



1. *By an Eye Witness*
2. *Living in His Presence*
3. *Grace and Guidance, Arthur Osborne*
4. *Fitness for Self-enquiry ?*
5. *The Heart Center ? (German devotee)*
6. *Only Mother*
7. *Obstacles and Aids*
8. *The 117th Jayanti Celebration, Report*
9. *Installation of Statue*

By an Eye Witness

Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami

The 47th anniversary of the Maharshi's Mahasamadhi will be observed on Tuesday, April 14th. Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami, the author of the following article, was the individual who took the vast majority of the photographs he gave of the Sage. Below he describes the Maharshi's last days and how it influenced the direction of his life.



Sitting on tiger-skin on the Skandaramam wall

I had the rare privilege of being allowed to stay with the Maharshi during the last days. Knowing full well that his end was near, I was inquisitive to watch and see if he would leave any message for us. Would he not speak words of solace? Would he not leave behind some directions for us? It was sad indeed to look at the suffering of the body. But the mystery was his attitude to it. He described all the pain and suffering as though the body belonged to someone else. The question arose whether he was suffering or not. How could he describe the pain and suffering so accurately and locate it in the body and yet remain unaffected by it? "There is a severe intolerable headache," he said as he was going into a slow uremia and his kidneys were failing. The Maharshi never described the symptoms in a subjective manner.

On the evening of the last day, the Maharshi asked to be propped up in a sitting posture. He tried to assume a semi-padmansana posture. His breathing was getting labored and heavy. The attending doctor put the oxygen to his nose. Those around stood sad, with baited breath. The Maharshi brushed aside the oxygen tube. There was a chorus of "Arunachala Siva" from outside the room. The gathering stood dumbfounded. Would death dare to touch him? No, it is impossible. A miracle would happen.

The atmosphere was tense with emotion, fear and expectation. There was some weeping. Very gently the Maharshi seemed to gasp a word and the body became still. Synchronized with the Maharshi's last breath, a meteor was seen to trail across the sky. We could scarcely realise what had happened. He had left us and for all. No more the beatific smile to greet us. No more the graceful form to adorn the Ashram. The Maharshi had deserted us! Were we now to turn our backs on the Ashram and go home disappointed?

This gave me a severe jolt. I was shocked. Had I missed the opportunity of a lifetime to imbibe the teaching of the Enlightened One? I had done nothing in the direction of spiritual sadhana. Had I wasted all my time taking photographs while I should have engaged myself in trying to understand and practice his teachings in his very presence? "No," I said to myself, "this cannot be true. I was sure that I had obtained some grace from the Maharshi." It was somehow still here; it was somehow still here. We would never be forsaken for he had himself assured us that he was not going away.

Then I turned to studying his teachings. I began to see light in them. Some of the sentences touched me and made me feel that I was in his presence, listening to him. I took heart. The more I read, the more intimate the Maharshi became to me. His teaching pulsated with life; I began to understand it and it mixed with my being and became my own.

— Ramana Pictorial Souvenir, 1967

Living in His Presence

The author of the following article is an American devotee living in Europe. She has been visiting Sri Ramanasramam regularly for the last fourteen years and attended last year's celebrations marking the Centenary anniversary of the Maharshi's arrival at Arunachala. She requested to be referred to as MT only.

I was very happy to be among the devotees who gathered at Sri Ramanasramam for the Centenary Celebration of Sri Bhagavan's arrival at Arunachala. I did not take an active role in the celebrations nor did I participate in the yatra from Madurai to Arunachala, although I was invited to join. Somehow, I felt that I should not move from Arunachala, and there was no rational explanation.

In the days prior to the celebration, I got into a routine of going around the hill (giri pradakshina), sitting in the Samadhi Hall, the Old Hall, or visiting the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple in the town. I watched as the Ashram workers built the pandal where the function would be held, and the other temporary structures to feed the 4,000 visitors that were expected on that day. Sometimes I helped in the kitchen cutting vegetables and splitting the banana leaves on which the food is served.

A temporary thatched extension to the dining room was erected, and groups of Indian men and women sat in circles cutting vegetables with a traditional cutting tool that had a sharp, upright blade mounted on a wooden base. There were literally mountains of vegetables to be cut for the sambar and curry. The volunteers played cassettes of Sanskrit stotras which helped to turn the work into meditation. A meditative atmosphere prevailed even as we chatted gaily. And of course, I always kept in mind that Sri Bhagavan himself used to go into the kitchen and take an active role in preparing food for his devotees.

On this particular visit to the Ashram I was more socially inclined as the circumstances did not favor having much privacy. I enjoyed meeting with fellow devotees, learning about their joys and pains and sharing some of mine. Sri Bhagavan continuously enfolds us in the aura of his presence. We only have to dive deep in the heart. What is going on externally is not the essential. There is a quiet current of peace that prevails, and we can hold fast to it.

Early mornings are particularly sacred at the Ashram. Some mornings I would set out for giri pradakshina, but most often I would go down to the Samadhi Hall, sit in the back and become absorbed in Sri Bhagavan's presence. The whole place is charged with that presence as devotees start to slowly walk around the samadhi in perfect silence or sit down in various places in the hall. As the Centenary Celebrations approached, the number of devotees increased significantly. The magnet of Sri Bhagavan's grace continues to draw us to him as honey draws bees to the flower.

There is something very special in this transition period between darkness and daylight (sandhya), as if all the tendencies of the mind (samskaras) are drawn into the Self and the whole creation lies suspended for a moment in this latent state. At the center is Sri Bhagavan's samadhi emanating grace. When the pujari begins to chant Sri Ganapati Muni's "Chaturvimsati," forty verses in homage to Sri Ramana, it seems as if all the creation is offered to the lotus feet of Bhagavan, allowing the "I" to shine forth even in the midst of activity. The milk offering is made after a short puja, and devotees take the light, apply kumkum and vibhuti and then file silently around the samadhi. Just before going out the door towards the dining room, as the bell rings for breakfast, another pujari pours a spoonful of milk into our open hands - the day begins.

Whether I am in the Samadhi Hall, on the pradakshina road or in the Sri Arunachala Temple in these early morning hours, this feeling of a new beginning dedicated to Sri Bhagavan is the same. There is a great feeling of oneness.

Just before the Centenary Celebration began the iron grille was removed from in front of Sri Bhagavan's samadhi. There was much banging and clanging for several days, but the result was well worth it. The samadhi is now fully open to delight our eyes with only a stone railing around it and a beautiful copper gate in front to mark off the limits.

The program started on Monday the 26th of August with the chanting of Yajur Veda in the morning and afternoon. The music program was a wonderful opportunity for us to listen to Sri Bhagavan's compositions in both Sanskrit and Tamil, some of which like "Upadesa Saram" we have the good fortune to hear during the Sanskrit and Tamil parayana carried out daily at the Ashram. This was a special occasion and the devotional fervor was at a peak. We were also able to listen to the "Sri Ramana Suprabatham" written by a visiting swami and sung by the devotees, the Ribhu Gita, Sri Ramana Gita, Sri Darshanam and others.

The chanting and music taking place one week before the Centenary day roused great feelings of devotion. I was particularly moved by the Indian lady devotees who sang Sri Muruganar's beautiful Sri Ramana Samidhi Murai in the New Hall outside the Mother's temple. I was lucky to have someone translate parts of it very discretely at my side. The spiritual emotions culminated in the Thevaram songs sung by the Oduvars from the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple accompanied by a violin and a drum. How to express the feelings? I was transfixed as these singers brought the ancient Tamil devotional hymns alive and stirred us in the depths of our being. I looked at the faces of some of the old devotees sitting there in rapture and felt chills running through me.

The ceremony at the pandal opened with the lighting of the Kuthuvilakku by Swami Ramanananda, formerly Sri Venkataraman who has served Sri Bhagavan and the Ashram tirelessly for most of his life. When his son, Sri V.S. Ramanam (Sundaram), gave the inaugural address, his voice shook with emotion, mirroring the feelings that we all shared. I listened to some of the program and alternately went into the kitchen to help. I felt very much at home.

Sunday was the 1st of September and there was to be a Mahabhishekam at the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple at 3:30 A.M. to commemorate the arrival of Sri Bhagavan one hundred years ago. At 6:00 A.M. the 'yatra' devotees would be greeted at the railway station by Sri Ramanananda and Sri Sundaram. I set off for the temple at 2:30 A.M. by myself. I had wanted to do giri pradakshina first, but I felt that I should go directly to the temple. When I got there just before 3:30 A.M. the temple gates were shut. A few devotees were sitting outside the temple, and we all waited as more devotees started to arrive. Some had carried out giri pradakshina first. We started to sing Arunachala Siva and the outer gates were opened. We were stopped again by the inner gate being closed. As we stood outside, a brief shower fell on us and I could not help but think of Sri Bhagavan's being bathed in the same way, when as a boy he arrived at his Father's abode. The gates opened and the devotees flooded into the courtyard in front of the inner sanctum (garbha griha), the shrine of Sri Arunachaleswara.

We could see the shape of Arunachala rising above the gopurams of the temple. With great reverence and awe, I entered the garba griha along with the other devotees. Although I had entered this area of the temple many times and attended many pujas over the past fourteen years, I felt this particular time was unique. I thought of the young Brahmin boy from Madurai who had come to join his father one hundred years ago. Sri Bhagavan came to the abode of his father by himself. Today there was a huge crowd, but somehow I felt as if we were all reliving this moment as one being united in our devotion to Sri Bhagavan and Arunachala.

Great heat emanates from the Arunachaleswara Linga. With the crowd it was even more intense like undergoing extreme tapas. The priests performed the Mahabhishekam ceremonies pour the Arunachaleswara Lingam is washed and dressed. The priests apply various items to the Lingam, like saffron, honey, milk, curd, vibhuti, sandal paste etc. Large vessels of water are carried in and the priests pour the water over the Lingam. A curtain is then drawn, as the priests continue to dress and garland the Lingam and adorn him with special ornaments. Food is also offered behind the curtain. All the while the priests are chanting mantras in Sanskrit. When the curtain was drawn revealing Sri Arunachaleswara in his full glory, we were filled with great awe and devotion. The priest waved the lamps as the temple bell tolled. I cannot describe the intense joy I felt during those precise moments - however, those moments are eternal and their significance can be relived over and over again by turning within.

After the ceremony in the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple was completed, the flow of devotees moved to the shrine of Apeethakuchambika (Unnamalajayman), the consort of Arunachaleswara. The coolness of the Mother's shrine refreshed us. Again the priests performed Mahabhishekam, garlanded and dressed Mother behind the curtain, drew the curtain revealing her glory and waved the lights.

As I came out of the Mother's shrine, I saw the devotees who had just returned from the yatra in the inner courtyard of the temple. I don't remember clearly what happened, just that I was completely transported and I saw my feelings reflected on the faces of the returning pilgrims. Then I knew that we were all like streams flowing into the same ocean of Sri Bhagavan's grace as we joined together in this sacred spot.

I joined the pilgrims as they walked back to the Ashram singing Arunachala Siva. It was moving to see some of the older devotees who had undertaken the yatra without the slightest strain. The pilgrims were greeted warmly as they entered the Ashram gates. The Centenary program was starting and I stayed for part of it. However, I felt some force pulling me back to the Arunachaleswara Temple. I returned in a rickshaw.

I spent the rest of that day in the temple, sometimes in the shrine of Arunachaleswara and sometimes in the shrine of Apeethakuchambika. Each puja drew me further inward and there are no words to describe the immense joy. In the evening I joined some devotees taking food outside the Mother's shrine. I contemplated the ever-present Arunachala Mountain and thanked him from the depths of my heart.

It was fairly late when I got back to the Ashram. There had been a concert by a popular Tamil musician, but most everyone was gone by then. The kitchen, however, was still open and Sundaram was making sure that some remaining devotees had their food. I was happy to take some drinking water, as I was quite thirsty. I then retired to my room very, very happy (santosham).

Grace and Guidance

Through the potent Grace of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, the path of Self-enquiry was brought within the competence of men and women of this age, was indeed fashioned into a new path that can be followed anonymously in the conditions of the modern world, with no forms or ritual, nothing to distinguish a person outwardly from the world wherein he moves. This creation of a new path to suit the needs of the age has made Arunachala the spiritual center of the world. More than ever, now that he has shed his physical body and is one with Arunachala, the Grace and guidance that emanates from him to those who turn to him and seek his aid is centered at Arunachala. It is the holy place and many are drawn there, both those who were disciples of the Maharshi in his lifetime and those who have come later.

— Arthur Osborne

Questions and Comments

Fitness for Self-enquiry

I was reading through one of the letters where a devotee asks the question, "Is this path Self-enquiry suited for everybody," to which Bhagavan Ramana replies that it is "...only for ripe souls. The rest should follow different methods according to the state of their minds."

My question is, how do I know whether I am ready to take up this path or not? Somehow, the Maharshi's answer is a little discouraging for me. Please explain what this means.

Ramakrishna
New Jersey

The path of Self-enquiry includes all other paths. Whatever practice you take up, Self-enquiry is its necessary end. So you need not worry whether you are fit for the path of Self-enquiry. One should do those spiritual practices that seem most natural and gives peace, always keeping in mind that Self-enquiry is the essence of that practice and the supreme path we all must tread. With sincere prayer, openness of heart and guilelessness one can never go wrong. Bhagavan watches over us and guides us. That is certain.

— Editors

The Heart Center

When I enquire "Who am I?" I feel an intense sensation in the heart center on the right side of the chest. It is a similar sensation like one has when overwhelmed with emotion. When this sensation becomes even more intense, it brings tears into the eyes. Every time I ask "Who am I?" it draws me to this center. Is it right to hold on to that sensation? I ask because I have read somewhere that though concentration on the heart center is a spiritual exercise, it is not the same as enquiry — I don't want to do anything wrong.

K. S.
Germany

Bhagavan asks concentration on the source of the "I" thought is the enquiry. It will of itself take us to the Heart center. Heart is the Self. If we experience a 'sensation' of any kind in relation to the Heart center, we must immediately ask who it is that experiences this sensation. We must hold on to the "I" thought alone until the conscious individuality has dissolved into the Heart or Self.

Bhagavan certainly guides those sincere devotees, like you, who turn to him. He will hold our hand and take us to the goal if we only turn to him and practice his teachings with devotion and dedication.

— Editors

Only Mother

Mother in the sea and she whose eyes See,
and ask a question, and always waiting,
You create and shape undulating certainties,
inhale,
And draw to your center my parts,
And spread among distant inlets;
I lose my senses, swimming too far into the deep,
And through separation from you,
I grow parched.
In the spray of your splashes,
my mother, I'm driftwood
Hardly a vessel with oars,
which carries a soul,
All salty tears, and bitter,
when I forget you.

Raju Parekh

Obstacles and Aids

Aids are meant for eradicating thoughts; these thoughts are the remanifestations of predispositions remaining in seed form. They give rise to diversity from which all troubles arise. These aids are hearing the truth from the Master (sravaṇa), reflection (manana) and one-pointedness (nididhyasana).

The effects of sravaṇa may be immediate and the disciple realises the truth all at once. This can happen only for the well-advanced disciple. Otherwise, the disciple feels that he is unable to realise the truth, even after repeatedly hearing it. What is it due to? Impurities in his mind: ignorance, doubt and wrong identity are the obstacles to be removed.

- (a) to remove ignorance completely, he has to hear the truth repeatedly, until his knowledge of the subject matter becomes perfect.
- (b) to remove doubts, he must reflect on what he has heard; ultimately his knowledge will be free from doubts of any kind.
- (c) to remove the wrong identity of the Self with the nonself (such as the body, the senses, the mind or the intellect) his mind must become one-pointed.

All these things accomplished, the obstacles are at an end, and samadhi results, that is, Peace reigns. Some say that one should never cease to engage in hearing, reflection and one-pointedness. These are not fulfilled by reading books, but only by the continued practice of keeping the mind withdrawn.

The aspirant may be kṛtopasaka or akṛtopasaka. The former is fit to realize the Self, even with the slightest stimulus: only some little doubt stands in his way. It is easily removed if he hears the truth once from the Master. Immediately he gains the samadhi state. It is presumed that he had already completed sravaṇa, reflection, etc. in previous births; they are no more necessary for him.

For the other, all these aids are necessary; for him doubts crop up even after repeated hearing. Therefore he must not give up aids until he gains the samadhi state. Sravaṇa removes the illusion of the Self being one with the body, etc. Reflection makes it clear that Knowledge is Self. One-pointedness reveals the Self as being Infinite and Blissful.

— Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, No. 249

The 117th Jayanti Celebration

The Celebration of Sri Ramana Maharshi's 117th birth anniversary took place for the first time in the new home of Arunachala Ashrama at 66-12 Clyde Street in Rego Park, Queens, New York City, on Sunday, January 5, 1997. At 11:00 a.m. the spacious and serene, sunlit sanctuary was filled to overflowing with devotees. The chanting of Sri Bhagavan's "Marital Garland of Letters" charged the atmosphere with devotional fervor. Following the recitation of "Ganesha Stuti," the children devotees offered worship with flowers to Sri Bhagavan while the "108 Names of Bhagavan" were chanted with reverence at the shrine.



Clyde St. Shrine

Dennis Hatfel extended a warm welcome to all, many of whom had traveled long hours and distances to be present. On this occasion, Dennis paid special tribute to the one-pointed dedication and vision of Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata, without whom this joyous occasion in Arunachala Ashrama would not have taken place. Invited to speak, Bhagawata, in brief, emphasized the directness and accessibility of Sri Bhagavan's path of Self-Enquiry and Surrender. Following Margot Martin's traditional reading of the story of Sri Bhagavan's birth, Swami Prakasamayanda from Sri Lanka began the song offerings with his most fervent bhajanas. One and all participated, from the youngest to the eldest. Raju Parekh offered an original poem composed especially for the occasion. Aarati was led by Geeta Bhatt. As usual, prasadam was shared amidst the warmth and glow of Sri Bhagavan's grace. Devotees returned to the sanctuary and continued to offer devotional songs and hymns of praise well into the evening.



Arunachala Bhakta Bhagavan's bhajanas

Installation of Statue

In 1949, Vaidyanathan Stapathi, the famous architect of the Mother's Temple at Sri Ramanasramam, employed his immense skill and devotion to carve a life-size stone statue of Sri Bhagavan. Bhagavan sat with the sculptor for many days as he worked on it. This sculpture now adorns the New Hall in Sri Ramanasramam. In November of 1989, James Hatfel visited Sri Ramanasramam for the express purpose of producing a replica of this statue and documenting the life of the Sage on video. The video documentary he edited, The Sage of Arunachala, was released two years later and now, after seven years, the statue was completed and installed in the shrine of Arunachala Ashrama in New York. While in India, Jim made thirty-three fiberglass molds from the original statue, brought them back to the USA in a suitcase and slowly, with sincere dedication, began reconstructing the replica.

This lifelike image of the Master in the Ashrama shrine exudes the fragrance of serenity and the power of peace that he so profoundly embodies.



Shri Bhagavan

Arunachala Ashrama Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center

Arunachala Ashrama is a non-profit 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 founded in the Nova Scotia ashrama.

At the New York Ashrama, meditation is conducted every evening from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Over eighty different books relating to the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi are available at the bookstall. Also, there are black and white photographs of the Maharshi and a documentary video on his life and teachings. A mail-order catalogue and a description of each publication, is available upon request.

IN NOVA SCOTIA, retreat facilities are offered for individuals and families. Those interested in short or long-term residence should write to the manager.

The daily services in the Nova Scotia temple are as follows:	
Morning	Sri Chakra Puja
4:30 - 5:15 - Morning Veda Parayana	Under the direction of the President of Sri Ramanasramam, a Sri Chakra was made and consecrated in the Matrubhuteshwara Temple in India.
5:30 - 6:00 - Reading	
6:00 - 6:30 - Sri Lalita Sahasranam Stotram	
6:30 - 7:15 - Silence, followed by a short reading	
Evening	
5:15 - 6:00 - Evening Veda Parayana	It was then sent to the Nova Scotia temple in 1976 for installation.
Night	Sri Chakra Puja is performed every Friday and Full Moon from 5:15 to 8:00 p.m.
7:30 - 9:00 - Recitations, Chanting and Silence, followed by a short reading	

For more information please write or call:

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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.