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The Attendant Rangaswamy

MP3

Sri Chelam from Andhra Pradesh interviewed a number of devotees of Sri Bhagavan who had long-standing association with Him and compiled their reminiscences. Some of these were translated and published by Sri Ramanasramam in Ramana Smriti in 1980. The following is another from this collection that was translated from Telugu by 'SRJ' and published in Ramana Jyothi, a Journal of the Sri Ramana Kendram of Hyderabad. Rangaswamy was an attendant of Bhagavan and can be seen walking behind the Maharshi in the archival film footage.



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My parents were farmers and my village is thirty miles from Tiruvannamalai. Yearning for male progeny my mother and father offered prayers to Lord Vinayaka. Thereafter, I and my younger brother were born.

In my twentieth year, I came to know that the Kartikai Festival in Tiruvannamalai was a grand affair. I became restless with a longing to see it and left home for Arunachala. The night before I left I had a dream of a *sannyasin* clad in only a loin cloth and surrounded by *brahmacharins*. Adjacent to the hill was his hermitage where he gave me *darshan* seated on a tiger's skin.

The next day I started off for Arunachala, but was not used to walking long distances. I stopped in a village on the way and went to the house of a family I knew. When they saw my haggard looks they restrained me from continuing. I was locked in a room.

The time of the festival was running out. Because of my persistent demands I was finally released. Only two hours were left before the lighting of the *deepam* (light) on the hill and I had yet fifteen miles to cover. In a frenzy, totally unconscious of my body, I ran. I felt as if I floated in the air. I reached Arunachala at 5:30 p.m. and had *darshan* of the *deepam* when it was lit at 6 p.m. Afterwards I went to the Esanya Mutl and the people there welcomed me and asked me to stay.

The next morning I started off for *giri pradakshina* of Arunachala. Sri Ramanasramam was on the way and, as everyone was going into the Ashrama to have *darshan* of Bhagavan, I followed. The moment I saw him I was overcome with emotion and cried out, "When will I be rid of this bondage?" I was visibly shaken. Bhagavan kindly gestured to me that I should sit. I sat down for an hour and was unconscious of my body. I had an urge to stay on there and asked Chinmaswami (the Ashrama manager) for permission. He said, "You are young. What can you do? Go back home." But I did not leave. I said, "Please give me any work. Bhagavan will give me the strength." As I would not leave, Chinmaswami relented and finally asked me to remove the weeds from the flower garden. With much enthusiasm I did the work of two people. Bhagavan also praised my work.

I would daily attend to the work given to me and when free would sit in meditation. That was my only routine. One day I asked Bhagavan, "Swami, what is the way to salvation?"

"The way you heard," was his simple reply.

The moment I came, he said this in my mind freely. He then asked me to read a verse from *Upadesa Saram*.

Later I was given the job of making garlands for the temple deities. Around the same time they were constructing a platform in the Ashrama. All of us were carrying stones. Sri Bhagavan too carried them with us. My finger got crushed under a stone, and until the finger healed, Bhagavan made the garlands on my behalf.

Later I made an attendant to Bhagavan. Me and Madhavaswami were his attendants. One time both of us were given damaged copies of Ramana Vijayam for reading. My copy did not contain all the pages. Bhagavan asked me to hand copy those pages, but I could not find the time to do it. One day he asked me, "Have you copied those pages?"

"I am not finding time," I said.

"What are you doing now?" he asked.

"I am going to Pallakottu to wash your loin cloth."

"All right. You do my work and I will do your work." Saying this he copied all the pages for me.

Those days when any offering was made it was distributed then and there. Ants, squirrels, cats, dogs, cows, children and adults were fed. There was no concept of storing for the morrow.

One day, Bhagavan, while cooking in the kitchen, asked me to put some oil in a ladle. Some of the oil spilled out on the floor. He massaged all that oil on my body and said, "Go have your bath."

Another day the district collector came from Vellore to see Bhagavan. The little squirrels were close by in their nest. A cat swallowed their mother. The responsibility of looking after them now fell on Bhagavan. He said, "These children do not know that it is to their advantage if they confine themselves to their nest. All the problems are outside, but they cannot resist the temptation of going out. Similarly, if the mind settles down in the Heart without straying out, there is no problem. But it cannot help going out."

"What is the method of restraining it?" I asked.

"Just the same as I am doing here: Whenever the squirrels come out, I put them back. The more we put them back they stay put. Then we can relax."

My parents began to search for me since I did not return the day after *Kartikai Deepam*. After a year had passed, they finally found me at Sri Ramanasramam. They came and wept before Bhagavan.

"If he goes with you, then take him. Why cry before me?" said Bhagavan. But I refused to go.

"We did a lot of penance to beget him. The same Lord who gave him to us took him back again for his service," they said, and then left the place.

After a few years I had an urge to go to Kashi. When I mentioned this to Bhagavan, he said, "'Ka-shi' -- if you forget those two letters, this itself is Kashi."

"I am unable to forget, Swami" I said.

"All right, fulfill your desire," said Bhagavan.

But Chinmaswami refused to allow me to go, but I still went. Devotees contributed funds for my expenses. I returned after three months, but Chinmaswami refused to admit me into the Ashrama.

"He is like that," Bhagavan said to Chinmaswami. Then he admitted me.

One evening Bhagavan was coming down the hill. I was walking behind him. A janitor offered his salutations to Bhagavan. Bhagavan said, "If you do your work with care, that itself is salutations." When Bhagavan went into the hall all the people stood up and some prostrated. When all of them settled down, Bhagavan asked me to relate what had happened on the hill and what he told that janitor.

Bhagavan then said, "These sittings, standings and salutations are not real marks of respect. Doing one's job with the utmost care is the real salutation."

Shantamma was a cook in the Ashrama. She derived satisfaction only when she served Bhagavan with her own hands. She used to serve Bhagavan before serving everyone else. Bhagavan was patient with her for a long time. Finally he said, "Swamy does not reside just in this body. He is present in every one of the devotees. This Swamy will be happy if he is served only after everybody else is served."

One evening Bhagavan and I were going up the hill. Mr.Chadwick was rocking on a chair in his verandah when he called out to me by clapping his hands. Bhagavan inquired as to what the matter was about. I briefly explained. In reply he said, "This is how the Westerners increase their needs. How comfortable it will be if we spread a mat and quit on it!"

Once the other attendant, Madhavaswami, had to undergo surgery in one of his ears. At that time I had to do the all the work of giving Bhagavan a bath, distributing offerings, going up the hill with the Swamy, keeping vigil in the night, etc. Consequently, because of the strain, I became unwell. I explained this to Bhagavan. Then, soon after, I was massaging Bhagavan's feet. Bhagavan then massaged my abdomen with his foot. Immediately, my illness vanished and I was infused with unusual strength. Henceforth, I was enabled to do the entire work effortlessly until Madhavaswami recovered.

Is Everything Ordained?

by A. Devaraja Mudaliar

MP3

ONE summer afternoon I was sitting opposite Bhagavan in the Old Hall with a fan in my hand and said to him: "I can understand that the outstanding events in a man's life, such as his country, nationality, family, career or profession, marriage, death, etc. are all predestined by his karma, but can it be that all the details of his life, down to the minutest, have already been determined? Now, for instance, I put this fan that is in my hand down on the floor here. Can it be that it was already decided that on such and such a day, at such and a such an hour, I shall move the fan like this and put it down here?"

Bhagavan replied "Certainly." He continued: "Whatever this body is to do and whatever experiences it is to pass through was already decided when it came into existence."

Thereupon I naturally exclaimed: "What becomes then of man's freedom and responsibility for his actions?"

Bhagavan explained: "The only freedom man has is to strive for and acquire the *jnana* which will enable him not to identify himself with the body. The body will go through the actions rendered inevitable by *prarabdha* (destiny based on the balance sheet of past lives) and a man is free either to identify himself with the body and be attached to the fruits of its actions, or to be detached from it and be a mere witness of its activities."

This may not be acceptable to many learned people or philosophers, but I am sure I have made no error in transmitting as above the gist of the conversation that took place between Bhagavan and me. Though this answer of Bhagavan may upset the apple cart of our careful reasonings and conclusions, I am satisfied that what Bhagavan said must be the truth. I also recall in this connection the following lines that Bhagavan once quoted to me from *Thayumanavar* on another occasion: "This is not to be taken to all. Even if we tell them, it will only lead to endless discussion."

It may be well to remind ourselves that Bhagavan has given his classic answer to the age-old question "Can freewill conquer fate?" as follows in his Forty Verses. "Such questions worry only those who have not found the source of both freewill and fate. Those who have found this source have left all such discussions behind." The usual reaction of Bhagavan to any such question would be to retort: "Who is it that has this fate or freewill? Find that out and then this question will not arise."

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The mind is a bundle of thoughts. The thoughts arise because there is the thinker.
The thinker is the ego. The ego, if sought, will automatically vanish. The ego and the mind are the same. The ego is the root-thought from which all other thoughts arise.
— Sri Ramana Maharshi

Sri Ramana's 47th Mahanirvana

Observed in Arunachala Ashrama in New York City

MP3

A radiant spring morning greeted the day of our *Mahanirvana* celebration. From the early morning hours of Sunday, April 13th gifts of fruits, flowers and sweets arrived at the Ashrama. These were the heartfelt offerings of devotees, many of whom had travelled long distances to be present. Truly, the words of Bhagavan, "Where shall I go? I am here," set the tone of the day. Because, were it not for his living presence would so many have responded to their inner prompting to join the devotees at Arunachala Ashrama on this special occasion?

The celebration began with *Ganesha Puja*, conducted by *Dr.Lakshminarayana*. The litany of the *108 Names of Bhagavan* followed, while the younger devotees reverently offered flowers at both the photo and life-size statue of the Master.

In his words of welcome, Dennis Hartel emphasised the dual ideals of *sadhana* and service as expressed to him twenty-five years ago by Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata. In his characteristic homely fashion, Bhagawata had told Dennis on the day they first met that he (Bhagawata) was the "doorman and doormat" of Sri Bhagavan's abode, and in this Ashrama there 'is' preaching, but 'preaching' without the first letter 'p' -- 'REACHING'. To 'reach' within, not to preach, is the ideal of this Ashrama.

The events surrounding Sri Bhagavan's last days were brought vividly before our eyes as we viewed the relevant scenes presented in the video biography, *The Sage of Arunachala*. Moments before his *Mahanirvana* forty-seven years ago, devotees joined together to sing the ecstatic verses of *The Marital Garland of Letters*. In the same manner, all the devotees gathered on this day sang this ecstatic composition of Sri Ramana.

Sri Arunachala Ashrama was doubly blessed during this weekend celebration, for the occasion was graced by a visit from the President of Sri Ramanasramam, Sri V.S.Ramaman. Also, a *sacred Sri Chakra* was installed and worshipped with much devotional fervour and meticulous attention by *Dr.J.S.S.Lakshminarayana* of Moncton, Canada. The Sri Chakra was first sanctified in the *Matrubhuteswara Temple* in Sri Ramanasramam and then brought to New York for installation in the Ashrama shrine.

The talk given by Sri V.S.Ramaman drew upon the personal memories of his early association with Sri Bhagavan and aptly elucidated the Maharshi's unique life and teachings (*text of talk begins below*).

The devotional song offerings began, according to tradition, with Miss Radha Ramaswami. All participated, while many offered devotional hymns and many more led *bhajans*. Devotees fervently chanted Sri Bhagavan's *Upadesa Sarah* and *Sri Arunachala Pancaratnam* in unison.

At the time of *arati*, the verses of "*na karmava...*" were intoned. The meditation upon these verses which so profoundly describe the ideal exemplified by Sri Ramana Maharshi brought our celebration to a fitting conclusion:

Not with action, nor with wealth, nor with children does a man become immortal, but by renunciation alone.
— Narayana Upanishad

The sharing of *prasadam*, the cordial conversations among devotees, the *bhajans* sung informally in the sanctuary throughout the afternoon all took place in an atmosphere of Sri Bhagavan's overflowing grace. Indeed, it seemed that Sri Bhagavan was blessing each participant with an awareness of the reality of his continued presence.

— Evelyn K. Saphier

Sri V. S. Ramanan's Talk

MP3

At Arunachala Ashrama on April 13, 1997

When dear Dennis asked me the other day to talk on "Sri Maharshi, My Grandfather," I readily agreed. Yes, I do belong to his lineage, being the eldest grandson of Swami Nirananjananda, His younger brother, whom I remember very well. Swami Nirananjananda's *Ekabhakti* to Bhagavan never once demonstrated his family link with Him. He always exhorted others to worship and cling to Bhagavan as the one and only Master.

Ladies and gentlemen, I feel proud to call myself the grandson of Swami Nirananjananda because he was one of the greatest devotees of our Master. I distinctly recollect what he once told a relative who prostrated before him. This relative, according to custom, was taking her child to Lord Venkateswara in Tirupati to have the baby's hair cut for the first time. The Swami advised her that "When Lord Venkateswara is right HERE, why go to Tirupati at all!" Such was his unshakeable faith in Bhagavan, his Guru. To me, also, Bhagavan is not just the grandfather, but the Guru. If He is my grandfather, He is the grandfather for all of us here. To Bhagavatiji, of course, He is the father!

Until I left for higher studies at a university, I lived with my family in the then sleepy town of Tiruvannamalai. My first recollection of Bhagavan is when I was about seven. On all Sundays, school holidays and festivals our entire family was in the Ashram from early morning until about 6 p.m. At that time the Vedic chanting in front of Sri Bhagavan would be concluding with the chanting of Bhagavan's *Upadesa Saram*. In those days I never failed to rush to the Old Hall and recite *Upadesa Saram* along with the *Veda Patasala* boys. It is the only composition of His I knew since my childhood.

Sri T.K.Sundaresa Iyer, my revered teacher, once dictated a story to me and I wrote it down. He showed it to Bhagavan and told Him that it was my handwriting. I was very happy to hear that Bhagavan said that my handwriting was good. I may say here that it is not bad even now!

I also remember Bhagavan grinding chutney for the breakfast in the long verandah east of the Ashram kitchen, and His offering a small quantity of it with His own hand to me to taste! I can't claim I was aware of His exalted state in those early years of my youth, but I was certainly aware that He was always natural, and most of the first-time visitors also felt that they somehow had always known Him. As Major Chadwick observed, "He was like a mirror which seemed to reflect back your own feelings." If you responded quite naturally to the all-embracing love of His presence, he treated you as one of His own.

Once a pair of pigeons were brought to the Ashram as an offering. Although Bhagavan was at first reluctant to add to the Ashram duties the care of the pigeons, He accepted them. He took them in His hands, patted them affectionately and then became silent, absorbed in *samadhi*. In the meantime it took the attendants nearly an hour to find a cage for the pigeons and bring it to the hall. All that time the pigeons quietly sat on the Maharshi's lap without moving, as if they were themselves a pair of yogis similarly absorbed in *samadhi*. Bhagavan said, "They came. They refuse to go back. Another family has joined me - as if I have not enough family already."

Similar is the story of my own family. In 1938, when some devotees proposed to Bhagavan that Venkato (my father) and his family could come to Tiruvannamalai and work in the Ashram office, Bhagavan agreed. Then from the year 1938 onwards, our family has been under the care of the Ashram.

We all know He gave *moksha* to His mother while in Skandashram. My daily prayer to Him ever since I came permanently to the Ashram in 1992, is: "Bhagavan, make me serve your devotees as the first servant of the Ashram and when my end comes, liberate me as You liberated Your mother."

I have often wondered about the great event which formed a turning point in Bhagavan's life, the dramatisation of the act of death he conducted about six weeks before he left Madurai for good. Was it this dramatisation alone that transformed the school boy into a sage? Was he not *purna* (complete) even from the instant of His birth on December 30th, 1879? Did not the blind lady who delivered Him see a bright light as he was born? Was there not a link between this light and the meteor that cut a golden path across the sky and faded over Arunachala at the moment of His passing? Did He not at the age of ten contemplate on death when His father died? Was it not a fact that in His youth nobody could wake Him up from sleep, even by severely beating Him? I sincerely feel that out of compassion for us, and so we may not swerve from His teachings, he chose to hide the Supreme State He was experiencing from the very day of His birth. His decision to wear only a *kaupina* (loin cloth) after throwing away all his possessions on September 1st, 1896 was not for His own edification. It was for us He did this. He Himself later observed "Some power acts through the body of a *Jivanmukta* and uses his body to get the work done."

When Paramahansa Yogananda asked Bhagavan why God permitted suffering in the world, Bhagavan replied, "*Suffering is the way for realization of God.*" And when further questioned why should there be suffering, His characteristic reply was "Who suffers? What is suffering?" Bhagavan always takes us back to the single question "Who am I?" - to cultivate Self-knowledge at all times. Self-knowledge serves the practical purpose of destroying pain and suffering caused by ignorance.

There is a poem composed by Bhagavan entitled *Ama Vidya* which begins: "Lo, very easy is Self-knowledge, Lo very easy indeed - even for the most infirm..." After hearing this poem, Prof. G. V.Subbaramayya asked Bhagavan why he was not getting it if it was that easy. Also, Sri *Balarama Reddy* endorsed G. V. S.'s doubt by quoting a verse from the *Bhagavad Gita*. Bhagavan looked at them with compassion and confirmed "What is written in *Ama Vidya* is true. Why do you doubt it? So real is the Self that compared with it even the gooseberry in the palm of one's hand appears a mere illusion." This categorical assertion is not only meant for those two great devotees, but for all of us who have been attracted to Him and have experienced His Grace. Yes, He continues to live in our midst as Awareness, as the Person in all persons; He lives in all and as all life!

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya !

Letters and Comments

Finding a Guru

MP3

I received the two videos and enjoy them. Now I have a question.

It seems that it would help to sit with someone who has realized the Self. Hopefully such a presence might enable me to practice Self-enquiry more productively. Can you suggest where I might go to meet such a person?
— Phil Safier, USA

The ancients say that by the accumulation of meritorious deeds over many lives we gain the company of a Jnani, or fully-enlightened person. And also, when we are ripe for such an association it will happen automatically.

This does not mean that we should sit and wait for it to happen. When the Maharshi was asked, "How to find the Guru?" He replied very simply: "By meditation." This means we should not go running around looking for some Mahatma to give us realization. When we have made sufficient effort and have matured spiritually, the Guru Himself will come to us. No effort will be required to find Him or benefit by Him. The fact is, He is already guiding us from within and we must turn within to our Source, and it is there where we will find Him and experience Him as our own Self.

By applying this kind of faith in the Master's words and acting on them with sincere devotion and perseverance, we will surely find the Master, and receive His Grace.

It is the experience of many seekers living today that Sri Ramana Maharshi guides those aspirants who turn to Him and sincerely practice his teachings. That was his promise to us before leaving the world scene.

— Editor

Dream

MP3

I had a dream, and although it was very short, it was certainly one of the most impressive dreams I ever had. I dreamed I was sitting in the Old Hall facing Bhagavan. Then he gave me a look, the same kind of look described by so many like *Paul Brunton*, *F.H.Humphreys*, etc. I felt indescribable peace and joy. Even now it still gives me the creeps (I hope this is the right term) and tears are in my eyes whenever I recall that dream.

Now my question: Is it possible that it was an initiation by look? I have read that this is possible in dreams too. If so, what is the significance of such an initiation? Or was it just an ordinary dream made of impressions and memories?
— A Young Devotee from Europe

It was a very wonderful dream you had of Bhagavan in the Old Hall. Yes, it happens like that. He comes to us in our dreams just as he came to others in their waking state. There is not much difference between the two states and both are real or both are unreal, from whichever perspective they are viewed.

For a devotee it is real, and these divine dreams are often more potent experiences than waking state experiences. You are fortunate that Bhagavan has blessed you. Have no doubts. Many other sincere souls have had similar experiences of Sri Bhagavan. He is our teacher and Guru and He will provide us with everything we need to realize Him as the Self. If we have faith in this, we need nothing else.

— Editor

Bhakti or Jnana

MP3

I have doubts if the path of Self-enquiry is the right one for me, especially after reading *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, by *Arthur Osborne*. Bhagavan enjoined the devotees to practice Self-enquiry in almost all cases, but Sri Shankara, for instance, did not. There is a well known devotee in Germany who visits Sri Ramanasramam every year. He told me that it is very difficult to meditate with 'Who am I?' and that it is of use only for advanced souls, and that many have wasted their time with it because they have not been mature enough. On the other hand, *Annamalai Swami* said in his book, "If you feel drawn to Self-enquiry then somehow practice it. All other paths are indirect." (This sentence is my translation from a German translation of *Living by the Words of Bhagavan*.) Also, Arthur Osborne wrote that Bhagavan made the path of Self-enquiry accessible to all and that in ancient times it was only for highly advanced souls.

If there is another path that suits me, then it is the path of *bhakti*. What do you think, would it be better for me to meditate on the Self or to do *japa*? Or is it combinable? Is it good to think of God in the form of Bhagavan in everyday life (which is so joyful) and meditate at home with 'Who am I?'. If I should go the path of *bhakti*, why do I feel that Bhagavan is my Master? His teachings are the only ones that satisfy my intellect, but it has not satisfied my heart so far.


— Same Young Devotee from Europe

You are a devotee. Have no doubts about this. There is no contradiction in Bhagavan's teachings regarding the path of devotion and that of knowledge. We can practice Self-enquiry and still be a devotee. Bhagavan is the Self. We pray to Him and practice His teachings to the best of our ability. That is all. If at times we feel unable to do Self-enquiry, we sing His praises, we remember Him by taking His Name. And when the mind is strong and still, we direct our attention to the Source of the breath, the Source of the sound, the Source of the "I". That is all. We are His children and he watches over us. He knows our sincerity and how we are trying to follow his directions. He will save us ultimately. His Grace is there for us. He is there for us. He is not dead. You are a devotee and Bhagavan is your Guru. Do not doubt this for a second.

— Editor

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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