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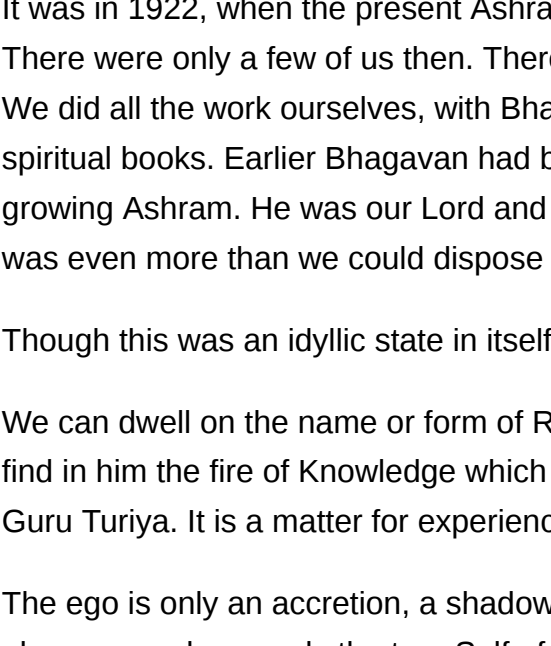
नमो भगवते श्री रघुनाय

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Early Days with Sri Bhagavan
by Ramaswami Pillai

From boyhood I was spiritually inclined. Although coming from a meat-eating family, I turned vegetarian while still a boy. I was mainly a worshipper of Shiva but learned about Christ and Buddha too and revered them. Twice I visited the great Muslim shrine at Nagore, and I understood that Allah was only another name for God. My one ambition in life was to see God face to face. This was granted to me while still a schoolboy in March of 1917 when I first went to Skandashram and set my eyes upon Bhagavan. Reclining on the couch, he looked indescribably majestic. Since then he has been God in human form for me, my God, Guru and All.I did not ask him for anything. I was filled to overflowing by just seeing him. He turned on me that look of heart melting Grace that he so often bestowed on newcomers. After a few days I had to return home. There I learned the "*Marital Garland of Letters*" and spent my time reciting it either mentally or aloud and even writing it out.



After finishing school I went to college. Then I returned to my village and, although I had no desire for married life, my parents got me married. I had no children, however, and was soon able to give up married life and go and live with Bhagavan at his Ashram.

Bhagavan had lived in various caves and temples, but Skandashram was the first to be known as an Ashram. He stayed there for seven years with his mother, his younger brother Niranjanananda Swami, who was to be the future Sarvadhikari, and a few sadhus. It was here that Ashram cooking was first started. This was due to the presence of his mother. It was her presence that made it into an Ashram. After her death Bhagavan abandoned it and went to live beside her shrine at the foot of the hill, where the present Ashram has grown up. This shows she had greater importance than commonly supposed.

During his years at Skandashram Bhagavan still spoke little and seldom. It did not matter; his gaze was dynamic, penetrating, gracious, soul stirring, ego killing. In later years, he spoke far more, but his silences were still tremendous.

It was on my second visit to Skandashram that I first made pradakshina. A visitor from Madurai whom I knew wanted to go round the hill with Bhagavan and I joined him. At that time the lower slopes were still forested and we took the forest path for a good part of the way before coming out on the road. Next day I had a sudden urge to go round by myself. I started out as before but soon lost my way on the forest track. As I started I had noticed that one of the Ashram dogs was following me. Now it ran in front and began to lead. At once it flashed on me that this was Bhagavan's work. With tears of gratitude and joy I followed my guide. He took me by the same path as the previous day until we came to the road and then disappeared; and I saw him at the Ashram when I got back. At the time I told nobody about this. It was my first experience of my spiritual relationship with Bhagavan and I was more than ever convinced that he would guide me through the unknown paths of life. Such an incident may appear trivial to the reader, but when it actually happens it strengthens one's faith in Bhagavan, who alone can help by his infinite Grace in opening one's inner vision.

For a whole year at Skandashram Bhagavan took only one meager meal a day. I was on a visit there the day he broke this fast. I had decided to stay the night even though there was no food for an evening meal for the rest of us. I didn't feel hungry. At about 7.30 one of the devotees, Ramanatha Brahmachari, came back with some pieces of broken coconut and some rice that he had been given at a ceremony he attended in town. Bhagavan suggested that we should boil it up on the charcoal stove we had there and share it, as was the usual custom. He told us to see whether there was any sugar or sugar candy left from gifts by earlier visitors to flavor it with. We looked but there was nothing at all. It was dark and raining outside and we could not go into town for anything. I was near to tears that Bhagavan should ask for something — so rare an event — and we should not be able to provide it. At that very moment the door opened and two students came in with a bag of sugar candy and a bunch of bananas that they had brought to present to Bhagavan. The meal was cooked and eaten, the two visitors also being invited.

Bhagavan remarked that we had asked for sugar candy and got bananas also, which could be cut up and served like a pickle with the food. After eating he said that it was just a year, 365 days exactly, since he had limited himself to one meal a day and that from now on he would eat in the evening also. That was how things happened with Bhagavan. He did not work miracles, things just happened right. Miracles are generally thought of as deliberate acts willed by a person, but happenings like this are the result of spiritual forces naturally and always at work. The Jnani is God Himself in human form. He never wills anything but things happen in his presence and the ignorant attribute them to him. His state is pure awareness. It is a matter of experience. One may get a glimpse of it in his presence.

It was in 1922, when the present Ashram at the foot of the hill first started, that I became a permanent resident. At first there was only a thatched hut over the Mother's shrine and a second small hut that served as a kitchen. There were only a few of us then. There were no Ashram servants in those days.

We did all the work ourselves, with Bhagavan working along with us. Puja was performed twice a day, as it still is. We spent our time doing Ashram work, chanting sacred songs, walking round the hill, meditating and reading spiritual books. Earlier Bhagavan had been more silent and aloof; later, when crowds began to come, he was necessarily more distant, but at this time he took part in everything, guiding and helping in every activity of the growing Ashram. He was our Lord and Guru and was always with us. Devotees used to bring us provisions when they were needed and we never felt any want. We used to share things out as they came. Sometimes there was even a cook — and we should not be able to provide it. At that very moment the door opened and two students came in with a bag of sugar candy and a bunch of bananas that they had brought to present to Bhagavan. The meal was cooked and eaten, the two visitors also being invited.

Though this was an idyllic state in itself, the essence of it was our striving for Realization. Having attained a human birth, that is the only goal worth aiming at, for it is unalloyed, eternal bliss and peace.

We can dwell on the name or form of Ramana or neither. Repeating the name 'Ramana' inwardly is itself a good sadhana for those who do not use Self-enquiry. Or by concentrating on him intensely and constantly we may find in him the fire of Knowledge which will burn up our ego and convert us into him so that we realize our identity with him who is the Self of the self. The state of bliss thus attained through merging into the Guru is called Guru Turiya. It is a matter for experience and cannot be explained in words.

The ego is only an accretion, a shadow, a ghost, an unstable outcome of the combination of chit and jada, consciousness and matter. It is the source of all mischief in our state of ignorance. Nothing is lost by its destruction. It obscures and conceals the true Self of us which is identical with Pure Consciousness. This false ego is to be dissolved by steady enquiry into it or by the Grace of our most gracious Sat Guru Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

The Mountain Path, January 1966

On January 14, 1995, at the ripe age of 100, Ramaswami Pillai was absorbed in his Master. He had lived in Sri Ramanasramam longer than any other - 72 years.

The Journey of My Heart

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam

(part 4, continued from Jan/Feb)

December 30, 1982:

This Afternoon at 4 p.m., *Ramaswami Pillai*, Paul [Evelyn's husband] and I went on rickshaw pradakshina during the lunar eclipse. I attempted to walk besidethe rickshaw could talk (Ramaswami and Paul rode in the rickshaw), but since the driver had trouble pedaling so slowly I ultimately had to climb in and sit on the small front bench.

Paul and I recited the "Sri Lalitasahasranam Stotram" as we went and Ramaswami's mood was melted. Here and there he would single out a name and repeat it in ecstasy.

We stopped the rickshaw to walk around the shrines of Ganesh and Hanuman and had passed Adi Annamalai by the time the recitation ended. The sun was setting and the sky was covered in hues of gentle pink, lavender and an unearthly blue. The normal reality of objects and events seemed called into question in the magical light of dusk.

Ramaswami said, "You have the recitation of 'Sri Lalitasahasranam Stotram' by heart, it seems. Very few can do it — it's a very rare thing. And you do it with faith...." 'Sri Lalitasahasranam' is so concentrated, so powerful! You can go on and on reciting it like Bhagavan's hymns."

At Bhagavan's bridge we offered chocolates, peanuts and tea to Swamiji. He declined our peanuts saying, "You will first have to give me teeth!" However, he then made it clear he had declined the Ashram's offers to make him dentures. He told us that at the preceding culvert Bhagavan had composed the verse of "Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai," *"Unless Thou savest me I shall melt away in tears of anguish, Oh Arunachala!"* Bhagavan told him that at that time a great flood of tears actually poured forth from his eyes!

"We'd be so carefree with Bhagavan!" Ramaswami continued. "We'd be singing and dancing!"

"Really?" I asked.

"Oh yes! We had a hell of it!" he exclaimed laughing.

On the paved road approaching Kubera Lingam we saw the moon in eclipse rising. The sun had just set and Ramaswami commented that in a certain town in South India one may see the beautiful sight of "The Twin Suns," i.e., the sun and moon rising and setting simultaneously on opposite horizons.

Ramaswami told Paul, "Whatever good work you take up there will be people to criticize you, but with love there comes understanding. You cannot really know a person unless you love the person." He spoke so beautifully while riding around Arunachala I wished I could have captured every word verbatim.

January 3, 1983

Once more I joined *Ramaswami Pillai* during the rest period after lunch and he talked on various subjects. Again and again he stressed the importance of practicing Sri Bhagavan's teaching of Self-enquiry and Self-surrender: "The two are one, you see. Only when you know 'who am I?' can surrender really come.

"Sri Bhagavan's teaching is really practical, but some people make it into a philosophy. They really wish to publicize themselves. People may talk on and on about Bhagavan, they may praise him, but unless they practice his teachings none of this impresses me.

"I can't talk this way with everyone," Ramaswami commented. "I am talking with you as though to a goddess. Because, you see, in India we stress that a man must be very careful with women — even one's own mother! But you recite 'Sri Lalitasahasranam' daily by heart. Not everyone is capable of this. Some brahmins may do so, but you do it with devotion and faith. When I hear 'Sri Lalitasahasranam' I am completely immersed. You can practice it the way I recite Akshara Mana Malai — automatically it goes on. I may pick it up anywhere and continue with it."

I described to Ramaswami the routine of morning and evening recitations done at Arunachala Ashrama, stressing that we all recite Mother's Names by heart. He said, "Regular *parayana* is good, but Self-enquiry must be practiced always. . . . continuously. By practicing *stotram* regularly, one may acquire most of what one desires in life. First one, like a child, asks of God and receives; second, he will say, 'Whatever You wish is best.'; finally, there comes a state in which even to think is a sin. Thought itself will be rejected.

"To think of many things makes a man weak!" he stressed. Talking of the many popular gurus of the day, Ramaswami commented, "I have read the books (this one or that one) that form the spiritual literature of today. But when one comes to the practice, the 'spiritual literature' is something separate."

— by Evelyn Kaselow Saphier,
(continued in the *May/June* issue)

Kanakammal's Memories of Bhagavan

Dr. Prakash Adiseshan of Ann Arbor, Michigan has translated the following interesting excerpts from Smt. Kanakammal's Tamil book, *Ninaivil Niraithavai*.

1. Sri Bhagavan was observing the activity of a child, who was pointing out that Sri Bhagavan's head was clean shaven and so is hers, etc. He talked about how observant some children are.

This led Sri Bhagavan to recall an incident about a little girl who used to live in Ramana Nagar. She had observed people bringing food and offering it to Sri Bhagavan and then distributing it to the people in the hall. One day she approached Sri Bhagavan hesitatingly, and upon asking he found out that she had wrapped a few *papads* in her dress, having got them from her kitchen at home. Sri Bhagavan and the girl shared the *papads*. The next day she repeated the act by bringing fruits from her garden. After sharing the fruits with her, He asked her if there was a picture of him in their house. The girl said that they had one. Sri Bhagavan asked her to henceforth offer the food to the picture and eat it herself and think that he ate it. (from Ch. 29)

2. An elderly man walked into the hall and upon seeing him, Sri Bhagavan's behavior changed: he appeared to behave like an obedient student. The person who entered said, "Bhagavan, please clear all my doubts."

Smiling and looking at a devotee nearby, Sri Bhagavan replied, "Do you know who this person is? I came away from Madurai unable to answer his questions. Now he has come all the way here with more questions!" The visitor was Sri Bhagavan's Tamil teacher in school. (from Ch. 17)

3. One day a devotee pointed out to Sri Bhagavan that someone in the hall was sleeping. The devotee added that he has been watching that person sleep this way for the past few days. Sri Bhagavan looked at the devotee and said, "That person is taking care of the purpose for which he came. How about you? Why have you come here?" (from Ch. 19)

4. Among Sri Bhagavan's attendants was one Vaikunda Vaasar (another name for Vishnu). Once when he was lying down in Sri Bhagavan's hall he noticed a snake near him. He became petrified and hastily approached Bhagavan pointing out the snake. Sri Bhagavan looked at the snake and said with a laugh, addressing the devotee, "Vaikunda Vaasar, your bed has come looking for you. Must be a smooth bed," referring to Sri Vishnu's lying posture on the snake. (from Ch. 19)

Aradhana Day

In 1953, three years after the Maharshi's body took its last breath, Sri Ramanasramam was still struggling financially and spiritually. Many of the thousands that previously visited the Maharshi thought that now that his body was gone his guidance, grace and power was no longer accessible. Major Alan Chadwick (Sadhu Arunachala), a resident of Sri Ramanasramam from 1935, clearly saw otherwise. In the following article published in the May 1953 "*The Call Divine*" he gives his reasons and, in the end, offers a challenge to all seekers.

ON MAY 11th the Ashram celebrates Sri Bhagavan's Aradhana Day, when one will be carried back to that momentous three years ago when he passed away. One can still see the tense crowds seated in rows under the verandah of the New Hall, waiting, waiting till the last breath should be breathed, and the one they all loved so much should once on all relinquish his body. Most of us felt it would be a happy release. We prayed he might be spared any further suffering. The sickness and pain had been so long drawn out, it was an agony to watch the loved one being slowly wasted away by the malignant disease.

Doubtless he was a Jnani and was beyond all suffering, he was dwelling in the bliss of the Self. But suffering there undoubtedly was, though he himself would have asked: "To whom is the suffering?" It is a mystery beyond my comprehension. Vaguely I sense that if one is liberated one is free from all pain and as the Self is all Bliss, then behind even suffering there must be a special bliss for such. It is only a surface appearance, though very real and painful for the onlooker. Swami Ramatirtha used to say that when he had high fever he experienced the most ecstatic bliss during meditation, more so than when he was in normal health.

At first people felt lost, they had relied too much on the personal form, though Bhagavan himself had repeatedly warned them: "You attach too much importance to this body, I am not the Body."

Still it was only natural that this body should be missed, though as time went on the loss became gradually less keen, his presence was felt so strongly in the Ashram, and daily the feeling of this actual presence grew. A visitor remarked to me lately, "One does not miss the presence of Bhagavan in the Ashram, he is there just as he was before." And this is true. He is there and he is surely working and the Ashram will grow in strength and renown as time goes on.

There have been dark days since that night three years ago. But, those days are past. The Ashram has taken on a new life. There is a new feeling in the air and the brought me back. The Veda Patasala school day has been revived and pujas are now performed so carefully and enthusiastically that the whole place rings up with the vibrations thus set up. I went away never to return, but he brought me back. And now I thank him every day that I have been allowed to take part in this renaissance. It is thrilling to the core to feel it happening. One should have known that it was bound to be like this all the time, for how could anything happen to the place he had sanctified with his presence for so long. The whole of India was blessed by his life, how much more so the place in which he made his home.

I have one piece of advice to offer one and all. Do not believe the stories you hear about Sri Ramanasramam, because you can always test the truth of such tales for yourself without relying on hearsay, it is very easy. Come and see for yourself. You will not be disappointed.

Sri Ramana Maharshi's 48th Aradhana

Will be observed at the New York City Arunachala Ashrama on

Saturday 25 April 1998

at 11 a.m.

The program will consist of puja, bhajans, talks and prasad (meals).

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Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center · Tel: (718) 575-3215

Audio Recordings From Sri Ramanasramam

Graham Boyd of Scarborough, England is presently on a three-month visit to Sri Ramanasramam. He took a professional-quality digital recording system with him. His plans were to record all the Tamil Parayanams that are regularly sung in the Samadhi Hall, produce CDs and audio cassettes and make them available to devotees.

We are happy to hear that this project has been taken up with great enthusiasm by the President of Sri Ramanasramam and resident devotees, and also that the scope of recordings has expanded considerably. Below is a recent report written by J.Jayaraman and emailed to Arunachala Ashrama in New York. It is heartening to know that J.Jayaraman, a longtime resident devotee, gifted singer and Tamil scholar is taking a leading role in this project.

J.Jayaraman writes:

Bhagavan's will is silent, sure, steady.... and sudden like the dropping of ripened fruit detached from the branch. I view Graham's sankalpa of making a CD, and then yours of having me included for reasons you have stated, and the further sankalpa of recording J J [himself] and Dr.Lingeswara Rao, as all part of the ripening process.

Your choice of the words: "Under the guidance of Kunju Swami, J.Jayaraman was able to resurrect the melodies these were originally sung in..." is very accurate. Melody means Bhava (feeling) Raga (tune) and Tala (meter). When the Tamil Parayanams were restarted in late 1980s, those who took it up ambitiously, were indeed directed by Kunju Swami to listen to his recitation in front of him. How could learning occur without the attitude of a learner? Over the years the parayana has strayed away from the meter in which Bhagavan intended them to be recited. Some exceptions like "Ashtakam" and "*Upadesa Saram*" have very obvious meter and so don't get easily tainted. In this connection you may like to read *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 14 April, 1946 as to how intensely Bhagavan felt about nonobservance of meter during parayana.

Your letter [from Dennis] to me through Graham, and your e-mail here to him listing the JJLR recordings and the following paragraph, ought also to have been addressed to the President. This would have forcefully placed the whole story in proper perspective, coming from you. So, I had them shown to the President, since I didn't see how I could play any useful role without the force of his sanction and trust.

In preparation for the recordings, the new parayana practice group consists of eight women and eight men. The primary criterion for selection being familiarity with the words, regularity of attendance at the daily shrine parayanams and musical ability. Considering the 'free for all' that Bhagavan always allowed (in the light of the *Day by Day* referenced *above*, shall I say 'suffered') this is perhaps as it should be.

Graham must finish recordings by mid March, whereas the chosen group, if they wished to perfect their renditions, would take 2-3 months for the venbas, and longer for "Navamani Malai," "Padhikam," the "Poppadam," and Sankara tidbits, the latter requiring a more developed sense of timing.

Graham, of course, confesses he is satisfied as long as the group 'come in' for their lines together and are in tune. So after the first week of (4 p.m. — 5 p.m.) practice I decided on a level of correction merely to ensure that the group came in together at the start of each line and in tune.

Then, Graham commented that the four days of Venba Parayanams (Tue-Fri) were too monotonous. Suggestions were made for changing the tune and slowing the pace of the "*40 Verses on Reality*." Since I saw that a change was being asked for, I took the position that it shall be a complete change to the way it was intended to be recited. So "40 Verses" and "Supplement" are now going to be heard in meter but without change of tune, since the President felt that the original should be kept. I need hardly add that LR and myself, and all of you there, like the grand dignity of its tune (which, incidentally, LR pointed out is the tune for Durga's famous 'Aiyirri Nandini'...). I had told Graham how 'chanted in meter, these poems would be hypnotic I have no doubt that the group will experience it when they get fully into the "40 Verses" and "Supplement." Today I showed it to them in its final form (dropping metrical gaps in between lines) and they are taking to it like ducks to water.

Sanskrit Recordings of Bhagavan's Works, etc.

Now to Lingeswara Rao and myself. We practice mornings and record, when possible, 10 p.m. — 12 p.m. Bhagavan led us steadily from the Samadhi Hall, to the New Hall and finally to the Old Hall where the acoustics are perfect. We have completed all Sanskrit requests except "*Lalitasahasranam*." We've added to your list all Sanskrit verses (26 I think) in "40 Verses Supplement," and Arunachala Mahatmyam as chosen by Bhagavan. We did his 42 from Bhagavad Gita also. Your list does not include Ramana Gita. If you wish, and in case there is time towards the end, we would do this. You have also not included Bhagavan's Malayalam 40 Verses, "Supplement," "*Upadesa Saram*" and Bhagavad Gita. We have taken care to do all Sanskrit in those ragas received through Swami Advaitutendra, Hari Ram Master and some others. Here and there finer nuances are incorporated for research and discovery by future generations! The tala cymbals are used throughout. President Ramanan (and Sri K.Natesan) upon hearing "*Catvarimsar*" ("Forty Verses in Praise of Sri Ramana," by *IGanapati Mun*) said they were in bliss. I would recommend adding the tanpura drone to all these Sanskrit recordings. I am not aware of poems in Anushtub (Gita) meter and other meters being sung with tala. They sound very captivating.

I have already suggested to the President and to Graham (he is not pleased as he would have to return lugging all that recording equipment again), that he ought to plan a how could (say 1999) for a more polished and authentic guru parayana recording.

Also, I would like to suggest the proposition of making a CD with a mix of performances, e.g., some from LR and my Sanskrit recording, some of Ravi and Sridhar, some of the group parayana, some from my Tamil Parayana. There is a rendering of the *Akshara Mana Malai* in 9 ragas (12 Verses per page) designed by President Ammal and recorded by the President, with Smt.Susheela and myself, which is quite popular. Also, some of Manavasi's songs which the ladies group sings very well. A mix of these would make a great product. Give it some thought.

It has been a great joy for LR and myself, despite a crippling schedule and pushing my vocal chords for 6-8 hours every day, doing the Sanskrit recordings, alongside other parayana practices and duties. I am sure the remaining two projects (group Parayanams, and the solos) would also come out fine in the ever-present Grace. I can't help recalling *Arunachala Bhakta Bhagavat*'s prayer when I was there in 92, that Bhagavan's gift to me should be shared with all. Maybe its happening.

Lastly, Graham Boyd writes:

My friends Jack and Vera Mutten bought the new JVC digital video camera and have been taking film of the mountain, Ashram, etc. It is a brilliant camera with pristine colors and ultra-sharp images. We are going to make a video of the Ashram and the local shrines, etc., plus a video pradakshina of Arunachala. To accompany the latter we are recording a one-hour version of "*Akshara Mana Malai*." This one-hour version will be the sound track of the VHS tape version of the pradakshina. There will also be a 30-minute video-CD with the shorter version of the song (30 minutes of film and 30 minutes of song can fit on a CD).

This year might bring some very useful fruit for overseas devotees as everything seems to have its own momentum.

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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