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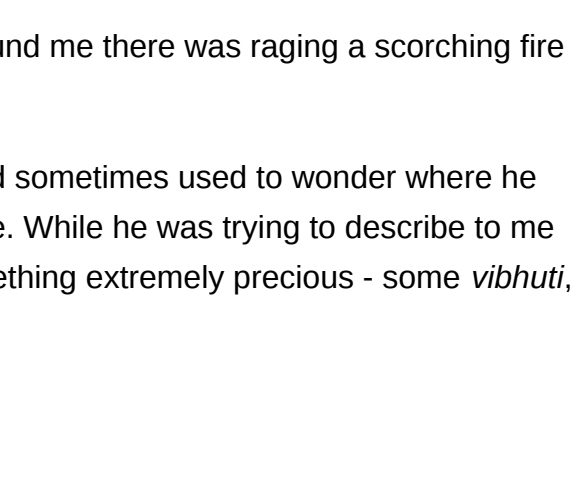
How The Maharshi Came To Me ^[1]

by *Chhaganlal V.Yogi*

MP3

What does Sri Bhagavan mean to me? After many years of experiencing his grace I can now reply, "He is everything to me. He is my Guru and my God." I can say this with confidence because, had I not had the good fortune of seeing him and thereafter getting into closer contact with him, I would have been still groping in the dark. I would still have been a doubting Thomas.

How did it all begin? When I was eighteen I read a lot of books by Swami Vivekananda and Swami Rama Tirtha. This reading generated a desire in me that I should also become a *sannyasin*, like the authors of these books. Their writings also implanted in me the ideal of plain living, high thinking, and a life dedicated to spiritual matters. Somehow, my desire to become a *sannyasin* was never fulfilled, but the ideal of a dedicated life made a deeper and deeper impression on my mind. At the age of twenty I had the good fortune of contacting *Mahatma Gandhi*. His ideals won my heart and for several years I faithfully tried to put them into practice.



I was doing my duty to the best of my ability and leading, as best I could, a pure and dedicated life until the age of thirty-eight. Around that time scepticism began to assail me and my mind became a home for all kinds of doubts. I began to doubt the ideals of Gandhiji; I began to doubt *sadhus* and *sannyasins*; I doubted religion, and I even began to doubt the existence of God.

It was in this darkest period of my life that I first heard of Sri Ramana Maharshi. At that time I seemed to be heading swiftly towards total scepticism. The world appeared to me to be full of injustice, cruelty, greed, hate and other evils, the existence of which logically led me to a strong disbelief in God. For, I argued, did He truly exist, could anything dark or evil ever have flourished? Doubt upon doubt assailed me like dark shadows which dogged my footsteps. I had, as a consequence, lost whatever little reverence I might have had for *sadhus* and *sannyasins*. I found myself slowly but surely losing my interest in religion. The very word itself eventually became a synonym in my mind for a clever ruse to delude the credulity of the world. In short, I began to live a life lacking optimism and faith. I was not happy in my disbelief, for my mind took on the aspect of turbulent waters, and I felt that all around me there was raging a scorching fire which seemed to burn up my very entrails.

One day, while travelling as usual on the train to the office, I happened to meet a friend who had spent over a decade in Europe and America. I hadn't met him for quite a long time and sometimes used to wonder where he had disappeared to. In answer to a query about his recent activities he said that he had been to Sri Ramanasramam and immediately launched into a description of what went on there. While he was trying to describe to me his experience of the *darshan* of Sri Bhagavan he drew out from his pocket a small packet which he extended to me. I wondered what it contained. He explained that it contained something extremely precious - some *vibhuti*, holy ashes brought from the ashram. He insisted on my accepting them. His kind invitation did not interest me in the least. On the other hand, it amused me.

I said scornfully, "Pardon me, but I think that all this sort of thing is mere sham and humbug, so I trust you will not misunderstand me if I refuse to accept."

He then argued that by refusing his gift, I was not merely insulting him, I was also insulting the *vibhuti*.

I thought that this was rather comical, but to placate him I replied, "Well, if that be so, to please you I will take a pinch of these ashes on the condition that you will allow me to do whatever I like with them."

Unsuspectingly, he nodded his head in assent and passed the packet over to me. A smile appeared on his lips as he watched me take a pinch out of it. This smile was the preface to a zealous exposition on Sri Bhagavan and his miraculous greatness. While he was lost in his missionary enthusiasm, I surreptitiously let the ashes fall onto the floor of the compartment. To be quite frank, it was a relief when my friend had concluded what I had then considered to be a puerile and unnecessary lecture. At the end of it I remarked, "I have an utter contempt for these so-called saints."

My friend refused to give up. He insisted on impressing on me that Sri Ramana Maharshi was not a 'so-called' saint, but an authentic sage acknowledged as such by great savants all over the world. He suggested that for my own benefit I read about him in some of the available literature. To start me off he gave me a book entitled *Sri Maharshi*, which had been written by Sri Kamathi, the editor of *The Sunday Times* in Madras.

I must confess that despite my prejudices the book evoked in me an interest in Sri Bhagavan. After completing this small book, I was sufficiently curious to borrow another book about him from a different friend. It was the second edition of *Self-Realisation*, the earliest full-length biography of Sri Bhagavan. From then on, my interest grew without my being aware of it. A little later I felt compelled to write to Sri Ramanasramam to ask for all the literature on Sri Bhagavan that was available in English. As I began to study it with great avidity, I found that my outlook on life began to undergo a subtle transformation, but only a partial one. At the back of my mind there still lurked a heavy doubt, resembling a cloud, that stained the gathering illumination. My old scepticism did not wish to yield place so easily to this new faith, which was apparently being inculcated in my mind. My scepticism tried to challenge my new faith by arguing, "So many books are wonderful to read, but their authors, more often than not, are not as wonderful to know. It is possible for men to teach truths which they are unable to live themselves. What, then, is the use of books, however wonderful?"

To counter this doubt I decided to correspond directly with Sri Bhagavan. Over the next few months I wrote several letters to him, all of which were answered by his ashram with a rare punctuality. However, although they breathed the teachings of the Master, they hardly gave me a glimpse into the nature of the daily life lived by him. Because of this I began to be haunted by a desire to visit the ashram to see for myself what went on there. To fulfil that desire I paid my first visit to Sri Ramanasramam in the Christmas holiday of 1938.

At first I was terribly disappointed because nothing seemed to strike me in the way I had expected. I found Sri Bhagavan seated on a couch, as quiet and unmoving as a statue. His presence did not seem to emanate anything unusual, and I was very disappointed to discover that he displayed no interest in me at all. I had expected warmth and intimacy, but unfortunately I seemed to be in the presence of someone who lacked both.

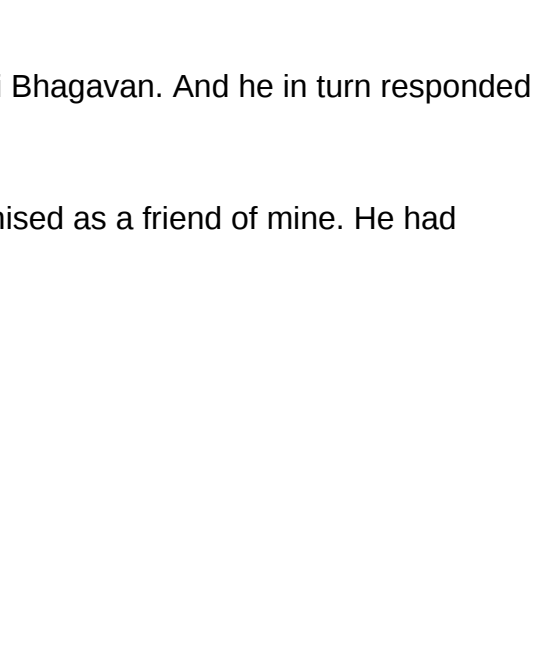
From morning till evening I sat waiting to catch a glimpse of his grace, of his interest in me, a stranger who had come all the way from Bombay, but I evoked no response. Sri Bhagavan merely seemed cold and unaffected. After pinning such hopes on him, his apparent lack of interest nearly broke my heart. Eventually, I decided to leave the ashram, knowing full well that if I did, I would be more sceptical and hard-headed than before.

The *Veda Parayana* was chanted every evening in Sri Bhagavan's presence. It was considered to be one of the most attractive items in the daily program of the ashram, but in my depressed state it fell flat on my ears. It was the evening of the day that I had decided to leave. The sun was setting like a sad farewell, spreading a darkness over both the hill and my heart. The gloom deepened until the neighbourhood disappeared into the blackness of the night. In my sensitive state the electric light which was switched on in the hall seemed like a living wound on the body of the darkness. My mind, which was deeply tormented, felt that the psychic atmosphere in the hall was stuffy and choking. Unable to bear it any longer, I walked outside to get a breath of fresh air. A young man called Gopalan came up to me and asked me where I had come from.

"Bombay," I replied.

He asked me if I had been introduced to the Master, and when I replied that I had not, he was most surprised. He immediately led me to the office, introduced me to the *Sarvadhikari* and then proceeded with me to the hall where he introduced me to Sri Bhagavan. When he heard my name Sri Bhagavan's eyes turned to me, looked straight into mine and twinkled like stars. With a smile beaming with grace he asked me if I were a Gujarati. I replied that I was. Immediately he sent for a copy of the Gujarati translation by Sri Kishorelal Mashruwala of *Upadesa Saram*, a few copies of which had only just arrived. He then asked me to chant the Gujarati verses from the book.

"But I am not a singer," I answered, hesitating to begin. But when it became clear that I was expected to perform, I got over my initial hesitation and began to chant verses from the book. I had sung about fifteen when the bell for the evening meal rang. All the time I was chanting I could feel Sri Bhagavan keenly observing me. It seemed that the light of his eyes was suffusing my consciousness, even without my being conscious of it. His silent gaze brought about a subtle but definite transformation in me. The darkness, which a few minutes before had seemed heavy and unbearable, gradually lightened and melted into a glow of well-being. My erstwhile sadness completely disappeared, leaving in my heart an inexplicable emotion of joy. My limbs appeared to have been washed in an ocean-tide of freedom.



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That evening I sat close to Sri Bhagavan in the dining room. In my exalted state the food I ate seemed to have an unusual and unearthly taste. I quite literally felt that I was participating in some heavenly meal in the direct presence of God. After having such an experience I, of course, abandoned all thought of leaving the ashram that night. I stayed on for three days longer in order to widen the sacred and extraordinary experience which had already begun, an experience of divine grace which I felt would lead me in the direction of spiritual liberation.

During the three days of my stay in the proximity of the Divine Master, I found my whole outlook entirely changed. After that short period I could find little evidence of my old self, a self which had been tied down with all kinds of preconceptions and prejudices. I felt that I had lost the chains which bind the eyes of true vision. I became aware that the whole texture of my mind had undergone a change. The colours of the world seemed different, and even the ordinary daylight took on an ethereal aspect. I began to see the foolishness and the futility of turning my gaze only on the dark side of life.

In those few days Sri Bhagavan, the divine magician, opened up for me a strange new world of illumination, hope and joy. I felt that his presence on earth alone constituted sufficient proof that humanity, suffering and wounded because of its obstinate ignorance, could be uplifted and saved. For the first time I fully understood the significance of '*darshan*'.

While I lay in bed in the guest room of the ashram, the encounter which had taken place on the train in Bombay replayed itself in my mind. I recalled the blind audacity which had prompted me to drop the thrice-holy *vibhuti* in contempt onto the floor of the railway carriage. Today, even one speck of such *vibhuti* is a treasure to me.

"O Master," I thought to myself, "what a miracle of transformation! Why did it take half a lifetime before I could meet you? Half a lifetime of blundering, of failing and falling. But I suppose, my Master, that you would say that time is a mental concept. For I feel that in your sight your *bhaktas* have, throughout all time, always been with you and near you. As these thoughts were passing through my mind, I slowly fell into a deep sleep. The next morning I arose in a rejuvenated state; there was a new vigour in my limbs and an awareness that my heart was permeated with light. On the third day of my visit I sadly took leave of Sri Bhagavan. I was still human enough, still caught in the sense of time and space, for the parting to leave me with a feeling of aching and emptiness in the heart. But there was no despair. Something assured me that I would be returning to the feet of the Master sooner than I could imagine.

My intuition turned out to be correct. In the following years repeated visits seemed to be miraculously and easily arranged by the Master. He seemed to know that I felt an occasional need to be close to him physically. In the years that followed, each succeeding visit deepened the light within, toned up my nerves and suffused my senses with an increasing experience of exhilaration.

In 1945 I decided to wind up my printing press in Bombay in order to go and settle at Sri Ramanasramam. I had no pre-arranged plan for closing down my business; I merely relied on Sri Bhagavan. And he in turn responded to my devout prayer.

In the early hours of the morning, while I was in my bed and only half awake, I saw a vision in which Sri Bhagavan appeared before me. By his side stood a gentleman whom I recognised as a friend of mine. He had neither been to the ashram nor had he ever exhibited any faith in Sri Bhagavan or me:

Bhagavan: You want to sell your press, don't you?

Me: Yes, Bhagavan, but I must find a buyer.

Bhagavan: (showing my friend standing by his side) Here is the buyer. He will buy your press, so sell it to him.

Me: Since Sri Bhagavan has been kind enough to show me the buyer, may he also favour me by stating the amount at which I should execute the sale?

Sri Bhagavan then showed me five figures on the opposite wall which were shining like a neon sign. The amount indicated to me was quite reasonable, neither low nor exorbitant.

Sri Bhagavan and my friend then disappeared from my sight and the vision ended. By itself the vision was astonishing enough, but there was more to come. When I entered my press that day at 11 a.m., my friend from the vision was waiting there for me. Of course, he had come to see me about some other work and had no idea that he had been singled out as a prospective buyer. Feeling that Sri Bhagavan had sent him to me, I told him about the vision that had come to me a few hours before. He listened to me very attentively. When I had finished my tale he simply commented, "I will buy your press at the price indicated by your Guru."

There was no limit to my joy. My desire to sell was fulfilled by his grace and the sale was completed in less than a minute.

— continued in the *Jan-Feb 1994* issue

Footnote
[1] Parts *three through five* of this series are titled "Living with the Master", the title "How the Maharshi Came to Me" of this article has been retained to match the original printing of this issue.

Brother Juniper

MP3

This is one of a dozen stories from the Little Flowers of St. Francis, relating the extraordinary life of Francis' childlike disciple, Brother Juniper.

THEREFORE the devil, wishing to make Brother Juniper suffer by some worldly means, went to a very cruel tyrant named Nicholas, who was the lord of a castle and village and who was then at war with the city of Viterbo. And he said to him: "Sir, watch out for this castle of yours, because soon a great traitor will be sent here by the men of Viterbo to kill you and set fire to your castle. And I give you these clues that this is true: he goes round dressed like a poor man with tattered and patched clothes and a torn cowl hanging on his shoulders, and he is carrying an awl with which to kill you, and he has with him flint and steel to set fire to this castle. And if you do not find this to be true, punish me any way you wish."

Nicholas the tyrant was very much surprised and frightened by these words, because the man who said them seemed to be trustworthy. So he immediately ordered that the gates should be carefully watched and that if a man with those signs should come, he should be brought before him at once.

Meanwhile, Brother Juniper came to that village, and he was alone, for owing to his perfection he had been given permission by his minister to go about and stay without a companion as he pleased. And he met some rowdy boys who as a joke dared and tore his cowl. He did not mind, but rather encouraged and helped them to make even more fun of him.

While the guards were watching at the gate, Brother Juniper came up with his habit mostly cut off, for he had given parts of it to some poor man along the way. Also, with his cowl torn and not looking at all like a Friar Minor, he clearly showed the signs that had been given them. So they quickly rushed upon him, seized him, and led him home by the tyrant. And when they carefully searched him for offensive weapons, they found in his sleeve an awl with which he used to mend his sandals, and also a flint which he carried to light a fire, because he used to have headaches and often lived in the woods and solitary places.

On seeing the signs in him which agreed with the devil's statement, Nicholas immediately ordered them to twist a cord around his head and tighten it with a bar. And they did so with such cruelty that the cord was almost buried in his flesh. Then they put him on the rack, and pulled and wrenched his arms and disjoined his whole body, without showing any mercy.

And when in that condition he was questioned as to who he was, he answered:

"I am a great sinner." And when he was asked whether he wanted to betray the castle and give it over to the people of Viterbo, he replied: "I am a great traitor and do not deserve any good." And when asked whether he wanted to kill tyrant Nicholas with that awl and to burn the castle, he answered: "I would do much greater and worse things if God would allow me to."

Then Nicholas overcome by his fury, did not wish to continue the questioning, but without further delay, angrily sentenced Brother Juniper to be tied to a horse's tail and dragged through the village to the gallows and there to be hanged by the throat at once. Now, at all this, Brother Juniper did not offer any excuses and he showed no sorrow, but rather, like someone who rejoices in tribulations for the love of God, he looked very joyful and glad. And when the tyrant's order was being carried out, and Brother Juniper's feet were tied to the tail of a horse and he was dragged over the ground to be hanged, he did not complain or lament, but went along in all humility, like a gentle lamb being led to slaughter.

This sight and the sudden sentencing brought a great crowd of people on the run to see the prompt and cruel execution. And no one knew him. However, as God willed, a certain good man who had seen Brother Juniper being arrested and then sentenced, ran to the place of the Friars Minor of that village and called the guardian, saying: "For God's sake, please come quickly, because a poor man has been arrested and immediately sentenced and is being led to execution! Come, so that he can at least commit his soul into your hands - because he seems like a good man to me and he has not had time for confession. And they are taking him to be hanged - but he does not seem to care about death or the salvation of his soul. Please come quickly!"

The guardian, who was a zealous and compassionate man, immediately hastened to him, to persuade him to confess and to try to save his soul. But when he arrived, the crowd that had gathered to see this execution had grown so large that he could not make his way through it. So he stood there and waited. And while he was waiting, he heard a voice in the crowd shouting:

"Don't do that, you naughty fellows! That rope is hurting my leg!"

On hearing this, the guardian thought he recognised Brother Juniper's voice. He strenuously pushed his way through the crowd and succeeded in reaching him. And when he tore away the linen cloth which usually covered the face of the person to be executed, he realized at once that it was indeed Brother Juniper, and he was understandably amazed.

Then Brother Juniper, paying no attention to his sufferings and wounds, saw the guardian and said to him half smiling: "Oh guardian, how fat you are!" Grieving and weeping, the compassionate guardian wanted to take off his own habit and give it to Brother Juniper, but the latter said with a smile and cheerful expression: "No, guardian, you are fat, and you would not look good without your habit. I don't want it."

Then the guardian tearfully asked the executioners and all the people standing around to wait a while for pity's sake, until he went to beg the tyrant Nicholas to have mercy on Brother Juniper. The executioners and the people sympathised with him, thinking that he was related to the prisoner, and they agreed to wait for the tyrant's answer.

Then the devout and compassionate guardian went to the tyrant Nicholas and said to him, weeping bitterly: "Sir, I can't tell you how amazed and how sad I am, because I believe that today in this place a greater sin and a greater wrong has been committed than was ever done in the days of our ancestors. But I believe that it was done through ignorance."

Nicholas listened patiently to the guardian and asked him: "What is the great crime and evil that has been committed in this place today?"

The guardian answered: "That one of the holiest friars in the whole world living today in the Order of St. Francis (for whom you have a special devotion) has been sentenced by you to a very cruel punishment - I fully believe without justification."

Nicholas said: "Now tell me, guardian, who he is. For perhaps without knowing it I have done a great wrong."

The guardian said: "He whom you condemned to death is Brother Juniper, the companion of St. Francis!"

Nicholas the tyrant was utterly astounded, because he had already heard about Brother Juniper's fame and his holy life. Overcome with horror, he trembled and turned pale. Then he ran quickly with the guardian to Brother Juniper and untied him from the horse's tail and set him free. And before all the people he threw himself on the ground in front of Brother Juniper, and weeping bitterly he humbly admitted his guilt for the harm and offence which he had caused to be done to this holy friar, and he begged to be forgiven: "I truly believe that the end of my evil deeds and my life is approaching. For since I have treated this holy man so cruelly without his being guilty - although I did not know it - God will not tolerate me any longer and I will soon die a violent death."

Brother Juniper generously forgave Nicholas the tyrant and went away, rejoicing in the Lord because he had conquered himself and had been willing to be despised for the love of Christ. And he left all the people very edified. To the glory of God. Amen.

The Little Flowers of St. Francis
Raphael Brown,
(New York: Image Books, 1958)

Obituary Srimati Ratna Ma Navartnam

MP3

It was with great sadness that we announce the passing of Srimati Ratna Ma Navaratnam, beloved wife of the late *Mr.Kasipillai Navaratnam*. She was a distinguished scholar on Saivaite Hindu philosophy and a former Regional Director of Education, Jaffna, Sri Lanka. She passed away peacefully early in the morning on Sunday, June 13, 1993 at her niece's home in Oakville, Ontario, Canada.

Smt.Ratna Ma was the daughter of Sangarapillai and Katpagam Chelliah, a distinguished family known for its cultural background in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. She was born on November 6, 1910.

She had a brilliant academic record, first at the Presidency College, Madras, then at Annamalai University, Madras, and later at the University of London, England. She was the principal of Jaffna Ramanathan Girls' College from 1933 to 1943, the first Ceylonese to hold that position. She served with the Department of Education in various capacities until her retirement as the Jaffna Regional Director of Education in 1969. Smt.Ratna Ma had travelled widely in India, the United Kingdom and Europe. She was a delegate to the Geneva Conference on International Understanding in 1951.

Smt.Ratna Ma was an active member in many educational and cultural organisations. She was a life member of the Royal Asiatic Society, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, and co-founded Sivathondan Nilayam with her husband, Mr. Kasipillai Navaratnam, after they had come under the spiritual influence of Yogar Swami in Jaffna.

Smt.Ratna Ma was a prolific writer and authored nearly twenty books on various aspects of Saivite philosophy, beginning with *A New Approach to Tiruvācakam*, which was published by Annamalai University in 1951. She wrote several books on the works of Yogar Swami and finished her last work, titled *Call of Maha Sakthi*: Mother Divine, only days before her death. This book was dedicated to her beloved husband who passed away last year. The book will be published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, India. Smt.Ratna Ma spent the last few years of her life in Canada, actively promoting Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. On behalf of the Hindu Temple Society of Canada she gave popular discourses on Hindu traditions and practices on Vision TV.

Her husband, Kasipillai Navaratnam, made his first visit to the Maharshi in 1935. After that he continued to spend his annual leave at Sri Ramanasramam. After he was married, his wife naturally joined him on his visits to the ashram and consequently became an ardent devotee of the Maharshi. Smt.Ratna Ma cherished her memories of Sri Ramana and held fast to his words, as she continually searched to discover "Who am I". She is survived by her sister, Mrs. Alagaratham Thevathasan (Oakville, Canada), and predeceased by her sisters, Mrs. Rasaratnam Veerasingam, Mrs. Thangaratnam Muthukumar, her brother, Mr. Chelliah Thuraiarasasingam, and husband. She will lovingly be remembered by her nieces, nephews and their children, and all those sincere seekers who were touched by her long life of service.

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Devotee: What is the purpose of life?

Maharshi: To seek to know the significance of life is itself the result of good *karma* in past births. Those who do not seek such knowledge are simply wasting their lives.


Devotee: People give some names to God and say that the name is sacred and repetitions of the name bestows merit on the individual. Can it be true?

Maharshi: Why not? You bear a name to which you answer. But your body was not born with that name written on it, nor did it say to any one that it bore such and such a name. And yet a name is given to you and you answer to that name, because you have identified yourself with the name. Therefore the name signifies something and it is not a mere fiction. Similarly, God's name is effective. Repetition of the name is remembrance of what it signifies. Hence its merit.

— *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*

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  channel.