

Five Poems by Tayumanavar

Tayumanavar, a seventeenth century poet-saint from Tamil Nadu, worshiped Lord Shiva. At an early age he began service as the exchequer to a king but his heart tugged him toward renunciation of his worldly duties for a contemplative life. He is revered as one of the great poet-saints of Tamil Nadu.

Puffed Ignorance

Unlearned men indeed are blessed.
My learning, lacking wisdom is a blight
When men discourse on faith, salvation's path,
I interrupt, proclaim good works supreme,
But if I hear good works extolled,
For ancient faith I speak up bold!
Confronted by a pandit versed
In Sanskrit lore, I show
My understanding, deep and broad,
Of Dravid tongue, un-Sanskritic.
But then a scholar comes,
Blear-eyed with labor, years of loving toil
On Dravid books: to him I speak
The purest Sanskrit undefiled.
Thus learned I, to all men shown,
Grove blindly and am lost,
Far from the wisdom of the truly wise!

Stillness Still Eludes

Yes, your hypnotic eye will tame
Unruly horses or rogue elephants!
Your whispered word will stop
the angry bear, the tiger tensed to strike.
Your finger raised will lead
The cobra to a friendly dance,
Your touch, alchemical transmutes
Dull matter into fiery gold.

Yes, you may win the secret soon
Of everlasting youth; or learn
To move abroad invisible; or walk
Upon the water, or on fire;
To make obedient messengers of all

The powers that rule the earth, the sea and air.

All this, all conquering Man, is yours; and yet
how hard to rule, to tame, control
the ever-roaming mind, and rest
in simple, still eternity!

The Passionate Seeker

O rarer than precious gold or gem!
My heart's desire, O Truth,
Perennial flood of Joy!
How long, how long have I pursued,
sought after Thee in frenzied song and dance,
calling, beseeching, supplicating,
with arms uplifted, hair on end,
and unremitting flood of tears!
Weary, sad, depressed am I,
Harder than steel my wicked heart, yet still
have I a moment turned away from Thee?
Ever and always I am Thine.
Poor dull clod I am, but is it in Thy law
that Thou forsakest me?
O Fount of joy, transcendent power,
O Being free of attribute!

Wanting Still

Wants are limitless. He who rules
the chunky earth still wants,
wants to stretch his sway
o'er undulating oceans. He who owns
Kubera's gold still wants,
wants alchemic formulars to make
all mud all god. And he who lives
a hundred years still wants,
wants eternal youth, and quaffs
elixirs fuming, gullet-blistering....

All's but toys, a tedious round
of eat and blink, until the final sleep...

Enough to have what is;
babbling of "I" and "Mine", let me not chase
deceitful sprites that draw me on
to drown in wants...

O Thou, Joy's Self, limitless, all pervading, whole,
extinguish thought, and lead
to bliss without alloy, entire and pure!

Everywhere, But Where?

Is it the fire of the sun,
or the moon's ambrosial light?
Beyond the bounds of this vast universe,
or in some vaster hyper-universe?
Or space without confine, in all directions limitless.
The infinity of purest sound,
or the long sweep of everlasting Time?
The myriad world of things perceived,
or unperceived sheer nothingness?
Or at the end of pathways shown
By creeds and dogmas multifarious?
Or in the hearts of men who melt in tears,
and scatter flower of simple faith?
Where, where is Thy dwelling place?
Vouchsafe me this to know,
O Fount of joy, transcendent Power,
O Being free of attribute!