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As I Saw Him - No.6 From Sri Ramana Reminiscences by G.V.Subbaramayya

MP3

Asked "How does a grihastha (householder) fare in the scheme of Moksha (liberation)?" the Maharshi said, "The obstacle is the mind. It must be got over whether at home or in the forest. Renunciation is always in the mind, not in going to the forest or solitary places, or giving up one's duties. The main thing is to see that the mind does not turn outward but inward."

G. V. Subbaramayya, a professor and poet, approached the Maharshi with childlike faith and spontaneous devotion - like an innocent child to his loving father. He laid bare, without reserve, his sorrows, joys, devotion and defects, and the Maharshi reciprocated, keeping a close and gracious eye on all his affairs. What follows is but a small, yet telling sample from his *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*.



My first pilgrimage to Sri Ramanasramam was on June 8th, 1933. I travelled alone to Tiruvannamalai. I was at that time in great sorrow, having suffered my first bereavement the previous December, when my two-year-old son died suddenly. For over two years I had been reading the works of Sri Bhagavan and other Ashrama literature. My main interest had been literary rather than philosophical. I had been struck with wonder at the style of the Telugu *Upadesa Saram* which, in its simplicity, felicity and classic finish, could equal that of the greatest Telugu poet Tikkana. I had felt convinced that a Tamilian who could compose such Telugu verse must be divinely inspired, and I had wanted to see him. But my immediate quest at the time was for peace and solace.

In the morning I had *darshan* of Sri Bhagavan in the old Hall. As our eyes met, there was a miraculous effect upon my mind. I felt as if I had plunged into a pool of peace, and with eyes shut, sat in a state of ecstasy for nearly an hour. When I came to normal consciousness, I found someone spraying the Hall to keep off insects, and Sri Bhagavan mildly objecting with a silent shake of his head.

As I now heard Sri Bhagavan saying something, I made bold to ask him a question. "The *Bhagavad Gita* says that mortals cast off their worn-out bodies, just as one casts away the worn-out clothes and wears new garments. How does this apply to the deaths of infants whose bodies are new and fresh?" I asked. Sri Bhagavan promptly replied: "How do you know that the body of the dead child is not worn-out? It may not be apparent; but unless it is worn-out it will not die. That is the law of Nature."

Immediately after lunch, I left the Ashrama even without taking leave of Sri Bhagavan. I came and went incognito, as an utter stranger.

After nearly three years, I again visited the Ashrama in the spring of 1936, this time with a note of introduction. Sri Bhagavan, even before going through it, gave me a knowing nod and gracious smile and said, "Why the introduction? You have come before; you are not new." To add to my wonder I now felt as though my dead father had come back alive; the resemblance was so striking. My approach to Sri Ramana has ever since been that of a child to its parent, quite fearless free and familiar.

Some years ago I had been initiated into two *mantras* and was enjoined to repeat them a minimum number of times every day. I had been doing it punctiliously, but now after entering the Ashrama, I had no mind to the *mantras* or do any kind of formal worship. After a few days I was seized with the fear of incurring sin by failing to observe the instructions on my initiation. So I put it to Sri Bhagavan himself, making a clean breast of my defeat. Sri Bhagavan smiled and said, "Just because you have done so much of *japa*, its merit has brought you here. Why should you now fear while enjoying the fruit of the *japa*?"

I had also at this time a more serious trouble. I had been practising *breath control (pranayama)* as taught by Swami Ramirtha in his works. There came a stage when I felt a terrible sensation as though my head would crack and break into pieces. Then I stopped doing it, but every day the sensation was recurring at the time of practice and the fear was growing that disaster was imminent. So, at dead of night, when Bhagavan was alone, I approached him with my tale. He said laughing, "What! Again you are seized with fear! These are the usual experiences of people who do yogic exercises without the immediate guidance of a Guru, but having come to me, why should you fear?" Then Sri Bhagavan added in an undertone: "Next time you get that sensation, you think of me and you will be all right." From that moment to this I have never felt it again.

"Be still and know that I am God"

During the Christmas of 1936, I attended Sri Bhagavan's *Jayanti* celebration for the first time. Many Western visitors had come. One of them, Mr. Maurice Frydman, a Polish Jew of subtle intellect, plied Sri Bhagavan with ingenious pleas for practical guidance for Self-realisation. Sri Bhagavan followed his arguments with keen interest but kept silent all the time. When pressed to say something, Sri Bhagavan only quoted from the Bible, "Be still and know that I am God," and added "The Lord said 'know' and not, 'think' that I am God." We understood Sri Bhagavan as meaning that all these arguments were spun by the intellect, the stilling of which was the only way to Realisation.

Another visitor, Mr. Duncan Greenless, said, "Bhagavan, while we are in your presence, a certain halo of purity and peace seems to surround us. It continues for some time after we leave. Then it disappears and the old stupidities return. Why is it so?" Sri Bhagavan replied, "It is all the work of the mind. Like the battery it wears out and has to be recharged. But when mind control is perfect, there will be no further trouble."

Availing myself of a short holiday in February 1937, I again went to the Ashrama to submit my translation of *Sri Kavyakantha's Gitamala* in person. As I entered the Hall and was prostrating, to my consternation, my five year old daughter, Lalita, went very near to Sri Bhagavan and asked him, "What is your name, Sir?" Sri Bhagavan replied with a counter-query, "What is your name?" "My name is Lalita," said she, and repeated her question, "What is yours, please?" Now Sri Bhagavan pointing to himself with His right hand on the right side of his chest said, "What! don't you know ME?" She at once answered, "Oh yes! I simply asked for fun." At this Sri Bhagavan burst into laughter.

Lalita's leave-taking was a most moving scene. As she knelt down, Sri Bhagavan who was then squatting after his breakfast, tapped her on the back with his stick saying, "This is to keep you in mind lest you should forget." Then he lifted her and hugged her to his breast. He told the people then present, "The speciality of this child is this: she has no sense of newness or strangeness, all beings and all things she takes as her own."

One day, having just read a biography of the late *Ammani Ammal*, sister of the late Dr. T.M. Nair, Sri Bhagavan spoke highly of her learning, philanthropy and devotion. In her last illness, she wired to Sri Bhagavan praying for a peaceful end. Just when Sri Bhagavan was perusing her letter, she expired in her home. As Sri Bhagavan was narrating this incident, he was so moved that he shed tears.

My long stay this time made the departure a wrench for me, and my feeling found vent in some Telugu verses which I composed on the way and posted to the Ashrama. In the opening verse I wrote, "Leaving Thy feet and going to my place, alas! I feel like the new daughter-in-law leaving her mother's home and starting to go and settle in her mother-in-law's place." The Ashrama reply stated, "Your letter with the '*padyam*' full of your feelings was perused by Sri Bhagavan." The very next time I returned to the Ashrama, Sri Bhagavan greeted me saying, "Lo! the new daughter-in-law has come back to her mother's home! You people treat her as becomes her." I have realised that these gracious words were not mere fun, but truly described Sri Bhagavan's attitude towards me at all times. It was pure, parental love.

Psychology, Philosophy and Spirituality

MP3

One morning Sri Bhagavan quoted from a journal the following sentence: "Where psychology ends, philosophy begins" and added his own remark, "Where philosophy ends spirituality begins."

I was asked to translate into Telugu an article on Sri Bhagavan by his English devotee, *Major A.W.Chadwick*. It was suggested that I might try to put the same ideas in Telugu poetry. In the inspiring presence of Sri Bhagavan, I composed sixteen verses in two hours, and at the instance of Sri Bhagavan, I read them out in the Hall. When I came to the fifteenth verse which stated: "On this occasion (*Shasti-Purti*) as we gather at the feet of Sri Bhagavan, we should neither discuss philosophy nor estimate our individual progress in spirituality, but simply pour our hearts out for his gracious condescension in living with us and befriending us these sixty years," my voice choked with emotion, and failed, Sri Bhagavan also shed tears. With great difficulty I somehow completed the reading.

A. Devaraja Mudaliar, a prominent lawyer and intimate devotee, asked how Sri Bhagavan could observe distinction among his devotees. "For instance," added Sri Mudaliar, "shall we be wrong if we say that *Subbaramayya* is showing a little more favour than others and is made to act as the High Priest of the Order?" Sri Bhagavan smiling, replied, "To me there is no distinction. Grace is flowing like the ocean ever full. Everyone draws from it according to his capacity. How can one who brings only a tumbler complain that he is not able to take as much as another who has brought a jar?"

At this time I was blessed with the rare good fortune of working with Sri Bhagavan in the kitchen. Hours of duty were between 2:30 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. Sri Bhagavan would come punctually at 2:30 a.m. and first spend some time in cutting vegetables with the workers and devotees. Then he would enter the kitchen and prepare *sambar* or chutney for breakfast, and occasionally some extra dishes also.

At first I was an ignoramus in the work. As I saw Sri Bhagavan perspiring profusely near the oven, I tried to fan him, but Sri Bhagavan objected. I stopped, but as his attention was engrossed in work, I gently repeated the fanning. Sri Bhagavan turning to me, laughed and said, "You want to do it on the sly, but you do not even know how to do it effectively. Let me teach you." So saying, he held me by the hand and taught me the proper way of waving the fan. Oh! How I thrilled at this touch and thanked my ignorance!

From the kitchen we would adjourn to another room for grinding the mixture. I did not know at first how to hold the pestle and grind. Sri Bhagavan placed his hand upon mine and turned the pestle in the proper way. Again what a thrill! How blessed was my ignorance!

After the work was finished, Sri Bhagavan would take out a bit from the dish, taste a little of it and give us the remainder to taste, and sometimes when our hands were unwashed, he would himself throw it into our mouths with his own hand. That would be the climax of our happiness. Then he would hasten back to the Hall and lie reclining on the couch and appear dozing as the brahmins arrived for *Parayana*. Squatting so close to Sri Bhagavan, chatting and joking with him and partaking of the fruit of his gracious labours, what a privilege and good fortune!

The work with Sri Bhagavan had its rigours as well as its pleasures. Though Sri Bhagavan was all mercy and grace, he was at the same time a strict disciplinarian. He would not tolerate the least sloppiness. Everything must be done to perfection. Nothing should be wasted or spoiled. He would demand full attention and implicit obedience to his directions. Each one was allotted a duty and he must take his cue from the mere look of Sri Bhagavan. My duty, for instance, was to supply salt and water, and whenever Sri Bhagavan glanced at me, I must bring either of the two, understanding the need.

We used to wake up at 2 a.m., finish our ablutions and be ready before time to report for duty. Once, however, I was late by five minutes. The work was already going on. Sri Bhagavan tasting the preparation said that salt was a little in excess, and turning to me, he added, "Since you were absent, I thought of you at the moment of adding salt, and that is the reason for this excess." That was Sri Bhagavan's way of reprimanding me for unpunctuality.

Another time the sour ingredient was slightly excessive. Sri Bhagavan, tasting it, joked and said, "Acidity is the effective remedy for *pittam* (giddiness). Since most of the people who come here are more or less giddy, this preparation will do us all a lot of good!"

My two daughters, nine-year-old Lalita and five-year-old Indira came and stayed in the Ashrama for a few days. Lalita was Sri Bhagavan's old favourite and Indira was a fresh entrant into his favour. As usual Sri Bhagavan asked both the children to sing and dance in the Hall. Indira would respond readily, but Lalita having grown by now into a little lady, needed much coaxing to commence her performance. Sri Bhagavan said, "What Lalita, I never asked anyone for anything. But now you have made me seek your favour. Look at Indira. She is a good child. Do emulate her example." So both the girls sang and danced together while Sri Bhagavan sat up and looked on, beaming with gracious pleasure. This 'entertainment' became a daily feature of Sri Bhagavan's '*Durbar*' during the children's brief stay.

One evening Lalita, having had her meal early, left with the ladies for town. Indira now remaining alone turned to me and complained of hunger. Sri Bhagavan at once took note of it and severely reprimanded me for delaying to feed the child. He said, "What is your meditation worth if you neglect to serve your child?" Such was his abounding grace to children.

"Why can't you be like me?"

Another night, Sri Bhagavan graciously enquired about my son-in-law's health, which had been causing anxiety for some months. After hearing my tale of domestic cares and worries, Sri Bhagavan looked me full in the face with utmost sympathy and spoke in melting tones: "Why can't you be like me? You know how I was when I arrived in Tiruvannamalai. There was a time when I went round the town begging for food. In those days I was observing silence. So I would pass down the street halting for a moment in front of a house and gently clap my hands. If there was no response, I would pass on. Whatever food was thus got by me and other associates, we would mix into one mass and take a morsel each. That we ate only once a day. Now you see what changes have come outwardly, what buildings have been raised and how the Ashrama has grown all-round. But I am ever the same. Only the sun rises and the sun sets. To me there seems no other change. So through all the vicissitudes of good and evil, you be like me and whenever you are prone to depression and melancholy, you remember me." These gracious words of Sri Bhagavan have been with me ever since and protect me as a talisman against all the ills of life.

The Ashrama was very busy with preparations for the *Kumbhabhishekam* of the Mother's shrine which was to be celebrated during the third week of March, 1949. With the conclusion of the *Kumbhabhishekam* our happiness too seems to have concluded.

Shortly before the function a small growth on Sri Bhagavan's left arm was removed surgically. Shortly after the celebration a new tumour appeared at the same place and grew rapidly. To my enquiry how the tumour would go, Sri Bhagavan simply replied: "As it came, so it will go."

On January 14th, 1950, at noon, with special permission I went to take leave of Sri Bhagavan and broke down completely. Sri Bhagavan called me close to him and asked me to touch the affected arm. He graciously consoled me saying: "Don't worry. It will go. As it came, so it will go. The body itself is a disease, which may be termed *Shroulam* (grossness). The subtle Spirit is encumbered with this lump of flesh called the body. The body is dead even while the man is alive, for it is but insentient matter. Only the spirit gives it an appearance of life and activity. . . . You people talk of the tumour and name it Sarcoma Cancer. But believe me when I tell you that in my view there is no tumour, nor Sarcoma Cancer at all."

Sri Bhagavan's vital energy was being sapped and his body appeared very weak and anaemic. However, his face and look did not betray the least trace of pain and suffering, but on the other hand glowed all the more with grace.

The last leave-taking

In view of Sri Bhagavan's weak condition, *darshan* was restricted to the queues in the morning and evening, and except the personal and medical attendants, all others were strictly forbidden to see Sri Bhagavan. So that night I started back with a heavy heart. As I neared the wicket-gate of Sri Bhagavan's room, Sri Jayadevalal who was guarding it whispered to me: "Do you want to see Sri Bhagavan?" I replied "Yes, but there is no permission." He said, "Never mind, get in," and he pushed me in. Sri Bhagavan lay alone facing the entrance as though he was expecting to see someone. As soon as I got up from prostrating at the doorstep Sri Bhagavan said, "Come in." As I went in and stood before him, Sri Bhagavan asked me: "What do you want?"

I said with streaming eyes: "I want *Abhayam* (security from fear)." Sri Bhagavan replied with overflowing grace: "*Saree icchanu* (Yes, I have given it.)" Then he added: "Don't fear. As it came, so it will go."

At once I felt as though a heavy load were lifted from my heart and as I touched His Lotus Feet with my hands and heard a thrill of ecstasy passed through my frame, and I felt like being plunged in an ocean of Peace and Tranquility. Sri Bhagavan and his gracious words granting me *Abhayam* have taken permanent abode in my being and are guarding me from all life's ills. "Be still and know that I am God"

One morning in June, Sri Bhagavan , while going up the Hill, told me jocularly about the Golden Jubilee of His advent at Arunachalam proposed to be celebrated on September 1st, 1946. He said, "Venkatchalam Chetty had a brainwave. The idea of such a celebration first occurred to him, and since he made the proposal, it seems to have caught every one's fancy." Thrilled with the joy of this news, I composed the following sonnet that very day.

At Arunachala, lo and behold!
Wonders of wonders! This half century
Transcendent Truth-Awareness-Ecstasy
Itself as living Person doth unfold,
Whose presence all in peace and bliss doth hold,
At Whose one word or glance all doubts do flee,
Who radiant with pure Divinity
Looks out for souls to save and rightly mould.
'Tis Ramana Maharshi world-renown'd
God-man, self's Self, embodied Love and Truth.
Ye mortals all, in dense ignorance bound
Come, seek His Grace and see the Light of Truth.
Miss not this rarest chance at any rate,
But taste the Bliss of Self ere 'tis too late.

Someone asked, "It is stated in the scriptures that the Self will reveal itself only to one whom it chooses. Then what is the use of our effort?" Sri Bhagavan replied: "The Self will draw unto itself an aspirant only when he becomes introverted. So long as he is extroverted, Self-Realization is impossible."

— from Sri Ramana Reminiscences

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

Part 4

(continued from the *Sep-Oct 1991* issue)

MP3

Continuing with the 1946 film made by Mr. Reddy of Hyderabad, we see the Maharshi and attendant Rangaswami walking up the stairs leading to the Mountain, north of the Ashrama. Sri Bhagavan seems to struggle somewhat while ascending the stairs. His ascent up the hill is also slow but steady. The cameraman must have been rushing about repositioning himself, for we see Sri Bhagavan from at least five different angles slowly moving up the Hill.

Then the camera focuses on two ladies, Mrs. Talayarkhan and Framji's daughter, both in white saris. One of them bends over and clears some pebbles from the trail, over which they expect the Maharshi to be treading momentarily. Sri Bhagavan appears at a distance on the return swing of his walk; the ladies slip behind a large boulder beside the path; the Maharshi proceeds closer to where the ladies remain in hiding. Is this an ambush in the making? Well, we will never know, for next we see Sri Bhagavan stop and turn towards the camera, exactly were the Mountain top looms directly overhead: the classic Father Arunachala and son Ramana shot.

As this film ends, Sri Bhagavan, followed by his attendant and, yes, the two devoted ladies are seen nearing the back entrance of the Ashrama. Another brief scene of Bhagavan entering the bathroom and it is all over.

Now we come to one of the more historically valuable films. In our possession are two films produced by the Indian Information Bureau. This first, short newsreel was shot on September 1st, 1946, the day commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Maharshi's arrival at Arunachala. On this day the Golden Jubilee Celebration was observed in a grand manner. *Suri Nagamma* gives many wonderful details relating to the event here: [>Letters From Sri Ramanasramam](#). This newsreel, with a commentary, was shown in cinema houses around the country and *G. V. Subbaramayya* reports seeing it, as described in his book, *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*. Bhagavan also comments about this movie in the same book.

The footage we have of this film is incomplete. The negative, apparently, was later stretched and stilled at several places in an attempt to fit the narration into the limited footage. The narration, too, has omissions. We believe there must be a complete version of this footage somewhere, but efforts so far to find one have not been successful.

The film begins by showing the archway entrance of Sri Ramanasramam. A large procession is then seen making its way through the entrance. The procession is again viewed passing the camera inside the Ashrama. Some prominent devotees seen are Swami Viswanathan, the present President of Sri Ramanasramam, T. N. Venkataraman and *Appuchi*, the present head priest.

At this point the narration starts, although the beginning of it has obviously been cut. The camera now shifts to the Maharshi majestically sitting cross-legged on a sofa under a *pandal* (unshaded shed). There are many men and one child standing near him. Increase slowly waits its fragrant smoke, swirling up before this holy scene. We can almost smell it. The Maharshi's eyes are open, but his look is lost in the unspeakable depths of everlasting awareness. The camera shifts and we view the sage from three different angles during a thirty second period. It is a powerful scene, a testimony to a lofty personality exuding a presence that has influenced the lives of so many during this century.

Throughout this *darshan* scene an English narration, in typically British accent, continues.

(continued in the *Mar-Apr* issue)

Book Review

Sri Ramana Reminiscences by G.V.Subbaramayya

MP3

Published by
Sri Ramanasramam,
Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, S.India

Extracts [from this book](#) forms our feature article (*As I Saw Him*) in this issue. Those of you that have read this will have had an engaging foretaste into the intimate life of a childlike devotee of the Master.

There are several interesting facets found in this book that are absent in other publications from Sri Ramanasramam. First of all, the writer was himself a poet, knowledgeable in Telugu, English and Sanskrit. His expertise in translating poetry and text was utilised by the Ashrama and in this we have the Maharshi taking a major role in proof-reading, correcting and composing. On this level of the author's relationship with the Maharshi, an unaffiliated onlooker might erroneously deduce that here are two professors collaborating. The Maharshi's interest and activities were almost on a daily basis - especially in his later years - directed toward compositions and publications, of which poetry seemed to take a major role; but the obvious interest the Maharshi showed was certainly influenced by the fact the author himself was a poet, whose thoughts and aspirations were clearly reflected in the pure waters of a *Jnani*'s mind.

Another special quality of this book is the detail in which the author openly relates his domestic woes and how the Maharshi's abundant grace was always present, in a very palpable manner, saving him from disaster. The death of a son, a stillborn child with delivery complications that caused his wife's death, followed by his daughter's sudden demise - these tragedies, affecting the sensitive heart of a loving husband and father, accentuate the power of the Maharshi's grace and the potency of his teachings in the life of the author.

His reminiscences are presented in chronological order starting from 1933 to 1950, with a few later anecdotal entries in the end. He regularly made three lengthy visits to the Ashrama every year and seemed to have maintained a diary - all events, visits, observations and utterances of the Maharshi are recorded with specific dates. Also, the letters he wrote to and received from the Ashrama are often quoted throughout the book. From all this, it is apparent that his whole life, whether living in the Ashrama or at home in Andhra Pradesh, was centered on his Master and Lord, residing at the foot of the holy Arunachala Hill.

For those wishing to have intimate look into the life of a single-minded and dearly-loved devotee of the Maharshi, we highly recommend the study of this book. Devotees will, undoubtedly, cherish it.

With this issue we begin our second year and Volume Number 2. The preparation and printing of this bimonthly has been a welcome source of inspiration for us, an inspiration that has been multiplied by numerous kind letters of encouragement and friendship.

We take this opportunity to warmly wish all our friends and well-wishers a very joyous and prosperous New Year.

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.

