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Living with the Master - Part IV

by *Chhaganlal V.Yogi*

continued from the *Mar/Apr issue* ^[1]

MP3

ONCE when Sri Bhagavan was very debilitated, the doctors recommended that he take some nourishing food. But he would not listen to them or the devotees who appealed to him to follow the advice. Some of them were earnestly begging him to eat thickly-buttered bread, others were trying to make him drink milk and orange juice. But to all of them he had only one answer to give. With his usual genial smile he would say, "But how can we afford to have such a luxurious diet? For us there can only be the poor man's rations."

"But what is the harm in changing one's diet for the sake of one's health?" ventured one devotee in a plaintive tone. "Even Mahatma Gandhi takes a special diet and Sri Aurobindo too does the same, to keep up their health. Please, therefore, take a tumblerful of orange juice, at least for our sake."

"But do you know the cost of a tumbler of orange juice?" asked Sri Bhagavan.

"Oh, only four annas," rejoined the devotee, with hope gleaming in his eyes.

"No, it won't be four annas. We will require about 200 tumblers of juice. Do you want me alone to gulp down the drink with all of you watching, empty-handed ? Moreover, how can poor people like us provide for 200 tumblers of juice, costing fifty rupees daily?"

This answer checked the devotee's pleas for a while, but he would not give up so easily. He still had a lingering hope that if once Sri Bhagavan started to take the nourishing diet, he would continue to do so for at least enough days for his health to improve a little. So, the next day, he quietly prepared hot *rotis* well smeared with *ghee*, and filled two tumblers, one with milk and the other with orange juice. Then, with the assistance of a few other devotees, he took all these things to Sri Bhagavan on a tray.

"What's all this?" he inquired as he saw them walking towards him. The devotees placed the tray before him, uncovered it and begged him to accept the offering. He refused point-blank even to touch the food, asking instead that the devotees should consume it. Repeated appeals to him from other devotees were also of no avail.

Then, in the heat of the moment, a woman devotee who was present at the time burst out, "O Bhagavan! Just as you are kind enough to agree to sit on your sofa - instead of on the floor like everyone else - for our sake, why not also favor us by taking this special diet?" Though the woman spoke these words in good faith, the outcome was quite the reverse of what was expected.

Hardly had she finished when, to her and the other devotees' dismay, Sri Bhagavan got down from his sofa and squatted on the floor. The woman was horrified by the consequences of her suggestion. She called out with anguish in her heart and tears in her eyes, "Bhagavan! No! Please don't! What a stupid woman I am!" Then she got hysterical and started screaming.

All the others stood around, aghast at what had happened. The remedy had turned out to be worse than the disease. The *rotis*, the milk, the juice were abandoned as everybody racked their brains to find a way out of this impasse and resat Sri Bhagavan on the sofa.

It was certain that no appeal or argument would move Sri Bhagavan to change his decision. Eventually a devotee who had been associated with Sri Bhagavan for over thirty-five years resolved to take a desperate step. Without any fuss, he simply started lifting Sri Bhagavan bodily. Seeing this, one or two other devotees joined him and together they succeeded in placing Sri Bhagavan's body back on the sofa. Sri Bhagavan did not resist, nor subsequently did he try to come down from the sofa. But the devotees had been so upset by the incident that even after seeing Sri Bhagavan sitting quietly on the sofa again, they began to beseech him not to get down again.

Sri Bhagavan accepted the new situation graciously. Thus, a loving attempt by devotees to make Sri Bhagavan agree to take a special diet came to a fruitless end.

"From anger proceeds delusion; from delusion confused memory; from confused memory the destruction of reason; from destruction of reason one perishes."

So says Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Ch. 2, v. 63. Anger is often the root cause of man's decay because it makes him devoid of humanity.

Once when Sri Bhagavan conquered his own anger by abiding as the Self. Since this is a seemingly impossible short-term goal for most people, I will offer an alternative method which Sri Bhagavan himself once suggested. A young man once came to Sri Ramanasramam and entered the hall. After prostrating to Sri Bhagavan he told him what he had come for: "Bhagavan, my senses are turbulent and fickle. Whatever I try to do, I cannot keep them under control. Please bestow your grace on me and show me the way to control them."

"Fickleness is due to the mind," replied Sri Bhagavan. "Once the mind is controlled, the senses will automatically be controlled."

"True, Bhagavan," said the young man, agreeing to the principle, "but I get excited even at trifles. The more I try to control my anger, the tighter becomes its grip on me."

"Is that so? But why on earth should you be angry at all? And if you want to be angry, why not get angry with your own anger." Explaining further, Sri Bhagavan said, "Whenever a fit of anger comes to you, direct it against your own self instead of wasting it on others. Be angry with your own anger. If you do this, your anger against other people will subside. This is the way to conquer it." Sri Bhagavan concluded by laughing, suggesting thereby that he was not being entirely serious.

Most of the devotees sitting in the hall joined him in his laughter, thinking that he had uttered the words as a joke. Only a few of those present seriously pondered over these valuable words and grasped the wisdom of this novel but useful way of controlling anger. We can remove a thorn in the foot by the means of another thorn. Then, when the first thorn is out, we can throw them both away. In the same way, Sri Bhagavan advises us to remove our anger against others by using it on ourselves. Then, afterwards, we can dispense with both angers.

Though he would usually get annoyed if devotees tried to give him special treatment, or if he saw people needlessly inflicting suffering on others, Sri Bhagavan could never be provoked to anger by any amount of criticism or personal abuse. Two separate incidents illustrate this very well.

Once when Sri Bhagavan was sitting in his cave on Arunachala, a *sadhu* who was jealous of his increasing fame urinated on his back as a deliberate act of provocation. Sri Bhagavan remained as unperturbed and Self-absorbed as ever. Not a tinge of anger rose in him. The *sadhu* was baffled by his calm response. Realizing that nothing could irritate Sri Bhagavan, the poor *sadhu* quietly went away.

On another occasion, many years later, a young man visited Sri Ramanasramam with an evil purpose. After entering the hall and taking his seat in the front row, he began to put all kinds of aggressive questions to Sri Bhagavan. He went out later that he wanted to extort hush-money from the ashram by trying to expose Sri Bhagavan as a hypocrite and a fraud. He had already successfully tried his trick elsewhere, and by repeated practice he had cultivated this art into a paying profession. Having gained successes in other ashrams, he had come to Sri Ramanasramam to try his tricks there.

Sri Bhagavan's own method of meeting insolence, malice, jealousy and misbehavior in general was the observance of complete silence. This powerful weapon baffled and disarmed all aggressive and insolent visitors.

When the youth tried to draw Sri Bhagavan into a controversial discussion so he could catch him when he made a potentially embarrassing answer, Sri Bhagavan remained completely silent. The poor man could make no headway at all. He tried insults, he tried belching out foul language, but Sri Bhagavan did not utter a single word. He did not accept any of the insults or respond to them in any way. He merely remained calm, unperturbed and smiling. The young man, after exhausting all his insults, saw the impossibility of achieving his object. He had to admit defeat and quit the ashram.

What we call miracles would sometimes occur in Sri Bhagavan's presence. Faith in Sri Bhagavan has produced many a miraculous cure, but he would never accept responsibility for any miracle. For him, all these things went on automatically and were part of the natural activity of the Self. I can illustrate this very well by retelling a story which was told to me by an old devotee who had known Sri Bhagavan from his earliest days on the hill.

In 1908 Sri Bhagavan was staying in *Pachaiammam Temple* on the north-eastern side of the mountain. There were many tamarind trees nearby. The municipality gave the highest bidder the contract to collect tamarind from these trees every year. That particular year a Muslim had got the contract. Since these trees gave an unusually rich yield, the contractor himself used to protect them from the monkeys, driving them away by shooting stones at them from a catapult. Because he only wanted to scare them away, he took care to see that they were not injured. However, by some ill chance, a stone from his catapult hit a monkey on its head so hard, it died on the spot. Immediately, a large number of monkeys surrounded the corpse and began to wail and lament the death of their relative. Then, by way of complaint, they took the dead body to Sri Bhagavan in the Pachaiammam Temple.

These monkeys considered Sri Bhagavan as a friend and arbiter. He frequently settled their internal disputes and even acted as an honest broker when rival tribes were having territorial disputes. He could communicate with them quite easily and he did his best to establish peace and harmony among the warring tribes and their fractious members. So, at this time of anger and grief, it was quite natural for the monkeys to bring both the corpse and their complaints to Sri Bhagavan.

As soon as they came near him they burst into angry cries and tears. Sri Bhagavan, whose heart registered and mirrored the emotions of those around him, responded to their anguish with tears of his own. Gradually, though, his emanations of sympathetic love soothed and calmed the turmoil within the monkeys' hearts.

Then, by way of consolation, Sri Bhagavan told them, "Death is inevitable for everyone who is born. He at whose hands this monkey died will also meet with death one day. There is no need to grieve."

Sri Bhagavan's words and his loving kindness pacified the monkeys. They went away, carrying the corpse with them.

Two or three days later the Muslim contractor became bedridden with some serious malady. The story of the *upadesa* given by Sri Bhagavan to the aggrieved monkeys spread from mouth to mouth till it reached the home of the Muslim contractor. The members of his family became convinced that his sudden illness was due to the saint's curse. They therefore went to *Pachaiammam Temple* and began to plead for Sri Bhagavan's pardon for the ailing contractor.

"It is certain that your curse has affected him," they began. "Please save him from death. Give us some *vibhuti* (sacred ash). If we apply it to his body, he will surely recover."

With a benign smile, Sri Bhagavan replied, "You are mistaken. I never curse or bless anyone. I sent away the monkeys that came here by telling them the simple truth that death inevitably occurs to all those who are born. Moreover, I never give *vibhuti* to anyone. So please go home and nurse the patient whom you have left all alone."

The Muslims did not believe his explanation. They announced that they were not going away unless they received some *vibhuti* to cure their relative with. So, just to get rid of them, Sri Bhagavan gave them a pinch of wood ash from the outside of his cooking fire. On receiving it, their faces beamed with joy. They expressed their hearty gratitude to the sage and returned home.

The family and the contractor had great faith in this *vibhuti*. Soon after it was applied to the ailing man, he began to recover. Within a few days he rose from his bed, fully recovered.

Footnote

[1] *part one* of this series was titled "How the Maharshi Came to Me", *part two* was titled "Chhaganlal V.Yogi."

One Has to Renounce Worldly Links, Hasn't One?

MP3

Tapas Swami - Bhagavan's devotee, Sri Toppayya Mudaliar, was so named by Sri Ma Anandamayee Ma when he was introduced to her - is now very old and is confined to his house at Naduvakkalappal village. He is a staunch devotee having come to Bhagavan in the thirties. Bhagavan expressed approval when he was chosen to supervise the Kumbhabhishekam ceremonies of Mother's Shrine in 1949. After repeated requests, he sent these reminiscences of the Master.

In 1930, one afternoon, when I entered the Hall I found Bhagavan all alone. Those were the days when I was disgusted with life, as I had to face too many family problems. In addition, I was entrusted with the supervision of a temple renovation which was a very tedious job. I was depressed and miserable, and had a longing to renounce the world and lead the life of a recluse. Summoning my courage, I approached Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, to pursue spiritual *sadhana* one has to renounce worldly links, hasn't one?" His answer was a motionless silence!

After some time I broached the subject again and said, "I am not yet blessed with a reply by Bhagavan!" Bhagavan looked stern and said, "What do you mean by 'giving up' (something) and 'taking up' (something) else ? Where to go, what to take? Everywhere, everything is only the 'I'. Who is to give up what and who is to go where?"

He uttered these words with such sternness that I took it as a reprimand and went out and started crying. After fifteen minutes, when I had calmed down, I became aware of the surroundings and wondered whether Bhagavan would have watched my crying. I was unnerved to see that Bhagavan was looking at me without any change in his stern face. When I went into his presence again, Bhagavan turned to *Muruganar* and said, "Look at him! He wants to give up everything and run away. From where have we come to think of going elsewhere? What is, always exists. Where to go, and who goes?" But then, suddenly, Bhagavan's face changed into one of love and compassion. He looked at me with tender affection and asked me in a sweet voice, "Who are you? Tell me."

Again, I gathered courage and said: "I know, Bhagavan, that I am the Self alone." Then, full of grace, He uttered the following words: "That is all that is to be understood. This intellectual conviction now is *athida jnana* (infirm knowledge). In due course, you will be established in *thida jnana* (firm abidance). That is the Final Truth - to be what you ARE!" I was fortunate indeed to get these words of assurance from the Master. What more do I want?

— From the *Mountain Path*, January, 1985

A Dream, A Visit, and Faith

MP3

Wednesday, March 10, 1993,
Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, New York City.

This morning I woke after the following dream. I was driving the ashram station-wagon on a country road. Seated to my side in the front seat were my mother and father. In the rear seat were friends from Arunachala Ashrama, one of which was Bhagawat, the ashram founder. I seemed to have been driving to a particular destination somewhere out in the country of New York State. Where this destination was, I am not clear, for we didn't discuss it in the car, nor did I question anyone about directions. I must have understood where we were going and the route to take. We departed on this trip from my hometown, Tonawanda, New York.

After a long drive we reached a complex of buildings that looked like some kind of an institution. I parked the car and asked everyone in the car to follow me into a building. We went inside and I, leading the group, walked down a long corridor, or hallway, that had rooms on both sides. I came to a door at the end of the hallway, walked outside, and then entered into another adjacent building. Soon after entering the hallway of this other building, I entered through a door of a room that was to my left. Upon entering the room I was surprised to see that it was very large, like a gymnasium. Everyone followed me into the room. We stood near the entrance inside the room and I said that there was no need for us to walk through this room, and then asked everyone to turn around and walk out.

After passing out through the door of this large room I glanced at the hallway that stretched out to my left. There, nearby, reclining on his couch, was Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. With his right hand supporting his head he was reclining on his right side in a relaxed and peaceful pose. People were walking by him without giving him much more attention than a side-glance. Then I saw one man go up and stare into the Maharshi's face. I also did likewise. I could see that although Bhagavan's eyes were open, he was lost to all outer sense. The man standing near me looked at him queerly, trying to figure him out. He somehow deduced there was something holy about him and joined his palms together, bowed his head slightly, and then walked away.

As I was watching all of this, I was saying within me, "What is Bhagavan doing here? This is not Ramanasramam. No one even knows him here." I was perplexed and wanted to question him, but I could not because he was so absorbed within. Standing there, looking at him and wondering about his presence in this unfamiliar place, I woke up. It was 4:10 a.m.

About 7 a.m. on this same morning, Bhagawat and I left for a day-trip to Scranton, Pennsylvania. There, being treated in the Allied Services Rehabilitation Hospital, was our old friend and Bhagavan's devotee, Roy Colonna. He was just transferred to this new facility for treatment a few days earlier.

Two months ago Roy had met with a serious car accident which left him paralyzed from the neck down. He was presently struggling through "unbearable pain" to regain at least some movement in his arms and legs. His success till now had been very slow, but hopeful.

After arriving and entering into the main lobby of the hospital we inquired and found Elizabeth (Roy's wife) with Roy in the occupational therapy room. When Roy saw Bhagawat, tears filled his eyes and he was unable to talk to express his feelings. Elizabeth asked the therapist to continue the treatment while she took us through the halls of the facility to her room, a place where accommodation is provided for relatives of the patients. Her intent was to serve us the rice, vegetables, dhal, yogurt, mango and tea she had affectionately prepared for us in the spacious kitchen attached to the guest rooms.

While we were slowly eating and Elizabeth was serving us in her usual whole-hearted and devoted manner, and, as she was also engaging Bhagawat in conversation, the vivid memory of my early morning dream came to my mind. Like one dozing in a classroom and suddenly awakened by the teacher calling his name, I suddenly woke up to the fact that the very buildings I walked through in my early morning dream were those of this rehabilitation center. The large gymnasium-like room was the same occupational therapy room where we first saw Roy when we arrived. And the hallway in which Bhagavan was reclining on his couch was the same hallway just outside this therapy room. I saw Bhagavan reclining and facing the room where Roy receives his therapy.

I sat there eating in a reflective mood, visualizing the dream and comparing it with the details of this building. Everything was exactly the same. I realized that Bhagavan must have given me this dream to strengthen our faith in him and also to relate it to our dear friend Roy who was now passing through the greatest crisis of his life. If this dream and the waking experience did not agree so precisely, I probably would not have mentioned it to anyone. But I believe that by such dreams, and other experiences, Bhagavan lets us know that he is always there guiding us to his supreme abode in the Heart.

Returning to see Roy after our meal, I stood near his bed and slowly related the dream to him. Roy listened quietly. I saw tears welling up and falling from his eyes. Bhagawat also listened and, after hearing all the details of the dream, he turned to Roy and said with enthusiasm, "You see Roy, Bhagavan was here even before we arrived!"

— Dennis Hartel

Retreat in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia

MP3

This time of year people begin planning their summer vacations to resorts, home-towns, or some other interesting destinations. We would like you to be aware of the facilities offered by this ashram and to think of it as a destination that will serve to transcend your inner life and fulfill your noble aspirations. We would also like you to think of us as friends and family members who, like you, are aspiring for inner strength and peace in our daily lives.

In Nova Scotia, Canada, Arunachala Ashrama has been maintaining a retreat in the scenic Annapolis Valley since 1972. It is open year around and offers to guests a sanctuary of peace, dedicated to the ideals lived and taught by Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Below is an excerpt from a standard letter we often send to those inquiring about the Nova Scotia Ashrama. Please accept it as your personal invitation.

Dear Friend,

In Nova Scotia, Canada we maintain retreat facilities for those earnest seekers who wish to deepen their spiritual experience and stabilize themselves in the practice of Self-awareness and surrender. The retreat is open to all, regardless of religious beliefs or creeds adhered to - including those of no particular faith. The only requirement is a sincere desire for peace and truth.

In the quiet, idyllic Nova Scotian countryside, a daily schedule of prayer, recitation and silence is conducted in the Temple. A period is also set apart for light work (if desired), meals and quiet time alone for individual study or walks. A minimum visit of one or two weeks is recommended to absorb the full effect of the Ashrama environment.

Arunachala Ashrama is a non-profit organization serving the needs of sincere seekers. Facilities are provided to guests without any formal rate of charge. We do accept donations from those who value our work and ideals.

For more information, please write:

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send email or call Nova Scotia: (902) 665-2090

— Dennis Hartel

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.