

A painted relief of Dakshinamurti above the southern gate of the Meenakshi Temple in Madurai

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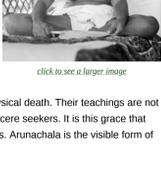
Arunachala Beckons All

Ocean of Nectar, Full of Grace, engulfing the universe in Thy Splendor!
O Arunachala, the Supreme Itself!
be Thou the Sun and open the lotus of my heart in Bliss.

— Five Stanzas to Sri Arunachala

One Hundred years ago, on September 1, 1896, a sixteen-year-old brahmin boy quietly walked straight into the inner sanctum of the great Arunachala Temple in Tiruvannamalai, South India. "Father, at thy call I have come," was his unspoken, heartfelt utterance. Since that day when Sri Ramana Maharshi made his appearance at the holy Arunachala Mountain, numerous seekers the world over have turned their gaze towards that ancient, holy hill of Light.

Now, forty-six years after the Maharshi cast off his mortal frame, it appears that even greater number of seekers from the West are being irresistibly attracted to him. His teachings are studied, disseminated and practiced by citizens of all countries from all walks of life. In my twenty-five years of living and working in an ashram dedicated to the Sage of Arunachala I have observed this increase first hand.



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It cannot be attributed to the efforts of any individual or groups propagating the Maharshi's teachings. Sri Ramana Maharshi is a unique powerhouse of peace. His powerful presence is his most striking feature, which even today draws us to him. During his lifetime he did not display occult powers, nor did he raise funds for any cause, lecture on Vedanta or go about making disciples. Rather it was his utter simplicity, transparent love and illumination that pierced even the most crusted hearts of unyielding sceptics. Here is a genuine, towering spiritual presence.

As this decade draws to an end and the panorama of spiritual teachers and teachings of the past century narrows, we find that the Sage of Arunachala is emerging as a dominant force. The spiritual power that he embodied during his lifetime is slowly being released after his death, and into the next century it will gain momentum, influencing the lives of countless seekers of Truth; and Arunachala will be the center from where this current of spirituality will flow.

Throughout history there have always been a few rare souls whose destiny requires them to act as ships, ferrying myriad pilgrims to the other shore. Their influence does not abate with physical death. Their teachings are not buried in their tombs. The Maharshi still floats high on the water of our consciousness, and his power lies not so much in his spoken word recorded in books but in his grace conferred to sincere seekers. It is this grace that opens the Heart and pulls us into It. The wisdom gained by such grace is not knowledge born of thought, but rather wisdom born of intuition when thought ceases and the Self alone remains. Arunachala is the visible form of the Self and also represents the path to the Self as taught and lived by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

The glory of the Arunachala Hill has been sung in scriptures passed down to us from antiquity. The Maharshi gave this meaning of Arunachala:

Aruna = red, bright like fire. [The fire is not ordinary fire which is only hot. This is Jnanagni (Fire of Wisdom) which is neither hot nor cool.]
Achala = a hill
So it means Hill of Wisdom

— Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, No. 216

Arunachala is already one of the oldest and most sacred of all India's holy places. The Maharshi called it the 'Heart of the earth, the spiritual center of the world.' Sri Shankara declared it to be Mount Meru. In the Skanda Purana we read, 'Of all, Arunachala is the most sacred. It is the heart of the world. Know it to be the secret and sacred Heart-center of Siva.'

Down through the ages, saints and sages have adorned its caves. And it has been said that even now invisible Siddhas (Sages with supernatural powers) dwell in these caves. The Maharshi has confirmed their existence and some have seen them moving as lights upon the hill at night. This hill is considered to be the original Siva Lingam and the story of its origin is found in the Arunachala Mahatmyam.

The legend, briefly, is as follows: There was a contest between Brahma, the creator, and Vishnu, the sustainer of the universe, regarding the superiority of the one over the other. Everything in creation went wrong and turned chaotic on account of the feud between them. Siva, deciding to put an end to it and restore order, appeared as an infinite column of light, thundering forth: "Whoever finds the top or bottom of this column is the greater!" Stunned at this, Brahma and Vishnu agreed to take up the challenge. Brahma took the form of a swan and flew up to find the top, whereas Vishnu became a boar and dug down into the earth to find the bottom. After eons of futile search, Vishnu failed to reach the base of the column of light but 'beginning to see within himself the Supreme Light which dwells in the hearts of all, he became lost in meditation, oblivious to the physical body and even unaware of himself, the one who sought'. Vishnu returned and readily admitted his failure. Brahma, on the other hand, saw the flower of a mountain tree falling through the air and, thinking to win by deception, returned with it and declared he had plucked it from the summit. Then Brahma's ruse was exposed and, being totally disgraced, he confessed his fault.

In this legend Vishnu represents the ego or individuality and Brahma the mentality, while Siva is Atma, the Spirit.

Because the column of Light was so dazzling and impossible to look upon, both Brahma and Vishnu prayed to Siva to take a more benevolent and accessible form so that all beings could worship Him and realize the goal of life. Siva accordingly took the form of the Arunachala Hill.

Devotees of the Maharshi sometimes wondered why he would often refer to the Arunachala Mountain as God. Was he not an Advaitin, a non-dualist? This question was put to the Sage by a learned professor, Dr. Syed, and recorded in Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: #273

Dr. Syed asked: I have been reading the 'Five Hymns.' I find that the hymns are addressed to Arunachala by you. You are an Advaitin. How do you then address God as a separate Being?

Maharshi: The devotee, God and the hymns are all the Self.

Dr. Syed: But you are addressing God. You are specifying this Arunachala Hill as God.

Maharshi: You can identify the Self with the body. Should not the devotee identify the Self with Arunachala?

Dr. Syed: If Arunachala be the Self why should it be specially picked out among so many other hills? God is everywhere. Why do you specify Him as Arunachala?

Maharshi: What has attracted you from Allahabad to this place? What has attracted all these people around?

Dr. Syed: Sri Bhagavan.

Maharshi: How was I attracted here? By Arunachala. The Power cannot be denied. Again Arunachala is within and not without. The Self is Arunachala.

To further convey the true significance of Arunachala, nothing is more revealing than these hymns Sri Ramana wrote praising the Holy Hill:

'Who is the seer? When I sought within I watched the disappearance of the seer and what survived it. No thought of "I saw" arose, so how could the thought "I did not see" arise? Who has the power to convey this in words when even Thou couldst do so in ancient days by silence only (appearing as Dakshinamurti)? Only to convey by silence Thy State Thou standest as a Hill shining from heaven to earth.'

— Eight Stanzas on Sri Arunachala

The ancient path of Self-enquiry taught by the Maharshi was previously relegated to hermits, far removed from worldly pursuits. What the Maharshi did was to make this path available to all, whether engaged with employment or rearing children, or living within the confines of a monastery. With a period of meditation each day and vigilant remembrance of the ideal throughout our activities, we can experience the true nature of Arunachala within and without. This is what the Maharshi taught and embodied as a living example. The study of his life is equal to the study of the scriptures, for in his every action the individual self was absent and the Supreme Self shone forth. This rare example in the 20th Century is an unflinching gauge to measure spirituality at its highest plateau, and we should make use of this standard to assess our life in all its varied aspects.

Recited daily before his tomb in Tiruvannamalai is this stanza composed by Kavayokantha Ganapati Muni:

Good luck accumulated to the Red Mount, Arunachala, for its having sheltered numerous sages in the past, has now grown incomparable because Lord Ramana Maharshi has chosen this hill among many other holy places, for his abode.

— Forty Verses in Praise of Sri Ramana

The Maharshi never admitted to having 'chosen' Arunachala as his place of residence, but had always expressed being "chosen by" Arunachala:
Bearing and tending me in the world in the shape of my father and mother, Thou didst abide in my mind, and before I fell into the deep sea called Jagannaya (universal illusion) and was drowned, Thou didst draw me to Thee, Arunachala, Consciousness Itself, such is the wonder of Thy Grace!

— The Necklet of Nine Gems

We also may feel that we have a choice to choose Arunachala, to choose the path of practice of Self-enquiry, to choose Sri Ramana Maharshi as our ideal, our goal, our Guru. And if we do this with our whole heart and mind, we will also come to know and experience "Thou didst draw me unto Thee, Arunachala, Consciousness Itself, such is the wonder of Thy Grace!".
(The preceding article was submitted by Dennis Hartel for the 100th Anniversary Souvenir, a book published by Sri Ramanasramam, India, commemorating Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala.)

September 1
1896



September 1
1996

One Hundredth Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala

You are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the One Hundredth Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's arrival at the Holy Sri Arunachala Hill.

The programme will start at 11:00 am. on Sunday, September 1st at both the Nova Scotia and New York Ashramas.

Bearing and tending me in the world in the shape of my father and mother, thou didst abide in my mind, and before I fell into the deep sea called Jagannaya (universal illusion) and was drowned, Thou didst draw me unto thee, O Arunachala, Consciousness itself, such is the wonder of Thy Grace!

— Sri Ramana Maharshi,
The Necklet of Nine Gems, verse 9.

On Saturday, August 31st

A satsang will be conducted at the Nova Scotia temple. Participants will exchange views and experiences relating to the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi and other spiritual topics. Accommodation will be provided. For reservations please call (902) 665-2090 or (902) 665-2293 (Darlene Karamanos). For details about the programme call Dr. Lakshminarayana at (606)-388-1723.

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Arunachala Ashrama, Bridgetown, Nova Scotia
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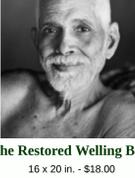
* Please note that the New York Ashrama has moved to a new address, which is only a five minute walk from its previous location.

Faith

Totally I believe
But then it turns its back on me -
My faith and love
All gone to waste.
That is how I feel.
But I should keep the faith.
For God carries me through
The times when faith turns away.
Keep the faith,
Keep the love
And don't lose hope.
Although all is destined
It doesn't hurt to hope.
It doesn't hurt to believe.
If you believe and hope and love
Slowly and gradually
You'll make it.
So trust faith enough to believe
And believe enough to love.

Henaz Bhatt
New Jersey, USA

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The Recollections of N. Balarama Reddy

Conclusion (continued from the Jul/Aug issue)
After the Mahasamadhi

ON APRIL 16, the day after Bhagavan's body was buried, I gathered all my belongings and left on the noon train for Madras. At that time, I didn't know when, or if, I would be returning to the ashram. Many prominent devotees also began leaving Tiruvannamalai. Everybody was selling off their properties, the ashram's income dramatically fell and the Mauni, Srivivasa Rao, was scheming to seize control of the ashram, even before Bhagavan's demise he was scheming.

After one year, I again returned to the ashram to attend Bhagavan's aradhana celebration. The ashram was struggling to stay afloat financially. I remember Chinnaswami informing me that the ashram would be unable to meet my breakfast and I should go to town and eat.

By the mid 1950s T. N. Venkataraman began to gain considerable support, although he definitely had an uphill battle. And, as Bhagavan willed, the ashram has somehow been going along, prospering ever since. There are, no doubt, the occasional incidental problems in the operation of the ashram. Still, like before, I believe it is only Bhagavan who is getting everything done. His presence continues to be the controlling factor in the day to day operation of the ashram. And just look how the ashram has grown and how more and more seekers from all over the world are flocking here.

"Why Do You Doubt It?"

One time G. V. Subbaramayya questioned Bhagavan about his *Alma Vidya* song, which begins with "Self-knowledge is an easy thing, the easiest thing there is." Subbaramayya wondered why, if it is so easy, we don't realize it. This is something we all wondered about.

I then quoted to Bhagavan verse three in the seventh chapter of the Bhagavadgita, wherein Sri Krishna says, "Of thousands of men, some rare soul strives to realize Me; of those striving yogis, again, some rare one (devoting himself exclusively to me) knows Me in reality."

I thought if *Alma Vidya* (Self-knowledge) was so easy, as *Bhagavan's song* suggests, why did Krishna make this declaration in the Gita?

Bhagavan looked at us with compassion and, smiling confidently, said, "What is written in the song *Alma Vidya* is true. Why do you doubt it? It is as clear as a gooseberry in the palm of your hand."

When he spoke to us like this, with such certitude and conviction, we were filled with an unflinching faith and self-confidence in our ability to attain the ideal he taught us. Moreover, he sat before us as the living example of that ideal, a perfected soul, absorbed in the purity and peace of the Absolute Reality. What more did we need in life? How blessed we all felt.

This concludes the Recollections N. Balarama Reddy, recorded by Dennis Hartel during a 1993 visit to Sri Ramanasramam. The foregoing ten installments and an additional Appendix (not published in 'The Maharshi', this newsletter) are being compiled into a book and published by Sri Ramanasramam, India. Sri N. Balarama Reddy was absorbed into his Master on May 11, 1995.

If one abuses another or injures him the remedy does not lie in retort or resistance.
Simply keep quiet. This quiet will bring peace to the injured but make the offender restless until he is driven to admit his error to the injured party.

— Sri Ramana Maharshi

Questions and Comments

The Need for a Living Guru

MP3
I wonder if you have any comments about an issue that's been troubling me, namely a need for a guru. Since I am an 'unrealized' person, my understanding is necessarily limited. I do appreciate that the true guru is within - it can't be otherwise. However, I am not at all clear about the need for an aspirant to spend time in the presence of a genuine sage. Obviously it's of considerable benefit. Here I think of the various individuals who have written about being transported into samadhi in the Master's presence; it seems that for most of them the experience would not have occurred but for the Master's grace, and that repeated 'doses' over a lengthy period of time were required before those states could be stabilized. That being the case, and fully-awakened individuals being exceedingly rare, the odds don't seem very good for us average seekers. Nevertheless, the Master himself, I gather, often counseled people, particularly those that could only spend a brief period with him, that physical distance was no barrier, that grace was always available. Based on your own experience and what you've seen of the early devotees, what do you think?

— Barbara Bondar
Taiwan

Your question regarding the necessity of a living Guru and seeking his immediate presence has been put to us many times. It is a natural question since, as you mention, we read of all those who were spiritually awakened sitting before the Maharshi. It must be remembered that even those who came under the immediate influence of the Master had to dedicate their lives totally to the spiritual ideal and put forth tremendous effort and sacrifice before resting in the supreme state of Self-abidance.

When once questioned as how to find one's Guru, the Maharshi answered: 'By intense meditation.' He also said that when your devotion to God has matured you, God comes in the shape of a Guru and from the outside pushes your mind inside, while being inside as Self, he draws you there from within.

We often feel that if left to ourselves we are unable to make satisfactory progress in our sadhana, so we seek someone to help us. But if we have firm faith in what Sri Bhagavan says about Guru, we need not seek him outwardly. However, that does not necessarily mean we will not have a bodily Guru, or at least a spiritually advanced friend to guide us to the Ultimate Goal. In other words, we need not feel that our progress has been stalled because we have not found a Sage to guide us and grant us His grace.

If we make the spiritual ideal the sole goal of our life, if all our actions and thoughts are directed toward that one end, surely the Guru will reveal himself to us. God or Guru comes to us; we do not go to Him. We earn His presence by our effort. The presence of the true Guru is the presence of the Self. We simply have to seek the Self with true sincerity and leave the rest to the Higher Power.

Did Christ die on the Cross? Did Sri Ramana Maharshi perish on April 14, 1950? No. The Guru is always present, the sun is always shining. We must simply turn to It.

There may not be another physical Guru of the Maharshi's stature available to us at present, but 'HE' is available to us at present. That is all we need to know. The rest depends on our sincere effort.

— Editor

Devotee: How is the Guru found?

Bhagavan: God, Who is immanent, in His Grace takes pity on the devotee and manifests Himself according to the devotee's development. The devotee thinks that he is a man and expects a relationship as between two physical bodies. But the Guru, who is God or the Self incarnate, works from within, helps the man to see his mistakes and guides him in the right path until he realizes the Self within.

A Tribute to Shep

MP3
For the last ten years, visitors to the Nova Scotia Ashrama were deeply impressed and enchanted by the Ashrama dog, a medium-sized German Shepherd, suitably named Shep. His previous owner was intent on destroying him, but a kind neighbour came to his rescue and brought Shep to the Ashrama in 1986. This gave the eager soul 10 more years to live, which he steadfastly utilised by attending all the parayanas, pujas and meditations in Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram, and helping to maintain it in all matters and many visitors were amazed seeing him rise just prior to the end of *Veda Parayana* and stretch out his front legs and paws in the direction of Bhagavan's shrine. He would do this at the conclusion of the Sri Chakra Puja as well.

Shep breathed his last and was merged in his Master on August 1st 1996. His samadhi was dug behind the temple and the burial took place amidst prayers and pujas.

Shep will always be remembered and missed by friends and residents of the Ashrama.

Photo CD Now Available

A Compact Disk containing the first 30 restored black and white images of Bhagavan Sri Ramana is now available for purchase. These images can be viewed on the UK and North American websites at
<http://www.ecayber.com/bsdirect/ramana/index.htm> or
<http://dragon.camoun-be.ca/~amber/maharshigrahamindex.htm>

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Arunachala Ashrama Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center

Arunachala Ashrama is a nonprofit religious organization founded in New York City in 1965 by Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata. In 1972, a retreat and residential ashrama was established in Nova Scotia, Canada, and in 1975 a temple, Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram, was consecrated at the Nova Scotia Ashrama.

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Issues on the Internet

This issue and all back issues of 'The Maharshi' newsletter are available in North America at:
<http://dragon.camoun-be.ca/~amber/maharshigraham/>
In Europe at:
<http://www.ecayber.com/bsdirect/ramana>

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.