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My Father Hari Chand Khanna

by Ranvir Khanna

MP 1

*In the obituary section of the 1999 Aradhana issue of **The Mountain Path**, two members of the same family were featured. One was Ranvir Khanna; the other was his mother, Premvati Khanna. Both mother and son had the unique privilege of living in the proximity of Bhagavan for many months from 1939 to 1950, and remained lifelong devotees thereafter. Ranvir Khanna's father first visited Sri Maharshi in 1939, was transformed by His grace, and then brought his family into the Maharshi's fold.*

*Ranvir wrote the following memoirs about his father and his own early visits to Sri Ramanasramam before he was absorbed into the Feet of his Master on April 8, 1999. Also, in the book **Day by Day with Bhagavan**, the Khanna's earnestness is evident in the recorded questions they asked Bhagavan, whereas Bhagavan's solicitude for them is clearly apparent in his replies. We have also reproduced these dialogues on pages five and six.*



My grandfather was a very religious man known to sing bhajans the whole night long. He was also very well read and used to read the daily newspapers. In one of the newspapers of the early 1930's he read an article about Ramana Maharshi, who was said to be a Self-realized man living in Tiruvannamalai. He cut out the article with an intention to visit Sri Ramanasramam. He tried his best but could not make it. He kept that cutting for few years and then showed it to his son, Hari Chand Khanna, who was then living in Kanpur, working for the Oriental Insurance Company.

My father Hari Chand Khanna was born in the year 1905 in a small village called Satghara, which is now part of Pakistan. He was a hard working man. He first worked for the Indian railways and then joined an Insurance company.

One summer vacation, my uncle from Bibana, Madhya Pradesh, invited my father to come with his family for a visit. My uncle was then serving in the Railways in Bibana. My father agreed to the proposal and our family visited my uncle. After two days in Bibana my father made inquiries as to how to reach Tiruvannamalai and then set out on his own, leaving our family with my uncle. If my memory serves me right, this took place in 1939.

My father returned to Bibana after about ten days, and from his talk and behavior everyone could make out that he was a completely changed man. We all returned to Kanpur after almost a month's stay in Bibana.

On reaching Kanpur my father smashed all the liquor bottles and liquor glasses in his possession. He had always been an outgoing man, but now he started spending much more time at home reading Ramana's books and in meditation.

It was my father's practice to visit hill stations during the summer vacations to avoid the tremendous heat of Kanpur in the months of May and June. But ever since he visited Ramana, he would take the family to Tiruvannamalai during summer, a town as hot, if not hotter than Kanpur. He rented a house in the Bose compound, because in those days ladies were not allowed in the Ashram after sunset. Father used to write to Mr.Bose in advance, reserving one set of rooms for us. When we arrived, there would be one set each of chatai (floor mat), pillow and a patra. The chatai was for sleeping on, and the patra was for keeping the luggage. There was no electricity and no indoor plumbing. There were thatched rooms for bathrooms and huge cauldrons of water were kept boiling for baths. I remember the locals bathing with very hot water, saying that it was good for the body.

We used to spend almost a month at the Ashram. I was six or seven when we first started visiting the Ashram. At that time Bhagavan's brother, Niranjanananda Swami, was the sarvadhikari looking after the Ashram.

During those early visits, I remember that every night we would find father missing from his bed. Then he would return in the morning, saying he was with Bhagavan through the night, and if Bhagavan didn't sleep, he also kept awake. He considered it the greatest good fortune to be able to spend his nights with his Guru in the Old Hall.

Often large bus loads of pilgrims would come to Tiruvannamalai during the night for Bhagavan's darshan. The pilgrms would wait until dawn for the doors of the Old Hall to be opened. When Bhagavan noticed that, he asked the sarvadhikari to keep the doors open all the time. After that the doors to his room were kept open all the time. Devotees would enter through one door, have darshan and exit from the other door.

Our annual visits went on for some years, but then were suspended for a few years for reasons unknown to me, though my father was in constant touch with the Ashram. When again we resumed the annual visits to the Ashram, my father would sometimes carry bottles of the Ayurvedic medicine (Mahanarayan oil) for Bhagavan. Bhagavan had rheumatism in his legs and could not walk properly. No sooner was Bhagavan given the bottles of medicine than he would announce then and there that Khanna has brought Mahanarayan Oil, which relieves pain in the legs, and anyone with pain in their legs could make free use of the same.

There were many times when my father used to prepare questions to ask Bhagavan, but he said that most of the time his questions would get answered by Bhagavan without them being asked.

In those days the Ashram's financial condition was not good. My father would send money to the Ashram regularly when there was a need.

At the Ashram I remember feeling very happy when Bhagavan played with my younger sister Kusum, who was then maybe a year old. Bhagavan would hold one end of his staff, while Kusum played with the other. Bhagavan would lift and pull the staff away as the child reached out for it. Bhagavan used to call her Jhansi Ki Rani, after the courageous queen of Jhansi, who died fighting the British in the first war of independence in 1857. Afterwards, I used to tease Kusum with that name.

We were six brothers. Pitaji, my father, divided us in two groups, and I was made the leader of one group. My younger brother, Kailash, was in charge of the other group. Bhagavan used to go up the hill with one attendant carrying his kamandalu. Pitaji asked us to go and touch his feet. My brother Kailash was very bold and dynamic; I was shy and withdrawn. Kailash touched Bhagavan's feet; I could not. Pitaji was annoyed. That evening Bhagavan laughed and told everyone: "Today Khanna's son caught me on the Hill."

Bhagavan made loud clucking sounds, calling out to squirrels with peanuts in his hands. Squirrels ran all over His body. He used to call out to the monkeys with bananas in his hand and warn the attendants not to show their stick to the monkeys.

I was ten years old and at the Ashram, when one day Lakshmi the cow came running with her rope trailing behind her. She made her way through the crowd of people towards Bhagavan. The crowd parted to make way for her. Bhagavan got up from his seat and came towards her. She became calm at his touch.

In 1950, my father was working in LRCH Mills Ltd. He came home one evening and called me, his eldest son, and told me that on his way back from work he had an intuition that his Guru Ramana was not in good health and he felt that Ramana wanted my father to reach the Ashram immediately. He told me that though he had not even applied for leave, he must leave immediately with my mother and my young sister Kusum. He also added that he is fully aware that all his children have to attend school and sit for final exams, but still he could not wait. All three of them left immediately for Madras en route to Tiruvannamalai.

When he returned home he told me that upon reaching the Ashram, Niranjanananda Swami saw him coming and rushed towards him, informing him that Ramana Maharshi had asked twice if Khanna had arrived. On hearing this my father rushed to Bhagavan immediately. When Bhagavan saw him he smiled and then closed his glorious eyes forever.

Immediately after Ramana Maharshi's Mahanirvana, my father rushed to the town and bought a very large, beautiful garland for Bhagavan's body. When he reached the Ashram, a dispute between different groups was going on as to who would be the first to garland the Maharshi's body. On seeing my father, both the Brahmins and non Brahmins amicably settled that Khanna, one of the oldest and staunchest devotees, must be allowed to garland Bhagavan's body first. Thus my father was the first to garland the deceased body of Ramana.

Two more incidents which I still recall but do not remember the dates of are still fresh in my memory. One time I was visiting my parents in Kanpur and saw that my younger brother, who lived in Jabalpur had been visiting my parent's house for the past few days. I didn't know why he had come there. One day, in my presence, a friend of my father's came to see him and said that if he could borrow a few thousand rupees immediately (I don't recall the exact amount) he would be saved from losing his honor. My father immediately got up, brought out the money and gave it to him. The gentleman left.

No sooner had this visitor left, my brother started quarreling with my father, questioning him as to why he had given such a large sum to his friend, while his own son was sitting there for the last few days, asking him for a loan of a much smaller amount. My father then asked the whole family to gather in the drawing room so he could disclose the secret of how he ran his life.

After we had all gathered, he said that all the money and other things that he has belongs to God Ramana who has appointed him as His cashier. Everyone knows that a cashier is not the owner, and that he has to obey his Master's commands as to how to handle His money. In the same manner, whenever he has to spend money or give money to someone he has to take orders from the Almighty, which he does by closing his eyes and asking for orders, and the orders always come in the form of a 'Yes' or 'No'. Only after receiving such orders, he acts accordingly. He further added that he closed his eyes every day since my younger brother had arrived and waited for orders, and the reply was always 'No'.

My brother was, of course, not satisfied with the explanation given by my father. He left the house most disappointed and unhappy. After he left my father remarked that nothing is hidden from God, and maybe He knows that my son is a 'eat, drink, and be merry' man that may misuse His money and that's why the order was 'No'.

My father never took a receipt for the money he gave away, and if anyone returned the loan, he would call it a bonus and keep it. If some didn't pay back the loan, he would never comment. His attitude was it was Bhagavan's money, and was given at His command.

Thus my father was spending his life happily, prospering both materially and spiritually, until 1980. That year my younger brother, Group Captain K.C.Khanna, who was serving as an Air Attache at Cairo, met with a car accident in which all his family died, except his eldest son who was with me at the time.

This incident hurt my father very much and he started questioning Ramana Bhagavan as to how such a tragedy could happen to my brother who was a staunch devotee, and the loving son of another devotee (my father). For approximately two years he stopped visiting the Ashram. On the other hand, my mother accepted the deaths of Kailash, Suneeta and their two children. She recited Bhagavan's name continuously. Pitaji commented that Mataji's bhakti was superior to his. She was completely surrendered to Bhagavan. After some time he reconciled and his visits to Tiruvannamalai resumed.

In 1984, about two weeks prior to my father's death, I had called upon my father at Premavati Khanna Guest House (opposite the Ashram) and stayed with him for a week. During the course of my stay I told my father that this was his longest stay at the Ashram. He had already been there for two months and I inquired how much longer he intended to stay? He replied that he had come to stay in God's House (he always called Sri Ramanasramam 'God's House') and that he will stay as long as Ramana wants him to stay with him. I then told my father, "I can see that you are very happy here. But there is one cause of anxiety for me and that is, God forbid, if anything was to happen to you, there are no medical facilities available for specialized treatment in this area."

On hearing this, he lost his temper, something which he never did before, and started taking me to task, saying that I was a complete fool, etc., and that he was very disappointed in me. At the time I could not understand what I had done to anger my father, and I too became very sad. After almost half an hour of enduring this unbearable torture, he asked me where was I staying. I replied that I too was staying in Bhagavan's House. He immediately said that I had not the least common sense, and that I was a fool to think that God would not look after him, and that doctors and physicians would give him much better treatment than Bhagavan.

I then realized how foolish it was of me to think in that manner. I understood my mistake and apologized. I soon left for Bombay as planned.

After about ten days, I received an urgent call from the Ashram and was told that my father had expired. Although I tried my best to make immediate arrangements to leave for the Ashrama, I could not leave until the next day. I traveled by air to Bangalore and then by taxi to the Ashram, reaching there at noon.

All the while en route, I was very worried thinking of my mother who was all alone and couldn't speak English or any south Indian languages. I went on praying for her safety.

On reaching the Ashram, I rushed to the Guest house where I found father's body laid out and my mother sitting beside it very composed. On seeing me she said that I must proceed immediately with the cremation according to the Ashram tradition. I did so.

My father always used to say that all his desires have been fulfilled by God and that his last one wish was to die at his Father's Feet, Arunachala. I used to question as to how that is possible because he is a karma yogi and always in Kanpur. My father would always reply: "We will see." In spite of this, I was stunned when my father passed away at the Ashram in good health.

My mother told me that on the day he died they had just returned to their room from lunch, and she told him that she had prepared some desert (sweet dish). She went into the kitchen area to bring it for him. When she returned from the kitchen, she found him sitting in a chair unconscious. She called out loudly, but there was no response. She sent for others, and they also were unable to evoke a response. A Doctor was sent for and he immediately declared him dead.

Funeral rites were performed by me and others from the Ashram. The Ashram has honored him with a samadhi within the Ashram compound, and a yearly puja is done by the Ashram at his tomb.

During his life, my father's earnest desire was to explain Bhagavan's teachings to all who visited him at his house in Kanpur. He considered Bhagavan's teachings to be the simplest and the best. He also stressed that if one wanted to lead a happy and contented life, then the only way was to follow the teachings of Sri Bhagavan. Also, whenever he visited someone, he would explain the same. He used to tell everyone, and especially his children, not to be outgoing but to turn inward and enjoy one's true nature. He used to impress upon his children not to strive for material wealth, which one has to leave behind after death, but instead to aspire for the real, everlasting spiritual wealth, as taught by Sri Bhagavan Ramana.

Dialogues with H. C. Khanna

from '*Day by Day with Bhagavan*'

MP 2

1-6-46 In the afternoon Bhagavan explained in answer to Mr. H. C. Khanna of Kanpur:

"Why should your occupation or duties in life interfere with your spiritual effort? For instance, there is a difference between your activities at home and in the office. In your office activities you are detached and so long as you do your duty you do not care what happens or whether it results in gain or loss to the employer. But your duties at home are performed with attachment and you are all the time anxious as to whether they will bring advantage or disadvantage to you and your family.

"But it is possible to perform all the activities of life with detachment and regard only the Self as real. It is wrong to suppose that if one is fixed in the Self one's duties in life will not be properly performed. It is like an actor. He dresses and acts and even feels the part he is playing, but he knows really that he is not that character but someone else in real life. In the same way, why should the body consciousness or the feeling 'I-am-the-body' disturb you once you know for certain that you are not the body but the Self? Nothing that the body does should shake you from abidance in the Self. Such abidance will never interfere with the proper and effective discharge of whatever duties the body has, any more than the actor's being aware of his real status in life interferes with his acting a part on the stage.

"You ask whether you can tell yourself: 'I am not the body but the Self'. Of course, whenever you feel tempted to identify yourself with the body (as you may often have to, owing to old vasanas) it may be a help to remind yourself that you are not the body but the Self. But you should not make such repetition a mantram, constantly saying: 'I am not the body but the Self'. By proper enquiry into the Self, the notion 'I am this body' will gradually vanish and in time the faith that you are the Self will become unshakeable."

26-6-46 When the Mauni brought the mail today he was limping with a pain in his right thigh. Bhagavan advised him to rub some liniment on it and told the attendant to give him some. Bhagavan's small bottle for constant use was empty, so Bhagavan told the attendant to take the big bottle from the cupboard. Bhagavan told Vaikunta Vasar to take a small bottle of it to Mauni and see that he used it. When the large bottle was taken out of the cupboard Bhagavan noticed that it was not full, so he turned to Khanna, who had bought it for him, and said: "It looks as though you bought this for yourself or your children and then gave it to me when you saw what a state I am in. And perhaps the Chavanaprash you gave me was also bought for you or your children."

Khanna assured Bhagavan that the liniment was not needed for himself or his family but had been bought specially for Bhagavan, and he explained that the reason why the bottle was not full was that he had bought it in several smaller bottles and transferred it to this large one.

A little later he handed Bhagavan a piece of paper on which he had written something. After reading it, Bhagavan said: "It is a complaint. He says, 'I have been coming to you and this time I have remained nearly a month at your feet and I find no improvement at all in my condition. My vasanas are as strong as ever. When I go back, my friends will laugh at me and ask what good my stay here has done me'."

Then, turning to Khanna, Bhagavan said: "Why distress your mind by thinking that jnana has not come or that the vasanas have not disappeared? Don't give room for thoughts. In the last stanza of "*Sukavari*" in *Thyumanavar*, the Saint says much the same as is written on this paper." And Bhagavan made me read the stanza and translate it into English for the benefit of those who do not know Tamil]. It goes: "The mind mocks me and though I tell you ten thousand times you are indifferent, so how am I to attain peace and bliss?"

Then I said to Khanna: "You are not the only one who complains to Bhagavan like this. I have more than once complained in the same way, and I still do, for I find no improvement in myself."

Khanna replied: "It is not only that I find no improvement, but I think I have grown worse. The vasanas are stronger now. I can't understand it."

Bhagavan again quoted the last three stanzas of "Mandalathin" of *Thyumanavar*, where the mind is coaxed as the most generous and disinterested of givers, to go back to its birthplace, or source, and thus give the devotee peace and bliss, and he asked me to read out a translation of it that I once made.

Khanna then asked: "The illumination plus mind is jivatma, and the illumination alone is Paramatma; is that right?"

Bhagavan assented and then pointed to his towel and said: "We call this a white cloth, but the cloth and its whiteness cannot be separated, and it is the same with the illumination and the mind that unite to form the ego." Then he added: "The following illustration that is often given in books will also help you. The lamp in the theatre is the Parabrahman or the illumination, as you put it. It illumines itself and the stage and actors. We see the stage and the actors by its light, but its light still continues when there is no more play. Another illustration is an iron rod that is compared to the mind. Fire joins it and it becomes red-hot. It glows and can burn things, like fire, but still it has a definite shape, unlike fire. If we hammer it, it is the rod that receives the blows, not the fire. The rod is the jivatma and the fire the Self or Paramatma."

28-6-46 In the afternoon Khanna's wife appealed to Bhagavan in writing: "I am not learned in the scriptures and I find the method of Self-enquiry too hard for me. I am a woman with seven children and a lot of household cares, and it leaves me little time for meditation. I request Bhagavan to give me some simpler and easier method."

Bhagavan: "No learning or knowledge of scriptures is necessary to know the Self, as no man requires a mirror to see himself. All knowledge is required only to be given up eventually as not-Self. Nor is household work or cares with children necessarily an obstacle. If you can do nothing more, at least continue saying 'I, I to yourself mentally all the time, as advised in Who am I? Whatever work you may be doing and whether you are sitting, standing or walking, 'I' is the name of God. It is the first and greatest of all mantras. Even OM is second to it."

Khanna: The jiva is said to be mind plus illumination. What is it that desires Self-realization and what is it that obstructs our path to Self-realization? It is said that the mind obstructs and the illumination helps.

Bhagavan: "Although we describe the jiva as mind plus the reflected light of the Self, in actual practice, in life, you cannot separate the two, just as, in the illustrations we used yesterday, you can't separate cloth and whiteness in a white cloth or fire and iron in a red-hot rod. The mind can do nothing by itself. It emerges only with the illumination and can do no action, good or bad, except with the illumination. But while the illumination is always there, enabling the mind to act well or ill, the pleasure or pain resulting from such action is not felt by the illumination, just as when you hammer a red-hot rod, it is not the fire but the iron that gets the hammering."

Khanna: "Is there destiny? And if what is destined to happen will happen is there any use in prayer or effort, or should we just remain idle?"

Bhagavan: "There are only two ways to conquer destiny or be independent of it. One is to enquire for whom is this destiny and discover that only the ego is bound by destiny and not the Self, and that the ego is non-existent. The other way is to kill the ego by completely surrendering to the Lord, by realizing one's helplessness and saying all the time, 'Not I but Thou, oh Lord!', and giving up all sense of 'I' and 'mine' and leaving it to the Lord to do what he likes with you. Surrender can never be regarded as complete so long as the devotee wants this or that from the Lord. True surrender is love of God for the sake of love and nothing else, not even for the sake of salvation. In other words, complete effacement of the ego is necessary to conquer destiny, whether you achieve this effacement through Self-enquiry or through bhakti-marga."

Khanna: "Are our prayers granted?"

Bhagavan: "Yes, they are granted. No thought will go in vain. Every thought will produce its effect some time or other. Thought-force will never go in vain.

The Turning Point

by Natananda

MP 3

I WAS TWENTY YEARS OLD in 1917-18 and a schoolmaster. Being naturally of a pious disposition I used to go about from place to place frequently to have darshan of the deities installed in temples. A noble soul who saw this brought to me of his accord the two books (in Tamil), Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam and Sri Vivekananda Vijayam, and asked me to read them. As soon as I had read them I was seized with an intense longing to obtain the vision of God and find out the guru who would show the way to it. While I was engaged in this search I heard about the extraordinary greatness of Bhagavan Sri Ramana through a holy person whom I happened to meet at Sriperumbudur. On 2nd May, 1918, I saw Sri Ramana for the first time at Skandasramam on Arunachala.

I beseeched him fervently thus: "It is my great desire that I should actually experience your gracious wisdom. Kindly fulfil my desire." In those days Sri Ramana was not speaking much. Still he spoke kindly as follows: "Is it the body in front of me which desires to obtain my grace? Or is it the awareness within it? If it is the awareness, is it not now looking upon itself as the body and making this request? If so, tell the awareness first of all know its real nature. It will then automatically know God and my grace. The truth of this can be realized even now and here."

Besides speaking thus, he also explained it as follows through my own experience. "It is not the body which desires to obtain the grace. Therefore it is clear that it is awareness which shines as 'you'. To you who are of the nature of awareness there is no connection during sleep with the body, the senses, the vital airs and the mind. On waking up you identify yourself with the state of deep sleep-as you know. This is your experience. All that you have to do hereafter is to see that you do not identify yourself with them in the states of waking and dream also and to try to remain yourself as in the state of deep sleep-as you are by nature unattached, you have to convert the state of ignorant deep sleep, in which you are formless and unattached, into conscious deep sleep. It is only by doing this that you can remain established in your real nature. You should never forget that this experience will come only through long practice. This experience will make it clear that your real nature is not different from the nature of God".

— From *The Mountain Path*

Guidance in a Dream

MP 3

I HAD read a lot about how Bhagavan would give initiation and instructions to devotees in dreams. So I was thrilled when, one morning, I woke up recollecting a dream I had about Bhagavan.

There was some construction work going on. It was not a new building being built, rather some patchwork masonry being performed in the ceiling of an empty room. I was standing in the corner away from the doorway along with a companion, observing the mason. Bhagavan entered the room accompanied by an attendant, walking slowly with the aid of his stick. The faces of Bhagavan's attendant, my companion and the mason are a blur. I just know that somebody was there.

Bhagavan walked up to the mason and inspected the job, giving instructions by raising his stick and pointing to the place where work was being done. He then turned and walked towards me. I remember noticing that Bhagavan was wearing spectacles with a black rim and that his beard had black hair mixed with white. I think I must have expected him to inspect the work and leave the hall, for my heart was thudding heavily as he walked towards me. He stood close to me and said, looking directly into my eyes, " Stay in your heart. That's all there is to be done." He then turned and left the hall, and I woke up.

— A USA devotee, November 1999

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.

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