

My first Meeting with Bodhinatha Veylonswami

an excerpt from the book "Atma Charitra" by Gananathamritananda Swami

I want to share an amazing story about the first time I physically encountered Satguru Bodhinatha Veylonswami. Bodhinathaji is the successor of Subramuniyaswami and the current Guru Mahasannidhanam of the Kailasa Parampara's Nandinatha Sampradaya. It is said that Bodhinathaji is none other than the living embodiment of Sage Thirumular.

In 2002, the Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona was conducting the Prana Pratishtha and Kumbhabhishekam rituals for the newly constructed Temple. I attended the event to chant with the Priests and pray with the devotees for the Divine Shakti of Lord Vighneshvara to fill the new Temple. I was very excited also to know that Bodhinathaji would be there, because I had a desire to meet Him.

I arranged funds for a plane ticket to Arizona from Virginia and a rental car to drive the 2 hours or so from the airport to the Temple. I did not have money for a hotel room and so I slept in the parking lot of the Temple. One day some devotees of the Temple approached me, while I was standing next to Bodhinathaji and said,

"You have a brilliant, bright light shining around your body like we have never seen before, you must be a great saint." They asked me to visit their home.

I replied. "Are you insane? I am like a dim candle, but this is the source," motioning toward the Guruji.

They looked at him and then looked at me and said, "We do not see light around him, we want you to come to our home."

The darshan of such a deeply connected Saint as Bodhinatha is said to be very subtle, so that devotees can barely perceive. I agreed to go with them and stay the night at their home. They told me that it had been their long-time prayer of theirs to have Mata Amritanandamayi Devi visit their home. Since Ammachi's busy schedule does not allow for many such personal visits, She had never fulfilled this request of their, though they had had the opportunity to ask her personally. They said that when they heard that I had studied with Ammachi that they felt that She must have sent me to them to fulfill their prayers. They were very kind and cooked me food, but after breakfast, we returned to the Temple so late that I had missed some of the rituals. After that, I did not go to the homes of any devotees but preferred to remain in the Temple parking lot.

When Bodhinathaji first arrived at the Temple, I felt a palpable presence of Divine shakti and began to weep uncontrollably. As He joined the puja, He focused His awareness on the Kumbha being blessed by the priest. I was deeply impressed by His deep and steady concentration which I could see was leading my consciousness and that of the other devotees into a deep state of concentration.

The next day, Bodhinatha was scheduled to give a discourse which I was looking forward to

attending. As I walked eagerly toward the Temple, I received inner feeling that I should go to the cow pen instead. When I reached the cow pen I saw that the Mother and baby cow had escaped and were running off into the Arizona desert. The devotees were full of bhakti but had little experience handling bovine. As the devotees attempted to prepare the cows for entering the Temple after the Netronmeelanam (eye-opening) ceremonies, they lost control over the animals. As I approached the cow pen, there was a feeling of pandemonium in the air. I could see the cows were afraid and the people were afraid. Without any thought of how to get the cows to return to their pen, a crowd of about thirty or forty devotees was frantically running around and screaming and this was frightening the cows even more and driving them further and further from the pen. I yelled to the crowd

"The cows are feeling afraid. If we will have any chance at getting them back to the pen, we must be calm and quiet. Please be quiet."

When the people were quite, I requested that they clear the path to the pen, and then went and spoke gently to the cows asking them to return to the pen, which, by the grace of Lord Ganesha, they did, first the mother and then the baby.

With the cows back in the pen, the devotees decided that it would not be wise to try to take the cows into the Temple itself but instead for the priests to offer the puja outside in the cow pen and to take the prasadam from the puja inside the Temple for the deities to see. The alankaran (garlanding and adornment) still needed to be done for the cows, who were still a bit shook up from their dramatic escape. A few devotees entered the cow pen to try to decorate the cows with flower garlands, turmeric, kumkuma, and sari fabric, but as the devotees approach the cows and tried to offer these substances, the cows seemed to feel threatened. The mother cow was especially protective of her baby and when the devotees approached the baby, she started making threatening gestures toward the devotees with her horns. This frightened the devotees so they quickly finished the alankaran, at least as much as the mother would allow, and immediately fled from the cow pen.

When the priests arrived to do the puja, the devotees warned them that the cows were feeling frightened, and the priests hesitantly started to enter the cow pen, but the mother cow came and drove them out. No one had any idea what to do, so I offered to enter the cow pen and to try to calm down the cows. As I entered, the devotees closed the gate to prevent another escape and I started to speak gentle words to the mother and baby cow. For a moment they seemed to be settled, but then the feeling of fear intensified and the mother came toward me and started making threatening gestures with her horns. Somehow I was not afraid for my well-being, but I felt very frustrated because I did not know what to do to help these people to make the traditional offerings for which they had prepared for with such great devotion for many months. No one seemed to be able to control the cows, the priests were afraid to enter the cow pen, and now my attempts to calm them seemed to be failing. It seemed like there was no way to make the offerings and I had no other ideas what could be done, so I folded my hands and said aloud

"Lord, if it be your will for us to complete this Go Puja for your sacred Kumbhabhishekam, please, help us."

No sooner than I had ended this brief but heartfelt prayer, I noticed Bodhinathaji walk out of the Temple and smile at me. Though I did not have a chance to confirm this with the other devotees, as far as I could tell Bodhinatha was giving a lecture to the people inside the Temple at the same time that he walked outside and looked over toward me in the cow pen. Then Bodhinathaji put up His hand as if to wave "hello" toward me, showing the abhaya mudra (the gesture of dispelling fear), gave a wide grin, and then walked back into the Temple. Immediately the cows seemed very calm and the priests entered the cow pen ring their bells and chanting "gananam tva ganapatigm havamahe..." I watched for a few minutes as the puja went very smoothly, as if all had completely forgotten the earlier drama.

Then suddenly some devotees asked me to come into the Temple to assist with some task. They brought me inside and asked me to sit at a particular place. As I entered the temple, Bodhinathaji was completing His pravachan (discourse). I sat and gazed at Him from across the room where the devotees had asked me to remain. I thought,

"I am so lucky to be in the presence of such a great soul, I wish I could be closer to Him."

No sooner than I had this thought, Bodhinathaji look at me and smiled. Instantly, two devotees rushed toward Him, seeming to appear from thin air and ushered Him toward me. They carried an asana for Him to sit on and placed it down right next to me, and so close in fact that it touched my leg. I recall thinking,

"It must be a great papam (offense) for me to touch the holy seat of such a great siddha with my leg." I lovingly touched the asana in the traditional gesture of apology for touching a sacred object with the legs or feet and I moved back a bit to offer Him space. As He sat there next to me I recall seeing and feeling a profound sense of stillness. Though He sat there, it seemed and felt as if He was in another world. I noticed Him looking at me with great love and detachment, and as He did, I became aware of many karmas within myself and felt heavy energies lifting from my aura by His grace. I felt very lucky to have had that moment to spend with Bodhinathaji. Though this event was ten years ago, I feel that Bodhinathaji's blessings to me in that moment continues to unfold, and there has hardly been a day since that time that I have not thought about meeting Him. That experience has changed and continues to change my perception of the world.

It has been my great fortune in this janma to have the association of many great teachers and Saints. I feel profoundly thankful for the presence in the world of such a rare gem among spiritual masters, who is dwelling within this world but transcends it with a truly rare attainment of vairagya (dispassion) and yoga (union). Among all the masters I have had the great fortune to encounter in this life, perhaps none has been so detached and inwardly established as Bodhinathaji.