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नमो भावते श्री रमणाय

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1. *Here Lies the Heart, part 2*  
2. *Sri Ramana Bestows His Grace, part 1*  
3. *98th Advent at Arunachala Celebrations*

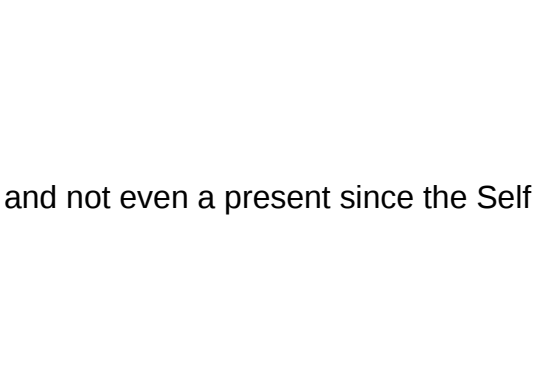
## Here lies the Heart - Part II

continued from the *Sep / Oct* issue

ME 3

With this article we conclude Mercedes de Acosta's account of her experiences with the Maharshi, as related in her autobiography, *Here Lies the Heart*, which was published in the USA in 1960. The questions she sent Guy Hague to ask Maharshi, and the Maharshi's replies, are also included. It must be noted that these are different from other questions Hague put to the Maharshi on de Acosta's behalf and are recorded in *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*, under the date 15th December, 1938.

Before leaving the ashram I wrote down several questions for Guy Hague to ask Bhagavan that I had not had a chance to ask myself. I had been bothered by the fact that so many saints and enlightened people had been ill and suffering physically. I asked, "Should they not have perfect bodies and why do they not cure themselves?" In Europe I got a letter from Guy saying he had discussed my question with Bhagavan. He wrote: "Bhagavan told me to tell you that the spiritually perfect person need not necessarily have a perfect body. The reason, as he explained it, is very simple.



"You see, the ego, the body and the mind are the same thing. The spiritually perfect person, like Bhagavan, is above these three things. Consequently he has no body to heal, neither a mind - or ego - to heal it with. He is beyond all this because it is illusion. He is living in Reality. Christian Scientists can take the mind and heal the body - for they are the same thing. American Indians heal, too, in this manner. It is faith healing.

"But if the spiritually perfect person is sick in body it is because the body is working out its *karma*. Bhagavan gave an illustration of *karma*, which he says is like an electric fan and must just run its course, only gradually ceasing even after it has been turned off. He says the mind is born into illusion and builds a body and a world to suit it - that is, a world that it has earned and deserves (by its *karma*). Bhagavan, knowing the body and the mind to be illusion, cannot experience any bodily ailment or discomfort. We make him suffer pain, loss of weight, etc. It is in our minds, not his. He is actually bodiless, though you and I cannot realize this as a fact."

In another letter Guy answered my questions, which led to others. He wrote down my questions and Bhagavan's answers.

*Question:* Is reincarnation a fact?

*Bhagavan:* You are incarnated now, aren't you? Then you will be so again. But as the body is illusion then the illusion will repeat itself and keep on repeating itself until you find the real Self.

*Question:* What is death and what is birth?

*Bhagavan:* Only the body has death and birth, and it (the body) is illusion. There is, in Reality, neither birth nor death.

*Question:* How much time may elapse between death and rebirth?

*Bhagavan:* Perhaps one is reborn within a year, three years or thousands of years. Who can say? Anyway what is time? Time does not exist.

*Question:* Why have we no memory of past lives?

*Bhagavan:* Memory is a faculty of the mind and part of the illusion. Why do you want to remember other lives that are also illusions? If you abide within the Self, there is no past or future and not even a present since the Self is out of time - timeless.

*Question:* Are the world, the mind, ego and the body all the same thing?

*Bhagavan:* Yes. They are one and the same thing. The mind and the ego are one thing, but there is no word to explain this. You see, the world cannot exist without the mind, the mind cannot exist without what we call the ego (itself, really) and the ego cannot exist without a body.

*Question:* Then when we leave this body, that is when the ego leaves it, will it (the ego) immediately grasp another body?

*Bhagavan:* Oh, yes, it must. It cannot exist without a body.

*Question:* What sort of a body will it grasp then?

*Bhagavan:* Either a physical body or a subtle-mental body.

*Question:* Do you call this present physical body the gross body?

*Bhagavan:* Only to distinguish it - to set it apart in conversation. It is really a subtle-mental body also.

*Question:* What causes us to be reborn?

*Bhagavan:* Desires. Your unfulfilled desires bring you back. And in each case - in each body - as your desires are fulfilled, you create new ones. You must conquer desire to be absorbed into the One and thus end rebirth.

*Question:* Can sex change in rebirth?

*Bhagavan:* Oh, surely. We have all been both sexes many times.

*Question:* Is it possible to sin?

*Bhagavan:* Having a body, which creates illusion, is the only sin, and the body is our only hell. But it is right that we observe moral laws. The discussion of sin is too difficult for a few lines.

*Question:* Does one who has realized the Self lose the sense of 'I'?

*Bhagavan:* Absolutely.

*Question:* Then to you there is no difference between yourself and myself, that man over there, my servant - are all the same?

*Bhagavan:* All are the same, including those monkeys.

*Question:* But the monkeys are not people. Are they not different?

*Bhagavan:* They are exactly the same as people. All creatures are the same in One Consciousness.

*Question:* Do we lose our individuality when we merge into the Self?

*Bhagavan:* There is no individuality in the Self. The Self is One - Supreme.

*Question:* Then individuality and identity are lost?

*Bhagavan:* You don't retain them in deep sleep, do you?

*Question:* But we retain them from one birth to another, don't we?

*Bhagavan:* Oh, yes. The 'I' thought (the ego) will recur again, only each time you identify with it a different body and different surroundings around the body. The effects of past acts (*karma*) will continue to control the new body just as they did the old one. It is *karma* that has given you this particular body and placed it in a particular family, race, sex, surroundings and so forth.

*Bhagavan added,* "These questions are good, but tell de Acosta (he always called me de Acosta) she must not become too intellectual about these things. It is better just to meditate and have no thought. Let the mind rest quietly on the Self in the cave of the Spiritual Heart. Soon this will become natural and then there will be no need for questions. Do not imagine that this means being inactive. Silence is the only real activity." Then Guy added, "Bhagavan says to tell you that he sends you his blessings."

This message greatly comforted me.

On my way back to Europe my boat stopped at Port Said. I landed there and motored across the desert to Cairo where I stayed three days and then caught the ship again when it docked at Alexandria.

In Cairo I stayed at the old famous Shepherd Hotel. I spent one day in the museum seeing the Tut Ankh Amon collection, and the second day I rode out by camel to see the Sphinx and the Great Pyramid. When I reached the Pyramid it was nearly sunset. There was no one around except my own dragoman and one or two Arabs sleeping against their kneeling camels. I decided to climb to the top of the Pyramid. Although it towered above me, tapering off into the sky, and looked terribly high, I did not realize how high it was until I started climbing. I started out briskly but after a certain distance I grew tired and my pace slackened. The steps of the Pyramid are very narrow and eroded, but I was determined to reach the top. Thoroughly exhausted, I finally did. The sun had already gone down. I turned and looked down the steep and awesome slope of the Pyramid. Suddenly I was overcome by the most frightful vertigo. My head swam and I felt that I was going to plunge to my death. I crouched on the narrow steps and clung to the top of the Pyramid so fiercely that my nails broke against the stone and my fingers bled. I could not bring myself to look down again. An agonizing fear took hold of me. I felt cold sweat pouring over my face, neck and back. I became hysterical. What was I to do? I knew if I let go I would fall, but I also knew I could not hold on much longer. I closed my eyes. I remembered what the Maharshi said - to dive deep into the Spiritual Heart. I summoned every faculty and all power within me and concentrated on the Heart. Suddenly I saw it, like a great light in my mind's eye. In the center I saw the Maharshi's face smiling at me. Instantly I felt calm. I turned and looked down. Far below I saw a man waving at me. I loosened one hand and held it over my head, then I waved back. The man began calling someone else. Another man ran to him. Swiftly they began to climb. They climbed expertly and fast but it seemed hours to me. Probably it took them about thirty-five minutes to reach me. One man had a rope. He tied it around my waist and gently stroked my face. He mumbled some words that I could not understand, but I knew they were kind words to encourage me. Between them, each one holding the rope as though we were mountain climbing, we began to descend. Eventually we reached the bottom safely. Some time after this I was told by an enlightened person that climbing the Great Pyramid was considered in ancient Egypt one of the "fear tests" which students had to pass in order to be initiated into the great religious mysteries. Aspirants were required to climb to the very top of the Pyramid, and if on reaching the top of it he or she could conquer fear, this particular test was won.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi died on April fourteenth, 1950. He had said, "I am going away? Where could I go? I am here." By the word "there" he did not imply any limitation. He meant rather, that the Self 'is'. There is no going, or coming, or changing in that which is changeless and Universal. I should not have regarded his death as a blow. How could I lose him? How can one lose anyone? How can one lose that which is Eternal? It is only in the first shock, and gripped in the illusion of death, that one grieves for the physical presence.

Yet, millions in India mourned the Maharshi. A long article about his death in the *New York Times* ended with, "Here in India, where thousands of so-called holy men claim close tune with the infinite, it is said that the most remarkable thing about Ramana Maharshi was that he never claimed anything remarkable for himself, yet became one of the most loved and respected of all."

— Concluded [Mercedes de Acosta died in New York City in 1968.]

## Sri Ramana Bestows His Grace

part 1

ME 3

In 1937, T.S.Anantha Murthy was a judge working in a remote area of Mysore State when he noticed newspaper articles almost every week on Sri Ramana Maharshi and his teachings. Even in this faraway place he heard stories from scholars and pilgrims who had visited the Sage of Arunachala. Intrigued by what he had read and heard, it wasn't long before he and his wife made arrangements to make a visit to Ramanasramam. This visit is graphically described by Anantha Murthy in a biography he published of the Maharshi in 1972. The detailed account of his visit is simple and captivating, taking us into the ashram during those early days when there were few visitors and the Sage was easily accessible to all. What is particularly interesting is that Anantha Murthy, not knowing Tamil, talked to Bhagavan only in English, and also received replies directly from him in English.

Soon after his book, *Life and Teachings of Sree Ramana Maharshi*, was published, the author kindly sent a complimentary copy to our New York City Ashram. The following has been taken from Chapter sixteen, titled "Sree Ramana Bestows His Grace on the Present Biographer in 1937."

With bare feet, my wife and I and a companion entered the hall of the ashram. It was filled with devout men and women, who were all squatting on the floor. The hall had two entrance doors and half a dozen large windows. We entered through the door which was just opposite to the sofa on which Sri Ramana Maharshi was found seated. He was quite naked except for the white cotton *koupina*, or lioncloth. His sofa was in the north-eastern corner of the hall. There were heavy pillows covered with white cotton covers at the eastern end of the sofa and the sage was reclining on them with his two legs fully stretched towards the western wall. His large head was held erect and his large eyes were beautiful to look at. The eyeballs were milk white in colour. His eyes appeared to be looking at some spot on the opposite wall and his eye lids were not winking at all. Incense and sandal sticks were found burning in his vicinity and there was a pleasing perfume which we smelt. There was an unlighted petromax lamp hanging from one of the crossbeams of the hall. My wife and I felt awe as we stood and looked at the great sage. It was a memorable experience to behold a *mahatma* of his eminence. We humbly conveyed our reverence and then sat down. Women devotees were found seated separately and so my wife sat in their group. I sat down among the men.

For about thirty minutes, three or four brahmins, who were seated at some distance from the sofa, continued to recite verses from *Taittiriya Upanishad*. In fact, the recitation had started a few minutes before we had entered the hall. Sri Ramana continued to sit in the same posture till it ended. There was no movement of his limbs at all. His eyelids too did not move. He seemed to be listening to the recitation of the sacred verses.

Though he appeared to be looking at the wall, he was not seeing any particular thing. His mind was, as we could easily realise, absorbed within. I was astonished to see the sage keeping his eyes wide open without winking or moving the eyeballs for such a long period of time. Men and women who sat in the hall belonged to all castes and nationalities. Two or three devotees who sat near me were foreigners, sitting uncomfortably with their trousers. However, all were listening to the recitation with rapt attention. The brahmins concluded the recitation by chanting,

*Twameva pratyaksham brahmasi,  
tvameva pratyaksham brahma vadishyami,  
svayam vadishyami, rnam vadishyami, tannamavatu,  
tadvakaramavatu, avatu mam, avatu vaktaram,  
aum santhi, santhi, santhi.*

This recitation was part of the *Veda Parayanam*, which was a daily function there. Those who recited the verses then stood up and prostrated to the sage and went out of the hall through the more distant door. I was familiar with the verses of *Taittiriya Upanishad*. The chanting was in the right style and I was thrilled while listening to it. I further felt that Sri Ramana, who sat in front of me in such an engrossed manner, was Brahman in human form and that spiritual illumination was enshrined in him. He was not only august to look at but also an inspiring figure. His ascetic garb and his well-chiseled face commanded awe and devotion. When such feelings were passing through my mind, Sri Ramana moved his head and looked around, and while doing so, he looked at me. There was benignity writ large on his broad forehead. There was simplicity and innocence in his movements. He picked up his walking stick and slowly moved out of the hall. I too came out and watched him walking slowly towards the hill on the northern side. The hill was the background of Ramanasramam. A half-naked, young attendant, carrying water in a *kamandalam*, followed the sage a few yards behind. Sri Ramana was tall and his arms long. His legs had lost their normal strength and so he carried his heavy body with some effort. His neck wobbled now and then, indicating that the muscles were weak. His age was just fifty-six years and three months and the hair on his head had turned gray. He and his attendant went away behind a boulder of the hill.

The *Sarvadhikari* of the ashram then approached me and said, "No ladies are allowed to stay in the ashram during nights, so your wife cannot stay with you in the guests' room. We have a house in town. Some ladies will accompany your wife and will also take care of her. She will be served a night meal there. Our ashram cart will take her and also bring her back in the morning." My wife and some other ladies sat in the ashram cart and in a few minutes left the premises. By that time it had become dark. Kerosene lamps were lighted here and there in the courtyard. It was the night of 31-3-1937.

After the ladies had gone away to town I was taken into the dining room of the ashram. It was a small tiled building in those distant days. It was situated a few yards to the south of the hall and it was lighted with some kerosene oil lamps.

On going into the dining room I saw some other visitors sitting on the floor in front of plantain leaves spread along the walls of the room. I too followed their example and sat in front of a leaf. There were no women among the people who sat for the night meal in the ashram. There was a slightly raised brick platform built on one side of the room. On it a plantain leaf was spread by one of the servants of the ashram. I guessed that it was intended for the use of the sage himself. Within a few minutes Sri Ramana walked into the dining room from another adjacent room, which then served as a kitchen. He sat in *padmasanam* on the platform in order to eat his supper, along with the visitors of that day. There was complete informality among the guests assembled there, though everyone of us looked at Sri Ramana with profound reverence. Devotees of the sage were serving as voluntary cooks and attendants. Some of them were young and some old. I was delighted to sit and take food sitting about five feet to the right of Sri Ramana on that memorable night. It was his grace that had enabled me and my wife to undertake the pilgrimage.

The meal served to everyone was quite simple. It consisted of rice, one vegetable curry, pickle, dahl, water and buttermilk. Sri Ramana ate his meal slowly. He did not leave any remnants of food on his plantain leaf. He did not speak with any one of the guests, though he looked at them. He was wearing only his usual *koupina*, while the visitors sitting that night before him were wearing shirts and *dhoties*. The servers were wearing only *dhoties* and they had no covering on the upper part of their bodies. Dim kerosene oil lamps were found burning in both the small kitchen and in the dining room. The supper was finished within fifteen minutes. It was about 7:30 in the night.

After the meal was finished, Sri Ramana stood up and walked out into the courtyard and washed his hands and feet with water that had been kept there in a vessel. I followed his example and washed my hands with water taken in a mug from the same big vessel. The other visitors too helped themselves in the same manner and dispersed. Sri Ramana then picked up his stick and slowly walked into the hall. I was eager to talk to him. So, I went behind him and entered the hall through the same door which I had used about two hours previously. Sri Ramana sat down on the sofa. A bright petromax lamp was then burning about twenty feet away from him. It illuminated the hall with sufficient brightness. I stood about three feet from him. There was no one else in that big hall. In fact, I longed to talk to him when there was nobody with us. The kind of opportunity which I was longing for was thus available to me without any special effort on my part. There was no need to draw his attention towards me. The merciful sage lifted up his face and smiled slightly. He did not utter even one word. He did not also make any other gesture. However, his gentle smile gave me sufficient courage to address him.

With folded hands, I said to him as follows: "Sir, I have come from Bangalore. I do not know Tamil. Please permit me to talk in English. I have not been in good health for some months. Dyspeptic troubles are the cause of my physical suffering. Doctors have been unable to cure me. My eyes are always burning and I feel giddy now and then. I have come here to obtain your blessings."

Sri Ramana heard these words patiently. He immediately lifted up his serene face once again and replied as follows: "All your troubles will disappear of their own accord."

These were the nine English words uttered by him in his mellow voice. I was filled with delight and gratitude on hearing the words of benediction so readily vouchsafed by the great sage. I prostrated to him and left the hall with my heart filled with joy and relief. I entered the guests room and slept by the side of another gentleman who had also come to Sri Ramana to obtain *darsan* of the sage. It was a memorable occasion indeed. My long cherished desire to obtain *darsan* of Sri Ramana had thus been fulfilled. In addition to it, about two hours after I had set foot in Ramanasramam all my bodily troubles ceased to torment me as the result of the great blessing which I so readily received from the sage.

On the morning of April 1, 1937, all the women visitors who had been sent into town arrived in the same bullock cart. My wife also came with them and reported that arrangements at the women's lodge were satisfactory and that she had slept with five or six other ladies who had come from distant places. She and I entered the hall and sat down on the floor after prostrating to Sri Ramana, who was seated on the sofa in a *vichara samadhi*.

The hall was more full with devotees than on the previous evening. Some of them were meditating with closed eyes. By then I had read the small book 'Who Am I?' and understood the method of *vichara* described in it. I too closed my eyes and started Self-enquiry within my own mind. The hall, though filled with men and women, was free from noise and peace reigned in the surroundings. I drove away my thoughts as and when they crossed my mind, saying to myself, "I am not this," and "this thought is not I," and so on. This is the kind of instruction found in that small book. My wife sat among the ladies and meditated in her own way and I engaged myself for a long time in the kind of meditation described above. More than one hour passed away. I then experienced a sense of total blankness.

At about 10 a.m. Sri Ramana moved his limbs and sat in *padmasanam* on the sofa. Taking advantage of that opportunity I approached the sofa and addressed Sri Ramana in English thus: "Bhagavan, I have till now been conducting self-enquiry as taught in 'Who Am I?'. I do not see anything. I see a blank. May I know if *Atman* is seen as a light, or is it a blank?" Sri Ramana heard this question put by me. He sat up smartly on his seat and with a serious countenance replied thus: "What? IS THAT a blank?" He laid emphasis on the demonstrative pronoun 'THAT', which he had used in his reply. He did not say anything more. He sat as serenely as before and closed his eyes. I did not have the courage to put any more questions to clear my doubt.

— continued in *Jan-Feb 1995* issue

## Advent at Arunachala Celebrations

ME 3

In New York City and Nova Scotia, Canada the ninety-eighth anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's arrival at Arunachala was celebrated on Sunday, September 4, 1994.

**At Arunachala Ashrama, Nova Scotia** one hundred and twenty-five friends and devotees gathered into Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram on this pleasant and warm day. Some had travelled from New York and some from Boston, but most of the participants had come from the Maritime Provinces on the East Coast of Canada.

*Dr.J.S.S.Lakshminarayana* conducted the program and *pujas*. He began the service at 11:00 a.m. with *Ganesh Puja*, followed by *Sri Ramana Ashtotaram*. All assembled repeated the names of Ramana Maharshi as lead by Dr. Lakshminarayana.

Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, the founder of Arunachala Ashrama, then gave a few welcoming remarks, which was in no way unfaithful to his simple village background and reliance on the unceasing repetition of the name of God.

Dennis Hartel then described, for the benefit of the new guests, some background history of Arunachala Ashrama in New York and Nova Scotia. He invited all to utilize the facilities of the Ashrama, and thanked everyone who had helped in preparing for that day's event and for traveling so far to attend it.

Michael Fahey, a professional musician who has channeled his talent into singing devotional *bhajans*, entertained the guests for about twenty minutes. He delighted everyone with his singing and playing of the dulcimer and mandolin string instruments.

P.E.Narasimahan then gave a talk on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, tying in the ancient teachings of this sacred text to the Maharshi teachings in the 20th Century. His daughter Jyoti joined him in reciting this *Upanishad*.

Sri Ramana's Sanskrit composition, *Upadesha Saram*, was recited by all present. This was followed by the chanting of Arunachala Siva and many contributed *bhajans* from the devotees gathered. All were filled with devotion and peace.

*Arati* was performed and a meal was served to the guests. As the weather was pleasant, everyone gathered outside, sitting on picnic tables or blankets spread over the spacious lawn of the Temple. A warm breeze blew from the east, the sky was clear, the sun bright, while the surrounding Annapolis Valley warmed and cheered the hearts of all.

**In the New York City Arunachala Ashrama**, about thirty devotees attended that day's function, which was conducted by Evelyn Kaselow-Saphier.

They began with the recital of the *Marital Garland of Letters*. *Ganesh Stuti* followed. Margo Martin read out from Arthur Osborne's book the description of the Maharshi's arrival in Tiruvannamalai in 1896, at the tender age of sixteen.

Sri Babubai Parekh then sang *Siva Tandava Stotra* and recited verse 22 from *Chavavimsar* of Ganapati Muni. Inspired by the elevating description of Bhagavan in Ganapati Muni's verse, he translated and commented on it for the benefit of all present. The translation is:

"*Salutations to Sri Ramana, the universal Master, the dispeller of misery from the world, the One Who chases away the darkness of his devotees and displays Himself as the Eternal Consciousness inhering in the heart, blazing both within and without, bereft of the least trace of ignorance - the One who shines as the Transcendental Truth underlying the world and beyond!*"

*Bhajans* followed. Everyone recited *Upadesha Saram*. Bhaskar Singh read out the Maharshi's spontaneous praise of Arunachala in the form of *Eleven Verses*. *Arunachala Pancaratnam*, another composition of the Maharshi, was recited, and *arati* concluded the program.

With unreserved friendliness and warmth the devotees sat together and ate the *prasad* offered to them at the conclusion of the function - *[comments and inquiries are welcome]*.

## 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.

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Choose Web-page Issue  
top of page

Jan / Feb 1995