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Jul / Aug 1991 Vol.1 No.3	<div>ॐ नमो भगवते श्री रघ्वाय</div>	Produced & Edited by Dennis Hartel Dr. Anil K. Sharma
<div>1. <i>As I Saw Him, No.3, Kunju Swami</i> 2. <i>Sri Kunju Swami</i> 3. <i>The Garland of Guru's Sayings</i> 4. <i>Films from Sri Ramanasramam, part 1</i> 5. <i>Prof.N.R.Krishnamoorthy Aiyer, part 2</i> 6. <i>Maharshi's Voice Recorded</i> 7. <i>Three Methods Explained</i> 8. <i>41st Brahma Nirvana Day</i></div>		

## As I Saw Him - No.3

by Kunju Swami

It was in 1919 that I first came to Sri Bhagavan. He was then living at Skandasramam on the slope of the Hill Arunachala. His mother and brother lived with him. Palaniswami used to attend to his few personal wants. Plague had driven away most of the inhabitants of the town and consequently visitors to Sri Bhagavan were few. I was, therefore, left alone with Sri Bhagavan most of the time.

I related to him all the spiritual practices I had been doing, what I had been studying, and what experiences I had. At that time I was very unhappy because in spite of all I had done I was unable to experience *samadhi*.

After patiently hearing me out, Bhagavan quoted from *Kaivalya Navaneeta* : "If you realize who you are, there is no cause for sorrow." "So if you come to understand who you are, then there is peace," said Bhagavan.

Well, I did not know what was meant by "know who you are". Bhagavan went on to explain that the mind is only a bundle of thoughts and that if I seek the source of all thoughts I would be drawn into the Heart. He simultaneously pointed to his Heart.

Bhagavan was looking at me intently and I focused my attention in the manner he instructed me and within a few minutes I was led into *samadhi*. I was thrilled. Coming to my senses we went for lunch. Then again, I sat before him and by a single look he put me into that blissful state.

This experience occurred again and again – during all seventeen days that I stayed with Bhagavan. I was like one intoxicated. I was absolutely indifferent to everything. I had no curiosity to see anything, no desire whatsoever. What I did I did most mechanically. I would have continued to live in this state if it had not occurred to me that it was not proper to partake of the food that was offered to Sri Bhagavan by his devotees without paying anything. I thought that he had initiated me into the experience of Brahman and that I had nothing more to gain by staying in his presence. I, therefore, returned to my native place and began to practice meditation in a room in my house all by myself. I could succeed to gain and retain that experience only for a few days; it started to diminish gradually and at last one day it was lost. I could not regain the experience. I decided to return to Sri Bhagavan. This I did, and great good fortune awaited me when I came.

Palaniswami, who was rendering personal service to Sri Bhagavan, had to go on a journey for some time. Before going he asked me to render such service. This I considered to be my greatest good fortune. I felt extremely happy for the grace which Bhagavan had shown me. I did not thereafter bother myself about the spiritual experience.

I, however, asked Bhagavan why I could not get the experience when I meditated in my house. Bhagavan said: "You have read *Kaivalya Navaneeta*, have you not? Don't you remember what it says?" And he took up the book and read the relevant verses.

Sri Bhagavan then explained to me at great length the purport of these verses. They relate to the doubt raised by the disciple about the need to continue spiritual practices even after one has had the supreme experience. The disciple wonders whether the spiritual experience once gained could be lost. The Guru says that it would be until he took care to practise *sravana, manana and nididhyasana*, that is hearing from the Guru the Truth, reflecting over it and assimilating it. The experience would occur in the presence of the Guru, but it would not last. Doubts would arise again and again and in order to clear them the disciple should continue to study, think and practice. These would be done until the distinction of the knower, the object of knowledge and the act of knowing no longer arise. In the view of Sri Bhagavan's explanation I decided to stay always by Bhagavan's side and practise *sravana, manana and nididhyasana*.

In olden days when we had the benefit of receiving personal instructions from Sri Bhagavan, one of them was to get into meditation before going to sleep. Thus sleep overtook one as a natural sequel to fatigue and was not induced or preceded by lying down. Also the first thing in the morning, immediately on getting up from bed was to go into meditation. This ensured a serenity of mind and also a feeling of tirelessness throughout the day. The state of mind immediately before sleep is resumed on waking.

After spending about twelve years in personal attendance on Bhagavan, I began to feel an urge to devote myself entirely to *sadhana*. However, I could not easily reconcile myself to giving up my personal service to Bhagavan. I had been debating the matter for some days when the answer came in a strange way.

As I entered the hall one day I heard Bhagavan explaining to others who were there that real service to him did not mean attending to his physical needs but following the essence of his teaching: that is concentrating on realizing the Self. Needless to say, that automatically cleared my doubts.

I therefore gave up my Ashrama duties, but I then found it hard to decide how, in fact, I should spend the entire day in search of Realization. I referred the matter to Bhagavan and he advised me to make Self-enquiry my final aim but to practise *Sadhana*, meditation, *japa* and recitation of scripture turn by turn, changing over from one to another as and when I found the one I was doing irksome or difficult. In course of time, he said, the *sadhana* would become stabilized in Self-enquiry or pure Consciousness or Realization.

Before recommending any path to an aspirant Bhagavan would first find out from him what aspect or form or path he was naturally drawn to and then recommend the person to follow it. He would sometimes endorse the traditional stages of *sadhana*, advancing from worship (*pooja*) to incantation (*japa*), then to meditation (*dhyana*), and finally to Self-enquiry (*vichara*). However, he also use to say that continuous and rigorous practice of any one of these methods was adequate in itself to lead to Realization.

Once some awkward problems concerning the Ashrama management came up. Without being directly concerned, I was worried about them, as I felt that failure to solve them satisfactorily would impair the good name of the Ashrama.

One day two or three devotees went to Bhagavan and put the problems before him. I happened to enter the hall while they were talking about them, and he immediately turned to me and asked me why I was interesting myself in such matters. I did not grasp the meaning of his question, so Bhagavan explained that a person should occupy himself only with that purpose with which he had originally come to the Ashrama and asked me what my original purpose had been. I replied: "To receive Bhagavan's grace." So he said: "Then occupy yourself with that only."

He further continued by asking me whether I had any interest in matters concerning the Ashrama management when I first came here. On my replying that I had not, he added: "Then concentrate on the original purpose of your coming here."

There are numerous photos of Bhagavan. Have you ever seen one with his eyes closed ? Bhagavan was pouring out his grace through his eyes. There would be any number of devotees sitting before him and each one would feel that Bhagavan was looking only at him or her.

Bhagavan's *drishti* (sight) was concentrated on space only. It was turned inward and everyone felt inwardly, in their hearts, that his sight was focused on them alone. Bhagavan cares about everyone, and his look pierces through each one's heart, dispels our darkness, gives us peace, even some liberation.

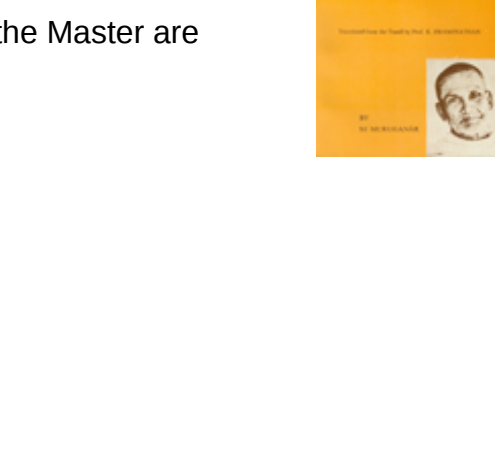
\* Source material for the above article came from the *Mountain Path* magazine and taped interviews.

## Sri Kunju Swami

*Sri Kunju Swami* occupies a special place in the hearts of the devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

To see him, talk to him, or just to sit in his august presence is sufficient to transport one, body and soul, to the living presence of the Master. Why? Because Kunju Swami has been fully absorbed in the Maharshi and radiates his personality through every word, gesture or thought.

At the ripe age of 92 he still remains a vigorous, humble servant of the devotees and *Sri Ramanasramam*, pouring out his stories and experiences, while remaining accessible during most of the day. At other times he can be seen to be quietly revelling in the joy of Being, earned by long austerity and the grace of his Master. A visit to Sri Ramanasramam is immeasurably enhanced by the company of those who moved closely with the Maharshi. In *Kunju Swami* we discover the reason why.



[click to see a larger image]

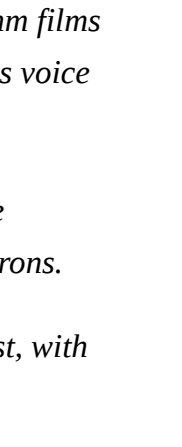
## The Garland of Guru's Sayings

*Sri Kunju Swami*

When *Muruganar* first beheld the Maharshi in 1923, all thought of the world left him and he became absorbed in the ocean of Sri Ramana's grace. Poetry spilled out from the brimming cup of his experience and flowed in torrents till his end in 1973. He was transformed into a poet-saint.

This translation of *Guru Vachaka Kovai (Garland of Guru Sayings)* has been wonderfully rendered into English by *Prof.K.Swaminathan*. In 1254 stanzas, under 231 chapters, the teachings of the Master are arranged, explaining step by step the theory, practice and final experience of *Jnana*. The Maharshi examined and approved the work, adding 28 stanzas of his own for clarification.

The book was recently released during the *Brahma Nirvana* celebrations at *Sri Ramanasramam* and is available at our New York Ashrama.



## Films from Sri Ramanasramam

Part 1

IN FEBRUARY OF 1990 all the old films from Sri Ramanasramam were brought to New York for restoration, preservation and reprinting. John E. Allen, Inc., the major East Coast film restoration company, has been engaged for this project.

The badly warped, shrunken and brittle reels were put through a patented 'Redimension' process, enabling them to pass through the sensitive transferring machines. As the work is progressing and the 35mm, 16mm and 8mm films are closely scrutinized, certain new images are surfacing. Valuable footage is being resuscitated and other more familiar films are being enhanced. Some of the films are government of India newsreels with a commentator's voice and background music. The distortions on these sound tracks are being corrected, as we consider them a valuable legacy of the nation's interest in the then contemporary Sri Ramana Maharshi.

All the details of these films - when they were taken, who took them, the individuals and events presented, and most of all, the many scenes of the Maharshi himself will, as time passes, evince greater interest and value. The restoration work presently being done will ensure that seekers two or three centuries from now will have the same opportunity as we have to view a fully enlightened Jnani, a Jagad Guru (world teacher) in his natural environs.

*Sri Ramanasramam* is planning to make all these movies available to the public in the form of video cassettes. Perhaps by next year the tapes will be ready. And, as these films always seem to generate considerable interest, with this issue we begin a series of articles about them.

The earliest surviving footage of film comes to us from the *Self-Realization Fellowship*, an organization founded by Swami Yogananda, the well-known author of the Autobiography of a Yogi. It was during the period he was collecting material for this book that he made a visit to the Maharshi on November 29, 1935.

This visit is well documented in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*: "Swami Yogananda with four others arrived at 8-45 a.m. He looks big, but gentle and well-groomed. He has dark flowing hair, hanging over his shoulders. The group had lunch in the Ashrama."

A very lucid conversation then ensued between Yogananda's secretary, Mr. C. R. Wright, and the Maharshi. "How shall I realize God?" Mr. Wright asks. He is told to realize the true nature of the Self. The Maharshi then explains what that Self is and the method to realize it. Mr. Wright asks several other sincere questions, to which he receives detailed and illuminating replies.

Swami Yogananda asks how to effect the spiritual uplift of the people and the *reason God permits suffering* in the world. *Suitable replies* are given to him also.

There is only about thirty seconds of 16 mm film available from this visit, but since it was probably immediately taken back to America for developing, printing and preserving, it is the best quality footage of all the forty-five minutes of film we have.

In the film we see the Maharshi seated on a bench placed north of the Old Hall. He is facing south with his arms to his side and the palms of his hands flat on the bench. A crumpled towel is under his right palm. To his left is Swami Yogananda standing next to *Paul Brunton*, who was visiting the Ashrama then. The Swami glances at the Maharshi and exchanges a hand shake with Paul Brunton. Four of the Swami's companions are kneeling or sitting to the right of the Maharshi. The film is very short and, consequently, an earlier editor has frozen some scenes to prolong the episode. From Mr. Wright's absence we can infer that he was the cameraman.

The most striking observation that can be made of this film is related to the Maharshi. If you focused your attention solely on him throughout the duration of this footage you would not know that you are watching a 'moving' picture; he is perfectly still, without even a blink of an eye.

(continued in the *Sep-Oct* issue)

## Prof. N.R.Krishnamoorthy Aiyer

Interview, Part 2

continued from the *may/Jun* issue

Concluding from the last issue, our respected professor graphically describes the remarkable experiences he had sitting before the Maharshi, and how his life was transformed.

My next visit to the Maharshi was in 1934 on a *Jayanti* Day. He was sitting on a raised platform under a pondal (thatched roof), specially constructed in front of the Mother's Shrine. As the celebration was going on, all the devotees were seated around him.

While sitting there, my eyes were intensely fixed upon the Maharshi and I saw his form assume different manifestations. It first changed to the *Avatar* of Vishnu (*Vahar Avatar*). Then his form changed into that of Ganesha, the elephant God. Next it suddenly changed and I saw Ramana and Arunachala as one. Then I had the vision of the whole Arunachala Hill - the top of the Hill was transparent and inside it I saw a *Shiva Lingam*, similar to what we see in temples.

Devotees were singing the *Marital Garland of Letters*. When they began singing the last couplet, "My Lord let us exchange garlands - the devotee (the bride) garlands the Lord Arunachala (the groom), and the Lord garlands the devotee," I suddenly saw garlands of flowers all over the pondal. The Maharshi had a string of flowers garlanded around his neck, and all the devotees (including myself) had a string of flowers around their necks. I saw a large garland around the *Shiva Lingam* on the hill top. All these garlands were shining with a dazzling brilliance. This experience convinced me of the existence of the deities mentioned in our ancient scriptures.

Later that evening in the Old Hall I sat at the feet of the Maharshi. He was reclining on the couch gazing westward and I sat on the floor facing him. Our eyes fixed, one upon the other, were pinned together for quite a long time. I then saw the form of the Maharshi take the shape of Ardhanareswara.

Ardhanareswara is one aspect of Shiva - one half is the Mother and the other half is the Father; one half of the form had a breast and the other had a trident. Around us the pundits were reciting Sanskrit verses.

As it went on, I began to witness certain changes in my body taking place. I saw a pair of serpents moving from the base of my spine in a criss-cross, spiralling manner. They rose to the crown of my head and spread their heads. One was red; the other blue. The whole cranium became suffused with a bright light. My attention was fixed upon the point between my eyebrows where the serpents' heads were pointed.

All of a sudden there was a splitting of the skull from the top front to the back. This was followed by an upward gush of a reddish flame shooting out from the top of my head. While this was flowing out, a stream of nectar issued from the single breast of the Ardhanareswara form of the Maharshi and a second stream of nectar flowed out from the top of Arunachala. Both streams landed on my head and sealed the break in my skull.

When the skull was sealed I experienced a brilliant light, like that of an arc lamp, and an indescribable joy and coolness filled my being. This light and joy continued for several hours. During this time I didn't move about and I was unconscious of what was going on around me. You may have seen a light focused on to a concave mirror. Its light is reflected with a single beam onto a point. Well, sometime about midnight all the light, like a concave mirror, was focused onto the Heart. Then all the light drained into the Heart. The *Kundalini* was completely sucked into the Heart and the Heart was glowing - that is the seat of Arunachala Ramana.

The Heart is normally closed, but when it was opened - I never knew any of these things and never read any theory. These are all practical experiences - a flood of nectar gushed forth and drenched every pore of my skin, drenched my whole physical system. It poured out, out, went on coming out in a great flood. The whole Universe was filled with that Nectar.

The wonder of it was that my awareness was not in the body - my awareness was over the whole of the space filled with that Nectar. The whole Universe was Nectar. I call it Nectar; you could call it Ether, something very subtle, attached with awareness at every point. And everything living and non-living was like snow flakes floating in that ocean of Nectar.

If you ask me what my body was, my body was the whole universe of Nectar, attached to awareness at every point. No particular association from the one body from where it started - this body was like every other body.

By morning everything subsided, though the underlying experience remained. I was totally unconscious of my body. I was moving around like an automaton, unaware of my body. In that state I returned to Madurai where I was a physics professor.

This was during a Christmas vacation. For the next two weeks I remained in that state. With the opening of college I was scheduled to give lectures and my relatives became rather concerned, for my behavior had changed considerably.

I then returned to Ramanasramam with the intention of returning to my regular mundane condition - I do not know what urged me to do this.

I went and sat before the Maharshi in the Old Hall. He gave no acknowledgment of my plight and sat, seemingly, unconcerned.

After a long time I said to myself, "Well, the son (Maharshi) seems indifferent to me. Let me go and seek refuge in my mother, Alagammal." I came and sat in the Mother's samadhi room. It was then only a thatched room. I picked up the book *Jnana Vashistha* and began reading it from beginning to end with the hope of finding the solution to my dilemma. I continued reading without eating the whole day. In the evening the answer came : a stanza in *Jnana Vashistha* said, "Between two thoughts there is an interval of no thought. That interval is the Self, the *Atman*. It is pure Awareness only.

In those days I was repeating the *mantra* '*Ram, Ram*'. So I said to myself : '*Ram* - that is one thought; and *Ram* again - that is another thought. But in the interval between these two thoughts there is silence. That Silence is the Self.' And so, I came to the conclusion that if I go on repeating '*Ram, Ram*' it will resolve itself into that Silence.

I was very happy. I rushed home and found I was my normal mundane self, teaching my classes in the usual way. But all the time, even while the lectures were going on, '*Ram, Ram, Ram*' went on repeating in my Heart. For nine years it went on like that and then stopped of its own accord. It ended in Silence.

—concluded

## The Maharshi's Voice Recorded

Excerpts from *Kanakamma's* talk at Arunachala Ashrama in New York City on May 12, 1991.

One of the devotees brought with him a tape recorder to *Sri Ramanasramam* with a view to record Bhagavan's voice. Until the visitor actually took the recorder into the hall he was all along apprehensive that Bhagavan, or someone, might not permit him to do it. He entered the hall, set the recorder in front of Bhagavan, did his usual *pranams* (prostrations), and sought his permission to record.

To the devotee's surprise, Bhagavan started putting questions, eliciting some technical information on the mechanism of operation. While giving the required information, the devotee felt relieved at the comfortable thought that Bhagavan was interested and was agreeable to having his voice recorded.

After the explanations were over, the devotee went around and instructed him on those present to keep quiet. Bhagavan was keenly watching all that was going on. The devotee then placed the microphone near Bhagavan and switched on the recorder. He quietly moved to a little distance. From then on silence fell . . . Only the whizzing sound of the revolving reel on the recorder could be heard. Ten or fifteen minutes passed thus, in near absolute silence.

Disappointed, and not knowing what to do next, the devotee went near Bhagavan, switched off the recorder, and in a subdued tone asked Bhagavan why he did not speak. He added, that unless he talked his voice could not be recorded.

Bhagavan replied: "Why do you think so? My voice, indeed, has been recorded. My language is that of silence, and that has been recorded. Is it not so ?" On hearing this the devotee stood baffled.

*Sri Muruganar*, one of the resident devotees, was in the gathering. He addressed the devotee and said: "Why did you switch off the recorder before asking these questions ? If you had not, there would have been, at least, the recording of Bhagavan's latest explanation of his own voice." Now the devotee was all the more perplexed.

— Translated by Professor S. Raman

## Brahma Nirvana Day

On May 12, 1991 the forty-first anniversary of the Maharshi's passing was observed at the New York City Arunachala Ashrama. Geeta Bhatt sends us this heart-warming report of the day's activities.

The auspicious Sunday dawned with clear skies and summer-like temperatures. Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, Margo Martin, Eric Ford, Arthur Coucouvitis, *Kanakamma* and her family from Philadelphia gathered for the morning *Veda Parayana* in the shrine room. Recitation of the Vedas was followed by the chanting of *Sri Lalita Sahasranama Stotram*. The presence of Kanakamma, a long-time resident of *Sri Ramanasramam*, Tiruvannamalai, whose visit to the U.S.A. and a weekend visit to New York City coincided with the celebrations, added a special fervor to this solemn day.

After the *Veda Parayana*, *Kanakamma* offered a recitation of the *Nine Gems*, a Tamil composition by Sri Bhagavan. The morning *Puja* was concluded with everyone joining Kanakamma in the recitation of *Aksharamanamalai* (The Marital Garland of Letters).

This meditative celebration that began at 4:30 a.m., continued throughout the day under the benign gaze of Sri Bhagavan. At 9:00 a.m. when Kanakamma and her party were about to leave, Chhaya Tewari, a devotee visiting from New Delhi [the contributor's sister], persuaded Kanakamma to stay and offer the devotees a few of her precious memories of Sri Bhagavan, in whose presence she had sat for many years.

*Kanakamma* not only began to recount her days with Sri Bhagavan, she also vividly re-enacted some wonderful incidents (see *The Maharshi's Voice Recorded* ). Professor S. Raman translated her talk from Tamil and what we could not follow from the translation was easily understood by her vivid expressions and gestures, reminiscent of Sri Bhagavan's movements and mannerism. We were all transported to the Old Hall and the living presence of the Master.

Her stories evoked so much of the spiritual energy from Sri Ramanasramam that we were all fixed to our seats in a meditative mood for the next two and a half hours. Silently we sat listening to a recording of the *Sri Chakra Puja*, taped in the *Matrubhuteswara Temple* at Sri Ramanasramam. This was followed by the singing of the Arunachala Ashrama's daily recitation. Then Sri Ramanlal Bhatt, who had the privilege of living in Sri Ramanasramam on a few occasions in the early days, recollected his first meeting with Sri Bhagavan. He commented on how one powerful look from the Master silenced all the questions that he had so meticulously prepared and written down.

While most of us sat in the shrine room, Hena Singh, Bhagawati's daughter-in-law, lovingly prepared a feast for the devotees. She later served it, in the same spirit, to all those gathered.

Some devotees had to leave in the afternoon, although the celebrations and the devotional fervor continued with the arrival of *Sri Babubhai and Bhanumati Parekh*, Raju and Swaroop, their two sons, along with other relatives. The Parekh family sang *bhajans*, and Bhagawati recited from Tulasidas' *Ramayana*.

The mood at the end of the day was one of deep peace and delightful joy. Sri Bhagavan showered His Grace in abundance. We all departed the Ashrama at different times of the afternoon or evening. Margo Martin and Bhagawati bid goodbyes to each one of us with warmth and the mutual understanding that for the devotees of Bhagavan there are no goodbyes or hellos.

*There is no end to the celebration of Bhagavan's Presence in our midst.*

## Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation have been going on in a few places near or in large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please see the *Sri Ramana Satsang online* pages.

"*The Maharshi*" is a free bimonthly newsletter distributed in North America by *Arunachala Ashrama*, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. You can subscribe to this newsletter's announcements by *email*. All back issues are available as *html pages* and in *Acrobat PDF* format from 2000 to the present. *Books, images, videos and audio CDs* on Sri Ramana Maharshi can also be found in the *eLibrary*, the *On-line Bookstore* pages and the Ashrama's *YouTube* channel.

May / Jun 1991 Choose Web-page Issue top of page Sep / Oct 1991