Mar/Apr 1999

THE MAHARSHI

Jul / Aug 1999

May / Jun 1999
Vol.5 No.3

ஸ்ரீ ரமண மஹரிஷி சரணம்

Produced & Edited by
Dennis Hartel
Dr. Anil K. Sharma

1. *Sadguru is Within*
2. *49th Maha Nirvana Observed at the New York Ashrama*
3. *Video Interview of Sri Ramanananda Saraswati*
4. *Children's Book*
5. *Ganapati Muni Library*
6. *Report about Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat*
7. *Introduction to the interview video*
8. *News from Sri Ramanasramam*
9. *The Journey of My Heart, part 10*
10. *Letters from Slobodanka and Natasha in Belgrade*
11. *Worship is only Self-Enquiry*

Sadguru is within

by Arthur Osborne

PART 1

Sri Maharshi was concerned rather with the practical work of training aspirants than with expounding theory. The theory had importance, but only as a basis for practice. The devotees had the freedom of argument with Sri Bhagavan. There were, however, some who desired a definite statement that Sri Bhagavan was a Guru, but this he would not make. When a devotee pressed him once more for a confirmation, he turned to the attendant and said humorously, 'Let him get a document from the sub-registrar and take it to the office and get the office stamp on it!'

In the following conversation, taken from *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, he implied clearly enough that he was to be regarded as the visible Guru. By Guru Bhagavan always meant Sadguru and that too in its highest meaning as nothing less than one who has realized his identity with the Self and abides therein constantly. It may be said by some that the doctrine of God manifested as Guru was all right for those who had the good fortune to meet Bhagavan in his lifetime, but what of those who seek a Guru now? It will be recalled that Bhagavan confirmed that the Guru need not necessarily be in human form. He himself had no human Guru. Just as, with Self-enquiry, he created a new path suitable to the conditions of the modern world, a path that can be followed without any outward means, mutatis, while conforming to the outer conditions of modern life, so also he brought to men the possibility of silent, formless initiation, requiring no physical Guru. He often confirmed that the truest upadesa was by silence only. Ramana Sadguru's silence is all-powerful even now.

Devotee: Can Sri Bhagavan help us to realize the Truth?

Bhagavan: Help is always there.

D.: Then there is no need to ask questions. I do not feel the ever-present help.

B.: Surrender and you will find it.

D.: I am always at your feet. Will Bhagavan give us some Upadesa to follow? Otherwise how can I get the help living 600 miles away?

M.: That Sadguru is within.

D.: Sadguru is necessary to guide me to understand it.

M.: That Sadguru is within.

D.: I want a visible Guru.

M.: That visible Guru says that He is within.

D.: Can I throw myself at the mercy of the Sadguru?

M.: Yes. Instructions are necessary only so long as one has not surrendered oneself.

* * * * * *

Maharshi: The highest form of Grace is *mouna*. It is also the highest *upadesa*. ... All other modes of instruction are derived from silence and are therefore secondary. Silence is the primary form. If the Guru is silent the seeker's mind gets purified by itself.

— Reprinted from the January, 1971 *Mountain Path*

49th Maha Nirvana

Observed at the New York Ashrama

Devotees from around New York City gathered on Sunday, April 18th to observe the Maharshi's 49th Aradhana. Although there was no notice of this function in the newsletter, or any invitations sent out, the word spread and the usual full house of devotees attended. On January 31, six devotees from Arunachala Ashrama left on a pilgrimage to Sri Ramanasramam. Geeta Bhatt, Prem Frel, Arvind Fogat, Arthur Couzounelis and Dennis Hartel left from the New York Airport and were joined by Ellen Zucker of Texas at the London airport. They arrived at Arunachala on February 2 and stayed for the various lengths of time, the longest being two months. Dennis described to the devotees some of their experiences on this pilgrimage. He pointed out that as next year will be Sri Bhagavan's 50th Maha Nirvana anniversary and, since the vast majority of devotees present would not be around for the 100th anniversary, it would be appropriate that we start planning something now for next year's event.

Interview Video

PART 2

Dennis explained that while in India, with this view in mind, they had videotaped the retired president of Sri Ramanasraam, Swami *Ramanananda Saraswati*, who graciously told us something of his remarkable life and introduced a video we plan, with Bhagavan's grace, to release in commemoration of his 50th anniversary (see page 3 at the end of the interview).

In 1999, James Hartel had videotaped interviews with the following lifelong devotees of Sri Maharshi: Sri T. N. Venkataraman, *Sri N. Balarama Reddy, Sri Annamalai Swami, Sri Ramaswami Pillai, Sri Kunju Swami*, Sri Krishna Swami, *Sri S. N. Rajan*, Prof. K. Swaminathan, Prof. N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer, *Sri K. Natesan, Sampoornama, Rajagopalam Ramani Ammal* and *Ammani Ammal*. Of these thirteen devotees who moved closely with Sri Bhagavan, only Sri K. Natesan and Sri T. N. Venkataraman (now Swami Ramanananda Saraswati) are still living.

After mentioning the interview-video proposal to the Ashrama president, Sri V. S. Ramanan, and his other devotees became enthused about continuing to videotape more interviews with the few remaining devotees around who had the good fortune to spend time with Sri Bhagavan. Another dozen interviews were done with the help of *Graham Boyd*, who had brought to India a professional-quality digital video camera.

Almost all of the archives at Sri Ramanasramam have now been digitized and copied onto CDs for storage. Because of this it was easy to view on the Ashrama computer (they have four!) the old photographs from the Ashrama archives and locate photos of the interviewed devotees in the company of Bhagavan. These were copied onto a CD to bring back to the USA. A number of the devotees interviewed are also seen with Bhagavan in the Archival Films video. With the use of these photos and films, with other period pictures and present-day photos and videos we plan to weave together a video production that will bring to life the gracious presence of the Sage of Arunachala seen through the eyes and experienced in the dedicated hearts of these venerable devotees.

The video will run somewhere between sixty and ninety minutes, which means that we will only we highlights of each interview. Also, the first interview video will have to be limited, with perhaps a few exceptions, to include only those devotees from the initial 1999 taping. Due to the great wealth of new material videotaped this year we may have to release two interview videos. We propose to do the digital editing of the video in the New York Arunachala Ashrama itself and, by his grace, complete it before Bhagawan's 50th Maha Nirvana day.

(the above was released in *May 2001* at the "Guru Retreat" DVD)

Children's Book

Another suggestion for commemorating Sri Bhagavan's 50th Maha Nirvana was given by Aruna Ramanan. A mother of two fine children, she suggested that a children's book that would win young, impressionable hearts to the Maharshi should be published. It should be a book that would aid to kindle in them the awareness of Bhagavan's presence and the value of His message for mankind. We have been discussing an outline for such a publication and welcome any suggestions from our readers.

(...to be continued in *May 2000*)

Ganapati Muni Library

PART 3

For about ten years Sri K. Natesan has been donating selected manuscripts and texts from the pen of the inspired 20th Century Vedic seer, *Vasishta Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni*, who was affectionately addressed by Bhagavan as Nayana. K. Natesan diligently copies volumes of the Muni's Sanskrit works into bound notebooks in his own flawless handwriting and then passes them on to interested devotees from around the world. He has been in touch with the unfathomable scholar and his family and these generosities will come to value the authentic and important record of Vasishta Ganapati Muni.

During this visit, Sri K. Natesan passed on another treasure from his storehouse of wealth to add to our Ganapati Muni Archive, a copy of *Uma Sahasram*, written in the Muni's own hand. Sri K. Natesan hopes that the future Western scholars of Sanskrit and devotees with a fervent love will not have to travel all the way to India to satisfy their interest in the writings of this 20th century luminary. We are grateful to K. Natesan and thank him for giving us one of his way to bring these invaluable documents into our hands "for the sake of protection, as he would say.

All this was explained and the book of *1000 verses on Mother Uma* was shown to the devotees who gathered for observing Sri Bhagavan's Maha Nirvana. It should be mentioned that this book in praise of Uma was the poet's favorite of Ganapati in the Divine Mother for securing him such an illustrious Guru, Sri Ramana. The last 200 verses were composed in the Mango Tree Cave in Bhagavan's presence, and the Muni experienced that the verses were directly inspired by Bhagavan, flowing through him onto the paper.

As the Maha Nirvana program continued the devotees, in unison, recited Bhagavan's Sanskrit works, Ganapati Muni's *forty verses on Bhagavan* and the "*Marital Garland of Letters*."

Several devotees led the group in bhajans. George Romney was asked to talk on his newly-completed book, Sean's Song, and also to read out some of the verses.

Sri Ramanasramam's Veda Vidya many times, George discovered that all the precepts of his book, which is an exposition of the Maharshi's teachings, were forming verses in his mind. He explained how one day he decided to write down the verses, and how in six weeks he wrote down the 800 verses, which make up the body of the book.

Arati was performed at the end of the program and all were served a bountiful feast prepared by various devotees of the Ashrama.

Report about Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat

The founder of Arunachala Ashrama.

On the night of October 9th, 1998, Bhagawat, now in his 87th year, see a normal meal, but experienced weakness while returning to his bed from the kitchen. Nevertheless, he was very cheerful and thought nothing of the weakness. Apprehensive about his health, one of the devotees checked on him at midnight. He looked fine and was sleeping soundly. Then he was checked on again at 3 a.m. This time things were different. Bhagawat was found on the floor and was unable to stand. He was helped to his bed and an ambulance was called. The paramedics were unable to determine the cause of his weakness. They, however, took him to the St. John's Hospital emergency room. He was thoroughly checked over by a doctor, a CAT scan was done, but no definite problem was discernible. He was kept in the hospital for observation. During the day his condition slowly deteriorated. It was determined the next day that he had suffered a stroke which progressed while in the hospital. He became paralyzed on the left side, affecting his ability to speak.

For two weeks he was in the hospital and then sent to a nursing home, just one block from the Ashrama. There, it was thought, he would undergo therapy to regain use, or partial use, of his limbs. This did not happen. His son Bhaskar explained to us how he was left with his family, and he thought to his son's home before Christmas and has remained there since. A home care worker attends on him from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Saturday. His family attends on him at other times. He is able to speak, but cannot walk. He thinks little about his physical limitations and was even enthused to join us on our trip to Arunachala in January 31. He is not in any particular pain, maintains a healthy appetite, a well-balanced lifelong trait, and is occasionally wheeled up to the Ashrama, which is only four blocks from his son's residence. Lastly, his mind is still freely fixed on his Guru and God, Sri Ramana. By simply mentioning His Name to him, one can watch how he melts in devotion.

Introduction to the interview video

by Swami Ramanananda Saraswati

PART 4

It has been fifty years since the Maha Nirvana of Bhagawan Sri Ramana Maharshi. I had the rare good fortune of being present on the night of April 14, 1950 when a brilliant star slowly sailed across the sky at the very moment the Maharshi took his last mortal breath.

Even more than this, my destiny has been uniquely connected to the Maharshi from my birth. My father, Nagasundaram Iyer, was the younger brother of Sri Bhagawan. Not long after I was born, my mother passed away, and when I was three years old, my father took sannyas and joined Sri Bhagawan and their mother, *Alagammai*, at Skandashram.

I was then lovingly raised by Bhagawan's sister, Alamelu, and her husband, Sri Pitchu Iyer. Since they had no children of their own, and none of my father's brothers had any issues, I became the only remaining descendent in my family's line.

As a child, I was brought to Tiruvannamalai two or three times each year to see Bhagawan, my father, and grandmother *Alagamma*, when she was still living. Sometimes I was left in the care of Bhagawan and stayed overnight in the Ashrama. Like a motherless child I would be put to sleep at night and then wake and wait me in the morning.

My life flowed on smoothly. I was married in 1929. All my seven children were brought to Bhagawan soon after their birth and He was pleased to bless them by giving them their names.

With Sri Bhagawan's consent and blessings I was requested in 1938 to move to Tiruvannamalai and assist my father, Sri Niranjanananda Swami, in managing the Ashram.

After my father was absorbed in Sri Bhagawan in 1953, I succeeded him as the Ashram manager and President.

In all humility, I can say that Bhagawan has showered on me incredible grace and blessings from my birth to this very day.

In 1984, my wife Nagalakshmi attained the holy feet of Sri Bhagawan. I continued serving in the Ashram until 1994, at which time I resigned, handed over the president-ship of the Ashram to my eldest son, Sri V.S. Ramanan, and took the vows of sannyas.

I now live a quiet life in the Ashram, remembering the holy presence of the Master and thanking Him for His innumerable blessings on me and all His devotees the world over.

After the Maharshi's Maha Nirvana we published many reminiscences about Bhagavan, written by devotees who moved closely with Him. These books are a valuable testimony to the ever-present, divine personality of the Master.

What you are about to see is yet another testimony to the living presence of Sri Ramana Maharshi. You will now hear from the lips of those who had the wonderful privilege of living under the watchful, loving eye of Sri Maharshi, who was perhaps the greatest Sage of the 20th Century.

I have known these devotees since I came here in 1938. We were like one family, and Bhagawan was our father, mother, our everything.

He continues to attract sincere devotees to Him from all over the world, as He lives, not only here in Sri Ramanasramam, but in the Hearts of all.

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

News from Sri Ramanasramam

The Maharshi's 49th Aradhana will be celebrated at His Shrine of Grace at Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, on Thursday, 13th May, 1999. Devotees are invited to participate and receive the blessings of Sri Bhagavan.

A Puja to mark the commencement of the renovation work at the Pataka Lingam Shrine in the Arunachaleswara Temple has performed on April 21. Sri Ramanasramam is undertaking the work. The expected cost will be approximately $20,000.

The inset photo of the Patala Lingam was taken early this century and shows the entrance to this underground shrine. It must have looked like this when the Maharshi occupied it soon after arriving in Tiruvannamalai in 1896.

The Journey of My Heart

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam

(part 10, continued from *Mar/Apr*)

PART 5

Friday, January 21, 1983 - Our last full day at Sri Ramanasramam

I met *Kunju Swami* in Ganesan's room, Paul had continued ahead to his own room. As usual Kunju Swami appeared light, happy, completely immersed in Bhagavan. "Kunju Swami has told me that what he told you on the hill, in this temple. He feels that time and distance have no meaning when it comes to Bhagavan," Ganesan reported.

"In Bhagavan's presence," *Kunju Swami* narrated, "there were always those who tried to let very close to him, as close as possible, for meditation. Others though, without being particular, might sit some place in the hall or outside and never feel the call that is in the eyes. Now and then he would look at those sitting far off. Those at a distance were the special recipients of his grace. Really, though, Sri Bhagavan was unique in his unrelenting practice of samadhanam. His grace fell equally on all. He was particular in seemingly small matters. For instance, in the dining hall he insisted on being served last." Kunju Swami said further: "On those devotees who made no demands on Bhagavan, on those who asked nothing of him, he showered his grace liberally. He may be deemed for greater or lesser roles in life, but in showering his grace, Bhagavan practiced equality."

In Paul's room, Kunju Swami presented Paul with a khadi shirt and an upper cloth which he placed over Paul's shoulders.

We sang "Ramana Sadguru" together. K. Natesan presented us both with copies of Sri Ramana Stuti Panchakam, in English and Tamil. Then *Kunju Swami* and Natesan taped for us the last four of the five hymns from the book.

While singing Bhagawan's hymns, Kunju Swami's mood was melted. He was intensely inbrahm, his eyes rimmed with tears of joy. He looked at no one-though his eyes were open, his mind was sunk deep within. This is a genuinely humble and happy human being, I thought. On this, our last night, Paul and I took the dust of Kunju Swami's feet with great feelings of reverence, gratitude and devotion.

Saturday, January 22, 1983 - Our Day of Departure

I stayed awake late into the night and, consequently, slept right through Paul's alarm. When I woke it was already starting to get light! I sprang from my bed and while running up to Bhagawan's Shrine to make my ablutions, I stopped at *Ramaswami Pillai's* room. I prostrated before him and took the dust of his feet.

"Think of Bhagawan always-before getting up, before eating, before doing any work and so on," he said. "This will help greatly in your present active life," he told me.

I went to Mother's Temple, *Apaduddhara* (the shrine), a.k.a. Apple's) was sweeping the outer room of the shrine and *Kittu* (another priest, now deceased) was standing nearby. I circled the steps to salute Apaduhr. "Please remember us when you do Sri Chakra Puja," I requested.

"And remember us when you listen to the tape of the pipe!" Kittu rejoined.

After breakfast I went to my room, quickly did last minute packing and, carrying my picture of Bhagawan, once again met Ramaswami.

"Master! You must take up Self-enquiry wholeheartedly! Whatever else you may be in this, you must do the vichara as if your life depended-on it. It is the one thing you MUST do!" Thus he pleaded with palms joined, standing by his door. "We will meet again. Come again soon!" These were his last words to me.

On our way to the last Puja and I took leave of our friends and acquaintances, and as we drove out of Sri Ramanasramam a crowd gathered on the steps to wave farewell. Paul and I felt overwhelmed by this touching scene. There was a lump in my throat and I could not speak. Paul, Ganesan, Kittu, *Apaschi*, T.R.S. and the office staff Natesan stood on the steps with palms joined. How hard it was to leave the love and affection of our friends, and the Mountain Itself and I felt immersed in the glow of Bhagawan's Grace. Therefore were we inclined to talk until well into the trip to Madras. As our taxi carried us out of the Ashram, my eyes were fixed on Sri Arunachala, the Mountain of Fire, the Mountain of Love, the mountain revered from time out now. Only now Ganges did it escape our sight. Yet the warmth of Bhagawan's love continued to envelop us with a sense of inward elation and jubilation. How blessed we felt, both inwardly and outwardly, by our seven-week stay.

Again and again I kept thinking, only the body leaves – this body is not I.

— by Evelyn Kawlow Saplner
(concluded)

Letters and Comments

Letters From Belgrade

PART 6

The following two E-mails were received in early April. Most of this were NATO air and missile attacks began in Belgrade. The writers, Slobandaka and Nebojsa, young and enthusiastic, are but two of a group of Yugoslavian devotees who have been intensely drawn to Bhagavan's teachings and who have been translating Sri Ramanasramam's publications into Yugoslavian. In another E-mail they expressed their frustration with the Milosevic government but, like other innocent citizens, they are suffering on account of NATO's military actions.

They have not responded to any E-mail since the first week of April.

From: ramanaa@EUnet.yu
To: Arunachala Ashrama

Dearest Friend, The start of the air attacks was not a surprise. Days before I intensively dreamt what I now can testify to. It was a dream of our Lord Ramana, which shall be translated to you some other time.

The first days were indeed terrible, until we got used to the ominous sound of the sirens warning us of the air danger. A priceless experience came to me the first night.

We had to go to the basement, mostly because the animals with us were so scared. It was a night of detonation, flying over of the airplanes; radio reports of the first missiles hitting; destroyed objects and victims, sitting silently in a dark, cold basement; animals shivering and moaning, terrified by the explosions; we tried to keep them around to set them at rest; the stone of Arunachala clinched firmly in hand; a little puppy on my lap carelessly asleep. Never before have I felt Ramana stronger and more intensely, nor have I more closely experienced death.

In that moment all needless contents of mind vanished completely. How divine was that feeling of 'releasing' and 'emptying' of ALL contents that were not I. Left was my love for Him and an unshakable feeling of protection, a feeling that I have neither sought nor prayed for, but felt. His face from that Picture I posted some of the Archival Films video, never shinier or brighter, breathes and possesses me as my only support.

Total surrender to Him. The fear had had paralyzed at first now turned to beaming and blissful peace. The sky was then so beautiful, so clean, scattered with stars. Ramana, Self, Arunachala-unity that brings the priceless and the most all-consuming realization of immortality; no loss, nothing to cry for, total feeling of fulfillment of one's goal in life, the whole being turned to Him.

It was wonderful and easy to merge into that fatal 'death', to surrender to Him - for there was no difference. He was everywhere. But, the physical 'death' did not happen. What happened here, and what is happening, has only positive connotations for me.

Forever in Him,
Slobodanka
Arunachala-Belgrad

Dear Friend,

You should not be worried about anything that is happening, and I am sure that you aren't, because you know that there is nowhere to go but in our own hearts. I hope you are all O.K., that your life is filled with grace and that all of you feel that peace for which we strive.

From: Nebojsa
To: Arunachala Ashrama

My illusions slowly disappear. I now see how many of them there are. And yet, how strange it is that under this shining sun we are able to value our little selves so much. What a shame for us.

I remember all your letters and sentences and many of them made a great impression on my memory. I know they are true and full-hearted and I thank you. To find such friends and well-wishers in life is truly rare.

This war is a great lesson for everyone, especially for those that want to learn. What they've only heard or read about in history books or seen in movies is now experienced in reality, or apparent reality. And, so far as I am concerned, I have a much different attitude and feeling about this now than I had before.

Earlier, I used to think about these problems over and over. Now it is different, I am different. This war and all other wars serve to illumine; they illumine the light of the Self. This process of Nature shows us that true peace can be found only within, even quickly, and that the outer events of life have their own course which need not disturb our inner peace.

There is nothing more to be said, only to forget all these words written and be in Bhagawan, where all this is an illusory letter on the paper of the Self.

Thank you for everything,
With Love,
Sasa you,
Nebojsa,
You be in your hearts,
Never let worry wear your hearts,
Be happy, be good,
Let love make you understand,
With no feeling but direction,
May we all be blessed and free
When He makes us see.

Worship is only self-enquiry

PART 7

The purpose of worshipping the Impersonal Supreme Being is the incessant remembrance of the truth that you are Brahman, because the meditation 'I am Brahman' comprises sacrifice, gifts, penance, ritual, prayer, yoga, and worship. The only way to overcome obstructions to your meditation is to turn the mind itself on itself on them and to introvert it into the Self and there witness unconcernedly all that happens; there is no other method. Do not even for a moment lose sight of the Self. Fixing the mind on the Self or the 'I' abiding in the Heart is the perfection of yoga, meditation, wisdom, devotion, and worship. Since the Supreme Being desires us the Self, constant surrender of the mind by absorption in the Self is said to constitute all forms of worship. Mind control and vichara are one and the same. The mind is itself the current, the ego-sense from it looks like a coiled serpent. The Sri Sukta says that Lakshmi and Alakshmi are merely mental qualities, hence to practice yoga. We project ourselves into time and worship them, because we do not understand true inward worship. Knowledge of the Self, which knows all, is Knowledge in perfection.

Distracted as we are by various thoughts, if we would continuously contemplate the Self, which is itself God, this single thought would in due course replace all distraction and would itself ultimately vanish; the pure Consciousness that alone finally remains is God. This is Liberation. Never to be heedless of one's own all-perfect pure Self is the acme of yoga, wisdom, and all other forms of spiritual practice. Even though the mind wanders restlessly, involved in external matters, and is forgetful of its own Self, one should remain alert and remember: 'The body is not I. Who am I?' Enquire in this way, turning the mind backward to its primal state. The enquiry 'Who am I?' is the only method of putting an end to all misery and ushering in supreme Beatitude. Whatever may be said and however phrased, this is the whole truth in a nutshell.

— From *Collected Works*, *"Self-Enquiry"*

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 *RSS* channel.