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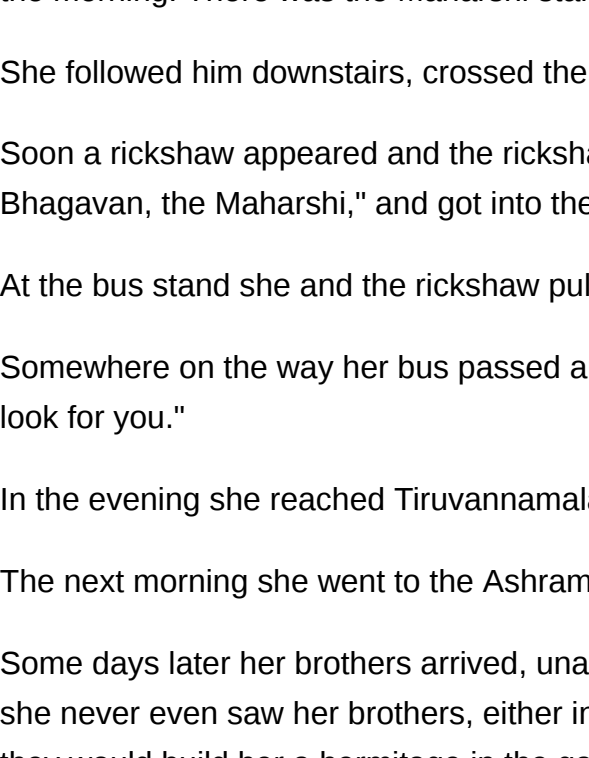
Sundarammal

by Swami Abhishiktananda

MP3

During April, 1953, Sundarammal arrived [at Arunachala] to spend forty-eight days in retreat in a hut close to that of Lakshmi Devi, for whom she had a great admiration. We were thus living very close to each other, but apart from the customary greetings, neither she nor I made any attempt to get into conversation.

One day, towards the end of her retreat, she invited me and some other sadhus to share a meal at her cell. It was the Telugu New Year's Day. It was then, before the meal began, that she told me her story.



She belonged to a wealthy Telugu family of Madras. She married young but very soon lost her husband. As a widow, she continued to live at home, surrounded by the love of her parents and brothers. She rarely went out, and when she did, it was always with her father. One day he took her to the neighboring temple to hear a talk given by a sadhu. This sadhu was a devotee of the Maharshi. He told his audience about the sage's 'conversion,' his disappearance from the world [leaving Madurai], his resort to the mountain of Arunachala, and the rest. Sundarammal was deeply moved. She begged her father to allow her to accompany some pilgrims to Arunachala. He refused, but promised that he would soon take her there himself.

But the promise was not fulfilled. Sundarammal passed the time thinking of Ramana and praying to him. She soon lost her appetite and was unable to sleep. But her father always had some specially urgent work which prevented him from taking her to Tiruvannamalai.

One afternoon, about four o'clock, she seemed to see Ramana coming down the mountain and approaching her. "Sundarammal, have no fear!" he said to her. "It is I. Enough of this weeping and not eating or sleeping. Come, I am expecting you." Her heart was filled with joy. Once more she appealed to her father, and once more he put off the pilgrimage to another day.

Some weeks later, she was alone one night in her room, weeping and calling on the Maharshi. Then, quite worn out, she fell asleep. Suddenly she felt a blow on her side and awoke with a start. It was about three o' clock in the morning. There was the Maharshi standing by the head of her cot. "Come," was all he said.

She followed him downstairs, crossed the hall and came out on the verandah. Hardly had she reached it when to her alarm she found herself alone. The Maharshi had disappeared. She sat down uneasily.

Soon a rickshaw appeared and the rickshaw puller said: "Is this Number 12, and are you Sundarammal? An old sadhu told me to come here and take you to the bus. Get in." Sundarammal thought quite simply, "It is Bhagavan, the Maharshi," and got into the rickshaw.

At the bus stand she and the rickshaw puller were both surprised not to find the old sadhu. However, she asked for the Tiruvannamalai bus and got in.

Somehow on the way her bus passed another one from which someone alighted and then entered the Tiruvannamalai bus. "Are you Sundarammal?" he asked. "Yes, I am," she replied. "Good. Bhagavan has sent me to look for you."

In the evening she reached Tiruvannamalai and retired for the night in one of the large halls kept for pilgrims. She prepared a cake to offer to Bhagavan and fell asleep full of joy.

The next morning she went to the Ashram and fell at the feet of Bhagavan. "Here you are at last," he said to her.

Some days later her brothers arrived, unable to understand how this child, who by herself had never set foot outside her home, could have managed to reach Tiruvannamalai. But Sundarammal was so deeply absorbed that she never even saw her brothers, either in the hall or at midday in the dining hall. Only in the evening were they able to approach her. They told her how upset everyone was at home and begged her to return. If she wanted, they would build her a hermitage in the garden. But nothing moved her and the brothers even spoke of taking her home by force. "If you do, I will throw myself into a well," she said. Her brothers had to yield, but they soon returned with their father. They found her in a cottage near the Ashram and arranged for her continued stay there as well as they could.

During the fifteen years that remained of the Maharshi's life, she never left Tiruvannamalai even for a day.

This was the story that Sundarammal told me that morning — Sundarammal who could never speak of God without her voice breaking with emotion and her eyes filling with tears.

— *The Mountain Path*, Oct. 1980

Rendered from French into English
by Father James Stuart

The Universe and Mind Control

MP3

The mind is like *akasa* (ether). Just as there are the objects in the *akasa*, so there are thoughts in the mind. The *akasa* is the counterpart of the mind and objects are of thought. One cannot hope to measure the universe and study the phenomena. It is impossible, for the objects are mental creations. To measure them is similar to trying to stamp with one's foot on the head of the shadow cast by oneself. The farther one moves the farther the shadow does also. So one cannot plant one's foot on the head of the shadow.... Similarly with the ignorant practitioner to study the universe. The universe is only an object created by the mind and has its being in the mind. It cannot be measured as an exterior entity. One must reach the Self in order to reach the universe.

Again people often ask how the mind is controlled. I say to them, "Show me the mind and then you will know what to do."

The fact is that the mind is only a bundle of thoughts. How can you extinguish it by the thought of doing so or by a desire? Your thoughts and desires are part and parcel of the mind. The mind is simply fattened by new thoughts rising up. Therefore it is foolish to attempt to kill the mind by means of the mind. The only way of doing it is to find its source and hold on to it. The mind will then fade away of its own accord.

— *Talks*, No.485

Srimati Kanakammal

MP3

Srimati Kanakammal doesn't need much coaxing to speak about the wonder of Sri Bhagavan and the blessings he showered on her. In the following videotaped interview, taken in Madras by Graham Boyd in March, 1999, she pours out her experiences and insights. These are only excerpts translated from Tamil by V. Swaminathan of New York.

How to speak ?

I would sit silently before Bhagavan. I was unable to ask him questions. But I would listen attentively whenever he answered others' questions. After all, even if I asked him, the replies would be the same. Occasionally, when I felt like something to Bhagavan, something within me would ask, "Would Bhagavan know about your doubt only if you asked him? Is he not within you also? Is it necessary to put your doubts in words?" Such thoughts would prevent me from speaking out. But again, I would observe devotees like *Devaraja Mudaliar*, *G. V. Subbaramaya*, Sambasiva Rao and others converse freely with Bhagavan and wonder: "These people are so free with Bhagavan, then why not me too?"

In those days, Bhagavan was sitting in the Jubilee Hall. I would enter from the Old Hall and Bhagavan would be able to see me only after I turned into the Jubilee Hall. A wall would obstruct his view until then. In the Old Hall, I would muster courage and resolve that I would definitely speak to Bhagavan on that day. But the moment I turned into the Jubilee Hall, all my courage would evaporate. I would almost feel something tangibly dropping away from me, as if something was being emptied out. My walk would slow down considerably. Beyond a point, I'll practically have to drag myself towards Bhagavan. To compound matters, on some such days, Bhagavan would look directly at me. I could not bear it when Bhagavan looked directly at me. The intensity of his gaze would push me inwards. In such situations, I would just prostrate and sit down quietly, not even bothering to go up front near him. Bhagavan's look would push me inside and I would sit quietly there for the whole day. This is what would happen to me again and again in His presence.

Eager to talk to Bhagavan I sought the help of *Anandammal*, who often sat next to me. "I want to talk to Bhagavan," I told her, "but I am unable to bring myself to do so. However, despite the absence of words, I still get the peace and satisfaction that I would if I talked to him. What should I do?" Anandammal smiled and remained silent.

The next day I wanted to go for a pradakshina around Arunachala. As I could not go alone, *Anandammal* would accompany me. When I went to take Bhagavan's permission at about 5 a.m., no one else was present. I thought that this would be my best opportunity to speak to Bhagavan. As I prostrate before him, I thought, "What do I ask him?" On such occasions, I would think, "What do you know? What will you ask this divine being at whose very sight you become tongue-tied?" All my questions would then remained bottled-up inside me. On that day, somehow mustering courage, I managed to speak out, "Bhagavan! I am going for pradakshina." I did not know what else to say. Bhagavan, who was reclining on the sofa came forward towards me and said, "Uh! What?" I then realized that although I requested permission to go for pradakshina, no sound came from my mouth. Only my lips moved. Again, I tried telling Bhagavan, with the same result. Bhagavan then said, "Oh! So you are going for the pradakshina? Who is accompanying you?" Anandammal, who had come to the hall by then and was standing beside me said, "Bhagavan, I am going." Bhagavan said "Very Good! Very Good" and gave a beatific smile. Thus, despite several opportunities to do so, I was never able to speak to Bhagavan. So how could I ask him anything? And what was I to ask? Some people told me to ask him whatever doubts came to me in my sadhana. But then it would occur to me that if we did sadhana the way Bhagavan asked us to, then there is absolutely no room for doubt. Such doubts are only on account of our own mistakes in not following Bhagavan. Thus, I never asked Bhagavan any questions.

Look of Grace

This incident took place when Bhagavan had moved into the new hall. During those days, the front row closest to Bhagavan was reserved for important people, although Bhagavan did not know about it. There was a specific unspoken seating arrangement and others who occupied those places would even be asked to go and sit elsewhere. On this day, Rani Mazumdar and myself were sitting by the window at the end of the hall when we noticed that the front row was empty. Rani suggested that the two of us could sit there close to Bhagavan. I agreed. The front row would begin at the pillars closest to Bhagavan's couch. No one could sit right beside the couch in order to give people room to move about. On seeing the two of us, a telugu lady called Kameswaramma also came and sat next to us in the front row. The three of us were directly facing Bhagavan.

As soon as we had settled there, Bhagavan began looking directly at me. Unable to bear the intensity of his direct look, I immediately closed my eyes. How long I remained like that I do not know, but sometime later, I opened my eyes and found Bhagavan seated motionless looking at me just as before. Again I closed my eyes. Sometime later, Mauni Srinivasa Rao came with the day's mail. Hearing Bhagavan talk to him, I opened my eyes. However, I was still in the same state that I was in when my eyes were closed and whatever was happening didn't really register in my mind. After attending to the correspondence, Bhagavan got up to leave for the cow shed. I got up along with everybody else but again without any real awareness of my surroundings.

Kameswaramma, who was sitting next to me, hugged me and said, "*Kanakamma*, you are extremely fortunate. Ever since you sat there, Bhagavan has been steadily looking directly at you up until the Mauni came with the mail. You have got everything. Bhagavan has given you all that you need." So saying, she hugged me close to her. But I was in no state to give a reply. I just told her, "Tears are streaming down my eyes. I don't know what to say." The waves of peace coming over me kept me from talking.

The Power of Bhagavan's Presence

Several prominent personalities and people of high social standing, wealth and prestige would visit Bhagavan. Seated inside the hall, when I observed them coming to meet Bhagavan, I could see that they were very conscious of their status, position and power. Their walk and bearing would clearly display such a consciousness. However, the moment they crossed the doorway into the hall and walked into Bhagavan's presence, there would be a remarkable transformation in their behavior, almost from tiger to kitten. Without being told anything, they would automatically fold their hands and stand bowed in respect before Bhagavan. We may see a form sitting on the couch, but the real Bhagavan is the spiritual force radiating everywhere that subdues everybody's ego even as they enter his presence. Everyone has to remove their ego and leave it outside, as it were, and sit quietly in Bhagavan's presence.

Another thing about Bhagavan was that his look would never vary irrespective of whether the person is a long-standing devotee or somebody visiting casually for the first time. It is we who interpret his looks according to our own state of mind. There would be no differentiation in his looks. Still, everybody could tell what he wanted to convey by his look. Such was the characteristic of Bhagavan's look, and it was unique to him.

His Continued Presence

The wonder of Bhagavan is this: At least people like us were fortunate to see Bhagavan in the body and live with him. Our attraction to Bhagavan was greatly enhanced by being able to observe him in daily life. But even if one goes to Sri Ramanasramam today, one can see devotees enter the hall with tears in their eyes, prostrate before Bhagavan and meditate, for how long even they do not know. Whenever they learn about some old devotee of Bhagavan who is still alive, they immediately seek them out and tell them, "You have been so fortunate to live and meditate in Bhagavan's physical presence. We get such peace of mind even in our short and infrequent stays here." For people like us who have lived with and enjoyed the physical presence of Bhagavan, being devoted to him is no great deal. What happened to me would have happened to you also had you been there in my place.

Today, I find people who have never seen Bhagavan physically, never heard his voice or listened to his upadesa, sit in the Old Hall or the Samadhi Hall, oblivious of themselves, often shedding tears, and going round the hall as if impelled by some unseen force. What gives these people their experiences? As Bhagavan always said, "Is this body Bhagavan?" When somebody expressed sadness at having to go back home from the Ashram, Bhagavan said, "What am I to do? You say that this body is Bhagavan. I say that it is not. Now, if you insist, what am I to do?" To others, he would say, "Look! He says he is going to a place where I am not." These new devotees of Bhagavan are proof of all he told us.

In those days, one could count the number of devotees on one's fingers. Today, there is not enough space in the meditation hall and we have devotees sitting in the Samadhi Hall and the Mother's Temple. A new dining hall has become necessary. It is Bhagavan's wonderful shakti that draws people here and keeps them here. After all, it is said that one gets moksha when one even thinks of Arunachala. There is hardly a person who does not long to return to Arunachala even as he is departing after a visit. He would leave wondering when he would have the next darshan of Bhagavan. Only now he refers to Bhagavan's samadhi rather than his physical body.

It was in Arunachala that goddess Ambika became one half of Lord Shiva. Hence, in Arunachala, the meditations of women will definitely attain fruition. Also, there are no temples for the mothers of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna, but Bhagavan himself had a temple built for his *mother Alagammal* in Arunachala. Nobody can say how big the Ashram will grow in the future.

In fact, Bhagavan's power and influence have grown stronger since his Mahasamadhi. *Muruganar* once said "Bhagavan's real power will be seen not now, but only a few hundred years after his physical body is no more. But we will not be around to see those days".

Just as Bhagavan used to guide devotees when in his body, he continues to guide people who come to him in the same way, in accordance with each person's temperament. Immediately after Bhagavan's mahasamadhi, even I used to wonder how I could continue to stay at the Ashram. While most devotees left the Ashram then, they all came back, just like the birds to the "*pai maram*". Today, the number of devotees has multiplied a hundred times over. Everywhere we have Ramana Kendras and Ramana Bhakta Sabhas. I don't have the competence even to speak about Bhagavan's shakti. See, these people are so eager to videotape me speaking about Bhagavan. Isn't this also Bhagavan's doing?

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As the mind tends to go out, turn it inwards then and there.
It goes out owing to the habit of looking for happiness outside oneself, but the knowledge that the external objects are not the cause of happiness will keep it in check. This is *vairagya* or dispassion. Only after perfect *vairagya* the mind becomes steady.

— *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*, No.344

Sri Ramana Maharshi's

50th Mahanirvana Anniversary

MP3

On April 14, 1950, Sri Ramana Maharshi took his last mortal breath and entered into Mahasamadhi, while crowds of devotees chanted "Arunachala Siva" and a bright star slowly moved across the sky, falling out of sight behind the holy Arunachala Mountain. It was a dramatic end to a life filled with few outwardly dramatic events. Yet, out of the numerous divine spiritual personalities who made their appearance in the 20th Century, there are very few like him who evoked such veneration and devotion during their lifetime and, after their death, continue to attract seekers, casting a profound influence upon their hearts and minds.

It is well known that on his death bed the Maharshi assured his disciples of his continued presence. After the passing of fifty years this assurance has been demonstrated, corroborated and experienced by countless aspirants. We can testify that the incidence of his influence is, in fact, increasing.

In contrast to Christian evangelism, the Maharshi's teachings are spreading in a mostly subtle manner. There is no International institution formed to spread his message to the world. Nor did he ever ask anyone to take up such an endeavor. Rather, he requested reformers and teachers to reform and teach themselves first, to realize their Self, assuring that the very act of doing this will set in motion the most powerful influence available to remove suffering and establish peace. He was himself the perfect example of this process. His life has set off repercussions extending beyond the mere realm of spiritual truths. Academics from various disciplines are discovering a mine of gems buried within his utterances and demonstrated by his life. Even after fifty years we are unable to fathom to what extent his personality will influence mankind. Kanakamma reported that *Muruganar* once said, "Bhagavan's real power will be seen not now, but only a few hundred years after his physical body is no more."

As members of Arunachala Ashrama, we are daily reminded of his pervasive and steadily-growing influence. We feel fortunate to be given the opportunity to witness his grace and guidance spreading throughout the world and to attend to the needs of those who feel his divine charm and power.

His Fiftieth Aradhana

This year, according to the Tamil calendar, Sri Bhagavan's Aradhana Day falls on May 1. Sri Ramanasramam in India is planning to observe it in a grand manner.

The President of Sri Ramanasramam, Sri V. S. Ramanan, has agreed to travel to New York after the program in India so that we could have him present at our Aradhana program on Sunday, May 7th. This will take place in The Community Center of the Hindu Temple Society of North America (Ganesha Temple) in Queens, New York.

In our *May issue* of the *MAHARSHI*, which we plan to send out in April, the details of the program and directions to it will be printed. As you who read this, are among those who have felt the blessings of the Maharshi's continued presence, we ask that you please keep Sunday, May 7th open, so you can join us in remembering the One who physically left us fifty years ago, but yet remains today an undeniable source of peace and strength.

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Service

MP3

The Lord of the Universe does not need our services. If occasionally we do something for the devotees, it is out of his compassion for us. Serving the devotees in however humble a way is service to Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan served the devotees in a unique way. He used to get up around 2 o' clock in the morning, cut vegetables and prepared food for them, day after day, for years. He used to grind rice for idly; he used to prepare chutney, etc., day after day out of love for the devotees. He is happy when a devotee serves other devotees without expecting anything in return. If we are given an opportunity to serve a devotee in any way, it is because of the grace of Sri Bhagavan. We cannot choose to serve; we are chosen by him.

— Dr. K. Subrahmanian

120th Jayanti celebrated in the New York Ashram

Devotees, mostly from the Tri-State area, gathered in Arunachala Ashrama in New York City on Sunday, January 2, to celebrate the 120th birth anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi. About 80 devotees joined in the recitation of the "*Marital Garland of Letters*" and other Tamil and Sanskrit works of Sri Bhagavan.

Excerpts from an *inspired videotaped interview* of Srimati Kanakammal, recorded in March of 1999, were played for the devotees. V. Swaminathan interpreted it into English (for the text, see *article 3*).

Arati was performed and the devotees were served a meal, devoutly prepared for the occasion.



Ron Ridolfo who consistently, with sincere devotion, adorns the altar with garlanded flowers and incense prior to every function

click on a large image

A Children's Ashram in Nova Scotia

MP3

RESPONDING to the suggestions from families, the Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama is planning to offer a five day "Children's Ashram" program from July 1 to July 5 this summer. The main objectives of this program are to bring all the children of Bhagavan/Ramana's family together, to create an atmosphere of learning, and to deepen the understanding of the Master's life and teachings.

Morning activities will start with simple hatha yoga instructions and meditation, followed by classes in chanting, the life of Sri Ramana Maharshi, and the importance of Arunachala. These classes will also introduce the history and geography of the times and places relating to the Maharshi's life through a variety of interactive activities.

In the afternoons we will have supervised group activities, e. g., swimming, biking, nature hikes, canoeing, games, etc.

After the evening meal the children will meet in the temple to sing bhajans, recite some of Bhagavan's works, or do simple puja. The day will end with a short meditation.

With Bhagavan's grace and everyone's enthusiasm, this first offering of an Ashram experience for children may become a reality. Families that accompany their children to the Nova Scotia Ashram can extend their visit to the Ashram, either by arriving before the program begins or staying on after it is completed.

For more information, or if you wish to enroll your children, or participate in this programme in any way, please call Geeta: (718) 575-3215

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.