



TIRUMANTIRAM: FOUNTAINHEAD OF SAIVA SIDDHANTA.

I want to introduce you to Saint Tirumular who is the very fountainhead of Saiva Siddhanta, and to his scripture, the Tirumantiram, considered the final authority on subtle matters of philosophy and theology in Saiva Siddhanta. In fact, it is said to contain the whole of Saiva Siddhanta. Saint Tirumular is a theologian of our faith, but not merely a theologian. He is also a siddhar, an accomplished yogi. Our Hindu scriptures come from such great men, men who have attained to the deepest realizations through their sadhana and their devotion. When their awareness dwells in the superconscious states resident in all men but penetrated intentionally by only a few, and when they speak out from that state, we consider that it is not man himself who has thus spoken but the Divine through man. Saint Tirumular was such a siddhar, and his words are valued as a divine message for mankind.

Those of you who have been on San Marga here on Kauai have seen the beautiful life-size granite statue of Saint Tirumular that arrived here along with the statue of Saint Tiruvalluvar, the author of the Tirukural. In India during Tiruvalluvar's time there was neither paper nor pens, so writing was accomplished with a stylus, the characters being scraped or scratched into a specially prepared leaf, called an Ola leaf. Many ancient scriptures and literature were produced in this manner, and it is amazing that some of the original writings so made still exist today. Certainly no modern day paper would have withstood the centuries so well! The statue of Saint Tirumular shows him sitting in the lotus posture, deep in meditation, while Saint Tiruvalluvar is seated with a small writing table on his lap composing his sacred verses with stylus in hand. His Tirukural speaks on virtuous living. It gives us the keys to happy and harmonious life in the world, but it doesn't give any insights into the nature of God, whereas, the Tirumantiram delves into the nature of God, man and the universe in its depths. Taken together, they speak to all Hindus and offer guidance for every aspect of religious life, the first addressing itself to the achievement of virtue, wealth and love, while the second concerns itself with attainment of moksha or liberation. The Tirumantiram is a mystical book and a difficult book. The original text is written in metered verse, composed in the ancient Tamil language. Saint Tirumular is the first one to codify Saiva Siddhanta, the final conclusions, and the first one to use the term "Saiva Siddhanta." It is a document upon which the entire religion could stand, if it had to. It is one of the oldest scriptures known

to man. I was very happy to find that all my own postulations, gathered from realization, are confirmed in this great work. That is why this book is so meaningful to me-as a verification of personal experience and a full statement of the philosophical fortress erected and protected by our Guru Paramparai.

It takes a bit of meditation to understand the Tirumantiram because you have to know occultism and scripture to catch the meaning. It is composed in rhyme and cloaked in code-when the Five become Six and the Seven become Twelve and so on, all talking about the petals of the chakras and the esoteric bodies of man or the material world components known as tattvas. For these tantras Brahmin priests and shastris from various parts of South India had to be hired to help in deciphering the deeper, more abstruse verses about the kundalini and other mystical subjects. Like all mystical writings one can only understand this scripture by close study with a teacher. Why is that? Because mystics are cautious, protective of their special knowledge that it does not get into the wrong hands. They therefore present their work minus a few important keys that the preceptor or Sat Guru has to fill in for the disciple who has proven himself worthy. It is something like a great chef who might write down all his finest recipes but leave out one or two crucial ingredients to preserve his reputation. Thus, many of the mantras or yantras spoken of in this or other texts are correct as far as they go, but usually leave out a necessary key which makes them work. That does not mean they are useless. It does mean, however, that the fullest use cannot be realized by merely reading or studying from the books.

There is a timeless quality about Saivism-which preceded Hinduism as we know it today-that sets it apart from the modern faiths on the planet such as Christianity and Islam. Of course, we know that the founders of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were all good Hindus. Saivism is so very ancient that it appears among the first civilizations unearthed by archeologists. It is our belief that Saivism is as old as man himself, the original or seed religion from which all others have sprung forth; and since they are the offspring of Saivism we look upon them as parents look upon their children, with a deep love and a hope that they will do well and a look askance when they don't. There never was a time when Saivism, the Sanatana Dharma, did not exist on the planet. Other religions trace their lineage to a man, to a founder, to a messiah or a theologian. Saivism does not. It has no founder because it was not founded by man. It is coexistent with man. That makes Saivism unique, different from all the religions and sects that followed it. Look into history and you will see it is the only religion without a beginning, without a founder and a date it was founded. Now one of the oldest of the preserved theologies of Saivism available to us today is that of Saint Tirumular. Of course, his was not the first

theology, just one of the oldest to be preserved. He did not start anything new. His work is only a few hundred years older than the New Testament. He codified Saivism as he knew it. He recorded its tenets in concise and precise verse form, drawing upon his own realizations of the truths it contained. His work is not an intellectual construction, and it is not strictly a devotional canon either. It is based in yoga. It exalts and explains yoga as the kingly science leading man to knowledge of himself. Yet it contains theological doctrine and devotional hymns. It is the full expression of man's search, encompassing the soul, the intellect and the emotions.

Saint Tirumular's story begins more than two thousand years ago in the Himalayas where the great rishis had gathered in conclave apart from the rest of the world holding fast to the Sanatana Dharma as they pursued their own meditations to ever deeper strata. From time to time these ashram communities would send out members in response to the needs of the world, pilgrims who would travel by foot, taking the Eternal Truths to be taught and reestablished where perhaps superstition or alien religions had gained a foothold. These rishis traveled throughout the known world in those early days, spreading the Sanatana Dharma, Saivism, far and wide. It was a one teaching, but people adapted it to their own understanding and culture and local conditions, and thus the various religions of the world arose. Saint Tirumular was such a Himalayan rishi, a siddhar sent on mission to South India to spread the purest teachings of Saivism to the people there. Hinduism is a missionary religion. Everyone within it, myself included, is on a mission or is purifying himself through sadhana enough so that he can be given a mission for the religion from some great soul or a God perhaps. This is the pattern within Saivism, and Saint Tirumular's mission was to summarize and thereby renew and reaffirm at one point in time the final conclusions of the Sanatana Dharma, the purest Saiva path, Saiva Siddhanta.

Rishi Sundaranatha, which was his name before he was sent to the South, had to walk all the way. Along the way he halted near the village of Tiruvavaduthurai where he found the body of a cowherd who had died in the fields. The milk cows were wandering around aimlessly, lamenting the death of their master whom they clearly loved. The sight moved Rishi Sundaranatha deeply, inspiring him to relieve the anguish of the cows. An extraordinary miracle occurred, a boon from Lord Siva to help the cows and also to assist the sage in his task. Leaving his physical body hidden in a hollow log, Rishi Sundaranatha used his siddhis or yogic powers to enter and revive the lifeless body of Mulan-that was the cowherd's name. He comforted and cared for the cattle and led them back to the village. Returning to the fields he was unable to

find his original physical body! He searched and searched, but it was not to be found. It had simply vanished! The Rishi was deeply perplexed, and he sat in meditation to come to some understanding of these strange happenings. Through his spiritual insight he discerned that it was Lord Siva Himself who had taken his body, leaving him to live thereafter in the body of the Tamil cowherd. He took this to be Siva's message that he should keep the South Indian body and serve in that way. He accepted it all as Siva's will and was thereafter known as Tirumular, or the holy Mular, for everyone realized that some extraordinary change had taken place in their village cowherd. Of course, there were certain advantages. For one thing, he could now fluently speak the language and knew the customs of the South. He stayed there and recorded the wisdom of the Upanishads and Saiva Agamas in the local language, Tamil.

Saint Tirumular began his mission of establishing the purity of the Saivite path soon thereafter when he settled down near Chidambaram, an ancient temple of Lord Siva as Nataraja, the King of Dancers. There he worshipped near a Banyan tree where there was a Swayambhu Lingam. That Lingam is revered by Saivites even today in a small shrine within the Chidambaram walls, and you can worship there on pilgrimage just as he did so long ago. It was there that he began composing the Tirumantiram. Legend has it that the sage retired to a cave where he would sit in samadhi for a full year without moving. At the end of each year he would break his meditation long enough to speak out a single Tamil verse giving the substance of that year's meditations. Each verse composed in this manner was just four lines long, but the wisdom each contained was boundless. He wrote over 3,000 verses in all. This may not be accurate by the calendar, but it is true to the spirit and quality of the Tirumantiram, which has within it the wisdom of three thousand years of meditation. It is without a doubt the most complete and authoritative scripture ever written. There are few before or since his time qualified to understand all the Tirumantiram says, much less to improve upon it. It is that perfect and that complete.

Today we hear the term "Siddhanta" and various meanings of the word may come to mind. For some perhaps their immediate thought would be Meykanda Devar and his interpretation of Saiva Siddhanta. For others some concept of a philosophy halfway between Advaita-Vedanta and Dvaita, a vague area of unclarity, and for others various literal translations of the word such as "true end," "final end" or "true conclusion." The term "Siddhanta" appears for the first time in the Tirumantiram. The word anta carries the connotation of goal}conclusion, as does the English word "end." Tirumular's specific use of the word was "the teachings and the true conclusions of the Saiva Agamas."

And these he felt were identical with Vedanta or "the conclusions of the Upanishads." In fact, he makes it very clear that pure Saiva Siddhanta must be based on Vedanta. Siddhanta is specific, giving the sadhanas and practical disciplines which bring one to the final Truth. Vedanta is general, simply declaring in broad terms the final Truth that is the goal of all paths. There are those who would intellectually divide Siddhanta from Vedanta, thus cutting off the goal from the means to that goal. But our Guru Paramparai holds them to be not different. How can we consider the mountain path less important than the summit to which it leads us? Both are one. Siddhanta and Vedanta are one also, and both are contained in Saiva Siddhanta. That is the conclusion of scripture and the conclusion of my own experiences as well. The Suddha Siddhanta of Saiva Siddhanta is Vedanta. Vedanta was never meant to stand alone, apart from worship, apart from religious tradition. It has only been taken in that way since Swami Vivekananda brought it to the West. The Western man and Western-educated Eastern man have tried in modern Vedanta to secularize traditional Sanatana Dharma, to take the philosophical conclusions of the Hindu religion and set them apart from the religion itself, apart from Chariya and Kriya-service and devotion. Vedantists who are members of other religions have unintentionally sought to adopt only the highest philosophy of Hinduism to the exclusion of the rich customs, observances and temple worship. They have not fully realized that these must precede yoga for yoga to be truly successful. Orthodox Hindus understand these things in a larger perspective. These same problems of misinterpretation must have existed even in Saint Tirumular's time, for he writes that "Vedanta is Suddha (pure) Saiva Siddhanta." (Verse 1422). "The faultless Jnani is the Lord of endless wisdom in whom has dawned the final Truth of Siddhantam, the cream of pure Vedantam." (Verse 1428).

It may be that Saint Tirumular pioneered the reconciliation of Vedanta and Siddhanta. But what is the Vedanta that Tirumular was referring to? Sankara, with his exposition of Vedanta, was not to come for many centuries. Thus, concepts such as Nirguna and Saguna Brahman being two separate realities rather than one transcendent }immanent God, the absolute unreality of the world, and the so-called differences between the jnana path and the previous stages had not yet been tied into Vedanta. The Vedanta Tirumular knew was the direct teachings of the Upanishads. If there is one thing the Upanishads are categorical in declaring it is Advaita, "Tat Tvam Asi-Thou art That," "Aham Bramasmi-I am Brahman." And when Saint Tirumular says that Siddhanta is based on Vedanta he is using Vedanta to refer to this Advaita, which according to him must be the basis of Siddhanta. This is perhaps one of the most important essentials of Tirumular's Siddhanta to be brought forward into the

Siddhanta of today, for it did, in fact, stray from the Rishi's postulations.

That is why we occasionally use the term "Advaita Saiva Siddhanta." It conveys our belief in the Siddhanta which has as its ultimate objective the Vedanta. It sets us apart from the Dvaita Saiva Siddhanta school of interpretation begun by Meykanda Devar which sees God and the soul as eternally separate, never completely unified. It is not unusual to find two schools, similar in most ways, yet differing on matters of theology. In fact, this has been true throughout history. It has its source in the approach to God. On the one hand you have the rishi, the yogi, the sage or siddhar who is immersed in his sadhana, deep into yoga which brings forth direct experience. His conclusions will always tend toward Advaita, toward a fully non-dual perception. It isn't even a belief. It is the philosophical aftermath of experience. Most Sat Gurus and those who follow the monastic path will hold firmly to the precepts of Advaita Saiva Siddhanta. On the other hand there are the philosophers, the scholars, the pundits. Relying not on experience and ignoring yoga, they must surmise, postulate, arrange and rearrange concepts through an intricate intellectual process in an effort to reason out what God must be like. These are not infrequently the Grahastras and their reasoning leads them to one or another form of Dvaita Saiva Siddhanta. These are both valid schools. They are both traditional schools, and comparisons are odious. But they are very different one from the other, and it is good that we understand those differences.

Of course, we don't believe in controversy between the various theologies of Saivism. Contention, argument and dispute never brought a single person closer to Sivajnana. These kinds of quarrelsome discussions are interesting to the intellect, but have a negative influence on spiritual unfoldment. They should be avoided by every sincere devotee. In their place we must find a common ground. We must work together for the benefit of Saivism as a whole. If differences persist, let them be. Hold to the unifying elements and let Saivism surge forward. We don't want to be like the Christians, busy arguing with each other and unable to work together for the benefit of their religion which has been fragmented into hundreds of partial religions each claiming to be the one and only true whole. Ours is a religion and has always been a religion of acceptance and understanding, able to harmonize differences. That is how we look at these controversies. We accept them, and the mission goes on.

The verses of the Tirumantiram are understandable if you learn how to study them and meditate within yourself. They are important because they tell about what our religion believes about inner, spiritual matters-about the soul and the

world and their relationship to Siva. It is very important to remember that what a person is taught to believe creates his or her attitudes toward others and toward the world and stimulates or suppresses desire. Beliefs create attitudes. We base our values and attachments upon what we were taught to believe, and yet those beliefs may not be precisely known to us though they are the compass of our destiny in this life. As our beliefs guide our spiritual evolution, it behooves us to know what those beliefs are. For example, when the belief is held that God and the soul are coexistent and that God did not create the soul and the two will never merge as one, this causes a certain attitude of indifference toward the practice of yoga and the realization of God. When on the other hand the belief is held that Lord Siva did create the individual soul, the attitude of striving for union through Chariya, Kriya and Yoga persists. I call these philosophies which believe that God is eternally separate from the soul "terminal philosophies."

It has been asked, "If Siva created the soul, then is not the soul different from Siva?" For our answer let us look at nature. When a tree "creates" a fruit, that fruit is not a "something else." It is not different from the tree. The Western idea of creation is a flash of lightening and the world appears as an entity different from the Creator. The truth is more like the example of the tree, though that analogy is only a partial analogy and does not explain how the soul merges with the Absolute. All of creation is the manifestation of Siva's own Being, like the fruit is the natural manifestation of the tree. Thus souls and the world are Siva. My beloved Gurudeva, Yogaswami of Columbuthurai, said some wonderful things about this. He said, "It will not be an overstatement if I say that man is God." He also said, "Nothing exists except the Lord. Everything is His action. Nothing exists apart from God. It is like the waves and the ocean." This is my belief, too.

People who hold to the belief in an eternal Hell where souls burn forever for their sins will have attitudes of a more or less fearful nature. But for those who believe that God created the soul with form and with a superconscious intelligence and that the two will ultimately merge in non-dualistic union, religion has meaning. They want to convert others to it and have the power to do so as a boon from Lord Siva, God of all the realms.

God Siva created the soul. How did he do this? Was it like a potter shaping clay into a pot? Was it like a carpenter creating a house out of lumber? It was more like the tree. In order to create another tree, the tree sends out its branches and the fruit grows on the branches and the seed grows within the fruit. The fruit drops off and the seed sprouts and a shoot comes out; that shoot becomes a

twig, then a sapling, then a small tree, and then a large tree. Finally, the tree is fully matured and sends out its fruits and begins the process all over again. In a similar way Lord Siva has created individual souls. Saint Tirumular assures us of this in one of his many statements about Siva the Creator: Of yore He created the worlds seven, Of yore He created celestials countless, Of yore He created souls without number, Of yore He created all-Himself, As Primal Param, uncreated. TANTRA TWO VERSE 446

We must understand the difference between the Self-God, Parasivam, and the soul. Many people think that the Self is something that you get. You pursue it and after a while you get it, like you get something in the world. But the Self is not separated from you by even the tiniest amount. You cannot go someplace and get it and bring it back. The formless, transcendent Self is never separate from you. It is closer than your heartbeat. God Siva is called the Primal Soul because He is the perfect form, the original soul who then created individual souls. The individual soul has a beginning, and it has an end, merging with God. It has form as well. All form has a beginning and an end. The Absolute Self, Parasivam, is formless, timeless, endless and beginningless. All things are in the Self, and the Self is in all things. Many people think of the Self as an object to be sought. You start here and you go there, and you get the Self. You pursue it today; and if you don't get it today, you try again tomorrow. It's different than that. It comes from within you more as a becoming of your whole being than something that you pursue and get. And yet you seem to pursue it, and seem to get it. It is very difficult to explain.

The individual soul is different. The soul has a form. The soul is form, a very refined and subtle form, to be sure, but still a form and form obeys the laws of form. The soul has a beginning in Lord Siva and an end in union with Him. The purpose of life is to know God, your very Self. This is the end of all religions, of all religious effort. This is why we say that religion is this process of lifting ourselves up, attuning our minds to the laws of life so that we become stronger and more mature beings. We become higher beings, living in the higher chakras, and we come closer and closer to God. God doesn't come closer to us. How will God come any closer? He is closer to you right now than your own thoughts. He is nearer than breathing, closer than hands and feet.

I shall explain the soul in yet another way for I see a questioning look in some of your faces. Man has five bodies, each more subtle than the last. Visualize the soul of man as a lightbulb and his various bodies or sheaths as colored fabrics covering the pure white light. The physical body is the outermost body. Next comes the pranic body, then the physical body's subtle duplicate, the astral

body. Then there is the mental or intellectual body in which one can travel instantaneously anywhere. Then comes the body of the soul, which I term the actinodic body. This is the body that evolves from birth to birth, that reincarnates into new outer sheaths and does not die when the physical body returns its elements to the earth. This body eventually evolves as the actinic body, the body of light, the Golden Body of the soul. This soul body in its final evolution is the most perfect form, the prototype of human form. Once physical births have ceased, this soul body still continues to evolve in subtle realms of existence. This effulgent, actinic body of the illumined soul, even after Nirvakalpa Samadhi, God-Realization, continues to evolve in the inner worlds until the final merger with Siva.

I like to say, "God, God, God." There is one God only, but man's comprehension of That is helped by consciously exploring the three aspects of the one Divine Being: the Absolute, Pure Consciousness or the Self flowing through all form, and the Creator of all that is.

Lord Siva is the Absolute Self, Parasivam, the timeless, formless, spaceless Reality beyond the mind, beyond all form, beyond our subtlest understanding. Parasivam can only be experienced to be known, and then it cannot be explained. Lord Siva is pure consciousness, the substratum, or Primal Substance of all that exists. He is the Energy within all existence. He is Satchidananda, or Truth, Consciousness and Bliss, the Self that flows through all form. Lord Siva is the Primal Soul, Mahesvara, the Original and most perfect Being. He is the Source and the Creator, having never been created. He is the Lord of all beings. He created all souls out of Himself, and He is ever creating, preserving and destroying forms in an endless Divine Dance. When I was nine years old, I was taught that Lord Siva is God-God the Creator, God the Preserver, and God the Destroyer. To this day I know and believe that Siva is all of these, Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. These are the final conclusions of Saivism, the Sanatana Dharma. The Upanishads state it in this way: He is the one God, the Creator. He enters into all wombs. The One Absolute Eternal Existence, Together with His inscrutable maya, Appears as the Divine Lord, and Personal God Endowed with manifest forms. With His Divine Sakti He holds dominion Over all the worlds. At the time of the Creation And Dissolution of the Universe He alone exists. Our Lord is One without a second. With His Divine Sakti He reigns over all the worlds. Within man He dwells, And within all other beings. He projects the universe, He maintains it, And He withdraws it into Himself. He is the Origin and the Support Of all the Gods; He is Lord to all. He sees all and knows all. Thou doth pervade the universe, Thou art consciousness itself, Thou art Creator of Time, Thou art the Primal Being.

Whether He manifests existence out of Himself or withdraws it entirely into His Being, existence is all of Himself, all is of Siva, the Auspicious One. Existence is indeed eternal, yet manifesting and dissolving in natural cycles of time and space. When the scriptures speak of the world or the soul as being eternal, we must understand that it is not any particular part of the world or any single soul that exists forever. Rather it is the existence of that which we call world. When this world ends, worlds and worlds will continue their existence in other parts of this universe. And when a great soul merges forever into Siva, there will be other souls working their way through their karma toward moksha. Similarly, there are always pine trees on the mountain tops. They have been there for millions of years. But those are not the same trees. In this sense we can say that world and soul are eternal, and this is to me the most profound understanding of these references in scripture.

You must all study the great scriptures of our religion. These divine utterances of the siddhars will enliven your own inner knowing. The Tirumantiram is similar to the Tirukural in many ways. You can teach them both to the children and apply their wisdom to everyday life. You can use them for guidance in times of trouble and confusion, and they will unerringly guide you along the right path. You can read them as hymns after sacred puja in your home shrine or in the temple precincts. Each verse can be used as a prayer, as a meditation, as a holy reminder of the great path that lies ahead. It is a difficult work, but don't be discouraged by that. Just understand that it could easily take a lifetime, several lifetimes, to understand all that is contained in this scripture, that it is for those deep into their personal sadhana. It was given by the saint to those who fully knew of the Vedas and the Agamas, and to understand it you too will have to become more familiar with these other scriptures, slowly obtaining a greater background.

In making our selections from the Tirumantiram we have chosen those verses that would be most readily understood and which, taken as a whole, would offer a good example of the contents of the entire work for those who may never receive the full edition. This has perhaps made it seem a more simple work than it really is in its fullness of over three thousand verses. We can all offer our respects to the translator for his years of effort. Dr. B. Natarajan has had given to him a mission in this life from a previous time, before birth, to present to the modern world in the English language in its pristine purity this Tirumantiram of Rishi Tirumular. He is now fulfilling that mission and has surpassed expectation in the poetic grandeur that flows from his plume. True to his name, Nataraja, Power of Tillai, forced these expressions through his mind.

The deed is done. Tirumantiram has been taken from the past and magically transported into the future through the Divine Dancer's own vehicle and namesake, now retired from a worthy career to devote his life to the Divine Will, to the Great Lords of our religion.

So, here it is. Proceed with confidence. Enjoy it. Study it. Meditate upon it. Let it become a part of your inner life, of your understanding of God, man and world. Study it. Meditate upon it. Let it become a part of your inner life, of your understanding of God, man and world.