

May / Jun 1992 THE MAHARSHI Sep / Oct 1992
Jul / Aug 1992 Produced & Edited by
Vol.2 No.4 Dennis Hartel
Dr. Anil K. Sharma

1. As I Saw Him, No. 9, Arthur Osborne
2. The Origins of Sri Ramanasramam
3. Films from Sri Ramanasramam, part 7
4. Thambiah Navaratnam
5. Sage of Arunachala, VHS

As I Saw Him, No.9

by Arthur Osborne

MP3

In December of 1941, Arthur Osborne, a university lecturer in Siam, was imprisoned by the Japanese. After three and a half long years, the Japanese were defeated and he was released. He then travelled to India and settled near Sri Ramanasramam, where his wife and children were waiting for him.

He had heard of Ramana Maharshi, read his teachings and seen pictures of him, but doubts remained whether the Maharshi was an actual Guru who actively guided seekers to salvation. It wasn't long before this doubt was cleared. He ultimately founded the ashram journal, *The Mountain Path*, and left a unparalleled legacy of literature on the Maharshi and his teachings.

Let us follow him as he tells how his heart and mind were joined to the silent Sage of the holy Arunachala Mountain.

I entered the ashram hall on the morning of my arrival, before Bhagavan had returned from his daily walk on the hill. I was a little awed to find how small it was and how close to him I should be sitting; I had expected something grander and less intimate. And then he entered and, to my surprise, there was no great impression; certainly far less than his photographs had made. Just a white-haired, very gracious man, walking a little stiffly from rheumatism and with a slight stoop. As soon as he had eased himself on to the couch he smiled to me and then turned to those around and to my young son and said: "So Adam's prayer has been answered; his Daddy has come back safely." I felt his kindness, but no more. I appreciated that it was for my sake that he had spoken English, since Adam knew Tamil.

During the weeks that followed he was constantly gracious to me and the strain of nerves and mind gradually relaxed but there was still no dynamic contact until the evening of *Karthikai* when, each year, a beacon is lit on the summit of Arunachala.

There were huge crowds for the festival and we were sitting in the courtyard outside the hall. Bhagavan was reclining on his couch and I was sitting in the front row before it. He sat up, facing me, and his narrowed eyes pierced into me penetrating, intimate, with an intensity I cannot describe. It was as though they said: "You have been told; why have you not realized?" And then quietness, a depth of peace, an indescribable lightness and happiness.

Thereafter love for Bhagavan began to grow in my heart and I felt his power and beauty. Next morning, for the first time, sitting before him in the hall, I tried to follow his teaching by using the *vichara*. "Who am I?". I thought it was I who had decided. I did not at first realize that it was the initiation by look that had vitalized me and changed my attitude of mind. Indeed, I had heard only vaguely of this initiation and paid little heed to what I had heard. Only later did I learn that other devotees also had had such an experience and that with them also it had marked the beginning of active *sadhana* under Bhagavan's guidance.

My love and devotion to Bhagavan deepened. I became aware of the enormous grace of his presence. Even outwardly he was gracious to me, smiling when I entered the hall, signing to me to sit where he could watch me in meditation. His face was like the face of water, always changing and yet always the same. He would be laughing and talking, and then he would turn graciously to a small child or hand a nut to a squirrel that hopped on to his couch from the window, or his radiant, wide-open eyes would shine with love upon some devotee who had just arrived or was taking leave. And then, in silence, a moment later, his face would be rock-like, eternal in its grandeur.

He was unperturbed whatever happened; the majesty of his countenance was inexpressible; and yet it is no less true that he was swift and spontaneous in response and that his face was the most human, the most living, one had ever seen. He attained Realization without learning and never displayed erudition, and yet he made himself better versed in the scriptures than the pundits who came to him for elucidations. He was all compassion, and yet his countenance might appear immovable, like stone. He was all love, and yet for weeks together he might not favor a devotee with a single look or smile. He replied to all graciously, and yet many trembled and feared to speak to him. His features were not good and yet the most beautiful and lovely trivial beside him. He often appeared scarcely to notice devotees, and yet his guidance was all unremitting then as it is now.

One day a sudden vivid reminder awoke in me: "The link with Formless Being? But he is the Formless Being!" And I began to apprehend the meaning of his *Jnana* and to understand why devotees addressed him simply as 'Bhagavan', which is a word meaning God. The *vichara*, the constant 'Who am I?', began to evoke an awareness of the Self as Bhagavan outwardly and also simultaneously of the Self within.

Bhagavan sought to free us from psychic as well as physical desires, and he therefore disapproved of all freakishness and eccentricity and of all interest in visions and desire for powers. He liked his devotees to behave in a normal and sane way, for he was guiding us towards the ultimate Reality where perceptions and powers which men call "higher" or "miraculous" are as illusory as those they call "physical". A visitor once related how his Guru died and was buried and then, three years later, returned in tangible bodily form to give instructions. Bhagavan sat unheeding. It was as though he had not heard. The bell rang for lunch and he rose to leave the hall. Only at the doorway he turned and quoted:

"Though a man can enter ever so many bodies, does it mean that he has found his true Home?"

I observed that he shunned theoretical explanations and kept turning the questioner to practical considerations of *sadhana*, of the path to be followed. He never encouraged any to give up life in the world. He explained that it would only be exchanging the thought "I am a householder" for the thought "I am a *sannyasin*." Whereas what is necessary is to reject the thought "I am the doer" completely and remember only "I am"; and this can be done by the means of the *vichara* as well in the city as in the jungle. It is only inwardly that a man can leave the world by leaving the ego-sense; it is only inwardly that he can withdraw into solitude by abiding in the universal solitude of the heart, which is solitude only because there are no others, however many forms the Self may assume.

Daily I sat in the hall before him. I asked no questions for the theory had long been understood. I spoke to him only very occasionally, about some personal matter. But the silent guidance was continuous, strong and subtle. It may seem strange to modern minds, but the Guru taught in silence. This did not mean that he was unwilling to explain when asked; indeed, he would answer sincere questions fully; what it meant was that the real teaching was not the explanation but the silent influence, the alchemy worked in the heart.

I strove constantly by way of the *vichara* according to his instructions. Having a strong sense of duty or obligation, I still continued, side by side with it, to use other forms of *sadhana* which I had undertaken before coming to Bhagavan, even though I now found them burdensome and unhelpful. Finally I told Bhagavan of my predicament and asked whether I could abandon them. He assented, explaining that all other methods only lead up to the *vichara*.

Early in 1948 constant physical proximity had ceased to be necessary and professional work had become urgently necessary. Work was found in Madras. Thereafter I went to Tiruvannamalai only for weekends and holidays, and each visit was revitalizing.

I was there at the time of one of the operations that Bhagavan suffered and had *darshan* immediately after it, and the graciousness of his reception melted the heart and awoke remorse to think how great was the reward for so little effort made.

Toward the end, Bhagavan was aged far more than his years. He looked more like ninety than seventy. In one who had a strong constitution, who had scarcely known sickness except for the rheumatism of his last years, and who was impervious to grief of worry, anxiety, hope or regret, this would appear incredible; but it was the burden of his compassion. "He who taketh upon himself the sins of the world."

Devotees came and sat before him, burdened with sorrows, tormented with doubts, darkened with impurities, and, as they sat, felt themselves free and lightened. How many have come and sat there weighed down with the grief of failure or bereavement, and the light of his eyes has dissolved their pain until they have felt a wave of peace flood their heart. How many have come primed with questions which seemed to them all-important and which their thought and reading has failed to solve; it might be in desperate hope or as a challenge that they brought the questions, but as they sat there the questioning mind itself was brought to tranquility and the questions faded out, no longer needing to be asked. And then, if they opened their hearts, a deeper understanding was implanted there. Those who sought refuge in him felt the burden of their *karma* lifted; and it was he who bore the burden.

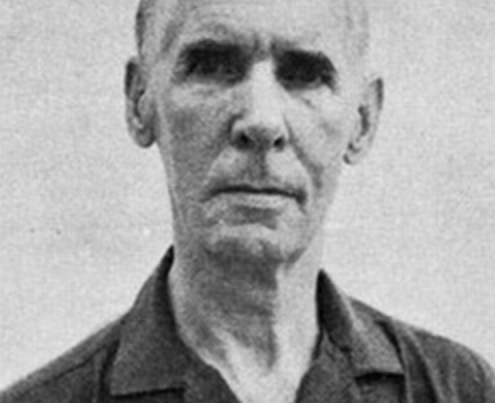
I was there that fateful April night of the body's death and felt a calm beneath the grief and a wonder at the fortitude Bhagavan had implanted in his devotees to bear their loss. Gradually one after another began to discover in his heart the truth that Bhagavan had not gone away but, as he promised, is still here.

Since that day his presence in the heart has been more vital, the outpouring of his Grace more abundant, his support more powerful. I have been to Tiruvannamalai since then also, and the Grace that emanates from the tomb is the Grace of the living Ramana.

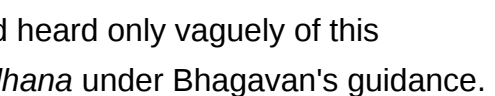
I have not given a clear picture of the man who was Ramana, but how can one portray the universal? What impressed one was his complete unself-consciousness like that of a little child, his Divinity and intense humanity.

We shall not see the Divine Grace in human form or the love shining in his eyes, but in our hearts he is with us and will not leave us. His Grace continues to be poured out, not only on those who knew the miracle of his bodily form, but on all who turn to him in their hearts, now as before.

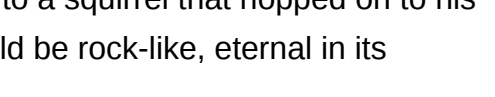
From *Ramana-Arunachala* by Arthur Osborne



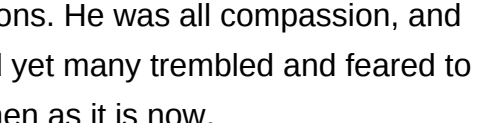
click to see a larger image



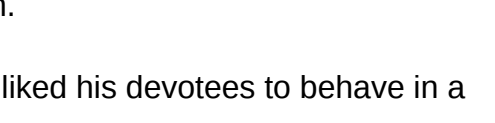
click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



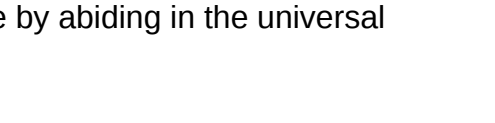
click to see a larger image



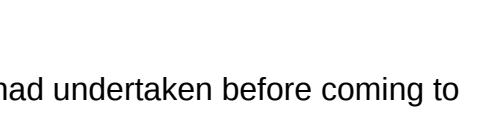
click to see a larger image



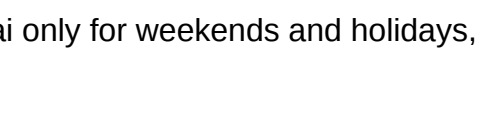
click to see a larger image



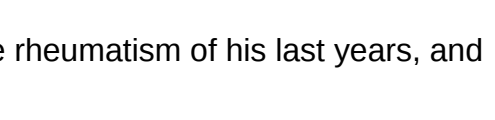
click to see a larger image



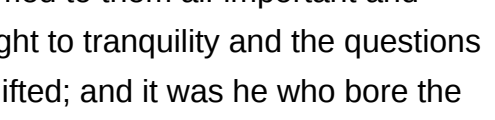
click to see a larger image



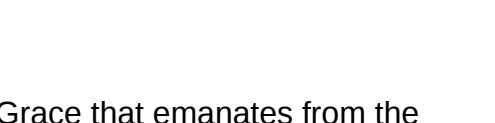
click to see a larger image



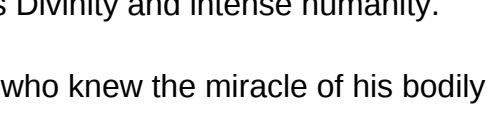
click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



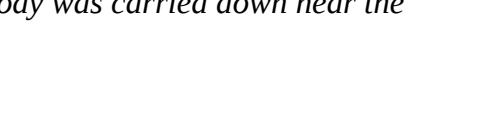
click to see a larger image



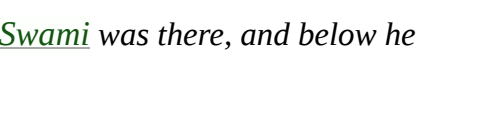
click to see a larger image



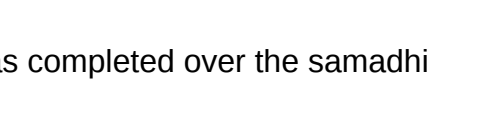
click to see a larger image



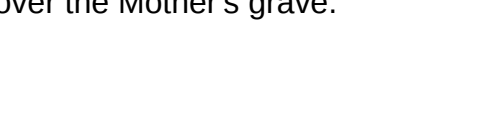
click to see a larger image



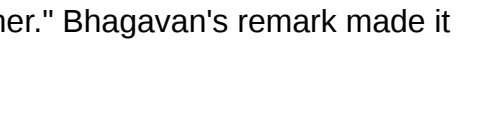
click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



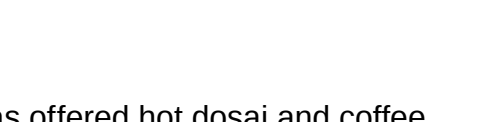
click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



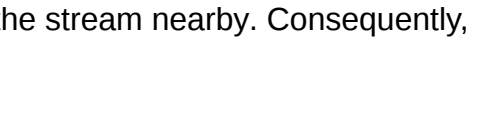
click to see a larger image



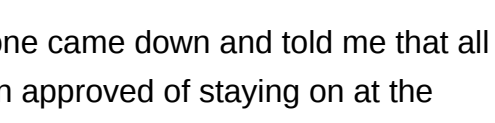
click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



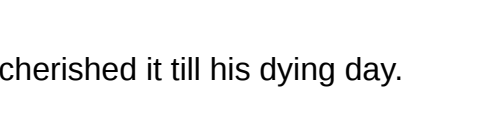
click to see a larger image



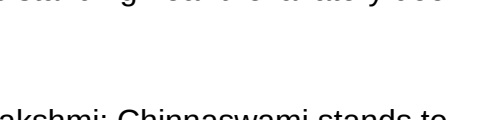
click to see a larger image



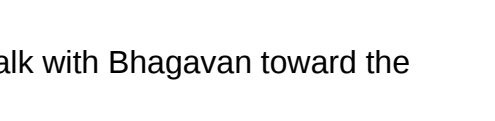
click to see a larger image



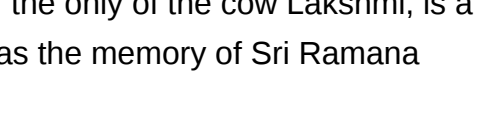
click to see a larger image



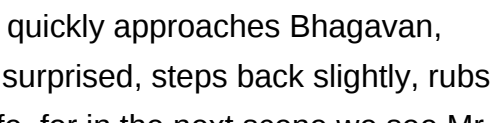
click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



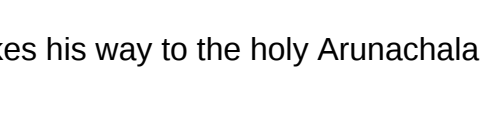
click to see a larger image



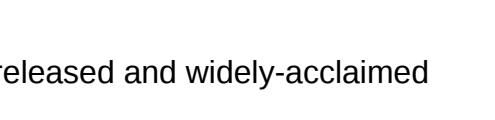
click to see a larger image



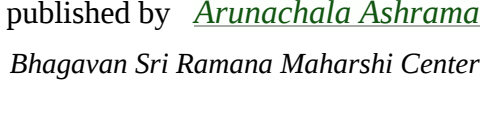
click to see a larger image



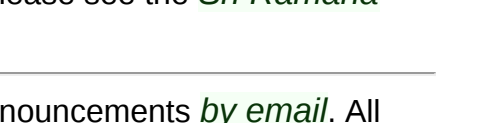
click to see a larger image



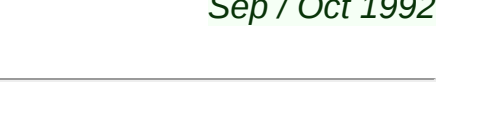
click to see a larger image



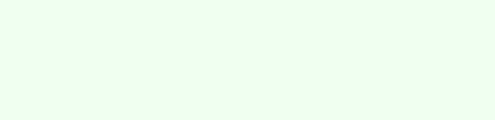
click to see a larger image



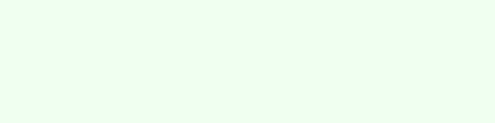
click to see a larger image



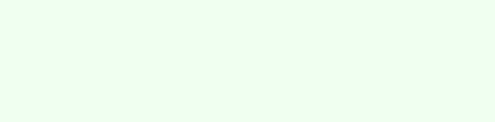
click to see a larger image



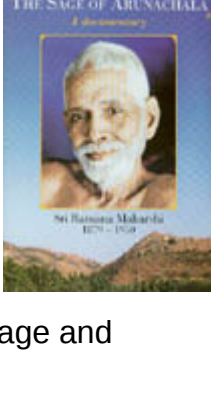
click to see a larger image



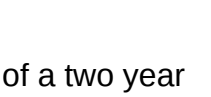
click to see a larger image



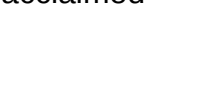
click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



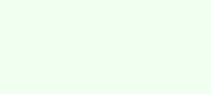
click to see a larger image



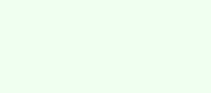
click to see a larger image



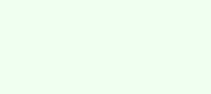
click to see a larger image



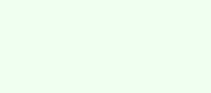
click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image



click to see a larger image