received by Sudarsana (Part I).
21 आ इति ब्रह्म (A iti brahma: ‘aa’ is Brahma)
22 समस्तज्ञानःमूलत्त्वादकार्यस्त्वभावतः I
   समस्तविज्ञानमूलत्त्वादं ब्रह्मणोजिष्ठस्त्वभावतः I
   वाच्यवाचकचमबन्धत्वोपयोर्यािं प्रतीयते II
The syllable ‘u’ (pronounced ‘oo’) is said to represent the preceptor. The preceptor is the factor that links the jivatma to the Paramatma.

Scriptures state that the syllable ‘u’ represents Sri, who through Her compassion, facilitates our bonding with the primordial being, the universal spirit, whom She never leaves even for a second, fearing in that brief moment someone may invite His wrath for some misdemeanour.

Since the preceptor’s nature of selflessness where the student is concerned mirrors Sri’s compassion, the syllable ‘u’ is taken to represent one’s guru as well.

The guru affirmed that the position of the jivatma is of the nature of a supplicant (see earlier footnote on supplicant’s attributes) vis a vis the Paramatma. [The association between these two entities is described thus by V.T.T. in a discourse on Acharya Hrudayam: ‘I am yours. Therefore you will take care of me’ is the attitude of the faithful.]

In his composition, Kanninun Chiruthambu (Pronunciation: kaNNinuN chiruththAmbu), Madhurakavi Azhwar says, ‘I have been fickle in my devotion to the Lord of the celestial beings, a veritable vagabond. Yet, I have been blessed to be able, at all times, to perceive the dark form of the Lord along with his consort. This is the blessing of the Lord of Kurughur, to whom I have surrendered my all.’

The person referred to by Madhurakavi as the ‘Lord of Kurughur’ is his teacher, Satakopa (Nammazhwar).

Sri, or Lakshmi, is the consort of the primordial being who is called Narayana, or Vishnu, by adherents of the Sri Vaishnava school of thought.
Those who have listened to their guru’s pronouncement know that all jivatma-s are supplicants of the Paramatma as there is none else worthy of our submission (ananyArhashESHatva), none else capable of giving refuge (ananyasharaNatva) and none else who is pleasure incarnate (ananyaBHOga).

Those who, seeing themselves as disciples of such an enlightened and selfless guru, imbibe his advice.

Followers of such a preceptor will attain to that ultimate paradise from which there is no risk of returning to mundane existence. So do I proclaim. (Having been a direct disciple of the peerless ascetic Ramanujacharya, Arulaala asserts this outcome with authority.)

Verse 2

The abode of Narayana. It has various appellations such as Tirunaadu, Sri Vaikuntam, Paramapadam.

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Transliteration

kulamOnDRu uyir pala thaNkuTRaththAliTTa
kalamOnDRu kAriyamum vERAm – palamOnDRu
kANAnmaikANum karuththAr thiruththALgaL
pENAmaik kANum pizhai.

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25 The abode of Narayana. It has various appellations such as Tirunaadu, Sri Vaikuntam, Paramapadam.
Free translation
Society is one, life forms are many;
The same elements of Nature constitute all life forms
but individual vocations differ.
Forsaking the advice of selfless seers exposes such inequities.

thAthparyam (Meaning)
We are unable to come to terms with the inequities we perceive in this
world because we neglect the advice (refer to previous verse) of selfless
seers whose only motive is to uplift humanity that is disenchant.
Even though individual actors are countless in number, all of us belong to one
human family. Life forms and vocations differ, but the same elements of
Nature constitute all beings26.

vyakhyAnam (Commentary)

(kulamonDRu)
There is only one social order, and it is both inclusive (nirupADHikam)
and constant (nityam). This group is the community of the devout27.

(uyir pala)
Individuals (jivatma-s) who constitute the community of the devout are
countless.

(thaN kutRaththAl iTTa kalam onDRu)
Though differences in state and status are contingent on each jivatma’s
conduct and deeds (karma), all life forms are constituted of the elements
of Nature.

26 Equally for all of creation God is the Original Cause (kArAnam: कारणम्) and the
Ultimate Salvation (rakshaNam: रक्षणम्)
27 The devout consider themselves supplicants of the entity called Brahman. The
attitude of complete submission to Brahman (Seshi) by the devotee (sesha) is called
seshatva. (Pronunciation: sEshi, sEsha, sEshathva)
It is said the community of jivatma-s is one despite the multitude of individuals. Similarly, all life forms spring from Nature though tasks vary depending on their respective life conditions. Since their life worlds are so different their experiences too vary, resulting in differing levels of joys and sorrows for each individual. What accounts for this lack of harmony or homogeny in the manner individual lives pan out? The answer to this inquiry is the subject of the rest of this verse.

When a person becomes a devotee it is with the knowledge that he is a supplicant (sesa) of that entity called Brahman (Seshi). Supplication (seshatva) is the bedrock of this relationship. The sesha submits himself totally to the care of the Seshi: ‘I am yours, therefore you will take care of me,’ is the attitude that defines the devotee.  

Deep though a devotee’s desire that which won’t do him good the Lord will not grant. A toddler may throw a tantrum and want to touch the fire but will a mother fail to prevent it from doing so?

The distress He causes may be great but it is for the devotee’s welfare the Lord of Sri truly cares. The pain of surgery may be unbearable but a father will still support removal of his son’s tumour.

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28 Two pAsuram-s from Jnanasaram (20 and 21) may be referred to here. They capture the nature of the deity’s benevolence and account for the supplicant’s unswerving faith:
The motivation of the teacher who has conferred knowledge of this relationship between the *sesha* and the *Seshi* is purely altruistic. He has only the ultimate emancipation (*siddhotaya*) of the student in sight and has no taste for fame, profit or *puja*-s (performance of rituals aspiring for specific, self-determined ends). A devotee who fails to cherish such a teacher and follow his tenets is in error and his life becomes directionless (as he is beset by doubts).

**Verse 3**

*pAsuram*

பாங்காண்டு மிளாது பாவமுள்ள குழந்தை

குழந்தைகளின் காரியமண்டு குழந்தை

தாண்டின்நன்பர் தாண்டின்நயின் பான்முள

ஆணுக்காள்நன்பர் பான்முள.

**Transliteration**

palaNGoNDu mILAdha pAvamuLadhAgil
kulaNGonDu kAriyamenkURIr – thalaNGoNDa
thALiNaiyAnanDRE thanaiyozhindha yAvaraiyum
ALuDaiyAnanDRE yavan.

**Free translation**

Desiring possessions, interred in a cesspool of sin
If this be your lot, to what avail being in the family of the faithful?
By spanning the world with His two feet aeons ago
Has He not taken custody of each and everyone?

**thAthparyam (Meaning)**

By straddling the universe (See footnote, this verse, on Vamana avatara)
God has shown the inclusive nature of His prowess. Nothing and no one falls outside the ambit of His protection and His authority. Knowing this, what can one say if those who belong to the community of the faithful
still perceive themselves as independent agents and exert themselves for personal profit?29

vyakhyAnam (Commentary)

(palaNGoNDu m1LAdha pAvam uLadhAgil kulaNGonDu kAriyam enkUIr)
If addiction to possessions results in ensnaring you in a vicious cycle of greed and sin, to what avail your claim to belong to the community of the devout?

(thalaNGoNDa thALiNaiyAn anDRE)
The Lord spanned all the worlds with His pair of feet30 to proclaim the entire Universe as His, aeons ago.

29 The following statements (71 and 72) from Pillai Lokacharya’s Sri VachanaBhushanam may be recalled here:

ஸ்வய்த்நநிவ்ருத்திபார்ந்த்ரயபெம்; பஸ்வப்ரமயாஜநநிவ்ருத்திமேஷத்வபெம் (71).
Cessation of exertion results when one recognizes one’s identity as a dependant (on the Paramatma); cessation of desire for personal profit results when one submits oneself completely (to the Paramatma).

பார்ந்த்ரயபெம்; த்த்த்விஷயப்பிரீனசந்யபெம் (72).
To advance God’s work is the purpose of all effort. To enjoy doing this is the purpose of life.

30 The allusion here is to the Vamana avatara episode, in which Vishnu assumes the guise of a diminutive mendicant and later transforms Himself into the gigantic Trivikrama, stretching from earth to sky and beyond, in order to deflate the ego of the mighty king Bali, who, proud of his invincibility, had become a menace to the divinities.

Vamana asked for three measures of land from the king, Bali, and when it was granted, the diminutive Vamana grew into the gigantic Trivikrama who straddled the worlds in just two steps. ‘Where shall I place the third step?’ He asks Bali, who bends down, contrite, and shows his head. The Lord places His foot on Bali’s head and in so doing, liberates him or grants him moksha.
By measuring out the worlds with His feet, Narayana symbolically indicated that each and every jivatma is under His care. Having done this, He was satisfied that He had affirmed to each one that they were under His guardianship. ‘However, failing to recognise this close relationship with the Absolute, the jivatma-s lead lives of pain and pandemonium due to their attachment to the material world and pursuits available to the finite mind. The cure is effected when the jivatma realises his position as a supplicant and submits himself to the care of the Purushottama31,32.’

Verse 4

*pAsuram*  

carumaththA jnyAnaththA kANum vagaiyuNDE  
dharumaththAlanD  

Transliteration  

karumaththA jnyAnaththA kANum vagaiyuNDE  
dharumaththAlanD Ri iRaithALgaL – oru maththA

Vamana is not only diminutive, He is also a mendicant. Should the Lord of the universe have to beg for alms? But He did. This shows the extent to which He will humble Himself for the sake of His devotees. Vamana’s purpose was not only to protect the divinities but also to redeem Bali himself.

Arrogance, ostentation and conceit are demoniac qualities which consign a jivatma to bondage, says Sri Krishna in the Gita. And the Lord wanted to save Bali who had succumbed to these qualities, as he was blameless otherwise.

31 The quotation is from V.T.T.’s commentary on *Sruta Prakasika* (see earlier reference to this work)

32 ‘Purushottama denotes a particular sentient entity which is the most supreme. Its unique attributes are that it is opposed to evil and it is the sole home of all auspicious qualities (Prof. V. T. Tirunarayana Iyengar).’
munnIrkaDaindhAn aDaiththAn mudhal paDaiththAn annIramarndhAnaDi.

_Free translation_
Self-effort, physical or mental, will it help to see
That holy pair of feet which are the sole refuge?
These are the feet of He who churned the waters once long ago,
Bridged it, caused it to be and then lay down on it.

_thAthparyam (Meaning)_
The Lord's pair of feet at once represent His inconceivable prowess and His incredible simplicity. This contradiction cannot be questioned; it has to be understood. And, it cannot be known through self-effort – physical or mental. It is a realisation that can come only through His blessing. He has repeatedly demonstrated this twin quality of mEnmai (immeasurable worth) and nIrmai (incomparable softness) that coexist in Him in order to make it easy for us to comprehend.

VyakhyAnam (Commentary)

(karumaththAl jnyAnaththAl kANum vagai uNDE)
“The supreme aim of a seeker (parama purshArTHa) is to secure emancipation or moksha that is, to pass beyond existence.” The means to secure such emancipation are believed to be various: karma yoga (the path of action), jnana yoga (the path of knowledge), and bhakti yoga (the path of devotion). However, none of these paths will prove useful

33 The quotation is from V. T. T.’s commentary on Sruta Prakasika (See earlier reference to this work).
34 See the Bhagavad Gita. There are chapters devoted to Krishna’s sermon on each of these paths.
unless prapatti (supplication) is the foundation of the means adopted to achieve the goal.

‘The Absolute (Brahman) enters the range of human knowledge and secures emancipation to the craving mind...It is the function of the Absolute to clear all the obstacles to knowledge and make realization (sAkshAtkAra) possible.’ However, the attractions of the material world (prakruti) on the sense organs and qualities that inhere in each individual and shape their character take one away from true knowledge (pramEyA). ‘Those who take refuge in me alone get over this illusion,’ proclaims the Lord (मामेव ये प्रपयनते मायामेतां तरन्ति ते)37.

(dharumaththAl anDRi iRaithALgaL)

चरणो शरण प्रपन्ने – Your pair of feet are my refuge: this I know and believe, says the first portion of the sacred Dvaya Mantra. This is the attitude of a prapanna (a supplicant, one who trusts Bhagavan is his sole refuge). Such an attitude of supplication, called seshatvam, is the mark of true knowledge. Knowledge without such self-effacement will not help a seeker in the quest for emancipation.

35 ‘Etymologically denotes an entity which possesses the attribute of infinity. It denotes at the same time an object which is by nature infinite. The word also refers to the attribute of conferring infinity on other minds by removing their imperfections and by making them realise infinite bliss.’ (V. T. T.)
36 These are the three guNas namely, sattva (purity or goodness, the first of the three primary qualities supposed to constitute Nature), rajas (passion, the second of the three primary qualities, supposed to be the source of motion or energy in creatures) and tamas (ignorance or darkness, the third of the three primary qualities).
37 Bhagavad Gita: Ch. 7 v.14.
38 Bhagavan can be justifiably used when the presence of unlimited virtues coupled with a total absence of vices is found to exist. The word, therefore, cannot denote all objects. It can be an epithet only for the Absolute (V. T. T.)
‘In the absence of either parthva (quality of being the ultimate or utmost – higher than which there is none, in every respect) or saulabhya (quality of being accessible, easily approachable) the importance of the Absolute to the finite mind would cease to be felt.’

The latter portion of the verse, from this phrase on, serves to underscore that the Lord is invincible but at the same time accessible. There is no limit to what He cannot do and there is nothing that He will not do for those who seek His help.

In order to restore their glory to the celestial beings who had lost their powers due to a curse, the Lord churned the vast ocean to retrieve the immortality-conferring nectar from its depths.

To wipe the tears off the face of Sita who was being held captive by Ravana in his island kingdom, the Lord built a bridge spanning the seas from mainland India to Ravana’s Lanka.

In order that there may be existence and enjoyment Bhagavan first conceived that element called water, aeons ago.

To be accessible to all of creation, the Lord then left His abode in Vaikuntam and settled down to rest on his snake couch (Adisesha) in the midst of that very vast reservoir of water He had brought into being.

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39 V. T. T. in his commentary on Sruta Prakasika (See earlier reference to this work).
40 Allusion is to the Kurma Avataram, one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu, in which He took the form of a giant tortoise.
The feet of such a one as this, who is at the same time omnipotent and approachable – the feet that had spanned the worlds to establish that all of creation was equally under His protection: except through His own grace, can a jivatma ever comprehend the potential of this pair of sacred feet?

**Verse 5**

**pAsuram**

முற்றும் வந்துருவதின் சுவடும் வந்துவான் வந்துவான் வந்துவான்

<transcribe>
vazhiyAvadhonD ren DRAl ma TRavaiyum mu TRum ozhiyA vadhon DRend RA lomen DRu - izhiy AdhE iththalaiyAlEdhumillai yen DRirundhadhudhAn aththalaiyAl vandhavaruL.

**Transliteration**
vazhiyAvadhonD ren DRAl ma TRavaiyum mu TRum ozhiyA vadhon DRend RA lomen DRu - izhiy AdhE iththalaiyAl Edhumillai yen DRirundhadhudhAn aththalaiyAl vandhavaruL.

**Free translation**

There is but one path. Once this is seen
All other paths are given up. One feels no qualms
about remaining passive as it is in submission to the Lord.
Such an attitude is but a blessing conferred by Him.
\textit{thAtparyam (Meaning)}

Once you have grasped the essence of true knowledge as conveyed by the selfless spiritual master (See Verse 1 of this composition), the path to emancipation becomes clear. You perform every action and accept every experience in a spirit of submission to His will. Everything else becomes inconsequential. Liberation from the encumbrance of exertion and expectation is the end result of His grace.

\textit{vyakhyAnam (Commentary)}

(vazhiyAvadhu onDRu enDRAl)

The Sastras (scriptures) say there are various means to emancipation. These are the ways of \textit{karma}, \textit{jnana}, \textit{bhakti} and \textit{prapatti}\textsuperscript{41}. If one of the first three means to emancipation is adopted, the jivatma turns to the Lord for help to achieve the goal. In case \textit{prapatti} is the means adopted, the jivatma puts himself in the Lord’s hands and allows himself to be led towards the goal.

In the former case, the jivatma chooses to retain his agency (I too am a sentient being, an \textit{atma}, is the attitude). Yet he is dependent on the Paramatma for success since he does not have the power to control the consequences. In the latter case, the jivatma chooses to be an agent of the Lord (in the spirit of \textit{seshatva}), recognising it to be his true identity. Thereby he does every act as an offering and accepts every consequence as a blessing. The superiority of \textit{prapatti} as the means to emancipation (\textit{sidhdhOpAya}), therefore, is evident.

(\textit{maTRavaiyum muTRum ozhiyA})

\textsuperscript{41} Pronunciation: jnyAna, BHakthi, prapaththi.
When all other means to emancipation are given up completely and only the one surefire path is relied on, then it is in keeping with Krishna’s exhortation in the Gita: सर्वधर्मार्त्य परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज 42.

(adhonDRu enDRAI)
For a true prapanna i.e., the jivatma who adopts prapatti as the means to moksha, it is not a process of exploration and choice. Rather, he does not even entertain the notion that there can be other ways to attain moksha.

(OmenDRu)
In complete submission

(izhiyAdhE)
Rather than asking ‘What can I do?’ submitting to the Absolute saying, ‘I am yours’, and adopting prapatti marga without expressing incredulity over the apparent lack of agency.

(iththalaiyAl Edhumillai yenDRu irundhadhudhAn)
Conceiving of the self as the instrument of the Lord and not claiming ownership over one’s body, mind or soul.

(aththalaiyAl vandha arul)
In fact, acquiring such an attitude of seshatva is itself only due to the benevolence of the Lord, to whom the jivatma surrenders without any expectation.

42 This verse (18.66) from Bhagavad Gita is regarded as a sacred Charama Slokam (Sri Krishna Charama Slokam). It is a reassurance given by the Lord to the prapanna seeking emancipation. ‘Give up all other paths and take refuge in me alone. I will obliterate all your sins and liberate you. Don’t worry.’
Verse 6

\textit{pAsuram}

If perceived as it is, is there any one thing we can lay claim to as ours? To Him who is not deficient in any way, what can we say, Who have nothing to call our own?

\textit{Transliteration}

\textit{Free translation}

\textit{thAtparyam (Meaning)}

When the identity of your self and the Supreme Real are understood in the right manner (see verse 1 and earlier verses of this composition), is there anything you can break away and claim as your own, over which the Paramatma can have no claim whatsoever? When everything is His, including you and yours, and He is flawless by nature, what is there left to pray for? Won’t He take care of His own?
vyakhyAnam (Commentary)

(uLLapaDi uNaril)
To know one’s self as it truly is, which means to not merely profess an attitude of supplication and submit oneself body and mind to the Lord but to entrust oneself completely to His care bereft of any notions of self-effort or self-protection\(^{43, 44}\).

(onDRu namakku uNDu enDRu viLLa viragiladhAi viTTadhe)
When we submit to the Lord, body, mind and soul, is there anything we can distinguish as being ours? If there is nothing outside the purview of protection of the Lord, what is it we should seek His protection for?

(koLLa kuRaiyEdhum illArkku)
He has no limitations that will come in the way of His caring for us and He has no expectations of return for the protection He provides us.

(iRaiyEdhum illAdha yAm)
We have nothing over which we can claim ownership since all entities, sentient and non-sentient, are in His custody.

(kUruvadh uen sollIr)
What need we tell Him that He does not already know? He is all-knowing and omnipotent, the Original Cause and the custodian of all.

\(^{43}\) Nanjeeyar once paid a visit to a disciple who was ailing. ‘My end is near. Kindly teach me something which will protect me in my last days,’ requested the disciple. ‘You only need to quash the very thought that you can protect yourself,’ replied Nanjeeyar.

\(^{44}\) See Jnanasaram, verse 18.
Verse 7

pAsuram
இல்லையிருவர்க்கு லமன்றிருப்பார்
இல்லையா லாருவர்க்லகட்டுமமா
இல்லைகுனறயுனையாலை
மனறயுனையமார்க்கத்ம காண்க.

Transliteration
illaiyiruvarkkum enDRiRaivyai venDRiruppAr
illai ahdhoruvarkkeTTumadhO – illai
kuRaiyuDaimaidhAnenDRu kURinArillas
maRaiyuDaiya mArkkaththEkAN.

Free translation
There’s nothing you lack, and there’s nothing I have:
so we both are on equal footing. Does it occur
to anyone to claim this equivalence with God?
Know this to be the path shown by the Veda.

thAthparyam (Meaning)
No one has succeeded in establishing this equivalence with God: ‘You
lack something and so do I. You lack nothing, neither do I. So aren’t we
on an equal footing?’
Since everything is His, He lacks nothing but therefore there is nothing
He can ask for either. We lack nothing because we are also His and He
will provide for all that we need but there is nothing we can give Him
since we ourselves belong to Him. Asks Arulaala: Has it occurred to anyone to win God over with this argument? This, indeed, is the path shown by the Veda, which is now being made explicit for the benefit of all.

vyakhyAnam (Commentary)

(Illai iruvarkkum enDRu)
Everything is yours and therefore there is nothing you can ask me to give you. Nothing is mine and therefore there is nothing I can give you. We both, therefore, are each lacking in something.

(iRaiyai venDRiruppAr illai)
There is none who has argued thus and established this equivalence with God.

(ahdhoruvarkku eTTumadhO?)
Indeed, does it occur to anyone that there is scope for such an inquiry?

(Illai kuRai uDaimaidhAn enDRu)
Being paripUrNa, complete in Himself, He lacks nothing. Having surrendered our all to Him, we have nothing we can call our own.

(kURinArillA maRaiyuDaiya mArkkaththE kAN)
The Veda 'covers experience extending to eternity and is, therefore, beyond the province of any producing agent.' (apaurushEya). Further, the Veda does not make any attempt to mislead or deceive and is, therefore, absolutely trustworthy. The knowledge established here, says Arulaala (of prapatti as the pre-eminent path to emancipation), is the path shown by the Veda and it is hereby made accessible to all.

45 V. T. Tirunarayana Iyengar’s brief notes on Vedantacharya.
Verse 8

pAsuram

Wealth and want, delight, distress, disease, downsides
They come and go – fret not over them.
Free from care, pray with devotion.
Such piety will put you on par with denizens of Paradise.

Transliteration

viththamizha vinbam thunbam nOi vlkAlam
thathamavaiyE thalaiyaLikkum – aththaiviDIr
ichchiyAnichchiyA dhEthhavezhil vAnath
thuchchiyAnuchchi yAnAm

Free translation

Wealth and want, delight, distress, disease, downsides
They come and go – fret not over them.
Free from care, pray with devotion.
Such piety will put you on par with denizens of Paradise.

thAthparyam (Meaning)

Wealth and loss of wealth, pleasure and pain, disease and death are different stages in life that will come and go. Drop these from your prayers. Instead, sing His praises without any self-interest. Such selfless devotees will find an everlasting place alongside the denizens in the abode of the Lord.
vyakhyAnam (Commentary)

(viththam izhavu inbam thunbam noI vlkAlam)
Wealth in all its forms and the loss of such wealth due to its inherent impermanence, happiness due to favourable experiences and distress due to unfavourable experiences, illness, disease and death.

(thatham avaiyE thalaiyAlikkum)
Each of these situations has to be faced: they will come and go in the course of one’s lifetime. They cannot be avoided.

(aththai viDlr)
Stop worrying about these transient phases in life. (Let your mind dwell instead on purposefully serving the Lord, as His instrument).

(ichchiyAn)
Those who let go of desire for transient pleasures

(ichchiyAdhu Eththa)
Having let go of even the desire to seek moksha, those who use their faculties with no other motivation than to simply serve the Lord as His instrument

(ezhil vAnaththu uchchiyAn uchchiyAnAm)
Such devoted service will resonate with Sarveswara\(^\text{46}\) in the heavenly realms. In the Lord’s eyes, such a devotee will gain the status of the

\(^{46}\) Another term for the Absolute, sarvEsha, the all-pervading One. sarvatra (in all places: there is never a moment when He is not available to everyone, everywhere); sarvatha (in all ways: He is present in all manner of things, does not choose or pick any type, class, category, nature or form); sarvadhara (at all times: He never turns His back on anyone or anything at any time. He is always present).
nitya-s (immortal divine beings) and mukta-s (jivatma-s who have attained final emancipation) who are ever beside the Lord in His abode, Paramapada.

Verse 9

pAsuram

தத்தமிரையின் வடிலவன்று விழங்கிராப்

Transliteration

thathamiRaiyin vaDivenDRu thALiNaiyai vaiththavavarai vaNaNGiyirAp – piththarAi

Free translation

To fail to treat as God incarnate the one who has shown the path
And to madly vilify such a guru instead
will ensnare (you) in endless life cycles.
Firm faith will secure eternal paradise.

nindhipparkkuNDERA nINirayam nIdhiyAl vandhippArkkuNDizhi yAvAn.
thAtparyam (Meaning)
The guru who has guided you towards the feet\(^{47}\) of Iswara is to be worshipped as God incarnate. To insult him instead by treating him as a mere mortal like any other will keep you entrapped in an endless cycle of birth, death and re-birth. Those who venerate their preceptor unequivocally will find eternal bliss.

vyakhyAnam (Commentary)

(thatham iRaiyin vaDivenDRu)
Each and every preceptor\(^{48}\) is an embodiment of the Lord Himself.

(thALiNaiyai vaiththa avarai )
The preceptor is the one who has equipped the student with the capacity to move from ignorance to knowledge and from darkness to light.

(vaNaNGi irA piththarAi)
Failing to regard one’s preceptor as the epitome of the worshippable Lord Himself, since to see the divine in a fellow human can be perplexing to many.

(nindhipparkku)
To perceive as a mere human the altruistic preceptor who has blessed one with the true knowledge of things (pramEya) is an offence.

\(^{47}\) The bodily organ that helps you walk on a path are your legs. It is the feet, therefore, that are worshipped as they help you progress on the right path towards God (From an initiation lesson in Tamil by V. T. T. Translation mine.)

\(^{48}\) A preceptor (AchArya or guru) is one whose only motive is to guide the student to seek ultimate emancipation. Underlying this motive is compassion for a fellow-being, the inability to tolerate the seeker’s pain due to ignorance regarding the true knowledge of things. The preceptor has no taste for wealth, recognition, power or such transient material ends.
Entertaining such a notion is disrespectful in itself even if one does nothing in particular to insult the preceptor.

*(ERA nINirayam uNDE)*

Those who disregard their preceptor thus are doomed. They will not find release from the never-ending cycle of birth and death with its trials and tribulations.

*(nldhiyAl vandhippArkku uNDu izhiyA vAn)*

Those who perceive the Lord in their preceptor and treat him with deference in accordance with such a notion will attain to the bliss of Paramapada. Madhurakavi Azhwar has established this as true.49

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**Verse 10**

*pAsuram*

I recited his name and found happiness.
I attained the lustrous feet of the Lord Himself.
I know nothing except my lord of Kurughur
Whose lyrics I sing and wander about.

(The Lord of Kurughur referred to in the verse is Madhurakavi’s teacher, Nammazhwar also known as Satakopa)
Transliteration
iRAlyumuyiru miruvarkumuLLa
muRAlyum muRaiyE mozhiyum – maRaiyum
uNarththuvArillA nALonDRalla Ana
uNarthtu vAruNDAna pOdu.

Free translation
The deity, the devotee, the bond between them
And the words of the Veda that affirm this link –
It was all obscure till the teacher came.
When he did, everything became clear.

thAthparyam (Meaning)
The svarUpa (characteristics) of the Paramatma and the jiva,
and the nature of the relationship between these two entities are explained in
the Veda, which are eternal, and hence always extant. But with none to
explain their content, the people at large remained lost due to their ignorance.50. But when a fitting preceptor emerged, the true knowledge
of things (pramEya) also came to light.51.

50 ‘The royal road to emancipation, mukti, trodden by the ancient seers and sages
was strewn with thorns and thistles gathered by the views and words of
philosophers whose views were narrow and dogmatic. As a result of this people lost
sight of the right view and way of life and were groping in the dark in despair.’ (From
V. T. T.’s commentary on Sudarsana’s Sruta Prakasika).
51 ‘With a view to helping them [see previous footnote] to see clearly the truth, being
convinced that the ancient seers, who had the undisputed gift of insight and
discrimination pursued the path which was safe and smooth, Ramanuja refuted all
the untenable theories and re-established the irrefutable view which was recognized
and followed by one long tradition.’ (From V.T.T’s commentary on Sudarsana’s Sruta
Prakasika).
vyakhyAnam (Commentary)

(iRAlyum)
The Lord, who is represented by the syllable ‘aa’

(uyirum)
The jivatma who is represented by the syllable ‘ma’

(iruvarkkum uLLa muRAlyum)
The relationship between the sesha and the Seshi exemplified by the attitude of seshatva

(muRAlyE mozhiyum maRAlyum)
The Tirumantram\(^{52}\) which duly represents this knowledge and is in itself a succinct representation of the Veda.

(uNarththuvArillA nALonDRalla)
The knowledge of all these, though always extant, was not evident till someone came and revealed its existence\(^{53}\).

(Ana uNarthtuvAr undAna pOdhu)
When this person who revealed this knowledge presented himself, so did the true knowledge of things.

The one who proclaims the existence of this knowledge is the Acharya, as indicated in the first verse of this composition.

Thus does Arulaala Perumal Emperumaanaar equip us with knowledge of how the preceptor enters our lives and removes our ignorance.

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\(^{52}\) Om nam\(\text{O}\) nAr\(\text{A}\)ya\(\text{N}\)a. See Appendix 2, Dvaya Mantra and Tirumantra.

\(^{53}\) From V. T. T.’s commentary on Sruta Prakasika.
Appendix 1

ARULAALA PERUMAL EMPERUMANAR

Yagnyamurthi was a renowned *sanyasi* (ascetic) affiliated to the Mayavada school of Hindu thought. Having heard of the philosophical truths presented to much acclaim by Ramanuja, Yagnyamurthi was eager to engage him in debate and win him over to his school of thought. So he travelled from Pudupuliman in the north to Srirangam in the south to meet Ramanuja in person, paid his respects to the great ascetic, and expressed his desire to logically refute the philosophical tenets propounded by Ramanuja’s school of philosophy (the Sri Vaishnava philosophy, which is known as Visishtadvaita). They agreed that the one who was unable to give a suitable response to the other’s question would give up his philosophy and become a follower of the one who asked the question.

The debate between Ramanuja and Yagnyamurthi went on for seventeen days with neither side flagging in either asking questions or in responding to them. Then it was the turn of Yagnyamurthi to ask a question, for which Ramanuja could not give an immediate response. It was decided that the proceedings for the day would be wound up and if Ramanuja could not provide a response next morning, he would give up his adherence to Visishtadvaita.

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54 This narrative is adapted from the renowned scholar Prathivadi Bhayankaram Annangarachariar Swami’s article, ‘Sri Ramanujar Vaibhavam’, published in the Tamil monthly *Sri Ramanujan* dated May 10, 1950, and re-published, with permission, in a memoir to mark a family event.

55 Ramanuja has been known by the appellation Emperumanar after he was addressed as such by one of his teachers, Tirukoshtiyur Nambi, for being comparable to the Lord Himself (Emperuman) in his compassion for fellow beings.
That night a much distressed Ramanuja, when performing the daily worship of his personal deity, Perarulaalan, exclaimed in anguish, ‘Alas! It is my misfortune that the great philosophy (darsana) propagated by the Azhwars and kept aloft by seers up to the time of the preceptor Alavandar, should suffer in reputation because of me. If this is your wish, so be it. Everything is your lila\textsuperscript{56}.\textsuperscript{57}.’ After performing oblations and offering food to the idol of Perarulaalan as was the daily practice, Ramanuja retired for the night too upset to eat anything himself. As he slept, the Lord appeared in Ramanuja’s dream and prompted him about the topics he should focus on to refute the arguments of Yagnyamurthi. An energised Ramanuja was up early next morning, and after performing his ablutions, presented himself at the venue of the debate.

Yagnyamurthi, a distinguished seer himself, could see that Ramanuja had been blessed by a divine hand. So, even before the arguments could begin, he conceded defeat and laying his head at the feet of Ramanuja, prayed to be taken into his fold. A surprised Ramanuja asked Yagnyamurthi why he had decided to suspend the debate, to which the latter replied, ‘When the Lord Himself has blessed you, is it possible for me to say anything more? All I ask is that you show me the right path.’

Since it was Perarulaalan Himself who had facilitated this victory over an antithetical school of thought, Ramanuja sought to proclaim this to the world by re-naming Yagnyamurthi after the Lord, combining it with the appellation by which he himself was known. Arulaaala Perumal Emperumanar, thus, was born.

\textsuperscript{56} Pronunciation: lIlA. Literally meaning ‘sport’. Tradition holds that God created all sentient beings and non-sentient things for His ‘lila’. The ‘lila vibhuti’ or the world of amusement mortals reside in is a temporary distraction, whereas the ‘nitya vibhuti’ or the abode of the Lord is eternal.

\textsuperscript{57} ellAm un arul, ellAm un seyal; ellAm un krupai, ellAm un ichchai (Everything is your blessing, your doing; everything is your grace, your wish): This total submission to God is the fundamental tenet as well as the ultimate knowledge for a devotee.
Appendix 2

DVAYA MANTRA AND TIRUMANTRA

Following is an attempt to provide a barebones meaning of the Dvaya Mantra and the Tirumantra, which have been the subject of erudite theses that have stood the test of time⁵⁸.

**Dvaya Mantra**

श्रीमन्नारायण चरणां शरणं प्रपद्ये
श्रीमतेनारायणाय नमः

srīman nAraYaNa charaNau sharaNam prapadhyE.
srīmathE nAraYaNAya namaha.

*srīman:* He who is one with Sri (sriyata iti srīhi = She who is worshipped by all; and also srayata iti srīhi = She who worships the Lord)

*nAraYaNa:* He who is the home for all beings (*nAraNAm ayanam yaha saha*) and also He who has His home in every being (*nAraAha ayanam yasya saha*)

*charanau:* (His) pair of feet

*sharaNam:* as refuge

*prapadhyE:* I seek, knowing, trusting.

*srīmathE:* United with Sri is He

*nAraYaNAya:* Narayana, to whom I submit totally

*namaha:* seeking (to do so) without any trace of I and mine (ego and attachment).

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⁵⁸ See Pillai Lokacharya’s *Mumukshuppadi.*
The divine couple Sri and Narayana are regarded as one. Sri is associated with the lotus, the metaphor of the flower serving to emphasise Her softness or gentleness. She is said to be the personification of compassion, even more so than the benevolent Lord whose ire may be provoked on occasion.

The Lord’s feet are a byword for asylum – none who seeks His refuge is ever disappointed, be they sentient beings or non-sentient things. By straddling the universe as Trivikrama the Lord demonstrated His sovereignty over all of creation, and also the inclusive nature of His protection.

That these feet are specified as being two in number is not a redundant oversight or a simple statement of fact. It indicates the twin attributes of immeasurable value (mEnmai) and infinite softness (menmai or nIrmai), the one due to His inherent pre-eminence and the other due to His inviolable association with Sri. Knowledge of the Lord’s dependability is, therefore, there for the asking and acknowledging this to be so gives us the confidence to entrust ourselves to His care with complete belief.

**Tirumantra**

ॐ नमः नारायणाय
Om namO nArAyaNAya

The terms namO and nArAyaNAya have already been explained in the Dvaya Mantra. The syllable Om (or ॐ), pronounced as a word with a single syllable, is in fact a combination of three Sanskrit letters (which also are three syllables) namely, ‘अ’ pronounced ‘aa’, ‘उ’ pronounced ‘oo’, and ‘म्’ pronounced like the ‘m’ in ‘hum’.
Each of these sounds is said to represent a particular entity\textsuperscript{59}, and in its entirety, \textit{Om} or the \textit{praNava} is said to symbolise the essence of the scriptures:

- ‘ॐ’ represents the deity, Paramatma the primordial supreme being, described as the Absolute in philosophy.
- ‘ már’ represents the jivatma or living being who exists at and for the pleasure of the Paramatma.
- ‘ॐ’ represents Sri and the preceptor (guru) who is believed to be the repository of attributes that are manifest in Her. Like Sri, the preceptor (guru or AchArya) is said to be the factor that links the jivatma to the Paramatma.

The Tirumantra essentially is said to mean, ‘I submit my all to Narayana.’

\textsuperscript{59} See Prameyasaram commentary, Verse 1.