The Maharshi Newsletters

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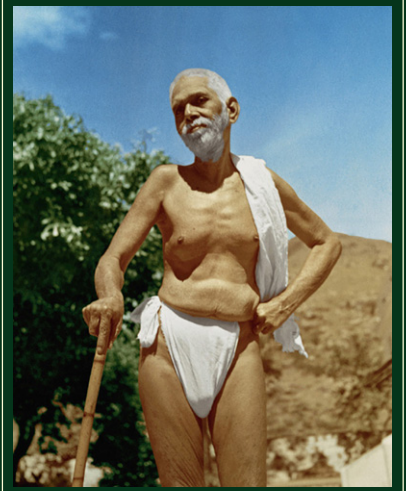

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and Mount Arunachala

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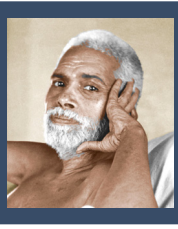
THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

MARCH / APRIL 1991 EDITED BY - DENNIS HARTEL & DR. ANIL K. SHARMA VOL. 1 - NO. 1



As I Saw Him - 1

by

Sadhu Arunachala

To try to describe my reactions when I first came into the presence of Bhagavan is difficult. I felt the tremendous peace of his presence, his graciousness. It was not as though I was meeting him for the first time. It seemed that I had always known him. It was not even like the renewal of an old acquaintanceship. It had always been there though I had not been conscious of it at the time. Now I knew.

It was only afterwards, when I had dwelt in India for some time, that I began to realise how gracious Bhagavan had been to me from the very first. And this attitude of mine was to my advantage. Bhagavan responded to people's reactions. If you behaved absolutely naturally, with no strain, Bhagavan's behaviour was similar.

When I entered the Hall for the first time, Bhagavan was seated on his couch, facing the door. It was about seven o'clock and he had just returned from his stroll on the Hill. Bhagavan adored the Hill and was never happier than when wandering about its slopes. He greeted me with his lovely smile and asked if I had had my breakfast, and then told me to sit down. Bhagavan talked to me the whole morning till it was time for the midday meal. He asked me many questions about myself and my life. All this seemed quite natural. Later I was to discover that he usually greeted visitors with a glance, made a few remarks and then remained silent, or waited for them to put their doubts and question him so that he might answer. Or often he appeared unconscious that anybody had entered, though this was only in appearance, for he was always fully conscious.

I found when I had been in the Ashram a short time and was beginning to know my way about, that the best time to catch Bhagavan alone was at one o'clock in the afternoon when he came back from the Hill. Everyone who could would have slipped away for a siesta, except for one attendant whose duty it was to remain with Bhagavan in case he needed anything. This was before the days of electricity so a punkah had been hung just over Bhagavan's couch and this would be kept in lazy motion by a sleepy attendant who was himself dying to run off and have a sleep. At times I would take his duty and let him go, at others I would sit up near the head of Bhagavan's couch and talk to him. It was during these quiet hours that he instructed me and those quiet hours spent with him then were the most valuable of all.

Bhagavan was a very beautiful person; he shone with a visible light or aura. He had the most delicate hands I have ever seen with which alone he could express himself, one might almost say, talk. His features were regular and the wonder of his eyes was famous. His forehead was high and the dome of his head the highest I have ever seen. As this in India is known as the dome of wisdom it is only natural that it should be so. His body was well-formed and of only medium height, but this was not apparent as his personality was so dominant that one looked upon him as tall. He had a great sense of humour and when talking a smile was never far from his face.

He had many jokes in his repertoire and was a magnificent actor; he would always dramatise the protagonist of any story he related. When the recital was very pathetic, Bhagavan would be filled with emotion and unable to proceed. When people came to him with their family stories he would laugh with the happy and at times

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shed tears with the bereaved. In this way, he seemed to reciprocate the emotions of others. Bhagavan never raised his voice and, if he did occasionally seem angry, there was no sign of it on the surface of his peace. Talk to him immediately afterwards and he would answer calmly and quite undisturbed. He would never touch money, not because he hated it - he knew that for the purpose of daily life it was necessary - but he had never any need of it and was not interested in it.

People said that Bhagavan would not talk but this was untrue, as were many other foolish legends about him. He did not speak unnecessarily and his apparent silence only showed how much foolish chatter usually goes on amongst ourselves. He preferred every sort of simplicity and liked to sit on the floor, but a couch had been forced upon him and this became his home for most of the twenty-four hours of the day. He would never, if he could help it, allow any preference to be shown to him and in the dining room he was adamant on this point. Even if some special medicine or tonic were given to him he wanted to share it with everybody. "If it is good for me, then it must be good for the rest," he would argue and make them distribute it round the dining hall. He would wander out to the Hill several times a day, and if any attachment to anything on earth could be said of him, it was surely an attachment to the Hill. He loved it and said it was God Himself.

Approached in the right way, Bhagavan would advise, though the majority of people who moved with him would deny it. They had never tried in the right way or, more probably, never intended to take permission at all. They thus bluffed themselves into thinking that he had given them leave and in this way did what they themselves had intended to do.

Bhagavan was invariably kind to all animals though he did not like cats or, I believe, mongooses; this was principally because the cats hunted his beloved squirrels or chipmunks. These squirrels used to run in and out of the Hall window over his couch and even his body. He would feed them with nuts and stroke them; some of them even had names. Their chief ambition seemed to be to make nests behind his pillows so that they might bring up their families under his protection.

On February 5th, 1949 the tragedy of the final illness had its inception. Bhagavan had been frequently rubbing his left elbow which was causing some irritation. His attendant inspected this to see what was the trouble and found a small lump the size of a pea. The doctor decided that it was only a small matter and should be removed by a local anaesthetic, and the operation was quietly performed in Bhagavan's bathroom one morning just before the meal. This was the beginning of the end. The curtain on the last act was slowly descending. The growth turned out to be sarcoma.

I feel that I should not let the occasion pass without saying a word to those who doubt the continued presence of our Guru amongst us. Though we talk as though he were dead, he is indeed here and very much alive as he promised, in spite of appearances.

Often visitors have remarked, "But one can feel him more strongly than ever." Of course, one misses the physical presence, the opportunity to ask questions, the delight of his greeting, the humour of his approach, and most of all his understanding and sympathy. Yes, one certainly misses all that, but one never doubts for a moment that he is still here when one has taken the trouble to visit his tomb.

When Sri Ramana lay dying, people went to him and begged him to remain for a while longer as they needed his help. His reply is well known:

"Go! Where can I go ? I shall always be here."

The power of Sri Ramana, who gave up his physical form, has not diminished. He is everywhere, like the light in a room shed by an electric bulb. But the light is found to be far stronger near the bulb, the source of light, than in any other part of the room, though no spot is in darkness. What wonder, then, if the power of our Guru is found near the place where his body is interred.

From - A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi

SELF REALISATION

By

Sri Ramana Maharshi

We usually identify ourselves in terms of name and form: "I am John, forty years old, 180 pounds. I have this job and live with that family, etc." This is all quite natural.

But those fortunate few who are destined to look deeper into their own nature will discover a Self much different from what outward circumstances dictate. The eternal, free and perfect Self is always present within us, while the veils of body-identification prevent us from experiencing who, in fact, we really are. The Maharshi stresses this point again and again.

In the following extract from Gems from Bhagavan, we are reminded of this truth and inspired to realise the True Self.

THE STATE WE CALL realisation is simply being oneself, not knowing anything or becoming anything. If one has realised, he is that which alone is, and which alone has always been. He cannot describe that state. He can only be That. Of course we loosely talk of Self-Realisation for want of a better term.

That which is, is peace. All that we need do is to keep quiet. Peace is our real nature. We spoil it. What is required is that we cease to spoil it. If we remove all the rubbish from the mind, the peace will become manifest. That which is obstructing the peace must be removed. Peace is the only reality.

Our real nature is *mukti*. But we are imagining that we are bound and are making various strenuous attempts to become free, while we are all the time free. This will be understood only when we reach that stage. We will be surprised that we frantically were trying to attain something which we have always been and are. It is another name for us.

Our wanting *mukti* is a very funny thing. It is like a man who is in the shade voluntarily leaving the shade, going into the sun, feeling the severity of the heat there, making great efforts to get back into the shade and then rejoicing 'How sweet is the shade. I have after all reached the shade!' We are doing exactly the same. We are not different from the reality. We imagine we are different, *i.e.*, we create the *bheda bhava* (the feeling of difference) and then undergo great *sadhanas* to get rid of the *bheda bhava* and realise the oneness. Why imagine or create the *bheda bhava* and then destroy it?

It is false to speak of realisation. What is there to realise? The real is as it is, ever. How to realise it ? All that is required is this. We have realised the unreal, *i.e.*, regarded as real what is unreal. We have to give up this attitude. That is all that is required for us to attain *jnana*. We are not creating anything new or achieving something which we did not have before.

Effortless and choiceless awareness is our real state. If we can attain it or be in it, it is all right. But one cannot

reach it without effort, the effort of deliberate meditation. All the age long *vasanas* (impressions) carry the mind outwards and turn it to external objects. All such thoughts have to be given up and the mind turned inward. For that, effort is necessary, for most people. Of course everybody, every book says 'Be quiet or still'. But it is not easy. That is why all this effort is necessary.

There is a state beyond our efforts or effortlessness. Until that is realised effort is necessary. After tasting such bliss even once, one will repeatedly try to regain it. Having once experienced the bliss of peace, no one would like to be out of it or engage himself otherwise.

You may go on reading any number of books on Vedanta. They can only tell you 'Realise the Self'. The Self cannot be found in books. You have to find it for yourself in yourself.

If we regard ourselves as the doers of action we shall also be the enjoyers of the fruits of such action. If by enquiring who does these actions one realises one's Self, the sense that one is the doer vanishes and with it go all the three kinds of *Karma* (*viz. sanchita, Agama and prarabdha*). This is the state of Eternal *Mukti* or Liberation.

The power of the sage's Self-Realisation is more powerful than all occult powers. To the sage there are no others. But what is the highest benefit that can be conferred on 'others' as we call them ? It is happiness. Happiness is born of peace. Peace can reign only when there is no disturbance by thought. When the mind has been annihilated there will be perfect peace. As there is no mind the sage cannot be aware of others. But the mere fact of his Self-Realisation is enough to make all others peaceful and happy.

PROMINENT PUBLICATIONS

Featuring reviews of lesser-known but highly-regarded books from Sri Ramanasramam

A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi

by

Sadhu Arunachala (A. W. Chadwick)

The first article in this issue, "As I Saw Him," is a collection of passages from this fascinating book.

When the author was in South America serving as a British army major in 1935, he read Paul Brunton's book, A Search In Secret India. He was so captivated with the chapters on the Maharshi that he resigned his position and travelled to India, arriving at Ramanasramam on November first of the same year.

This move was not a reckless or impulsive one, for, as revealed in his book, we see him as a mature seeker who had been practising meditation for many years; and, once arriving in the presence of the Maharshi, he felt perfectly at home. In fact, he remained there to his end in 1962.

Bhagavan once commented, "Chadwick was with us before, he is one of us. He had some desire to be born in the West, and that is now fulfilled."

Sadhu Arunachala (the name given him by the Maharshi) was a man of vast experience and keen intelligence. His grasp of the Master's teachings was impeccable and intuitive. Equally impeccable were his observations and interpretations of certain incidents relating to Bhagavan. He witnessed the Maharshi's approval of a will; Bhagavan's participation in the construction and consecration of the temple over the Mother's grave; and the visit of the celebrated author, Somerset Maugham. On these and other matters he unmasks the true spirit of the Maharshi, constructing before our eyes an unforgettable personality.

This book is naturally captivating and as easy to read as it is to breathe. The reason is that it has been written by an intimate, Western disciple who lived for fifteen years with the Maharshi - physically - and has now been absorbed in Him for all time.

Within fifty-eight pages, the compiler has gathered all the salient teachings of the Maharshi and set them forth in thirteen chapters.

A study of this small, precious book will equip the reader with the full breadth and depth of all of Bhagavan's teachings. For example, chapter three, "Mind"; chapter four, "Who Am I?" Enquiry; chapter five, "Surrender"; and chapter nine, "Heart," serve to crystallise the direct method to "Self Realisation," which is the title to chapter eight.

An earnest aspirant will keep this book close at hand, for the Maharshi's instructions on almost all subjects of *sadhana* are readily and clearly presented. Truly, no other book is necessary to understand the teachings and tread the path taught by the Master.

The compiler, A. Devaraja Mudaliar, was a lifelong devotee of Bhagavan, resided with him for some years, and has several other excellent books to his credit. But in this book he has performed a yeoman service by providing us with a veritable wealth in the form of numerous Gems From Bhagavan.

SIVA'S TEARS OF BLISS

A letter from Sri Ramanasramam, dated November 28, 1990

"When we arrived in Tiruvannamalai on Sunday evening the rain was pouring down and it continued non-stop until Tuesday morning. There are mud puddles on all the roads, the vegetation is sporting a cheerful countenance and all the tanks and ponds around the Hill are filling up. Today it is cloudy and the peak of Arunachala has been covered with holy ashes [clouds] most of the time. Yesterday we went round the Hill and saw all the streams full and rushing. They seemed like Siva's tears of bliss flowing in streams down His face to His children below...."

Signed: Lingeswara Rao

WILL YOU NOT LET ME GO?

By Sadhu Arunachala (Major A.W. Chadwick, O.B.E.)
From The Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1946

Will you not let me go ?
Like some insidious druggist you would make
Me come with craven pleading to your door,
And beg you of your mercy let me take
From out your potent wares a little more.
And so, You will not let me go.

Will you not let me go ?
Here, in an alien land I pass my hours,
Far from my country and all former ties.
A restless longing slowly me devours
That me all wordly happiness denies.
And so, Will you not let me go ?

Will you not let me go ?
You tell me, "Yes, I do not keep you here."
That's but your fun. Why else should I stay ?
While months pass by and mount up year by year
So that it seems I'll never go away.
And so, You do not let me go.

Will you not let me go ?
Nay, I'm a fool, I cannot if I would.
I am your slave, do with me what you will.
That you should all deny, well, that is good.
If it so pleases you. I'll speak no ill.
And so, Refuse to let me go!

Will you not let me go ?
I'm only sorry wax beneath your hands.
You've striven long to mould me into shape.
Your endless patience no one understands;
Your boundless love there's no escape.
And so, You'll never let me go.

Will you not let me go ?
I'm a fool that I should try to flee,
For here, there is a peace I'll never find
When I the least am separate from Thee;
Then I'll be but a slave to caitiff mind.
And so, I do not wish to go.

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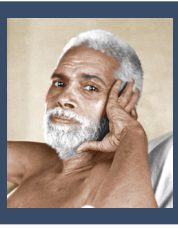

AS I SAW HIM - 2

By S. S. Cohen

The third of February 1936, early morning, saw my horse-cart rolling on the uneven two-and-a-half mile road from Tiruvannamalai railway station to Ramanasramam. Two sleepless nights in the train from Bombay found me tired in body and mind. My head was swimming and my senses confused. I had hoped for some rest at the Ashram, but when I arrived there at last there was not a soul to be seen anywhere. Presently, a corpulent man with a giant, rugged head and scarlet-red lips from perpetual chewing of betel nuts appeared. "Is that Mr. Cohen? Follow me quickly before the Maharshi goes out for his walk," he called out. I obeyed, extremely eager to see the great sage who had haunted me night and day for three long months. I was led to a small dining room, at the door of which I was asked to remove my shoes. As I was trying to unlace them my eyes fell on a pleasant-looking middle-aged man inside the room, wearing nothing but a *koupina*, with eyes as cool as moonbeams, sitting on the floor before a leaf-plate nearly emptied and beckoning me with the gentlest of nods and the sweetest smile imaginable.

It was then the Ashram's custom to honour the newcomer by giving him his first meal in a line directly opposite the Maharshi's seat and at hardly four feet distance from it. I took no notice of the cakes, although my hand fingered them, but directed my whole look at the peaceful countenance of Sri Bhagavan. He had by then finished eating and was slowly rolling a betel leaf for a chew, as if deliberately to give me a little more of his company, when a man entered from the back door, which was the passage to the small kitchen, and in a low voice said something in Tamil to him. Then Maharshi rose, looked at me by way of farewell, and left the room. I hastily swallowed half a cake, gulped the cup of tea and went out in search of my room to which my luggage had been taken, when someone announced that Sri Maharshi was coming to the *Darshan* Hall. I rushed straight to the Hall with my hat and full suit on. Behind me calmly walked in the tall, impressive figure of the Maharshi with leisurely though firm steps.

I was alone in the Hall with him. Joy and peace suffused my being - such a delightful feeling of purity and well-being at the mere proximity of a man, I never had before. My mind was already in deep contemplation of him - him not as flesh, although that was exquisitely formed and featured, but as an unsubstantial principle which could make itself so profoundly felt despite the handicap of a heavy material vehicle. When after a while I became aware of my environment, I saw him looking at me with large, penetrating eyes, wreathed in smiles rendered divinely soothing by their childlike innocence.

Bhagavan was then enjoying the sound, robust health of middle age and could very well afford to be available at almost all hours of the day to devotees. The years 1936-1938 were very blissful indeed to us, when we could gather round his couch and speak to him as intimately as to a beloved father, tell him all our troubles and show him our letters without let or hindrance. After 8:00 p.m. when the Hall contained only the local residents, we sat round him for a 'family chat' till about ten o'clock.

Then he related to us stories from the *Puranas* or the lives of saints, yielding to transports of emotion when he depicted scenes of great *bhakti*, or great human tragedies to which he was sensitive to the extreme. Then he shed tears which he vainly attempted to conceal.

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On one occasion, Bhagavan recited from memory a poem of a Vaishnava saint in which occurred the words, "Fold me in Thy embrace, O Lord," when the arms of Bhagavan joined in a circle around the vacant air before him and his eyes shone with devotional ardour, while his voice shook with stifled sobs which did not escape our notice. It was fascinating to see him acting the parts he related and be in such exhilarated moods as these.

Some disciples and his attendants used to sleep on the floor of the Hall at night. Bhagavan's sleep was very light. He woke every now and then and almost always he found an attendant nearby fully awake to say a few words to, and then sleep again. Once or twice he would go out for a few minutes and, by 5:00 a.m, when the Veda chanters came from the township, they found him fully awake and chatting in a soft, subdued voice. Now the *parayanam* would get started and go on for little less than an hour, during which everybody abstained from talking and Bhagavan often sat cross-legged and completely indrawn. Then he went out on the hill and returned at about 7:30, when visitors and devotees began trickling in - men, women and children, till they filled the Hall by about 9:00 a.m. This morning hour of the *parayanam* was the best time of the day for meditation. The congregation was small, women and children absent, the weather cool, and the mind had not yet completely emerged to run its usual riot. Over and above this, Bhagavan then shone in the stillness of his *samadhi*, which permeated the hall and the meditation of his disciples.

Bhagavan went out at his usual hours. These were : 9:45, for a few minutes; 11 o'clock, for luncheon, followed by the midday stroll in Palakottu; evening, 4:45 on the hill, preceding the evening *Veda parayanam*; and 7 o'clock for dinner.

The constant influx of visitors was of some help in that it afforded the much-needed relaxation to an otherwise tense life. Secondly, the peculiar problems which visitors brought with them were a useful study. Watching the masterly ways Bhagavan tackled these problems was a *sadhana* in itself.

Rationality was the very essence of his arguments, while the ultimate answer to all the questions was always the same, namely, "Find out who you are." He first met every questioner on his own ground, and then slowly steered him round to the source of all problems - the Self - the realisation of which he held to be the universal panacea. When the audience shrank, he at times became humorously autobiographical about his early school and home life or about his many experiences on the hill with *sadhus*, devotees, etc. As time passed and the Master's state of mind and ideas took firm root in me, I ceased to ask questions, or to intercept him in his walks outside the Ashram grounds, as I used to do in the first six months. The final conclusion to which I came in the end of these six months I reported one day to Bhagavan. He showed his gracious approval by a gesture of finality with his hand and said: "So much lies in your power, the rest must be left entirely to the Guru, who is the ocean of grace and mercy seated in the heart as the seeker's own Self."

The builders had put the finishing touches to my small mud hut in Palakottu garden on April 4, 1936. I completed my arrangements for the warming ceremony, known here as *griha pravesham*, to take place the next day. The invited devotees gathered in my hut, and about noon the Master himself strolled in, on his way back from his usual walk and, refusing the special chair I had ready for him, he squatted like the others on the mat covered floor. After the ceremony, Bhagavan left. I followed him from a distance, waited till the devotees cleared away and approached him. "Bhagavan," I started, "you have given a home for my body, I now need your grace to grant the eternal home for my soul, for which I broke all my human ties and came." He stopped in the shade of a tree, gazed silently on the calm water of the tank for a few seconds and replied: "Your firm conviction brought you here; where is the room for doubt?" "Where is the room for doubt, indeed?" I reflected.

Three years had passed since that *griha-pravesham* day. "Bhagavan," I said on a day then near my hut, "I feel a strong urge to go on *Yatra* (pilgrimage). I feel that I need a change for some months, which I intend

spending in holy places." He smiled approval and enquired about the date and time of my starting and whether I had made arrangements for my stay in the various places I was to visit. Extremely touched by his solicitude, I answered that I was going as a *sadhu*, trusting to chance for accommodation.

For three months thereafter I lay on a mat in Cape Comorin, immensely relieved of the mental tension which the Master's physical form had caused me. In solitude I plunged into reflections on his blissful silence and calm repose. The stillness of his mind haunted me everywhere I went - in the beautiful, gem-like temple of the youthful virgin goddess, on the shores of the vast blue ocean around me and the sand dunes, in the fishing villages and endless stretches of coconut groves, which ran along the sea shore and the interior of the Cape. I felt his influence in the depth of my soul and cried: "Oh Bhagavan, how mighty you are and how sublime and all pervasive is the immaculate purity of your mind! With what tender emotions do we, your disciples, think of your incomparable qualities, your gentleness; your serene, adorable countenance; your cool, refreshing smiles; the sweetness of the words that come out of your mouth; the radiance of your all-embracing love; your equal vision towards one and all, even towards diseased stray animals."

Evening Shadows

The years 1948-50 saw the evening shadows gathering and closing on the mortal coil of the Master. Advancing age brought a series of mishaps to it - a fall, a nervous hiccup lasting many days, a clinging rheumatism, and, lastly, a malignant tumour which inch by inch ate the flesh of his left arm, poisoned his blood and finally rang down the curtain on an immaculate life.

22nd February 1949

About a fortnight ago, the Ashram doctor, Dr. Shankar Rao, assisted by Dr. Srinivasa Rao, removed a very small growth from the left elbow of the Maharshi, since when it has remained bandaged; but today the bandage has been removed and it is left exposed - it is presumed to have healed.

27th March 1949

The lump which was removed from Maharshi's left elbow last month and which was thought to be healing satisfactorily, subsequently started to grow again, so that the eminent surgeon, Dr. Raghavachari, came today from Madras with surgical instruments to remove it. The surgeon, we are told, performed the operation skilfully by cutting deep and removing the last cell of growth. He does not expect a recurrence of the growth.

4th December 1949

This is *Deepam* day, most holy to Hindus in the South. The holy beacon will be lighted tonight on top of Arunachala. Tonight Sri Maharshi sat in the north verandah of the *Darshan* Hall. All around him hundreds of devotees squatted. This jubilation is not without a sting. Will the health of Sri Maharshi favour us with another *Deepam* day and he be with us in the flesh, or is this to be the last? As we see him seated fresh and bright as ever, gazing expectantly at the top of his beloved Arunachala, we cannot help being optimistic of his recovery. The body which is stricken by a most malignant disease, hacked on many occasions by the surgeon's knife, burnt by radium, and drugged by all sorts of powerful drugs, bears no trace of the agonising ordeal in the brilliance of its eyes or in the joyful expressions of its face. What miracles are being performed in it! What are its mysteries!

- The preceding was gathered from the pages of S.S. Cohen's book, GURU RAMANA.

Meeting with S. S. Cohen

A Devotee's Diary

Yesterday, while waiting for Sri Kunju Swami and Sri K. Natesan to arrive to continue the recordings of all the different *parayanas*, Bhagawat and I took the opportunity to visit S. S. Cohen. He is now eighty-three years old, ill and weak.

His hired Tamilian attendant had just helped him to walk out of his room and sit in a chair under the shade of the *banyan* trees. We also grabbed two chairs and sat facing him.

As his attendant helped him into the seat he told him something, which he immediately translated to us with a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his face: "I just told him, 'Observe me carefully, because thirty years hence you are going to be in the same situation - old, feeble and sick.' "

This quip quickly put me at ease about his physical condition, and I cannot remember ever seeing such an old, feeble man exude such lightness and cheer.

We presented to him our Ashram brochure and began describing 'Sri Bhagavan's Abodes' in New York City and Nova Scotia, Canada. I then offered him one of our treasured six ounce cans of Dole Pineapple Juice. He drank it with satisfaction.

Bhakta Bhagawat then began describing to him his life and how he experiences Sri Bhagavan's Presence. While pouring out his heart to this senior disciple of the Maharshi, he bent over and touched his feet several times and asked for his blessings.

"You don't need my blessings," S.S. Cohen said. "Blessings are always flowing to you."

Then Cohen continued, as if talking to himself: "I am old now. I have no desire to do anything." He paused. "Do you know, indescribable peace crawls over you slowly - one does not even notice it."

It is obvious that he is nearing death, but he is not sad; nor does he allow anyone else to be sad on this account.

Later he said to me, with that same twinkle and same smile, "If you want to take me to Canada, you will have to pay all the expenses; and I am not just talking about the air fare - you will have to pay the cost of burying me in the ground as well!" He laughed.

Later that evening, as I passed his room, the door was open and a dim light shone from within. There he was sitting, alone, quiet, eyes closed and at peace. Leaving the world behind, with the goal at hand, he sat, waiting. What a lesson for a young aspirant like myself!

Dinesha Dayalu

"To those who feared that the guidance might end with death he replied curtly, 'You attach too much importance to the body.' Now, as then, he guides whoever approaches him and whoever submits to him he supports. To all who seek he is here."

Arthur Osborne

Death and Dying

Once we are born, there is nothing more certain - among all the uncertainties of life - than death. Yet, when it comes knocking at our door, or the doors of our near and dear ones, we are often caught by surprise and thrown into a whirlpool of confusion and sorrow. Why does this event, as inevitable as the morning light, cast a shadow of darkness all around?

While, traditionally, people of all nations rely on the revelations of their seers and prophets to clear the confusion regarding death, a tinge of wonder and timidity ferment in the hearts of even the most faithful. Death, shrouded in mystery, forever the burden of poets and philosophers, scriptures and dogma, has nothing to do with oblivion or loss; indeed, for those endowed with right understanding and a keen aspiration to know what death is, the once foreboding door of death opens to the eternal glory of immortality and bliss.

Sri Maharshi was born into that world of eternal Reality through the womb of death, during a brief, intense experience in his seventeenth year. From then on, he was established in the realisation of his true Self and the illusion of death died forever.

Here, as recorded in Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, are a few words he spoke, from the depth of his experience, on death and dying.

Mourning is not the index of true love. It betrays love of the object, of its shape only. That is not love. True love is shown by the certainty that the object of love is in the Self and that it can never become non-existent. There will be no pain if the physical outlook is given up and if the person exists as the Self.

There is no death nor birth. That which is born is only the body. The body is the creation of the ego. But the ego is not ordinarily perceived without the body. It is always identified with the body.

If a man considers he is born he cannot avoid the fear of death. Let him find out if he has been born or if the Self has any birth. He will discover that the Self always exists, that the body which is born resolves itself into thought and that the emergence of thought is the root of all mischief.

Find where from thoughts emerge. Then you will abide in the ever-present inmost Self and be free from the idea of birth or the fear of death.

Recall the state of sleep. Were you aware of anything happening? If the son or the world be real, should they not be present with you in sleep?

You cannot deny your existence in sleep. Nor can you deny you were happy then. You are now the same person speaking and raising doubts. You are not happy according to you. But you were happy in sleep. What has transpired in the meantime that happiness of sleep has broken down? It is the rise of the ego. That is the new arrival in the *jagrat* (waking) state. There was no ego in sleep.

The birth of the ego is called the birth of the person. There is no other kind of birth. Whatever is born, is bound to die. Kill the ego: there is no fear of recurring death for what is once dead. The Self remains even after the death of the ego. That is Bliss - that is immortality.

Training the mind helps one to bear sorrows and bereavements with courage. But the loss of one's offspring is said to be the worst of all griefs. Still it is true, pain on such occasions can be assuaged by association with the wise.

The shock of the fear of death drove my mind inwards and I said to myself mentally, without actually framing the words: 'Now that death has come; what does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies . . . But with the death of the body am I dead? Is the body I? . . . The body dies but the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death. That means I am the deathless Spirit.' All this was not dull thought; it flashed through me vividly as living truth which I perceived directly. . . From that moment onwards the 'I' or Self focussed attention on itself by a powerful fascination. Fear of death had vanished once and for all. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on.

- Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Interviews

Professor N. R. Krishnamoorthy Aiyer

I am now ninety-two years old and I first met the Maharshi in the summer of 1914, when I was just a boy of sixteen. We were then on a pilgrimage to Tirupati and had halted in Tiruvannamalai, from where my grandmother hailed. We were not strangers to this town.

In the pilgrim party there were half a dozen boys, all of whom were about my age. We all decided to go up to Virupaksha cave. The Maharshi was then residing there and was attentive to all the activities of us youngsters. I noticed his gaze particularly focused on me.

We were all playing with the conch shell. The *sadhus* used to blow this shell like a horn when they went into town to beg for alms.

One after the other, we attempted to blow the conch shell. No one prevented us from doing this, and I noticed an encouraging smile from the Maharshi. This was my first visit.

Some eight years later, I came to Tiruvannamalai to visit my sister, who was married there. One evening, two companions and I went to visit Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni up on the hill where he had his ashram. What can I say about that great seer of *Mantra Sastra*?

I was just then out of college after finishing my masters degree in physics. I presented to Kavyakanta the latest views of Einstein, Planck and others in regard to the constitution of matter and the universe. He gave a patient hearing, and then said, "Can you put it in a brief way?" Answering in the affirmative, I went on explaining that there is a continuum in which time and space are involved, wherein particles change into waves and waves change into particles and all can dissolve into a single unitary medium. That is the prospect of the future.

He listened patiently to all this and said, "the world picture is in that frame," and after a pause he exclaimed, "chitram, chitram!" These words mean 'picture' - you may call it a movie-picture. Those words sent a thrill through my body, through my whole frame. I suddenly felt disembodied. I was myself the whole space in which the pictures were placed - this body being one of the pictures. This experience lasted for a brief eternity. When I came round to myself we took leave of Kavyakanta.

The next day we had a meeting with Bhagavan. This was about the time he arrived at the present site of Sri Ramanasramam (1922). There were no buildings at all, except for a small shed covering the samadhi of the Mother.

Bhagavan was seated on a bench under the shade of a tree, and with him, lying on the same bench, was the dog named Rose. Bhagavan was simply stroking the dog.

I wondered, among us Brahmins the dog was such an animal that it would defile all purity. A good part of my respect for the Maharshi left me when I saw him touching that unclean animal - for all its apparent cleanliness and neatness it was unclean from the Brahmin point of view.

I had a question for the Maharshi. At that time I was an agnostic. I thought nature could take care of itself, so where is the need for a Creator? What is the use of writing all these religious books telling 'cock and bull' stories, which do not change the situation.

I wanted to put to him straight questions: is there a soul? Is there a God? Is there salvation? All these three questions were condensed into one: Well sir, you are sitting here like this - I can see your present condition - but what will be your future *sthiti*? The word *sthiti* in Sanskrit means 'state' or 'condition'.

The Maharshi did not answer the question. "Oho," I thought, "you are taking shelter under the guise of indifferent silence for not answering an inconvenient question!" As soon as I thought this the Maharshi replied and I felt as if a bomb had exploded under my seat.

"*Sthiti*, what do you mean by the word *sthiti*!" he exclaimed.

I was not prepared for that question. "Oho, this man is very dangerous, very dangerously alive. I will have to answer with proper care," I thought.

So I said to myself, "If I ask him about the *sthiti* or 'state' of the body it is useless: the body will be burned or buried. What I should ask him was about the condition of something within the body. Of course, I can recognize a mind inside of me." Then I was about to answer "By *sthiti*, I mean mind," when it struck me what if he counter-questions with "What is mind?" This I am not prepared to answer.

As all this was passing through my mind he was sitting there staring at me with a fierce look.

I then questioned within me, "What is mind? Mind is made up of thoughts. Now, what are thoughts?" I landed in a void. No answer. I then realised that I could not present a question about a mind which did not exist!

Up to that point, the mind was the greatest thing that existed for me. Now I discovered it did not exist! I was bewildered. I simply sat like a statue.

Two pairs of eyes were then gripping each other: the eyes of the Maharshi and my eyes were locked together in a tight embrace. I lost all sense of body. Nothing existed except the eyes of the Maharshi.

I don't know how long I remained like that, but when I returned to my senses, I was terribly afraid of the man. "This is a dangerous man," I thought. In spite of myself, I prostrated and got away from his company.

- To be continued

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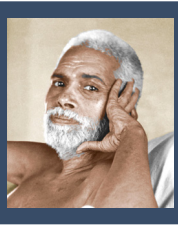

AS I SAW HIM - 3

By Kunju Swami

It was in 1919 that I first came to Sri Bhagavan. He was then living at Skandasramam on the slope of the Hill Arunachala. His mother and brother lived with him. Palaniswami used to attend to his few personal wants. Plague had driven away most of the inhabitants of the town and consequently visitors to Sri Bhagavan were few. I was, therefore, left alone with Sri Bhagavan most of the time.

I related to him all the spiritual practices I had been doing, what I had been studying, and what experiences I had. At that time I was very unhappy because in spite of all I had done I was unable to experience *samadhi*.

After patiently hearing me out, Bhagavan quoted from *Kaivalya Navaneeta*: "If you realize who you are, there is no cause for sorrow." "So if you come to understand who you are, then there is peace," said Bhagavan.

Well, I did not know what was meant by "know who you are". Bhagavan went on to explain that the mind is only a bundle of thoughts and that if I seek the source of all thoughts I would be drawn into the Heart. He simultaneously pointed to his Heart.

Bhagavan was looking at me intently and I focused my attention in the manner he instructed me and within a few minutes I was led into *samadhi*. I was thrilled. Coming to my senses we went for lunch. Then again, I sat before him and by a single look he put me into that blissful state.

This experience occurred again and again-during all seventeen days that I stayed with Bhagavan. I was like one intoxicated. I was absolutely indifferent to everything. I had no curiosity to see anything, no desire whatsoever. What I did I did most mechanically. I would have continued to live in this state if it had not occurred to me that it was not proper to partake of the food that was offered to Sri Bhagavan by his devotees without paying anything. I thought that he had initiated me into the experience of Brahman and that I had nothing more to gain by staying in his presence. I, therefore, returned to my native place and began to practice meditation in a room in my house all by myself. I could succeed to gain and retain that experience only for a few days; it started to diminish gradually and at last one day it was lost. I could not regain the experience. I decided to return to Sri Bhagavan. This I did, and great good fortune awaited me when I came.

Palaniswami, who was rendering personal service to Sri Bhagavan, had to go on a journey for some time. Before going he asked me to render such service. This I considered to be my greatest good fortune. I felt extremely happy for the grace which Bhagavan had shown me. I did not thereafter bother myself about the spiritual experience.

I, however, asked Bhagavan why I could not get the experience when I meditated in my house. Bhagavan said: "You have read *Kaivalya Navaneeta*, have you not? Don't you remember what it says?" And he took up the book and read the relevant verses.

Sri Bhagavan then explained to me at great length the purport of these verses. They relate to the doubt raised

by the disciple about the need to continue spiritual practices even after one has had the supreme experience. The disciple wonders whether the spiritual experience once gained could be lost. The Guru says that it would be until he took care to practise *sravana, manana* and *nididhyasana*, that is hearing from the Guru the Truth, reflecting over it and assimilating it. The experience would occur in the presence of the Guru, but it would not last. Doubts would arise again and again and in order to clear them the disciple should continue to study, think and practice. These would be done until the distinction of the knower, the object of knowledge and the act of knowing no longer arise. In the view of Sri Bhagavan's explanation I decided to stay always by Bhagavan's side and practise *sravana, manana* and *nididhyasana*.

In olden days when we had the benefit of receiving personal instructions from Sri Bhagavan, one of them was to get into meditation before going to sleep. Thus sleep overtook one as a natural sequel to fatigue and was not induced or preceded by lying down. Also the first thing in the morning, immediately on getting up from bed was to go into meditation. This ensured a serenity of mind and also a feeling of tirelessness throughout the day. The state of mind immediately before sleep is resumed on waking.

After spending about twelve years in personal attendance on Bhagavan, I began to feel an urge to devote myself entirely to *sadhana*. However, I could not easily reconcile myself to giving up my personal service to Bhagavan. I had been debating the matter for some days when the answer came in a strange way.

As I entered the hall one day I heard Bhagavan explaining to others who were there that real service to him did not mean attending to his physical needs but following the essence of his teaching: that is concentrating on realizing the Self. Needless to say, that automatically cleared my doubts.

I therefore gave up my Ashram duties, but I then found it hard to decide how, in fact, I should spend the entire day in search of Realization. I referred the matter to Bhagavan and he advised me to make Self-enquiry my final aim but to practise Self-enquiry, meditation, *japa* and recitation of scripture turn by turn, changing over from one to another as and when I found the one I was doing irksome or difficult. In course of time, he said, the *sadhana* would become stabilised in Self-enquiry or pure Consciousness or Realization.

Before recommending any path to an aspirant Bhagavan would first find out from him what aspect or form or path he was naturally drawn to and then recommend the person to follow it. He would sometimes endorse the traditional stages of *sadhana*, advancing from worship (*puja*) to incantation (*japa*), then to meditation (*dhyana*), and finally to Self-enquiry (*vichara*). However, he also use to say that continuous and rigorous practice of any one of these methods was adequate in itself to lead to Realization.

Once some awkward problems concerning the Ashram management came up. Without being directly concerned, I was worried about them, as I felt that failure to solve them satisfactorily would impair the good name of the Ashram.

One day two or three devotees went to Bhagavan and put the problems before him. I happened to enter the hall while they were talking about them, and he immediately turned to me and asked me why I was interesting myself in such matters. I did not grasp the meaning of his question, so Bhagavan explained that a person should occupy himself only with that purpose with which he had originally come to the Ashram and asked me what my original purpose had been. I replied: "To receive Bhagavan's grace." So he said: "Then occupy yourself with that only."

He further continued by asking me whether I had any interest in matters concerning the Ashram management when I first came here. On my replying that I had not, he added: "Then concentrate on the original purpose of your coming here."

There are numerous photos of Bhagavan. Have you ever seen one with his eyes closed? Bhagavan was pouring out his grace through his eyes. There would be any number of devotees sitting before him and each one would feel that Bhagavan was looking only at him or her.

Bhagavan's *drishti* (sight) was concentrated on space only. It was turned inward and everyone felt inwardly, in their hearts, that his sight was focused on them alone. Bhagavan cares about everyone, and his look pierces through each one's heart, dispels our darkness, gives us peace, even some liberation.

- Source material for this article came from the Mountain Path magazine and taped interviews.

Sri Kunju Swami

Sri Kunju Swami occupies a special place in the hearts of the devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi. To see him, talk to him, or just to sit in his august presence is sufficient to transport one, body and soul, to the living presence of the Master. Why? Because Kunju Swami has been fully absorbed in the Maharshi and radiates his personality through every word, gesture or thought.

At the ripe age of 92 he still remains a vigorous, humble servant of the devotees and Sri Ramanasramam, pouring out his stories and experiences, while remaining accessible during most of the day. At other times he can be seen to be quietly revelling in the joy of Being, earned by long austerity and the grace of his Master. A visit to Sri Ramanasramam is immeasurably enhanced by the company of those who moved closely with the Maharshi. In Kunju Swami we discover the reason why.

The Garland of Guru's Sayings

When Muruganar first beheld the Maharshi in 1923, all thought of the world left him and he became absorbed in the ocean of Sri Ramana's grace. Poetry spilled out from the brimming cup of his experience and flowed in torrents till his end in 1973. He was transformed into a poet-saint.

This translation of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* (Garland of Guru Sayings) has been wonderfully rendered into English by Prof. K. Swaminathan. In 1254 stanzas, under 231 chapters, the teachings of the Master are arranged, explaining step by step the theory, practice and final experience of *Jnana*. The Maharshi examined and approved the work, adding 28 stanzas of his own for clarification.

The book was recently released during the *Brahma Nirvana* celebrations at Sri Ramanasramam and is available at our New York Ashram.

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

In February of 1990 all the old films from Sri Ramanasramam were brought to New York for restoration, preservation and reprinting. John E. Allen, Inc., the major East Coast film restoration company, has been engaged for this project.

The badly warped, shrunken and brittle reels were put through a patented 'Re-dimension' process, enabling them to pass through the sensitive transferring machines. As the work is progressing and the 35mm, 16mm and 8mm films are closely scrutinised, certain new images are surfacing. Valuable footage is being resuscitated

and other more familiar films are being enhanced. Some of the films are government of India newsreels with a commentator's voice and background music. The distortions on these sound tracks are being corrected, as we consider them a valuable legacy of the nation's interest in the then contemporary Sri Ramana Maharshi.

All the details of these films - when they were taken, who took them, the individuals and events presented, and most of all, the many scenes of the Maharshi himself-will, as time passes, evince greater interest and value. The restoration work presently being done will ensure that seekers two or three centuries from now will have the same opportunity as we have to view a fully enlightened *Jnani*, a *Jagad Guru* (world teacher) in his natural environs.

Sri Ramanasramam is planning to make all these movies available to the public in the form of video cassettes. Perhaps by next year the tapes will be ready. And, as these films always seem to generate considerable interest, with this issue we begin a series of articles about them.

The Films

The earliest surviving footage of film comes to us from the *Self-Realization Fellowship*, an organization founded by Swami Yogananda, the well-known author of the Autobiography of a Yogi. It was during the period he was collecting material for this book that he made a visit to the Maharshi on November 29, 1935.

This visit is well documented in Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: "Swami Yogananda with four others arrived at 8-45 a.m. He looks big, but gentle and well-groomed. He has dark flowing hair, hanging over his shoulders. The group had lunch in the Ashram."

A very lucid conversation then ensued between Yogananda's secretary, Mr. C. R. Wright, and the Maharshi. "How shall I realize God?" Mr. Wright asks. He is told to realize the true nature of the Self. The Maharshi then explains what that Self is and the method to realize it. Mr. Wright asks several other sincere questions, to which he receives detailed and illuminating replies.

Swami Yogananda asks how to effect the spiritual uplift of the people and the reason God permits suffering in the world. Suitable replies are given to him also.

There is only about thirty seconds of 16 mm film available from this visit, but since it was probably immediately taken back to America for developing, printing and preserving, it is the best quality footage of all the forty-five minutes of film we have.

In the film we see the Maharshi seated on a bench placed north of the Old Hall. He is facing south with his arms to his side and the palms of his hands flat on the bench. A crumpled towel is under his right palm. To his left is Swami Yogananda standing next to Paul Brunton, who was visiting the Ashram then. The Swami glances at the Maharshi and exchanges a hand shake with Paul Brunton. Four of the Swami's companions are kneeling or sitting to the right of the Maharshi. The film is very short and, consequently, an earlier editor has frozen some scenes to prolong the episode. From Mr. Wright's absence we can infer that he was the cameraman.

The most striking observation that can be made of this film is related to the Maharshi. If you focused your attention solely on him throughout the duration of this footage you would not know that you are watching a 'moving' picture; he is perfectly still, without even a blink of an eye.

INTERVIEWS

Professor N. R. Krishnamoorthy Aiyer

Concluding from the last issue, our respected professor graphically describes the remarkable experiences he had sitting before the Maharshi, and how his life was transformed.

MY NEXT VISIT to the Maharshi was in 1934 on a *Jayanti* Day. He was sitting on a raised platform under a pondal (thatched roof), specially constructed in front of the Mother's Shrine. As the celebration was going on, all the devotees were seated around him.

While sitting there, my eyes were intensely fixed upon the Maharshi and I saw his form assume different manifestations. It first changed to the *Avatar* of Vishnu (*Vahar Avatar*). Then his form changed into that of Ganesha, the elephant God. Next it suddenly changed and I saw Ramana and Arunachala as one. Then I had the vision of the whole Arunachala Hill - the top of the Hill was transparent and inside it I saw a *Shiva Lingam*, similar to what we see in temples.

Devotees were singing the *Marital Garland of Letters*. When they began singing the last couplet, "My Lord let us exchange garlands - the devotee (the bride) garlands the Lord Arunachala (the groom), and the Lord garlands the devotee," I suddenly saw garlands of flowers all over the pondal. The Maharshi had a string of flowers garlanded around his neck, and all the devotees (including myself) had a string of flowers around their necks. I saw a large garland around the *Shiva Lingam* on the hill top. All these garlands were shining with a dazzling brilliance. This experience convinced me of the existence of the deities mentioned in our ancient scriptures.

Later that evening in the Old Hall I sat at the feet of the Maharshi. He was reclining on the couch gazing westward and I sat on the floor facing him. Our eyes fixed, one upon the other, were pinned together for quite a long time. I then saw the form of the Maharshi take the shape of Ardhanareswara.

Ardhanareswara is one aspect of Shiva - one half is the Mother and the other half is the Father; one half of the form had a breast and the other had a trident. Around us the pundits were reciting Sanskrit verses.

As it went on, I began to witness certain changes in my body taking place. I saw a pair of serpents rising from the base of my spine in a crisscross, spiralling manner. They rose to the crown of my head and spread their hoods. One was red; the other blue. The whole cranium became suffused with a bright light. My attention was fixed upon the point between my eyebrows where the serpents' heads were pointed.

All of a sudden there was a splitting of the skull from the top front to the back. This was followed by an upward gush of a reddish flame shooting out from the top of my head. While this was flowing out, a stream of nectar issued from the single breast of the Ardhanareswara form of the Maharshi and a second stream of nectar flowed out from the top of Arunachala. Both streams landed on my head and sealed the break in my skull.

When the skull was sealed I experienced a brilliant light, like that of an arc lamp, and an indescribable joy and coolness filled my being. This light and joy continued for several hours. During this time I didn't move about and I was unconscious of what was going on around me. You may have seen a light focused on to a concave

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mirror. Its light is reflected with a single beam onto a point. Well, sometime about midnight all the light, like a concave mirror, was focussed onto the Heart. Then all the light drained into the Heart. The *Kundalini* was completely sucked into the Heart and the Heart was opened - that is the seat of Arunachala Ramana.

The Heart is normally closed, but when it was opened - I never knew any of these things and never read any theory. These are all practical experiences - a flood of nectar gushed forth and drenched every pore of my skin, drenched my whole physical system. It poured out, went on coming out in a great flood. The whole Universe was filled with that Nectar.

The wonder of it was that my awareness was not in the body - my awareness was over the whole of the space filled with that Nectar. The whole Universe was Nectar. I call it Nectar; you could call it Ether, something very subtle, attached with awareness at every point. And everything living and non-living was like snow flakes floating in that ocean of Nectar.

If you ask me what my body was, my body was the whole universe of Nectar, attached to awareness at every point. No particular association from the one body from where it started - this body was like every other body.

By morning everything subsided, though the underlying experience remained. I was totally unconscious of my body. I was moving around like an automaton, unaware of my body. In that state I returned to Madurai where I was a physics professor.

This was during a Christmas vacation. For the next two weeks I remained in that state. With the opening of college I was scheduled to give lectures and my relatives became rather concerned, for my behaviour had changed considerably.

I then returned to Ramanasramam with the intention of returning to my regular mundane condition - I do not know what urged me to do this.

I went and sat before the Maharshi in the Old Hall. He gave no acknowledgement of my plight and sat, seemingly, unconcerned.

After a long time I said to myself, "Well, the son (Maharshi) seems indifferent to me. Let me go and seek refuge in my mother, Alagammal." I came and sat in the Mother's samadhi room. It was then only a thatched room. I picked up the book *Jnana Vashistha* and began reading it from beginning to end with the hope of finding the solution to my dilemma. I continued reading without eating the whole day. In the evening the answer came: a stanza in *Jnana Vashistha* said, "Between two thoughts there is an interval of no thought. That interval is the Self, the *Atman*. It is pure Awareness only."

In those days I was repeating the *mantra* '*Ram, Ram*'. So I said to myself: "*Ram* - that is one thought; and *Ram* again - that is another thought. But in the interval between these two thoughts there is silence. That Silence is the Self." And so, I came to the conclusion that if I go on repeating '*Ram, Ram*' it will resolve itself into that Silence.

I was very happy. I rushed home and found I was my normal mundane self, teaching my classes in the usual way. But all the time, even while the lectures were going on, '*Ram, Ram, Ram*' went on repeating in my Heart. For nine years it went on like that and then stopped of its own accord. It ended in Silence.

The Maharshi's Voice Recorded

Excerpts from Kanakamma's talk at Arunachala Ashram in New York City on May 12, 1991.

ONE OF THE DEVOTEES brought with him a tape recorder to Sri Ramanasramam with a view to record Bhagavan's voice. Until the visitor actually took the recorder into the hall he was all along apprehensive that Bhagavan, or someone, might not permit him to do it. He entered the hall, set the recorder in front of Bhagavan, did his usual *pranams* (prostrations), and sought his permission to record.

To the devotee's surprise, Bhagavan started putting questions, eliciting some technical information on the mechanism of operation. While giving the required information, the devotee felt relieved at the comfortable thought that Bhagavan was interested and was agreeable to having his voice recorded.

After the explanations were over, the devotee went around and instructed all those present to keep quiet. Bhagavan was keenly watching all that was going on. The devotee then placed the microphone near Bhagavan and switched on the recorder. He quietly moved to a little distance. From then on silence fell .... Only the whizzing sound of the revolving reel on the recorder could be heard. Ten or fifteen minutes passed thus, in near absolute silence.

Disappointed, and not knowing what to do next, the devotee went near Bhagavan, switched off the recorder, and in a subdued tone asked Bhagavan why he did not speak. He added, that unless he talked his voice could not be recorded.

Bhagavan replied: "Why do you think so? My voice, indeed, has been recorded. My language is that of silence, and that has been recorded. Is it not so?" On hearing this the devotee stood baffled.

Sri Muruganar, one of the resident devotees, was in the gathering. He addressed the devotee and said: "Why did you switch off the recorder before asking these questions? If you had not, there would have been, at least, the recording of Bhagavan's latest explanation of his own voice." Now the devotee was all the more perplexed.

- Translated by Professor S. Raman

Three Methods Explained

1/ Destroy the power of mind by seeking it. When the mind is examined its activities cease automatically.

2/ Looking for the source of mind is another method. The source may be said to be God or Self or Consciousness.

3/ Concentrating on one thought, all other thoughts disappear; finally that thought also disappears. It is necessary to be aware while controlling thoughts, otherwise it will lead to sleep.

- Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: No. 345

Brahma Nirvana Day

On May 12, 1991 the forty-first anniversary of the Maharshi's passing was observed at the New York City Arunachala Ashram. Geeta Bhatt sends us this heart-warming report of the day's activities.

The auspicious Sunday dawned with clear skies and summer-like temperatures. Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat,

Margo Martin, Eric Ford, Arthur Coucouvitis, Kanakamma and her family from Philadelphia gathered for the morning *Veda Parayana* in the shrine room. Recitation of the Vedas was followed by the chanting of *Sri Lalita Sahasranama Stotram*. The presence of Kanakamma, a long-time resident of Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, whose visit to the U.S.A. and a weekend visit to New York City coincided with the celebrations, added a special fervour to this solemn day.

After the *Veda Parayana*, Kanakamma offered a recitation of the *Nine Gems*, a Tamil composition by Sri Bhagavan. The morning *Puja* concluded with everyone joining Kanakamma in the recitation of *Aksharamanamalai* (The Marital Garland of Letters).

This meditative celebration that began at 4:30 a.m., continued throughout the day under the benign gaze of Sri Bhagavan. At 9:00 a.m. when Kanakamma and her party were about to leave, Chhaya Tewari, a devotee visiting from New Delhi [the contributor's sister], persuaded Kanakamma to stay and offer the devotees a few of her precious memories of Sri Bhagavan, in whose presence she had sat for many years.

Kanakamma not only began to recount her days with Sri Bhagavan, she also vividly re-enacted some wonderful incidents (see *The Maharshi's Voice Recorded*). Professor S. Raman translated her talk from Tamil and what we could not follow from the translation was easily understood by her vivid expressions and gestures, reminiscent of Sri Bhagavan's movements and mannerism. We were all transported to the Old Hall and the living presence of the Master.

Her stories evoked so much of the spiritual energy from Sri Ramanasramam that we were all fixed to our seats in a meditative mood for the next two and a half hours. Silently we sat listening to a recording of the *Sri Chakra Puja*, taped in the Matrubhuteswara Temple at Sri Ramanasramam. This was followed by the singing of the Arunachala Ashram's daily recitation. Then Sri Ramanlal Bhatt, who had the privilege of living in Sri Ramanasramam on a few occasions in the early days, recollected his first meeting with Sri Bhagavan. He commented on how one powerful look from the Master silenced all the questions that he had so meticulously prepared and written down.

While most of us sat in the shrine room, Hena Singh, Bhagawatji's daughter-in-law, lovingly prepared a feast for the devotees. She later served it, in the same spirit, to all those gathered.

Some devotees had to leave in the afternoon, although the celebrations and the devotional fervour continued with the arrival of Sri Babubhai and Bhanumati Parikh, Raju and Swaroop, their two sons, along with other relatives. The Parikh family sang *bhajans*, and Bhagawatji recited from Tulasidas' *Ramayana*.

The mood at the end of the day was one of deep peace and delightful joy. Sri Bhagavan showered His Grace in abundance. We all departed the Ashram at different times of the afternoon or evening. Margo Martin and Bhagawatji bid goodbyes to each one of us with warmth and the mutual understanding that for the devotees of Bhagavan there are no goodbyes or hellos.

There is no end to the celebration of Bhagavan's Presence in our midst.

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THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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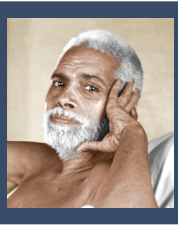

As I Saw Him - 4

By Swami Viswanatha

MY FIRST *darshan* of Bhagavan Sri Ramana was in January, 1921 at Skandashram, which is on the eastern slope of Arunachala and looks like the very heart of the majestic hill. It is a beautiful quiet spot with a few coconut and other trees and a perennial crystal-clear spring. Bhagavan was there as the very core of such natural beauty.

I saw in him something quite arresting which clearly distinguished him from all others I had seen. He seemed to live apart from the physical frame, quite detached from it. His look and smile had remarkable spiritual charm. When he spoke, the words seemed to come out of an abyss. One could see immaculate purity and non-attachment in him and his movements. I sensed something very refined, lofty and sacred about him. In his vicinity the mind's distractions were overpowered by an austere and potent calmness and the unique bliss of peace was directly experienced. This I would call *Ramana lahari*, 'the blissful atmosphere of Ramana.' In this ecstasy of grace one loses one's sense of separate individuality and there remains something grand and all-pervading, all-devouring. This indeed is the spirit of Arunachala which swallows up the whole universe by its gracious effulgence.

There were about ten devotees living with him there, including his mother and younger brother. One of them was Vallimalai Murugar, who for a while every morning sang the Tamil songs of the Tirupugazh with great fervour. These well-known songs, the remarkable outpourings of the famous devotee, Sri Arunagirinatha, are songs in praise of Subrahmanya. When he sang, Bhagavan used to keep time (*tala*) by tapping with two small sticks on the two rings of an iron brazier of live coal kept in front of him. Fumes of incense spread out in rolls from the brazier, suffused with the subtle holy atmosphere of Bhagavan. While Bhagavan's hands were tapping at the brazier thus, his unfathomable look of grace gave one a glimpse of the Beyond in silence. It was an unforgettable experience.

There was also a devotee from Chidambaram, Subrahmanya Iyer, who often sang with great fervour Tiruvachagam, hymns in praise of Arunachala by Bhagavan, and songs in praise of Bhagavan also. One morning when he began a song with the refrain, "*Ramana Satguru, Ramana Satguru, Ramana Satguru Rayane*," Bhagavan also joined in the singing. The devotee got amused and began to laugh at Bhagavan himself singing his own praise. He expressed his amusement and Bhagavan replied, "What is extraordinary about it? Why should one limit Ramana to a form of six feet? Is it not the all-pervading Divinity that you adore when you sing *'Ramana Satguru, Ramana Satguru?'* Why should I not also join in the singing?" We all felt lifted to Bhagavan's standpoint.

The inmates of the Ashram used to get up at dawn and sing some devotional songs in praise of Arunachala and Bhagavan Ramana before beginning their day's work. Niranjanananda Swami told Bhagavan that I could recite hymns in Sanskrit, and Bhagavan looked at me expectantly. Seeing that it was impossible to avoid it, I recited a few verses in Sanskrit. When I had finished, Bhagavan gently looked at me and said, "You have learned all this. Not so, my case. I knew nothing, had learned nothing before I came here. Some mysterious power took possession of me and effected a thorough transformation. Whoever knew then what was happening to me? Your father, who was intending in his boyhood to go to the Himalayas for *tapas*, has become the head of a big family. And I, who knew nothing and planned nothing, have been drawn and kept down here for good! When I left home (in my seventeenth year), I was like a speck swept on by a tremendous flood. I knew

not my body or the world, whether it was day or night. It was difficult even to open my eyes - the eyelids seemed to be glued down. My body became a mere skeleton. Visitors pitied my plight as they were not aware how blissful I was. It was after years that I came across the term '*Brahman*' when I happened to look into some books on Vedanta brought to me. Amused, I said to myself, 'Is this known as Brahman'!" One of the earliest devotees, Sivaprakasam Pillai, has referred to this at the beginning of his brief biography of Bhagavan in Tamil verse (known as *Sri Ramana Charita Ahaval*) as, "One who became a knower of Brahman without knowing even the term *Brahman*." Sivaprakasam Pillai used to sit in a corner in Bhagavan's presence, as the very embodiment of humility.

Finding that I knew a bit of Sanskrit, Bhagavan asked me to take down a copy of *Ramana Gita* and give it to my father. I did so, and it was only after going through it that my father understood Bhagavan. Yet I myself had not studied its contents. It was at the end of 1922 that I happened to go through the thrilling verses in praise of Bhagavan Ramana and, profoundly moved, I made up my mind to return to Bhagavan for good. Thus, *Sri Ramana Gita* served to give direction to me in a critical period of my life when I was thinking of dedicating myself solely to the spiritual pursuit.

As it was impossible to get the permission of my father, I left home unknown to any and reached Tiruvannamalai on the evening of the 2nd of January, 1923. Hearing that Bhagavan had left Skandashram and was then living in a cottage adjoining his mother's samadhi on the southern side of Arunachala, I made my way straight to it, after meditating for a while at sunset time. Proceeding round the Hill, I reached the cottage where Bhagavan was then living. Entering it, I saw Bhagavan reclining peacefully on an elevated dais. As I bowed and stood before him, he asked me, "Did you take the permission of your parents to come over here?" I was caught, and I replied that he need not ask me about it since he had himself irresistibly attracted me to his feet. With a smile, Bhagavan advised me to inform my parents of my whereabouts so that they might be somewhat free from anxiety. I wrote to my father the next day and saw his letter to the Ashrama inquiring about me the day after.

There was a gathering of devotees there and I came to know that it was for the forty-third birthday celebration of Bhagavan the next day. So I learned that I had come to Bhagavan on the evening of the famous *Arudra Darshanam* day. Early next morning there was a gathering of devotees - they were sitting before Bhagavan. But my attention was particularly gripped by a radiant personality amidst the gathering. He was, I came to know, Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri. At once I saw that he was not merely a sastri, a learned man, but a poet and a *tapaswin*. His broad forehead, bright eyes, aquiline nose, charming face and beard, and the melodious ring in his voice - all these proclaimed that he was a *Rishi* to be ranked with the foremost of the Vedic Seers. There was authority, dignity and sweetness in his talk, and his eyes sparkled as he spoke. He recited the following verse (*sloka*) in praise of Bhagavan, which he had just then composed, and explained its import:

1/ It is effulgent Devi Uma sparkling in your eyes dispelling the ignorance of devotees;
2/ It is Lakshmi Devi, the consort of lotus-eyed Vishnu, alive in your lotus face;
3/ It is Para Vak Saraswati, the consort of Brahma, dancing in your talk.
4/ Great Seer, Ramana, the Teacher of the whole world,
5/ How can mortal man praise you adequately?

Those who have come in contact with Ganapati Muni would find this verse well-suited to describe him as well.

After the devotees who had gathered for the birthday celebration of Bhagavan left the Ashram, I approached him with my problem: "How am I to rise above my present animal existence? My own efforts in that direction have proved futile and I am convinced that it is only a superior might that could transform me. And that is

what has brought me here." Bhagavan replied with great compassion, "Yes, you are right. It is only on the awakening of a power mightier than the senses and the mind that these can be subdued. If you awaken and nurture the growth of that power within you, everything else will be conquered. One should sustain the current of meditation uninterrupted. Moderation in food and similar restraints will be helpful in maintaining the inner poise." It was this grace of Bhagavan that gave a start to my spiritual career. A new faith was kindled within me and I found in Bhagavan the strength and support to guide me forever.

Another day, questioned about the problem of *brahmacharya*, Bhagavan replied, "To live and move in Brahman is real *brahmacharya*; continence, of course, is very helpful and indispensable to achieve that end. But so long as you identify yourself with the body, you could never escape sex-thought and distraction. It is only when you realise that you are formless Pure Awareness that sex-distinction disappears for good and that is *brahmacharya*, effortless and spontaneous."

A week after I arrived, I got the permission of Bhagavan to live on *madhukari, i.e.*, begged food. In that context, Bhagavan spoke as follows: "I have experience of it; I lived on such food during my stay at Pavalakkundru to avoid devotees bringing for me special rich food. It is altogether different from professional mendicancy. Here you feel yourself independent and indifferent to everything worldly. It has a purifying effect on the mind."

Four months after my arrival at Arunachala, my parents came there to have *darshan* of Bhagavan and take me back home. Though they did not succeed in this latter intention, they were somehow consoled by Bhagavan before they returned. He told them, "If it were possible to wean one from a course one had taken with all one's heart and soul, parents might, as a matter of duty, try it if it was a wrong course that one had taken; the problem did not arise, if the course taken was intrinsically good." My father was a cousin of Bhagavan four or five years older than he and knew him very well as Venkataraman before he left home for Tiruvannamalai. Though he had heard from others about Bhagavan's spiritual greatness and had also gone through his teaching in *Sri Ramana Gita* and verses in praise of him by his scholar-poet disciple, Ganapati Muni, he was not sure what his reaction would be on seeing Bhagavan. He decided to go to him with an open mind and see for himself what he was. But the moment he sighted him in the stone *mantapa* (on the other side of the Ashram), he was overpowered by a sense of genuine veneration, fell at his feet in adoration and said, "There is nothing of the Venkataraman whom I knew very well in what I see in front of me!" And Bhagavan replied with a smile, "It is long since that fellow disappeared once for all!"

My father then explained that he did not visit him so long because he had not enough of dispassion and non-attachment to approach him. Bhagavan replied, "Is that so? You seem to be obsessed by the delusion that you are going to achieve it in some distant future. But, if you recognise your real nature, the Self, to what is it attached? Dispassion is our very nature."

As the Ashram cottage was being repaired, Bhagavan stayed in the huge stone *mantapa* on the other side of the road during day time and devotees had *darshan* of him there. Bhagavan used to dine with others under the shade of a huge mango tree within the Ashram premises. The cool, clear water of the Ashram well was kept in big pots at the foot of the tree. We enjoyed the shade of the tree and the grace of Bhagavan which, like a cool breeze, blew off man's torments.

As advised by Bhagavan, I engaged myself in non-stop *japa*, day and night, except during hours of sleep. And I studied *Sri Ramana Gita* in the immediate presence of Bhagavan, drinking in the import of every *sloka* in it. Bhagavan explained to me his own Hymn in Praise of Arunachala. Even during his morning and evening walks I used to follow him, hearing his explanations of his inspired words. Early one morning there was no one else

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near Bhagavan and he suggested that we both might go round Arunachala and return before others could notice his absence and begin to search for him. He took me by the forest-path and suggested that Sankara's Hymn in Praise of Dakshinamurti might be taken up for discussion on the way. And within three hours we reached Pandava Thirtham on the slopes of Arunachala, a little to the east of the Ashram, where he used to bathe on a few former occasions.

I shall not pretend that I understood everything that Bhagavan said in explaining the import of the hymn, but there was the spiritual exhilaration of his company in solitude and that was enough for me.

Viswanatha Swami

Those who had the good fortune to enter into the company of Swami Viswanatha will ever remember their contact with him. He was an all-renouncing *sadhu*, a living embodiment of humility, simplicity and deep spiritual experience. On one occasion when requested by an earnest New York devotee to narrate some of his reminiscences of Sri Bhagavan, he began by saying, "Sri Bhagavan has given me the experience that he is none other than my Self. He is not external to me."

And without the slightest pretence or air of scholarship, his knowledge of Tamil and Sanskrit was profound. His proficiency in English was also precise. Bhagavan valued his keen insight in literary matters and encouraged him. He has many translations and works to his credit and the litany of *108 Names of Bhagavan*, daily recited before the Maharshi's Samadhi (grave), was composed by him.

He was a friend and mentor to all devotees coming to Sri Ramanasramam. His austere silence, his genial smile, his love and care for all, especially the disabled and poor, and his fatherly guidance will always be remembered - remembered and missed.

The following letter sent to Arunachala Ashrama in New York, less than two months before his demise, is a testimony to his total absorption in the Supreme Self that Arunachala Ramana was for him.

Dear Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata and fellow devotees at New York and Nova Scotia, I am in receipt of Sri Bhagawat's letter of the 31st of July and Dennis Hartel's letter of August 4th with the good wishes of Yogamayaji, Bhaskar, Joan, Evelyn, Darlene, Margo, Matthew and all of you.

I am reminded of a small couplet (in Tamil): *Nama rupam poyyada, Nadadangalum sattada*; which means: "Name and form is false, the whole universe is nothing but one Existence." The latter half of the verse means: "Delay not; hold on to it."

All well here. Ganesan has returned from his trip to Calcutta and other places. What is there to write and communicate? Sankara says in his *Sarva-vedanta-siddhanta-sara-sangraha* which I studied in my teens: "*Silence, Silence, and again Silence; Silence, Silence and nothing more*." Silence is where *jnana* and *bhakti* meet. There can't be any talk in profound *jnana* or *bhakti*.

Yet, Sankara has written so many commentaries and composed so many original works and hymns in praise of all deities, to draw to the centre various persons in various stages of spiritual development. Dakshinamurti taught in silence; Sankara condescended to help through reasoning as well; and Ramana is Dakshinamurti and Sankara in one form. He is Arunachala in human form. Words are inadequate to describe him. Those who are

fortunate to enter into the Spirit of Arunachala by Divine Grace are saved, *i.e.*, they no longer exist as individuals. They are once for all lost in Bhagavan. To be lost is to be saved.

"All ego gone,
Living as That alone
Is penance good for growth,
Sings Ramana, the Self."
Upadesha Saram, v. 30

After all this, how am I to sign my name?
Love to all of you. *Sri Ramanasramam, 30 August 1979*

Arunachala Akarshaka

(The pull of Arunachala)

The following article was submitted at our request by Eric Ford. Eric is a physics student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. It is often refreshing to read of how a young seeker of Truth traverses the world in search of light and then makes the discovery which fully satisfies his longing, setting him on the royal road to perfection.

In thinking about my trip to India, and ultimately Ramanasramam, I wonder when my journey really began. Two years ago, while I was even still in high school, the idea of going was beginning to take form. In a more subtle - but undeniably real - way, though, all of life was leading to that adventure, that experience.

Throughout my journey a tangible force guided me, drove me. And yet Its workings were obscured to me; I did not see where It was leading me. Before I left the States, and even as I travelled through India, I was not aware of the true nature of my wanderings. Someone once asked me, "Why are you going to India?" And I found I had no answer. Why I was going seemed a mystery. The opportunity had presented itself; what could I do but seize it? I knew not Him who guides, nor to where I was being guided, nor even that I was being guided at all. My journey, it seems, was all about finding that out. Now, months later, the purpose of the journey seems so clear. It was just this: to experience Ramanasramam. By no will of my own I was led there. All happened as ordained by the One higher than this mind. All was the blessings of Bhagavan. Perhaps this is the most striking feature of my journey: I started out not knowing what I was doing or where I was going but in the end was led to the place where I needed to go. In the beginning, visiting India had nothing to do with going to Tiruvannamalai. I had reserved a plane ticket before I even knew Ramanasramam existed. But as the day of departure came closer I came to know of Bhagavan. From that time forward I began to know more and more, and gradually Ramanasramam became my unswerving goal. In the end it was apparent that my trip to India and my trip to Arunachala were one and the same.

I came to feed on Thee, but Thou hast fed on me; now I am peaceful, O Arunachala.
Marital Garland of Letters, v. 28

December 25, 1989, found me in Bombay, a few thousand kilometres from where I was supposed to be - New Delhi - but well on my way nevertheless. My journey had begun.

I travelled quite a bit before eventually coming to stay at Ramanasramam - each stop offering a new lesson bearing me on to the goal.

First on the itinerary was New Delhi; then it was on to Hardwar and Rishikesh. There I spent a few days visiting various places and one day took a bath in the (cold) Ganga.

Soon enough I was on my way to Benares. I stayed there almost a week and gradually developed a great affinity for the place. It was when I was there, I believe, that I really began to understand where my trip was taking me.

"6 January 1990 - I realised yesterday that at one level my trip here only serves to satiate the senses (like it does for my fellow tourists). I saw a sign that said: 'The best and most beautiful things cannot be seen or even touched but must be felt with the heart.' I have become dissatisfied with the sensory aspect of my journey. The trip meets ends that I don't have any need of. But in another sense, my search is for more than just a new and exotic sense experience. It is a search for things that can be felt with the heart. It's a search for my soul. That's what India has to offer. That's why I want to get to Ramanasramam now."

And on to Ramanasramam it was. After a short stay in Calcutta, a few long train rides, and seven days, I was there.

"14 January 1990 - I have arrived. I'm here! Here where Bhagavan lived (and I think still does in a non-physical way). This place is very special. I feel comfortable. It's as if this is home in a way. Perhaps the best part, now it seems, is that I'll be staying for quite some time here. That is, until the end of my trip."

I guess the important part of my story is all over. I had arrived; what more could be said? Nevertheless, I am compelled to tag some feeble words to my two-week stay there.

Many striking things happened at Ramanasramam. The experiences of each person must come according to what stage he is in. For me, my mind was constantly turned inward. This was very important and produced many benefits.

"23 January 1990 - The past ten days have been almost like a continuous meditation. Just being here puts me in a state where I feel full with quietness. The whole day is one long quest. Hour after hour I'll spend quieting my mind and searching for the source of the 'I'."

Shortly after arriving I met up with Dennis. He was staying at Ramanasramam for three or four months, some of which overlapped my stay there. Having him there was very helpful. Much of the first week I spent reading about Bhagavan's life and visiting many of the places I read about: Arunachaleswara temple, Gurumurtam, places on the hill, etc.

Soon I began to meet some of the various devotees, a few of whom were alive in Bhagavan's time. This was very special indeed and I consider it to be a momentous blessing.

"*Darsan* of the matured *jnani* constitutes the acme of purification of baths taken in sacred waters, divine worship, *mantra-japa*, spiritual austerities, charitable acts, and devotional worship of Lord Siva Himself. To find and gain access to the sacred presence of such a *jnani* is the luckiest of opportunities that one could ever obtain in this world." - *Ribhu Gita Ch. 19 v. 11* - translated by Professor N.R. Krishnamoorti Aiyer in *The Essence of the Ribhu Gita, No. 33, p. 10*

About a week after arriving I went on the famed trek around Arunachala.

"19 January 1990 - I just finished *Giri Pradakshina*. I started out after breakfast at 7:30 a.m. and went around arriving back here at 11:00 a.m. I walked mostly barefoot, although I did put on sandals for some of the stretch along the dirt road part. My feet are not happy, but I am."

My stay at Ramanasramam continued and gradually drew to a close. Soon I would be leaving.

"25 January 1990 - I climbed Arunachala today. It's so big! I didn't realize the height of the peak - it's a half-mile up. Parts of it were quite steep but the trail was easy to follow. I knew I was getting near the top when I started seeing broken coconut shells (left-overs from *Deepam* festivals). The top is all black from the soot of

many *deepam* lightings, and oily from the coconuts of many *puja* offerings. Looking down I could see all of Tiruvannamalai and also Adi Annamalai as well as the *pradakshina* road and the *gopurams* of the temple here at Ramanasramam ... Well, tomorrow I take leave of this place."

Everything was arranged so that when it was time for me to leave Ramanasramam, I was prepared to do so. I had really come to feel, beyond just words, that Arunachala is not a place in South India. It is always and everywhere, and there is no coming or going.

Having been led to Ramanasramam and emboldened by my stay there, I am ready to continue my *sadhana* - now in another part of the world.

These days, I continue on and on. There is no stopping, no turning away, any more. I plug along until the very end; until the real journey is over and there is no one left to write any stories; until He completely absorbs me.

In Memorium

Maganlal L. Bhatt, 82, quietly passed away on Tuesday, July 16th at his son's home in Parlin, New Jersey.

M. L. Bhatt was a self-made man, born in Babra, Gujarat. He travelled extensively throughout India in different business capacities. While in Bombay in 1946 he joined the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Sri Ramana Maharshi and it was then that the seed of 'Ramana' was planted in him. It slowly grew until 1952 when his devotion to his Guru and God blossomed and became all-consuming.

He raised four children (Chhaya, Maya, Geeta, and Virat), all of whom have followed his righteous example and become devotees of Bhagavan.

During his last years, whenever he was questioned about Bhagavan, he would invariably begin speaking with enthusiasm, but soon his voice would quiver, tears would flow and he would assume silence. His devotion transcended words. Throughout his final days he suffered much. When asked he would reply, "Yes, the body is in pain. I am not."

When his last moments approached, Geeta and Virat were sitting on the floor at his bedside; his gracious and pious wife, Indira, was quietly sitting by his side. At 8:45 a.m. Indira saw a sudden flash of lightning. Looking up at the window she noticed it was a clear and sunny day. Looking back down at her lifelong partner, she saw his breath had ceased that very moment. Maganlal Bhatt was absorbed into the light of Arunachala, the Self.

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

From 1935 we move on to the latter part of 1938, where in the film we first see Bhagavan sprightly traversing his beloved Arunachala. In his left hand he carries a kamandalu, while his right hand lightly works a walking stick. His towel covers the front part of the body from his chest down to below his koupina. The towel is not tied but rather tucked under his armpits and held there by keeping the upper part of his arms close to his body. Although his back is not seen, we can assume it is not covered.

The President of Sri Ramanasramam, Sri T. N. Venkataraman, remembers this film to be taken by Jayadevlal Dave in the year 1938. A clue to a more precise date of the filming can be construed by the presence of Guy Hague, an American mining engineer. In Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, talk number 594, dated December 15, 1938, there is mention of "...Mr. Hague, the American mining engineer who is here as a temporary

resident for the last two months." Thus we can infer the filming was done in October, November or December of '38. Bhagavan was clean-shaven in the film, and it is well known that he was shaved every month on *Purnima* (full moon). In 1938 *Purnima* fell on October 9, November 7, and December 7. So, if the Talks statement ("...resident for the last two months") is correct, then the month of October can be disqualified. Let us take it that this film was shot in November or December 1938. With the help of Sri Ramanasramam's guest register we, in all likelihood, could pinpoint the date exactly.

In the film Bhagavan appears cheerful while walking on the hill northwest of the Ashram. He is followed by T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, Guy Hague (in shorts, white shirt, sandals and cane, with a safari-like hat under his right arm), Krishnaswami (an attendant), someone from the filming group (evident from the camera paraphernalia dangling from his arm), and Annamalai Swami, who later joins the group.

Annamalai Swami was a long-time resident of the Ashram and laboured hard constructing many of the present well-built Ashram buildings. We find a number of references to him in Talks and other Ashram books. Surprisingly, fifty-three years after this film was shot, the attendant Krishnaswami and Annamalai Swami are still residing at the foot of the Holy Hill, just west of the Ashram in Palakottu. The ideals and teachings imbibed from their long association with the Maharshi have remained intact and they both have been living an austere and simple life all these decades.

T. K. Sundaresa Iyer is seen walking directly behind Bhagavan, and at one point we see him leaning his torso to the right, gesturing with his hands and speaking to Bhagavan in a very humble, imploring manner. Bhagavan seems to be responding to him, although he never turns his head when replying.

Guy Hague is said to have stayed at Ramanasramam for two-and-a-half years. It seems he was called back to America with the onset of World War II. There is much speculation that he was the inspiration behind the leading character in Somerset Maugham's novel, The Razor's Edge. The similarities are many. Also, there are many similarities between Bhagavan and the Indian Yogi presented by the author in the same novel. Maugham visited the Maharshi and evidence reveals he was duly impressed.

Finally, the group, having made its way to the north entrance of the Ashram, walks down the stairs and over to the front of the Old Hall, where a large, cushioned chair has been placed outside. Bhagavan sits on the chair, wipes the perspiration from his brow with his towel, while Krishnaswami cleans his feet with another towel. He is given a cup of water to drink, which he does in typical South Indian style. Meanwhile, Madhava Swami (another attendant) picks up a fan and begins fanning Bhagavan. Bhagavan lifts his feet up on the chair, turns to the camera and gives a broad, gracious smile. Right after that, Krishnaswami relieves Madhava of fanning, but Bhagavan soon comments, gestures with both hands, and gives a quick shake of the head. The message seems clear: stop fanning. Krishnaswami continues and the scene closes.

All of what has just been described comprises only one minute and fifteen seconds of film. Although brief, it is relevant footage, being one of only two short reels existing from the 1930's. The Maharshi was then nearing his fifty-ninth birthday.

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THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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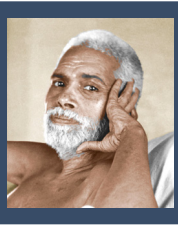


As I Saw Him - 5

by

Varanasi Subbalakshmi

Varanasi Subbalakshmi rendered useful service in the Ashram kitchen during the lifetime of Sri Bhagavan. Her chosen God was Lord Viswanath of Benares. However, when she was going to Benares for good she had a dream in which Lord Viswanath told her to return to Arunachala, saying that Bhagavan Ramana was the embodiment of Rama, Krishna, Siva and all other Gods.

I lost my husband when I was sixteen. I went back to my mother's house and lived there as a widow should, trying to pray to and meditate on God. My mother's mind too was devoted to the spiritual quest and religion was the main thing in her life.

Once we went on a pilgrimage to Kaveri Pushkaram and on our way back we stopped at Arunachala. There we were told that a young Brahmin saint had been living on the hill for the past ten years. The next morning we went up the hill along with others with whom we were travelling. At Mulaipal Tirtha we cooked our food, ate and had some rest. Then we went further and found the young Swami near Virupaksha Cave. There was a brick platform at the entrance of the cave and he was sitting on it. As soon as I saw him, I was at once convinced that God Arunachala Himself had come in human form to give salvation to all who approached Him.

He was about thirty at the time, and wonderful to look at; he was bright and shining like burnished gold, his eyes were blooming and clear, like the petals of a lotus. He looked at us for a long time. The peak of Arunachala was towering over our heads, the huge towers of the temple were below and an immense silence surrounded the Swami. Then the ladies started whispering. One wanted to pray for a child for her daughter-in-law who was barren, but another was saying that the Swami was too exalted for such worldly matters. Finally the Swami was told of the young wife's sorrow. He smiled and lifted his folded hands to the sky as if saying : "All happens by the will of the Almighty."

We returned to Nellore and the impression of that visit faded away. I did not even dream at that time that my life would be spent at the feet of the Swami.

When I was thirty-one I went to Rameshwaram on a pilgrimage and on my return journey I stopped at Tiruvannamalai. I learned that the Swami was then living at the foot of the hill. That afternoon we went to see him at his Ashram. There was a thatched shed over his mother's samadhi and a tiled hall for meeting the Swami. He was seated on a couch and about a dozen devotees were on the bare floor. We sat in silence for ten minutes and returned to the town.

Bhagavan's presence gave me the experience of inner silence and mental stillness, but away from him I could not regain it and I spent a year vainly trying to free myself from all thought. Some friends were going to see Sri Aurobindo's Ashram at Pondicherry and they took me along. They were to stay there for a week. I was not much impressed and went for a short visit to Ramanasramam. A learned Shastri whom I knew appeared in my

dream and asked me: "Where was the need for you to go to Pondicherry? Entrust yourself to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. He is God Himself. He will surely lead you to salvation."

But even such a clear dream was not enough. I cherished a plan of going to Benares and spending my life there in holy austerities. I decided to go to Bhagavan, learn from him how to meditate, and then leave for Benares for good. My friend Parvatamma decided to join me in the spiritual adventure. Accordingly we went to Tiruvannamalai and rented a house. In the afternoon we took cashew nuts and sugar candy as an offering to Bhagavan and went to the Ashram. We placed our offerings on a stool before him and sat down. The cow Lakshmi happened to be lying near Bhagavan's sofa. She got up and began to chew our precious offerings. Bhagavan looked on and said nothing. His attendant, Madhava Swami, did not even look. We thought it might be impious to disturb the cow, but soon I got exasperated and exclaimed, "Please remove the cow !" Madhava Swami replied: "Why? I thought you offered those sweets to Lakshmi !"

What is Atma?

The next day at noon I was again at Ramanasramam. His midday meal over, Bhagavan was reclining on the sofa and explaining a verse from the *Bhagavad Gita* to Sri Ramiah Yogi. As no one else was in the hall, I gathered courage and asked: "What is *Atma*? Is it the limitless ether of space or the awareness that cognizes everything?" Bhagavan replied: "To remain without thinking 'this is *Atma*' and 'that is *Atma*', is itself *Atma*." He looked at me and I felt my mind melt away into nothing. No thought would come, only the feeling of immense, unutterable peace. My doubts were cleared.

Every day I would visit Bhagavan and listen to his talks with the devotees. Deep in my mind there was the same rock-like stillness, immensely solid and yet strangely vibrant.

Several times I was invited to work in the Ashram, but the Ashram ways were not orthodox enough for me. One day Bhagavan's own sister asked me to take her place in the Ashram, for she had to leave for some time. I could not refuse. At that time Santammal was the chief cook and my duty was to help her. To my great joy Bhagavan was in the kitchen with us most of the time. He taught me to cook tastily and neatly. I would spend all day in the Ashram and in the evening I would go to the town to sleep, for there was no sleeping accommodation for women in the Ashram.

Once Bhagavan said: "You widows do not eat vegetables like drumsticks and radish. Diet restrictions are good to strengthen the will. Besides, the quality of food and the manner of eating have an influence on the mind." I was very happy to work in the kitchen directly under Bhagavan's supervision; yet I wanted to go home. The Ashram ways were too unorthodox for me. And there was too much work. I did not want to work all day long. I wanted to sit quietly and meditate in solitude.

I Leave the Ashram

So I left again for my village and I went away for about a year. I divided my time between idleness and meditation. Yet my heart was at the Ashram. I would tell myself: "Where is the need of running about. Is not Bhagavan here and everywhere?" But my heart was calling me to Bhagavan. Even when I was pleading with myself, that in the Ashram there would be no time for meditation, my heart would say: "Working in the kitchen by his side is far better than meditation." At home I had all the leisure I wanted, but it seemed to me that I was wasting my time. Later I learned that that was the time Bhagavan used to remember me very often.

Once they were preparing *pongal* (pulse with rice and black pepper) to celebrate Bhagavan's monthly birth-star (*Punarvasu*) and Bhagavan told Santammal: "Subbalakshmi is far away yet she worries whether *pongal* is cooked here today or not." On some other festival day Bhagavan announced:

"Subbalakshmi will turn up; keep some *pongal* for her." That very day I arrived at the Ashram.

His great love for me, a worthless devotee, bound me firmly to his feet. Again and again I wanted to leave the Ashram, but he held me for my good, more powerfully than I held on to him.

Whenever I was collecting courage to tell Bhagavan about my desire to leave, he would seem to read my thoughts and forestall me by giving me something special to do. I felt I had too much to do and that my life was being wasted.

One day Bhagavan was looking at me intently and said: "It looks as if you are still hankering after meditation." I replied: "What have I got except endless work in the kitchen?" Bhagavan said with deep feeling: "Your hands may do the work but your mind can remain still. You are that which never moves. Realize that and you will find that work is not a strain. But as long as you think that you are the body and that the work is done by you, you will feel your life to be an endless toil. In fact, it is the mind that toils, not the body. Even if your body keeps quiet, will your mind keep quiet too? Even in sleep the mind is busy with its dreams."

I replied: "Yes, Swami, it is as natural for you to know that you are not your body as it is for us to think that we are the body. I had a dream recently in which you were explaining this very point. I was dreaming that I was working in the kitchen and you were having your bath in your usual place behind the bamboo mat partition. You asked: 'Who is it?' I replied:

'Who shall I say I am?' You said: 'Exactly so, you are nothing of which something can be said.' Now, just remember that was my dream and it was quite clear. Why can't I remember always that I am not the body?" "Because you haven't had enough of it," he smiled.

Do Not Torture The Body

I used to fast quite often, as advised in some scriptural texts. In one of the books, I read: "He who wants to know himself and yet pays attention to his body is like a man who trusts a crocodile to take him across a river." I showed the text to Bhagavan and he explained: "It does not mean that you should starve. You need not torture the body. It only means not giving the body more than it needs. With your mind, hold on to enquiry and just keep the body going so that it does not become a hindrance. For this, pure and fresh food, simply prepared and taken in moderation, is a great help."

Another day I asked Bhagavan's permission to put on the *sannyasin's* orange robes and beg for my food. He said: "Will coloured clothes give you renunciation? First learn what *sannyasa* means."

Once five or six devotees sat down before Bhagavan and sang a hymn in praise of the Guru. He got up in the middle of the recitation and went away, saying: "Prayers and praises will not take one far. It is the merciful look of the teacher that bestows true knowledge." I felt elated. Had I not received his merciful glances? But the next day he was saying: "Unless one becomes a six month old baby there is no hope for him in the realm of self-knowledge." My heart sank. Although I lived in the presence of Lord Arunachala Himself, I was far from becoming an infant.

Why Should You Doubt?

Another time Bhagavan was telling us stories from the lives of devotees of bygone ages. I questioned him: "It is written that God appeared before the devotee and shed His grace on him while he was still in his mother's womb. Can it be true?" To that Bhagavan replied: "Why should you doubt? Will doubt profit you? Only your devotion will suffer. Those stories are as real as your telling me that you are present here and now."

Bhagavan was one day reading and explaining *Tirupugazh* in Tamil to Alamelammal of Madura. I did not know Tamil and I could only look on. I saw a change in Bhagavan. A light was shining from within him. His face was radiant, his smile was beaming, his eyes were full of compassion. His words reverberated in the mind and were instantly and deeply understood. All my being was carried upwards on a current of strange vibrations. The memory of this experience is ever present in my heart. A great joy has remained with me that I was privileged to sit at the feet of the Divine Being.

It was ever like this with him. Whoever went to him, he would go down to his level; his words and gestures, even the intonation of his voice, would adapt themselves to the make-up of the people around him. With children he was their playmate, to family people - a wise counsellor, to pundits - a well of knowledge, to yogis - the God of will, the God of victory. He saw himself in them and they saw themselves in him and their hearts would be bound to his feet in everlasting love. All who came to see him would be charmed by his love and kindness, beauty and wisdom, and the overwhelming sense of unity he radiated like fire radiating heat. To some he would grant a special vision, invisible to others; with some he would openly discourse. Crowds would gather round him and each one would see him differently. Even his pictures differ. A stranger would not guess that they are all of the same person.

Grant Me Salvation, Swami

One afternoon a lady from Kumbhakonam sat near Bhagavan and exclaimed: "How glad I am that I have met you, Swami. I have craved to see you for a long time, Swami. Not that I want anything, Swami. Only please be kind and grant me salvation, Swami." With that she got up and went away. Bhagavan had a hearty laugh. "Look at her - all she wants is salvation. Give her salvation, she wants nothing else." I said: "Is it not what we all want?"

He replied: "Is salvation something to be handed over on request? Do I keep bundles of salvation concealed about me, that people should ask me for salvation? She said 'I do not want anything.' If it is sincere, that itself is salvation. What is there I can give and what is there they can take?"

Somebody brought a bell to be rung at the *arati* ceremony and it was put into Bhagavan's hands. He tried its sound in various ways and laughed: "God wants us to make a fire of our past evil deeds and burn our karma in it. But these people burn a copper worth of camphor and hope to please the Almighty. Do they really believe that they can get something for nothing? They do not want to bend to God, they want God to bend to them. In their greed they would swallow God, but they would not let him swallow them. Some boast of their offerings. What have they got to offer? The idol of Vinayaka (Ganesha) is made of *jaggery*. They break off a piece of it and offer it to Him. The only offering worthy of the Lord is to clear the mind of thoughts and remain steady in the peace of Self."

In the early days, when I joined the Ashram, Bhagavan used to help in grinding lentils, peeling vegetables and even lending a hand in cooking. He would get up long before daybreak to join the kitchen staff at their work.

We ladies would arrive by sunrise, and Bhagavan would see that all was ready for our arrival and we would often find a part of our work already done. To forestall him we would come by five; he would come at four; we would come then at three. When he saw that we were left without sleep, he stopped entering the kitchen before sunrise and gave us time to sleep.

He was the very embodiment of wisdom and kindness, though he did not mind our faults and mistakes, he made us follow his instructions to the letter. We had to do the same task again and again until it was done to his complete satisfaction. Did he do it for himself? Of what use was it to him? He wanted to prove to us that we could do things right, that only lack of patience and attention causes all the mess. He sometimes seemed too severe, even harsh, to make us do something correctly, for he knew what we did not know - that we can act correctly if we only try. With experience came confidence, and with confidence the great peace of righteousness.

In daily life he avoided all distinction. At work and at food he was one of us. But in the hall, seated on the sofa, he was the great Lord of Kailas, the Holy Mountain. Whenever Bhagavan would enter or leave the hall, we would all get up respectfully. One could see that he did not like so many people being disturbed because of him.

He wanted us to learn well the lesson that God is present in every being in all his glory and fullness and must be given equal reverence. He was tireless in hammering this lesson into our minds and hearts, and he would ruthlessly sacrifice the little comforts we so loved to provide for him, as soon as he noticed a trace of preference. The law that what cannot be shared must not be touched was supreme in his way of dealing with us. Separative and exclusive feelings are the cause of the "I" and therefore the greatest obstacles in the realization of the One. No wonder he was exterminating them so relentlessly.

Once Bhagavan had jaundice. He had to be put on a fruit diet, but he would not eat fruit unless all ate, and in equal quantities too! Where could we get such a lot of fruit? Yet he was adamant and would leave his share untouched unless he saw an equal share on everybody's leaf-plate. Those who say that a sick man needs special food and must not give trouble, miss the point. Bhagavan was not sick. His body had jaundice, that was all. He wanted to impress on our minds that under no condition must a man have a greater share. Our learning this lesson was more important to him than the cure of his jaundice.

To serve him at meal-times was by itself a dangerous adventure. Our womanly desire was to fill him to the brim. His rule was to clear the plate no matter what or how much was served. Not a speck of food would be left uneaten. So we had to be watchful and serve much less than what we would like to. It was not easy and we would often fail. He would scold us bitterly, or, what was infinitely worse, would fall ill and suffer. I cannot understand how he managed to produce an illness when a lesson was needed, but our life with him was crisis after crisis.

He would take any amount of trouble to teach us the virtues necessary for self-discovery. Our life in the Ashram was a school of yoga, and a hard school too. For book-knowledge was as nothing to him; only character and genuine spiritual experience counted.

With time he ceased working in the kitchen, but we could still find him in the dining hall. When all would leave after food, he would linger on his seat and we would collect around him and chat and listen to his precious words. He would teach us and guide us and we would forget the years that passed and be again the happy crowd of yore.

Changed to the Very Root of Our Being

One had to live and work with him to know what a great teacher he was. Through the trifles of daily life he taught us Vedanta in theory and practice. He led us with absolute wisdom and infinite kindness and we were changed to the very root of our being, not even knowing the depth and scope of his influence. It is only now, after so many years, that we can see the meaning of the orders, prohibitions, scoldings and storms that we had to endure. At that time we understood so little and just obeyed, because we felt that he was God. Even that feeling we owed to his grace, for from time to time he would let us see him as he really was, the Lord Almighty, and not the human frame to which we were accustomed.

We were women, simple and uneducated. It was our love for him, a reflection of his love, that chained us to his feet and made us stay. For him we gave up hearth and home and all our earthly ties. We only knew that we were safe with him, that in some miraculous way he would take us to our goal. He himself was our goal, our real home. More than that we did not know or care. We were even slow to learn the lesson of equality to man and beast which he was so anxious to teach us first. To us he alone existed. The radiant form of Ramana was enough for us. We did not know that it was not enough, that a human soul must learn to embrace the universe and realize its own presence in every living being. We would concentrate too much on him and resent his compelling us to enlarge our little circle. His sometimes harsh treatment would bewilder us and make us cry. Now we see that it was love that suffered as it laboured.

Yogis control themselves severely for long to reach the state to which Bhagavan would take us by making us work near him in the kitchen. The small tasks of daily life he would make into avenues to light and bliss. Whoever has not experienced the ecstasy of grinding, the rapture of cooking, the joy of serving *iddlies* to devotees, his devotees, the state when the mind is in the heart and the heart is in him and he is in the work, does not know how much bliss a human heart contains.

Although physically he is no more with us, he still directs us, as in the past. He will not let go his hold on us until we reach the Other Shore. This is our unshaken faith. We may not always be conscious of his guidance, but we are safe in his hands.

Sri Krishna, in His mercy became a cowherd to teach simple milkmaids the way to salvation. Similarly Bhagavan, the same supreme Being in another form, took to cooking in order to save a few ignorant women. With his eyes he served his devotees the food of the spirit, with his hands-the bread of life.

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

(Continued from the last issue)

The next two minutes of 16mm film are a continuation of the 1938 film featured in our last issue and taken by Jayadevlal Dave. It begins with a view of the newly built dining hall, shot from the hill, about 100 meters up. This combined dining hall and kitchen, built from local stone and high quality material, was Sri Ramanasramam's largest construction endeavour to that date - certainly, some sceptics believed unjustifiably large. But, in reality, it was a foresighted enterprise, towards which Jayadevlal Dave must have been importuned to aim his camera with impressive results.

From the dining hall the camera briefly pans to the east, taking in the *gosala* (cow shed) and other buildings,

mostly hidden by overgrowth. Then on to the new office and bookstore, standing side by side with "SRI RAMANASRAMAM, OFFICE, NIRANJANANDA SWAMI, C. R. SARVADIKARI [spelling as given] written above the entrance. The office building, also a well-built structure, stands today and is used for storing and packing book orders. It is just north of the Samadhi Hall. And when the Samadhi Hall was built in 1970 the whole bookstore building was razed and the space incorporated into the large hall enshrining the *Lingam* over Bhagavan's grave.

Now on to the Old Hall where we briefly see Jayadevlal Dave and Krishnaswami. The camera quickly scans the holy hill then focuses on a whitewashed stone where we read "Skandasramam" in English and Tamil, and an arrow pointing the way. Even today this rock is whitewashed and painted with the same message.

At this juncture, the Maharshi enters the scene walking down his beloved hill, followed by his devoted attendant, Madhava Swami. Before entering the Ashram grounds, Mr. Dave walks into view with joined hands to offer salutations to the Maharshi (and obviously to be filmed). The Maharshi lifts his cane as to shoo him away and avoid the adoration. He then makes his way to the stairs that go up and then down into the Ashram.

In the next scene we see Bhagavan, the attendant Krishnaswami, and Mr. Dave walking west of the Ashram in Palakothu. The Maharshi seems unconcerned about the filming as he proceeds on his normal daily walk to this area; of course, not so with the other two. We see a thick forest in contrast to its present condition. The group unceremoniously walks around the bank of the small tank in Palakuttu and the film ends. This is the last of the films from the 1930s.

From here, our next film takes us ahead about eight years to 1946. On the opening scene the front gate of Sri Ramanasramam appears, just as we see it today. Then a few quick images pass: a detailed view of the Mathrubhuteswara Temple construction, the main entrance of the *gosala*, the Old Hall, and then Bhagavan appears in a delightful manner.

Walking out of the office Bhagavan turns left towards the Old Hall and is immediately met by a man holding a one-year-old babe. He spontaneously lifts the point of his walking stick and playfully pokes the child in the tummy, then affectionately pats the child and moves on. This short little act of playful affection is one of the few scenes wherein we see the Bhagavan so often read about - his human tenderness, his gracious spontaneity.

This is the same year that the famous 'Welling Bust' photo of the Maharshi was taken. It could have been taken that very day, for his features are charmingly softened by a short crop of white hair covering his face and head, his look is cool and penetrating and an inexplicable aura of freedom and joy seems to touch the heart of the onlooker.

The Maharshi turns toward the camera, grasps the towel resting over his left shoulder and flips it under his left arm, being quite aware the camera is focused on him. He walks almost directly toward the camera. The attendant Rangaswamy, along with T. N. Venkataraman's two sons, Sundaram and Ganesan, follow behind him. During the next thirty seconds the cameraman takes five other shootings of Bhagavan walking towards him. In one we see the storekeeper, Kumaraswamy.

- (To be continued)

BOOK REVIEW

Ramana Smrti Souvenir

(Published by Sri Ramanasramam)

In 1980 the birth centenary anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi was observed in India and abroad. It was a grand occasion marked by a heightened awareness throughout the world of this unique personality, born in a remote South Indian village one hundred years ago. One of the more lasting and inspiring tributes to the beloved sage is this *Ramana Smrti Souvenir*, released as an offering during the celebrations.

The lead article of this issue (AS I SAW HIM-5) is an extract from this book. There are several other articles such as this, providing us with a novel view of how the Maharshi instructed his intimate devotees - mostly women - in the highest principles of spirituality through the simple chores of daily life. While reading these unforgettable tales, one actually feels the Maharshi's presence and his relentless concern for the welfare of his devotees.
Shantamma, Lokammal, Gouriammal and Sampurnamma are a few of the many women devotees represented in this work. Their recollections bring to light new facets of Bhagavan's personality and are rich with a clear reflection of the love and guidance they received from their Master. These reminiscences recreate a large family of devotees, from all walks of life, bathing in the grace of a Mahapurusha.

Besides this, there are a total of sixty-two tributes and recollections by admirers, scholars, new and old devotees from the East and West. T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, Voruganti Krishnayya, Swami Chidbhavananda, Wei Wu Wei, K. K. Nambiar, T. M. P. Mahadevan, Dilip Kumar Roy, A. Devaraja Mudaliar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Dr. Karan Singh are just a few of the eminent personalities who contributed.

It is a 7 x 10 inch publication, having a picture-frame quality photo adorning its frontispiece. Also, many of the contributor's photos follow their tribute, along with numerable bust photos of the Maharshi.

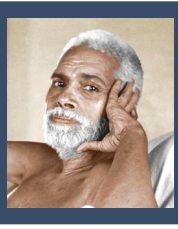
The book concludes with an invaluable six-page "Visitors Guide" to Tiruvannamalai and Sri Ramanasramam.

We highly recommend this book to all who wish to dive deeper into the unique life and teachings of the Maharshi.

The *Maharshi* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil K. Sharma. Produced and distributed by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, 66-12 Clyde Street, Rego Park, New York 11374, USA. Tel: (718) 575 3215. E-mail: ashrama@aol.com. All editions of this newsletter can be found on the internet at - "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 1992 EDITED BY - DENNIS HARTEL & DR. ANIL K. SHARMA VOL. 2 - NO. 1



AS I SAW HIM - 6

From Sri Ramana Reminiscences

by

G. V. Subbaramayya

Asked "How does a *grihastha* (householder) fare in the scheme of *Moksha* (liberation)?" the Maharshi said, "The obstacle is the mind. It must be got over whether at home or in the forest. Renunciation is always in the mind, not in going to the forest or solitary places, or giving up one's duties. The main thing is to see that the mind does not turn outward but inward."

G. V. Subbaramayya, a professor and poet, approached the Maharshi with childlike faith and spontaneous devotion - like an innocent child to his loving father. He laid bare, without reserve, his sorrows, joys, devotion and defects, and the Maharshi reciprocated, keeping a close and gracious eye on all his affairs. What follows is but a small, yet telling sample from his *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*.

My first pilgrimage to Sri Ramanasramam was on June 8th, 1933. I travelled alone to Tiruvannamalai. I was at that time in great sorrow, having suffered my first bereavement the previous December, when my two-year-old son died suddenly. For over two years I had been reading the works of Sri Bhagavan and other Ashram literature. My main interest had been literary rather than philosophical. I had been struck with wonder at the style of the Telugu *Upadesa Saram* which, in its simplicity, felicity and classic finish, could equal that of the greatest Telugu poet Tikkana. I had felt convinced that a Tamilian who could compose such Telugu verse must be divinely inspired, and I had wanted to see him. But my immediate quest at the time was for peace and solace.

In the morning I had *darshan* of Sri Bhagavan in the old Hall. As our eyes met, there was a miraculous effect upon my mind. I felt as if I had plunged into a pool of peace, and with eyes shut, sat in a state of ecstasy for nearly an hour. When I came to normal consciousness, I found someone spraying the Hall to keep off insects, and Sri Bhagavan mildly objecting with a silent shake of his head.

As I now heard Sri Bhagavan saying something, I made bold to ask him a question. "*The Bhagavad Gita* says that mortals cast off their worn-out bodies, just as one casts away the worn-out clothes and wears new garments. How does this apply to the deaths of infants whose bodies are new and fresh?" I asked. Sri Bhagavan promptly replied: "How do you know that the body of the dead child is not worn-out? It may not be apparent; but unless it is worn-out it will not die. That is the law of Nature."

Immediately after lunch, I left the Ashram even without taking leave of Sri Bhagavan. I came and went incognito, as an utter stranger.

After nearly three years, I again visited the Ashram in the spring of 1936, this time with a note of introduction. Sri Bhagavan, even before going through it, gave me a knowing nod and gracious smile and said, "Why the introduction? You have come before; you are not new." To add to my wonder I now felt as though my dead

father had come back alive; the resemblance was so striking. My approach to Sri Ramana has ever since been that of a child to its parent, quite fearless free and familiar.

Some years ago I had been initiated into two *mantras* and was enjoined to repeat them a minimum number of times every day. I had been doing it punctiliously, but now after entering the Ashram, I had no mind to the *mantras* or do any kind of formal worship. After a few days I was seized with the fear of incurring sin by failing to observe the instructions on my initiation. So I put it to Sri Bhagavan himself, making a clean breast of my default. Sri Bhagavan smiled and said, "Just because you have done so much of *japa*, its merit has brought you here. Why should you now fear while enjoying the fruit of the *japa*?"

I had also at this time a more serious trouble. I had been practising breath control (*pranayama*) as taught by Swami Ramtirtha in his works. There came a stage when I felt a terrible sensation as though my head would crack and break into pieces. Then I stopped doing it, but every day the sensation was recurring at the time of practice and the fear was growing that disaster was imminent. So, at dead of night, when Bhagavan was alone, I approached him with my tale. He said laughing, "What! Again you are seized with fear! These are the usual experiences of people who do yogic exercises without the immediate guidance of a Guru, but having come to me, why should you fear?" Then Sri Bhagavan added in an undertone: "Next time you get that sensation, you think of me and you will be all right." From that moment to this I have never felt it again.

"Be still and know that I am God"

During the Christmas of 1936, I attended Sri Bhagavan's *Jayanti* celebration for the first time. Many Western visitors had come. One of them, Mr. Maurice Frydman, a Polish Jew of subtle intellect, plied Sri Bhagavan with ingenious pleas for practical guidance for Self-realization. Sri Bhagavan followed his arguments with keen interest but kept silent all the time. When pressed to say something, Sri Bhagavan only quoted from the Bible, "Be still and know that I am God," and added "The Lord said 'know' and not, 'think' that I am God." We understood Sri Bhagavan as meaning that all these arguments were spun by the intellect, the stilling of which was the only way to Realisation.

Another visitor, Mr. Duncan Greenless, said, "Bhagavan, while we are in your presence, a certain halo of purity and peace seems to surround us. It continues for some time after we leave. Then it disappears and the old stupidities return. Why is it so?" Sri Bhagavan replied, "It is all the work of the mind. Like the battery it wears out and has to be recharged. But when mind control is perfect, there will be no further trouble."

Availing myself of a short holiday in February 1937, I again went to the Ashram to submit my translation of Sri Kavyakantha's *Gitamala* in person. As I entered the Hall and was prostrating, to my consternation, my five year old daughter, Lalita, went very near to Sri Bhagavan and asked him, "What is your name, Sir?" Sri Bhagavan replied with a counter-query, "What is your name?" "My name is Lalita," said she, and repeated her question, "What is yours, please?" Now Sri Bhagavan pointing to himself with His right hand on the right side of his chest said, "What! don't you know ME?" She at once answered, "Oh yes! I simply asked for fun." At this Sri Bhagavan burst into laughter.

Lalita's leave-taking was a most moving scene. As she knelt down, Sri Bhagavan who was then squatting after his breakfast, tapped her on the back with his stick saying, "This is to keep you in mind lest you should forget." Then he lifted her and hugged her to his breast. He told the people then present, "The speciality of this child is this: she has no sense of newness or strangeness, all beings and all things she takes as her own."

One day, having just read a biography of the late Ammani Ammal, sister of the late Dr. T. M. Nair, Sri Bhagavan spoke highly of her learning, philanthropy and devotion. In her last illness, she wired to Sri Bhagavan praying for a peaceful end. Just when Sri Bhagavan was perusing her letter, she expired in her home. As Sri Bhagavan was narrating this incident, he was so moved that he shed tears.

My long stay this time made the departure a wrench for me, and my feeling found vent in some Telugu verses which I composed on the way and posted to the Ashram. In the opening verse I wrote, "Leaving Thy feet and going to my place, alas! I feel like the new daughter-in-law leaving her mother's home and starting to go and settle in her mother-in-law's place." The Ashrama reply stated, "Your letter with the '*padyam*' full of your feelings was perused by Sri Bhagavan." The very next time I returned to the Ashram, Sri Bhagavan greeted me saying, "Lo! the new daughter-in-law has come back to her mother's home! You people treat her as becomes her." I have realised that these gracious words were not mere fun, but truly described Sri Bhagavan's attitude towards me at all times. It was pure, parental love.

Psychology, Philosophy and Spirituality

One morning Sri Bhagavan quoted from a journal the following sentence: "Where psychology ends, philosophy begins" and added his own remark, "Where philosophy ends spirituality begins."

I was asked to translate into Telugu an article on Sri Bhagavan by his English devotee, Major A. W. Chadwick. It was suggested that I might try to put the same ideas in Telugu poetry. In the inspiring presence of Sri Bhagavan, I composed sixteen verses in two hours, and at the instance of Sri Bhagavan, I read them out in the Hall. When I came to the fifteenth verse which stated: "On this occasion (*Shasti-Purti*) as we gather at the feet of Sri Bhagavan, we should neither discuss philosophy nor estimate our individual progress in spirituality, but simply pour our hearts out for his gracious condescension in living with us and befriending us these sixty years," my voice choked with emotion, and failed, Sri Bhagavan also shed tears. With great difficulty I somehow completed the reading.

A. Devaraja Mudaliar, a prominent lawyer and intimate devotee, asked how Sri Bhagavan could observe distinction among his devotees. "For instance," added Sri Mudaliar, "shall we be wrong if we say that Subbaramayya is shown a little more favour than others and is made to act as the High Priest of the Order?" Sri Bhagavan smiling, replied, "To me there is no distinction. Grace is flowing like the ocean ever full. Everyone draws from it according to his capacity. How can one who brings only a tumbler complain that he is not able to take as much as another who has brought a jar?"

At this time I was blessed with the rare good fortune of working with Sri Bhagavan in the kitchen. Hours of duty were between 2:30 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. Sri Bhagavan would come punctually at 2:30 a.m. and first spend some time in cutting vegetables with the workers and devotees. Then he would enter the kitchen and prepare *sambar* or chutney for breakfast, and occasionally some extra dishes also.

At first I was an ignoramus in the work. As I saw Sri Bhagavan perspiring profusely near the oven, I tried to fan him, but Sri Bhagavan objected. I stopped, but as his attention was engrossed in work, I gently repeated the fanning. Sri Bhagavan turning to me, laughed and said, "You want to do it on the sly, but you do not even know how to do it effectively. Let me teach you." So saying, he held me by the hand and taught me the proper way of waving the fan. Oh! How I thrilled at this touch and thanked my ignorance!

From the kitchen we would adjourn to another room for grinding the mixture. I did not know at first how to

hold the pestle and grind. Sri Bhagavan placed his hand upon mine and turned the pestle in the proper way. Again what a thrill! How blessed was my ignorance!

After the work was finished, Sri Bhagavan would take out a bit from the dish, taste a little of it and give us the remainder to taste, and sometimes when our hands were unwashed, he would himself throw it into our mouths with his own hand. That would be the climax of our happiness. Then he would hasten back to the Hall and lie reclining on the couch and appear dozing as the brahmins arrived for *Parayana*. Squatting so close to Sri Bhagavan, chatting and joking with him and partaking of the fruit of his gracious labours, what a privilege and good fortune!

The work with Sri Bhagavan had its rigours as well as its pleasures. Though Sri Bhagavan was all mercy and grace, he was at the same time a strict disciplinarian. He would not tolerate the least sloppiness. Everything must be done to perfection. Nothing should be wasted or spoiled. He would demand full attention and implicit obedience to his directions. Each one was allotted a duty and he must take his cue from the mere look of Sri Bhagavan. My duty, for instance, was to supply salt and water, and whenever Sri Bhagavan glanced at me, I must bring either of the two, understanding the need.

We used to wake up at 2 a.m., finish our ablutions and be ready before time to report for duty. Once, however, I was late by five minutes. The work was already going on. Sri Bhagavan tasting the preparation said that salt was a little in excess, and turning to me, he added, "Since you were absent, I thought of you at the moment of adding salt, and that is the reason for this excess." That was Sri Bhagavan's way of reprimanding me for unpunctuality.

Another time the sour ingredient was slightly excessive. Sri Bhagavan, tasting it, joked and said, "Acidity is the effective remedy for *pittam* (giddiness). Since most of the people who come here are more or less giddy, this preparation will do us all a lot of good!"

My two daughters, nine-year-old Lalita and five-year-old Indira came and stayed in the Ashram for a few days. Lalita was Sri Bhagavan's old favourite and Indira was a fresh entrant into his favour. As usual Sri Bhagavan asked both the children to sing and dance in the Hall. Indira would respond readily, but Lalita having grown by now into a little lady, needed much coaxing to commence her performance. Sri Bhagavan said, "What Lalita, I never asked anyone for anything. But now you have made me seek your favour. Look at Indira. She is a good child. Do emulate her example." So both the girls sang and danced together while Sri Bhagavan sat up and looked on, beaming with gracious pleasure. This 'entertainment' became a daily feature of Sri Bhagavan's '*Durbar*' during the children's brief stay.

One evening Lalita, having had her meal early, left with the ladies for town. Indira now remaining alone turned to me and complained of hunger. Sri Bhagavan at once took note of it and severely reprimanded me for delaying to feed the child. He said, "What is your meditation worth if you neglect to serve your child?" Such was his abounding grace to children.

"Why can't you be like me?"

Another night, Sri Bhagavan graciously enquired about my son-in-law's health, which had been causing anxiety for some months. After hearing my tale of domestic cares and worries, Sri Bhagavan looked me full in the face with utmost sympathy and spoke in melting tones: "Why can't you be like me? You know how I was when I arrived in Tiruvannamalai. There was a time when I went round the town begging for food. In those

days I was observing silence. So I would pass down the street halting for a moment in front of a house and gently clap my hands. If there was no response, I would pass on. Whatever food was thus got by me and other associates, we would mix into one mass and take a morsel each. That we ate only once a day. Now you see what changes have come outwardly, what buildings have been raised and how the Ashrama has grown all-round. But I am ever the same. Only the sun rises and the sun sets. To me there seems no other change. So through all the vicissitudes of good and evil, you be like me and whenever you are prone to depression and melancholy, you remember me." These gracious words of Sri Bhagavan have been with me ever since and protect me as a talisman against all the ills of life.

The Ashram was very busy with preparations for the *Kumbhabhishekam* of the Mother's shrine which was to be celebrated during the third week of March, 1949. With the conclusion of the *Kumbhabhishekam* our happiness too seems to have concluded.

Shortly before the function a small growth on Sri Bhagavan's left arm was removed surgically. Shortly after the celebration a new tumour appeared at the same place and grew rapidly. To my enquiry how the tumour would go, Sri Bhagavan simply replied: "As it came, so it will go."

On January 14th, 1950, at noon, with special permission I went to take leave of Sri Bhagavan and broke down completely. Sri Bhagavan called me close to him and asked me to touch the affected arm. He graciously consoled me saying: "Don't worry. It will go. As it came, so it will go. The body itself is a disease, which may be termed *Sthoulyam* (grossness). The subtle Spirit is encumbered with this lump of flesh called the body. The body is dead even while the man is alive, for it is but insentient matter. Only the spirit gives it an appearance of life and activity. . . . You people talk of the tumour and name it Sarcoma Cancer. But believe me when I tell you that in my view there is no tumour, nor Sarcoma Cancer at all."

Sri Bhagavan's vital energy was being sapped and his body appeared very weak and anaemic. However, his face and look did not betray the least trace of pain and suffering, but on the other hand glowed all the more with grace.

The Last Leave-taking

In view of Sri Bhagavan's weak condition, *darshan* was restricted to the queues in the morning and evening, and except the personal and medical attendants, all others were strictly forbidden to see Sri Bhagavan. So that night I started back with a heavy heart. As I neared the wicket-gate of Sri Bhagavan's room, Sri Jayadevalal who was guarding it whispered to me: "Do you want to see Sri Bhagavan?" I replied "Yes, but there is no permission." He said, "Never mind, get in," and he pushed me in. Sri Bhagavan lay alone facing the entrance as though he was expecting to see someone. As soon as I got up from prostrating at the doorstep Sri Bhagavan said, "Come in." As I went in and stood before him, Sri Bhagavan asked me: "What do you want?"

I said with streaming eyes: "I want *Abhayam* (security from fear)." Sri Bhagavan replied with overflowing grace: "*Saree icchanu* (Yes, I have given it.)" Then he added: "Don't fear. As it came, so it will go."

At once I felt as though a heavy load were lifted from my heart and as I touched His Lotus Feet with my hands and head a thrill of ecstasy passed through my frame, and I felt like being plunged in an ocean of Peace and Bliss. That vision of Sri Bhagavan and his gracious words granting me *Abhayam* have taken permanent abode in my being and are guarding me from all life's ills. "Be still and know that I am God"

One morning in June, Sri Bhagavan , while going up the Hill, told me jocularly about the Golden Jubilee of His advent at Arunachalam proposed to be celebrated on September 1st, 1946. He said, "Venkatachalam Chetty had a brainwave. The idea of such a celebration first occurred to him, and since he made the proposal, it seems to have caught every one's fancy." Thrilled with the joy of this news, I composed the following sonnet that very day.

At Arunachala, lo and behold!
Wonders of wonders! This half century
Transcendent Truth-Awareness-Ecstasy
Itself as living Person doth unfold,
Whose presence all in peace and bliss doth hold,
At Whose one word or glance all doubts do flee,
Who radiant with pure Divinity
Looks out for souls to save and rightly mould.
'Tis Ramana Maharshi world-renown'd
God-man, self's Self, embodied Love and Truth.
Ye mortals all, in dense ignorance bound
Come, seek His Grace and see the Light of Truth.
Miss not this rarest chance at any rate,
But taste the Bliss of Self ere 'tis too late.

Someone asked, "It is stated in the scriptures that the Self will reveal itself only to one whom it chooses. Then what is the use of our effort?" Sri Bhagavan replied: "The Self will draw unto itself an aspirant only when he becomes introverted. So long as he is extroverted, Self-Realization is impossible."

FILMS FROM SRI RAMANASRAMAM

(Continued from the last issue)

Continuing with the 1946 film made by Mr. Reddy of Hyderabad, we see the Maharshi and attendant Rangaswami walking up the stairs leading to the Mountain, north of the Ashram. Sri Bhagavan seems to struggle somewhat while ascending the stairs. His ascent up the hill is also slow but steady. The cameraman must have been rushing about repositioning himself, for we see Sri Bhagavan from at least five different angles slowly moving up the Hill.

Then the camera focuses on two ladies, Mrs. Talayarkhan and Framji's daughter, both in white saris. One of them bends over and clears some pebbles from the trail, over which they expect the Maharshi to be treading momentarily. Sri Bhagavan appears at a distance on the return swing of his walk; the ladies slip behind a large boulder beside the path; the Maharshi proceeds closer to where the ladies remain in hiding. Is this an ambush in the making? Well, we will never know, for next we see Sri Bhagavan stop and turn towards the camera, exactly were the Mountain top looms directly overhead: the classic Father Arunachala and son Ramana shot.

As this film ends, Sri Bhagavan, followed by his attendant and, yes, the two devoted ladies are seen nearing the back entrance of the Ashram. Another brief scene of Bhagavan entering the bathroom and it is all over.

Now we come to one of the more historically valuable films. In our possession are two films produced by the

Indian Information Bureau. This first, short newsreel was shot on September 1st, 1946, the day commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Maharshi's arrival at Arunachala. On this day the Golden Jubilee Celebration was observed in a grand manner. Suri Nagamma gives many wonderful details relating to the event her *Letters From Sri Ramanasramam*. This newsreel, with a commentary, was shown in cinema houses around the country and G. V. Subbaramayya reports seeing it, as described in his book, *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*. Bhagavan also comments about this movie in the same book.

The footage we have of this film is incomplete. The negative, apparently, was later stretched and stilled at several places in an attempt to fit the narration into the limited footage. The narration, too, has omissions. We believe there must be a complete version of this footage somewhere, but efforts so far to find one have not been successful.

The film begins by showing the archway entrance of Sri Ramanasramam. A large procession is then seen making its way through the entrance. The procession is again viewed passing the camera inside the Ashram. Some prominent devotees seen are Swami Viswanathan, the present President of Sri Ramanasramam, T. N. Venkataraman and Appuchi, the present head priest.

At this point the narration starts, although the beginning of it has obviously been cut. The camera now shifts to the Maharshi majestically sitting cross-legged on a sofa under a *pondal* (thatched shed). There are many men and one child standing near him. Incense slowly wafts its fragrant smoke, swirling up before this holy scene. We can almost smell it. The Maharshi's eyes are open, but his look is lost in the unspeakable depths of everlasting awareness. The camera shifts and we view the sage from three different angles during a thirty second period. It is a powerful scene, a testimony to a lofty personality exuding a presence that has influenced the lives of so many during this century.

Throughout this *darshan* scene an English narration, in typically British accent, continues. *(Next issue: the narration)*

BOOK REVIEW

SRI RAMANA REMINISCENCES

By

G. V. Subbaramayya

(Published by Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, S. India)

Extracts from this book forms our feature article (As I Saw Him) in this issue. Those of you that have read this will have had an engaging foretaste into the intimate life of a childlike devotee of the Master.

There are several interesting facets found in this book that are absent in other publications from Sri Ramanasramam. First of all, the writer was himself a poet, knowledgeable in Telugu, English and Sanskrit. His expertise in translating poetry and text was utilised by the Ashram and in this we also find the Maharshi taking a major role in proof-reading, correcting and composing. On this level of the author's relationship with the

Maharshi, an unfamiliar onlooker might erroneously deduce that here are two professors collaborating. The Maharshi's interest and activities were almost on a daily basis - especially in his later years - directed toward compositions and publications, of which poetry seemed to take a major role; but the obvious interest the Maharshi showed was certainly influenced by the fact the author himself was a poet, whose thoughts and aspirations were clearly reflected in the pure waters of a *Jnani's* mind.

Another special quality of this book is the detail in which the author openly relates his domestic woes and how the Maharshi's abundant grace was always present, in a very palpable manner, saving him from disaster. The death of a son, a stillborn child with delivery complications that caused his wife's death, followed by his daughter's sudden demise - these tragedies, afflicting the sensitive heart of a loving husband and father, accentuate the power of the Maharshi's grace and the potency of his teachings in the life of the author.
His reminiscences are presented in chronological order starting from 1933 to 1950, with a few later anecdotal entries in the end. He regularly made three lengthy visits to the Ashram every year and seemed to have maintained a diary - all events, visits, observations and utterances of the Maharshi are recorded with specific dates. Also, the letters he wrote to and received from the Ashram are often quoted throughout the book. From all this, it is apparent that his whole life, whether living in the Ashram or at home in Andhra Pradesh, was centred on his Master and Lord, residing at the foot of the holy Arunachala Hill.

For those wishing to have intimate look into the life of a single-minded and dearly-loved devotee of the Maharshi, we highly recommend the study of this book. Devotees will, undoubtedly, cherish it.

With this issue we begin our second year and Volume Number 2. The preparation and printing of this bimonthly has been a welcome source of inspiration for us, an inspiration that has been multiplied by numerous kind letters of encouragement and friendship.

We take this opportunity to warmly wish all our friends and well-wishers a very joyous and prosperous New Year.

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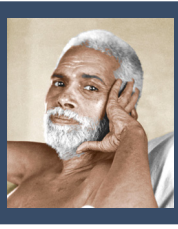

As I Saw Him - 7

Extracts from the works of Paul Brunton

When R. Raphael Hurst, a London journalist, first visited Sri Ramanasramam in 1931, he was sincerely seeking a direct experience of Truth. Up till then, all his travels, his meetings with holy men, yogis and occultists failed to satisfy the inner yearnings of his soul. The record of his search, culminating with an ecstatic glimpse of Reality while sitting in the presence of the Maharshi, was published in England in 1934. It was a sensation, an instant best seller enchanting thousands. *A Search in Secret India*, written under the pen name of Paul Brunton (a name he later adopted as his permanent name), did more at that time to propagate the spiritual grandeur of the Maharshi than any other medium. Now the world came to sit at the feet of the sage of Arunachala.

Let us follow Mr. Brunton on his first visit.

"We shall now go in the hall of the Maharshi," announces the holy man of the yellow robe, bidding me to follow him. I pause outside the uncovered stone veranda and remove my shoes. I gather up the little pile of fruits which I have brought as an offering, and pass into an open doorway.

Twenty brown-and-black faces flash their eyes upon us. Their owners are squatting in half-circles on a red-tiled floor. They are grouped at a respectful distance from the corner which lies farthest to the right hand of the door. Apparently everyone has been facing this corner just prior to our entry. I glance there for a moment and perceive a seated figure upon a long white divan, but it suffices to tell me that here indeed is the Maharshi.

The divan is but a few paces away from a broad high window in the end wall. The light falls clearly upon the Maharshi and I can take in every detail of his profile, for he is seated gazing rigidly through the window in the precise direction whence we have come this morning. His head does not move, so, thinking to catch his eye and greet him as I offer the fruits, I move quietly over to the window, place the gift before him, and retreat a pace or two.

A small brass brazier stands before his couch. It is filled with burning charcoal, and a pleasant odour tells me that some aromatic powder has been thrown on the glowing embers. Close by is an incense burner filled with joss sticks. Threads of bluish grey smoke arise and float in the air.

I fold a thin cotton blanket upon the floor and sit down, gazing expectantly at the silent figure in such a rigid attitude upon the couch. The Maharshi's body is almost nude, except for a thin, narrow loincloth, but that is common enough in these parts. His skin is slightly copper-coloured, yet quite fair in comparison with that of the average South Indian. I judge him to be a tall man; his age somewhere in the early fifties. His head, which is covered with closely cropped grey hair, is well formed. The high and broad expanse of forehead gives intellectual distinction to his personality. His features are more European than Indian. Such is my first impression.

⇦

Pin-drop silence prevails throughout the long hall. The sage remains perfectly still, motionless, quite undisturbed at our arrival. I look full into the eyes of the seated figure in the hope of catching his notice. They are dark brown, medium-sized and wide open. If he is aware of my presence, he betrays no hint, gives no sign. His body is supernaturally quiet, as steady as a statue. Not once does he catch my gaze, for his eyes continue to look into remote space, and infinitely remote it seems.

It is an ancient theory of mine that one can take the inventory of a man's soul from his eyes. But before those of the Maharshi I hesitate, puzzled and baffled.

The minutes creep by with unutterable slowness. First they mount up to a half-hour by the hermitage clock which hangs on a wall; this too passes by and becomes a whole hour. Yet no one in the hall seems to stir; certainly no one dares to speak. I reach a point of visual concentration where I have forgotten the existence of all save this silent figure on the couch. My offering of fruits remains unregarded on the small carved table which stands before him.

There is something in this man that holds my attention as steel filings are held by a magnet. I cannot turn my gaze away from him. My initial bewilderment, my perplexity at being totally ignored, slowly fade away as this strange fascination begins to grip me more firmly. But it is not till the second hour of the uncommon scene that I become aware of a silent, resistless change which is taking place within my mind. One by one, the questions which I have prepared in the train with such meticulous accuracy drop away. For it does not now seem to matter whether they are asked or not, and it does not seem to matter whether I solve the problems which have hitherto troubled me. I know only that a steady river of quietness seems to be flowing near me, that a great peace is penetrating the inner reaches of my being, and that my thought-tortured brain is beginning to arrive at some rest.

I surrender myself to the steadily deepening sense of restfulness until two hours have passed. The passage of time now provokes no irritation, because I feel that the chains of mind-made problems are being broken and thrown away.

Comes the first ripple. Someone approaches me and whispers in my ear, "Did you not wish to question the Maharshi?" The spell is broken. As if this infelicitous intrusion is a signal, figures rise from the floor and begin to move about the hall, voices float up to my hearing, and - wonder of wonders! - the dark brown eyes of the Maharshi flicker once or twice. Then the head turns, the face moves slowly, very slowly, and bends downward at an angle. A few more moments, and it has brought me into the ambit of its vision. For the first time the sage's mysterious gaze is directed upon me. It is plain that he has now awakened from his long trance.

The intruder, thinking perhaps that my lack of response is a sign that I have not heard him, repeats his question aloud. But in those lustrous eyes which are gently staring at me, I read another question, albeit unspoken.

"Can it be - is it possible - that you are still tormented with distracting doubts when you have now glimpsed the deep mental peace which you - and all men - may attain?"

The peace overwhelms me. I turn to the guide and answer: "No. There is nothing I care to ask now. Another time."

The midday meal is over. For once I am grateful that India is favoured with a climate which does not foster

activity, because most of the people have disappeared into the shady groves to take a siesta. I can therefore approach the Maharshi in the way I prefer, without undue notice or fuss.

I enter the large hall and sit down near him. The Maharshi holds a folded manuscript book in his hands; he is writing something with extreme slowness. A few minutes after my entry he puts the book aside and calls a disciple. A few words pass between them in Tamil and the man tells me that his master wishes to reiterate his regrets at my inability to partake of their food. He explains that they live a simple life, and never having catered for Europeans before do not know what the latter eat. I add that I regard the question of diet as being far less important than the quest which has brought me to his hermitage.

The sage listens intently, his face calm, imperturbable and noncommittal.

"It is a good object," he comments at length.

This encourages me to enlarge upon the same theme.

"Master, I have studied our Western philosophies and sciences, lived and worked among the people of our crowded cities, tasted their pleasures and allowed myself to be caught up into their ambitions. Yet I have also gone into solitary places and wandered there amid the loneliness of deep thought. I have questioned the sages of the West; now I have turned my face towards the East. I seek more light."

The Maharshi nods his head, as if to say, "Yes, I quite understand."

"I have heard may opinions, listened to many theories. Intellectual proofs of one belief or another lie piled up all around me. I am tired of them, sceptical of anything which cannot be proved by personal experience. Forgive me for saying so, but I am not religious. Is there anything beyond man's material existence. If so, how can I realize it for myself?"

He makes no verbal reply but appears to have dropped into some train of thought. Because there is nothing else to do and because my tongue has now been loosened, I address him for the third time:

"The wise men of the West, our scientists, are greatly honoured for their cleverness. Yet they have confessed that they can throw but little light upon the hidden truth behind life. It is said that there are some in your land who can give what our Western sages fail to reveal. Is this so? Can you assist me to experience enlightenment? Or is the search itself a mere delusion?"

I have now reach my conversational objective and decide to await the Maharshi's response. He continues to stare thoughtfully at me. Ten minutes pass in silence.

At last his lips open and he says gently:

"You say I. 'I want to know.' Tell me, who is that I?"

What does he mean? He has now cut across the services of the interpreter and speaks direct to me in English. Bewilderment creeps across my brain. "I am afraid I do not understand your question," I reply blankly.

"Is it not clear? Think again!"

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I puzzle over his words once more. An idea suddenly flashes into my head. I point a finger towards myself and mention my name.

"And do you know him?"

"All my life!" I smile back at him.

"But that is only your body! Again I ask, 'Who are you'?"

I cannot find a ready answer to this extraordinary query.

The Maharshi continues:

"Know first that I and then you shall know the truth."

My mind hazes again. I am deeply puzzled. This bewilderment finds verbal expression. But the Maharshi has evidently reached the limit of his English, for he turns to the interpreter and the answer is slowly translated to me:

"There is only one thing to be done. Look into your own self. Do this in the right way and you shall find the answer to all your problems."

It is a strange rejoinder. But I ask him:

"What must one do? What method can I pursue?"

"Through deep reflection on the nature of one's self, and through constant meditation, the light can be found."

"I have frequently given myself up to meditation upon the truth, but I see no signs of progress."

"How do you know that no progress has been made? It is not easy to perceive one's progress in the spiritual realm."

"Is the help of a master necessary?"

"It might be."

"Can a master help a man to look into his own self in the way you suggest?"

"He can give the man all that he needs for this quest. Such a thing can be perceived through personal experience."

"How long will it take to get some enlightenment with a master's help?"

"It all depends on the maturity of the seeker's mind. The gunpowder catches fire in an instant, while much time is needed to set fire to coal."

"Will the Maharshi express an opinion about the future of the world, for we are living in critical times?"

"Why should you trouble yourself about the future?" demands the sage. "You do not even properly know about the present! Take care of the present; the future will then take care of itself."

There is an abrupt pause. An attendant approaches and lights another incense stick. The Maharshi watches the blue smoke curl its way upwards and then picks up his manuscript book. He unfolds its pages and begins to work on it again, thus dismissing me from the field of his attention.

Feeling that our conversation is really at an end, I rise from the tiled floor, place my hands together in farewell, and leave him.

My proposed weekend quickly passes and I extend it to a week. The week passes and I extend it to a fortnight. Each day I sense the beautiful peace of the sage's mental atmosphere, the serenity which pervades the very air around him.

The last day of my visit arrives and yet I am no closer to him. My stay has been a tantalising mixture of sublime moods and disappointing failures to effect any worthwhile personal contact with the Maharshi. I go out to one of his old disciples and tell him earnestly of my wish to have a final chat with his master. I confess that I feel too shy to tackle the sage myself. He leaves me and soon returns with the news that his master will be very pleased to grant the interview.

I hasten to the hall and sit down conveniently near the divan. The Maharshi turns his face immediately, his mouth relaxing into a pleasant greeting. Straightaway, I feel at ease and begin to question him.

"The Yogis say that one must renounce this world and go off into secluded jungles or mountains, if one wishes to find truth. Such things can hardly be done in the West; our lives are so different. Do you agree with the Yogis?"

"The life of action need not be renounced. If you will meditate for an hour or two every day, you can then carry on with your duties. If you meditate in the right manner, then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in the midst of your work. It is as though there were two ways of expressing the same idea; the same line which you take in meditation will be expressed in your activities."

"What will be the result of doing that?"

"As you go on you will find that your attitude towards people, events and objects will gradually change. Your actions will tend to follow your meditations of their own accord."

"Then you do not agree with the Yogis?" I try to pin him down.

But the Maharshi eludes a direct answer.

"A man should surrender the personal selfishness which binds him to this world. Giving up the false self is the true renunciation."

"How is it possible to become selfless while leading a life of worldly activity?"

"There is no conflict between work and wisdom."

"Do you mean that one can continue all the old activities in one's profession, for instance, and at the same time get enlightenment?"

"Why not? But in that case one will not think that it is the old personality which is doing the work, because one's consciousness will gradually become transferred until it is centred in That which is beyond the little self."

"If a person is engaged in work, there will be little time left for him to meditate."
The Maharshi seems quite unperturbed at my poser.

"Setting apart time for meditation is only for the merest spiritual novices," he replies. "A man who is advancing will begin to enjoy the deeper beatitude, whether he is at work or not. While his hands are in society, he keeps his head cool in solitude."

"Then you do not teach the way of Yoga?"

"The Yogi tries to drive his mind to the goal, as a cowherd drives a bull with a stick, but on this path the seeker coaxes the bull by holding out a handful of grass!"

"How is that done?"

"You have to ask yourself the question, *Who am I?* This investigation will lead in the end to the discovery of something within you which is behind the mind. Solve that great problem, and you will solve all other problems thereby."

There is a pause as I try to digest his answer.

The Maharshi addresses me again:

"Will it be clearer if it is put in this way? All human beings are ever wanting happiness, untainted with sorrow. They want to grasp a happiness which will not come to an end. The instinct is a true one. But have you ever been struck by the fact that they love their own selves most?"

"Well?"

"Now relate that to the fact that they are ever desirous of attaining happiness through one means or another, through drink or through religion, and you are provided with a clue to the real nature of man."

"I fail to see . . . . "

The tone of his voice becomes higher.

"Man's real nature is happiness. Happiness is inborn in the true self. His search for happiness is an unconscious search for his true self. The true self is imperishable; therefore, when a man finds it, he finds a happiness which does not come to an end."
"But the world is so unhappy?"

"Yes, but that is because the world is ignorant of its true self. All men, without exception, are consciously or unconsciously seeking for it."

[*Editor's note:* After this conversation, one by one, the hall empties. Paul Brunton sits alone facing the Maharshi. Brunton receives a piercing steady glance and begins to lose body consciousness; nevertheless, he breaks away and makes his departure. He eventually travels to Bombay and purchases his sea-voyage ticket back to England. But his two-week encounter with the Maharshi haunts him. He abandons his travel plans and returns to the Maharshi.

Once there he settles in, builds a hut west of the Ashram, and pursues the inner quest as taught by the Maharshi. And one day, his departure imminent, his health on the verge of collapse, he sits once again in the hall and attempts the inner quest. This time his efforts are quickly rewarded as the Maharshi turns his penetrating gaze on him.]

Finally it happens. Thought is extinguished like a snuffed candle. The intellect withdraws into its real ground, that is, consciousness working unhindered by thoughts. I remain perfectly calm and fully aware of who I am and what is occurring. Yet my sense of awareness has been drawn out of the narrow confines of the separate personality; it has turned into something sublimely all-embracing. Self still exists, but it is a changed, radiant self. For something that is far superior to the unimportant personality which was I, some deeper, diviner being rises into consciousness and becomes me. I, the new I, rest in the lap of holy bliss. My heart is remoulded in rapture.

I return to this mundane sphere impelled by a force which I cannot resist. I discover I am still sitting in the hall of the Maharshi and that it is apparently deserted. My eyes catch sight of the hermitage clock and I realise that the inmates must be in the dining-room at their evening meal. And then I become aware of someone to my left. It is the ex-station-master, who is squatting close beside me on the floor.

"You have been in a spiritual trance for nearly two hours," he informs me.

I endeavour to make some reply, but discover to my astonishment that my power of speech has gone. Not for almost fifteen minutes do I recover it. Meanwhile the old man supplements with the further statement:

"The Maharshi watched you closely all the time. I believe his thoughts guided you."

With the fall of dusk I take my farewells of everyone except the Maharshi. I feel quietly content because my battle for spiritual certitude has been won. Yet when the Maharshi comes to the courtyard with me a little later, my contentment suddenly deserts me. This man has strangely conquered me and it deeply affects my feelings to leave him.

I raise my palms and close them together in the customary salutation and then mutter a brief goodbye. The sage smiles and looks at me fixedly, but says not a word.

One last look towards the Maharshi, one last glimpse by dim lantern light of a tall copper-skinned figure with lustrous eyes, another farewell gesture on my part, a slight wave of his right hand in response, and we part.

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

On Wednesday the 11th of last December, Dr. Anil Sharma, coeditor of the MAHARSHI, flew from New York City for a three week visit to Sri Ramanasramam in South India. Only a few hours earlier he and Dennis Hartel were waiting in the office of John E. Allen, Inc. They quietly sat there at 10:00 a.m. anticipating the final-edited, 16mm, restored film to arrive by overnight delivery from California; they were, in fact, promised it would be there by 10:00 a.m. This day was the culminating point of a two year effort to collect, restore, edit and preserve all the films taken at Sri Ramanasramam between the years 1935 to 1950.

John Allen knew the project would take time. First of all, many of these films were suffering from acute triacetate base deterioration. That means that we were looking at reels of film with erratic distortions, twists, curls, shrinkage and loss of flexibility. This is the natural result of old acetate film being stored in uncontrolled conditions. Our films were a classic case of all that could go wrong in the storage of old films. Fortunately, there is a demand in this country for the restoration and preservation of old films and John E. Allen is the most competent filmologist on the East Coast.

Without delving into all the procedures, decisions, costs, companies subcontracted and work involved prior to that anticipated day, we are happy to inform you that the final-edited film arrived from California as promised. Dr. Anil Sharma took it, along with all the old source films, with him to Ramanasramam, and on December 23rd, the 112th Jayanthi Celebration of Ramana Maharshi, this new, fifty-minute film was shown to a packed and enthusiastic crowd in the Samadhi Hall.

We have been informed that Ilaya Raja, the famous South Indian music composer, has offered to take this film and make a video production from it. We have no indication as to when this will be completed or when it will be available here in North America. Of course, we will keep you informed.

(The description of films will resume in our next issue.)

The Video Biography

This documentary on the life of Ramana Maharshi is another project that has also been slowly evolving during the last two years.

The videographer, James Hartel, travelled to India with his brother Dennis over two years ago and shot all the required footage. This past January, more than two hundred hours were spent in a video-editing room in Buffalo, New York, and a seventy-five minute 'rough cut' on three-quarter inch tape was put together. This April and May, another editing session will probably be arranged in Buffalo. We hope to complete the project at this time and have it available at the New York Ashram by the summer.

In January of 1991, our good friend John Flynn recorded the narration in a sound studio in Washington, D. C. Narrating films is his profession and his rich, articulate voice can often be heard narrating documentaries on television for National Geographic and on the Discoveries cable channel.

In a brief seventy-five minutes, we will take our viewers from the small, remote village of the Maharshi's birth, to his final days when the faithful masses press in from all sides to have one last look, a benediction, from the holy sage.

A panorama of scenes will pass over the screen: present-day views of all the places associated with the Maharshi's life; over fifty photographs, interspersed by many of the restored films from 1935 to 1950, and vivid interviews from some of the old devotees who have had intimate contact with him from as early as 1916.

We are using every resource available to make this production tasteful and technically professional. All our friends, or anyone with the slightest interest in the life and teaching of Ramana Maharshi, will certainly value this visual life portrayal. We have been encouraged by, and received full cooperation from, the management of Sri Ramanasramam in South India. The final production will also be available through their Book Depot for distribution in India.

Sivaratri

On March 2nd, the holy day of *Sivaratri* is observed throughout India. Devotees will fast during the day and remain awake the whole night performing worship, prayers and meditation.

At Sri Ramanasramam, many pious aspirants can be seen circumambulating the holy Arunachala Hill in the dead of night. Arunachala stands as a vibrant manifestation of Lord Siva, absorbing the hearts and minds of the devotees.

Sivaratri with the Maharshi

When T. K. Sundaresa Iyer was a boy of twelve he first visited the Maharshi on the Hill in 1908. That first meeting bonded him to Bhagavan for the remainder of his life and, consequently, he was a witness to many marvellous events in his Guru's presence. Here is one such incident on a holy *Sivaratri* night in Sri Ramanasramam, as recorded in his book, *At the Feet of Bhagavan*.

It was Sivaratri day. The evening worship at the Mother's shrine was over. The devotees had their dinner with Sri Bhagavan, who was now on his seat; the devotees at His feet sitting around him.

At 8:00 p.m. one of the *sadhus* stood up, did *pranam* (offered obeisance), and with folded hands prayed: "Today is the *Sivaratri Day*; we should be highly blessed by Sri Bhagavan expounding to us the meaning of the *Hymn to Dakshinamurthy* (*stotra*)."

Says Bhagavan: "Yes, sit down."

The *sadhu* sat, and all eagerly looked at Sri Bhagavan; Sri Bhagavan looked at them. Sri Bhagavan sat in his usual pose, no, poise. No words, no movement, and all was stillness! He sat still, and all sat still, waiting. The clock went on striking, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, one, two and three. Sri Bhagavan sat and they sat. Stillness, calmness, motionless - not conscious of the body, of space or time.

Thus eight hours passed in Peace, in Silence, in Being, as It is. Thus was the Divine Reality taught through the speech of Silence by Bhagavan Sri Ramana-Dakshinamurthy.

At the stroke of 4:00 a.m. Sri Bhagavan quietly said: "And now have you known the essence of the *Dakshinamurthy Hymn?*" All the devotees stood and made *pranam* to the holy form of the Guru in the ecstasy of their Being.

Jayanti Celebration in New York

The following report was submitted to us by Evelyn Kaselow Saphier, a longtime devotee from New York City.

The New York family of devotees gathered at Arunachala Ashram and celebrated Sri Bhagavan's *Jayanthi* on New Year's Day, 1992.

As usual, our celebration included *Ganesha Puja* performed by the attending children, a reading of the story of Sri Bhagavan's birth, the recitation and interpretation of Kavyakantha Ganapathi Muni's verses on the Maharshi, numerous *bhajans* in several languages, the singing of *Aksharamanamalai, Upadesa Saram, Arunachala Pancharatnam* and the wholehearted chanting of *Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala*. This was followed by *Arati*.

After the ceremony we rejoiced in one another's company, and enjoyed a feast which had been prepared thanks to the devotion, love and affection of several lady devotees.

As ever, this sacred occasion afforded us an opportunity to ponder the extraordinary grace which has come to us, His grateful devotees, as a result of His birth and sojourn on earth. We pray that Sri Bhagavan may ever keep us at His lotus feet, inspiring us to remember Him and abide in Him always!

Arunachala Ashram maintains year-round retreat facilities for individuals, families or groups in the picturesque Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia.

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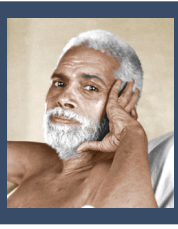

As I Saw Him – 8

From 'My Recollections'

By Devaraja Mudaliar

A. Devaraja Mudaliar had a unique, innate ability to associate with the Maharshi in an entirely natural manner, while yet maintaining complete faith and devotion to him. This resulted in an intimate relationship and frank dialogues on many subjects, including the practical application of the Maharshi's teachings.

The rare devotion Devaraja Mudaliar developed for the Maharshi eventually compelled him to leave his home and profession and settle down in Sri Ramanasramam in 1942. His four years of tenancy at the Ashram secured for posterity invaluable records in the form of a diary, subsequently published as Day By Day with Bhagavan. Later, his written reminiscences formed the book entitled My Recollections, which was the source for the following article.

Devaraja Mudaliar, at the ripe age of 85, was absorbed in his Master in 1972.

The earliest recollection I have of Bhagavan dates back to 1900. Along with some of my relations, I went to Tiruvannamalai for the *Deepam* festival. Even as early as that, the crowds that came for *Deepa darshan* used to visit our Bhagavan, then popularly known as Brahmana Swami.

I did not visit him again until 1914, two years after I came to Chittoor and settled down there to practise as a lawyer. Kuppuswami Mudaliar accompanied me on my visit. We arrived at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon and found Bhagavan sitting on the parapet wall outside Virupaksha Cave. So far I can remember there was no one else there at that time. There were only a few monkeys near Bhagavan, and he started telling me about them, their ways, their government, kings, queens, etc. I stayed nearly two hours and the whole time was spent in listening to these stories about monkeys. I was still a young man and did not take seriously to the spiritual side of life, so I did not ask Bhagavan for any spiritual guidance. I was satisfied with having seen him and talked to him.

It was made possible for me to visit Bhagavan again about the end of 1922. By this time Bhagavan's mother had attained *Mahasamadhi* and Bhagavan had come to live near the mother's samadhi (grave) at the foot of the hill where Sri Ramanasramam now stands. There was a small thatched shed housing the samadhi, where the temple now stands, and to the north of the samadhi was a narrow pial, or raised floor, on which Bhagavan used to sit or lie down.

I told Bhagavan that, though I went to temples like other people, they did not much appeal to me and asked Bhagavan what he would advise me to do. He replied: "That does not matter. Think of God as being in your heart and meditate on God that way. That will be enough."

The end of 1933 saw my first long stay of nearly a week at Bhagavan's feet and his presence was such a balm to my stricken heart that from that visit dates my intimate and close association with him.

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It is said that man's adversity is God's opportunity. Bhagavan proved a great solace to me when I lost my wife in 1933 (I was then 47). So naturally, when the next misfortune came, in 1935, I threw myself even more completely on Bhagavan, going to him as often as possible and basking in his presence.

I lost my job as Government Pleader and Public Prosecutor which I had held for fifteen years (that is for five successive terms). In my then circumstances, this was a great misfortune, and it was a serious problem with me how I was going to make both ends meet after losing a steady, assured income of about Rs. 6,000 a year to which I had been accustomed for fifteen years. I mention the gravity of this crisis only to indicate that it drove me to lean more and more upon Bhagavan.

I decided about 1939, that I would give up practice completely in 1941, wind up my establishment at Chittoor and go and live with Bhagavan at the Ashram for the rest of my life. I asked and received permission to build a one-room cottage inside the Ashram premises. Such permission was rarely given, in fact it was given only to two others, namely, Major Chadwick and Yogi Ramiah. The room was ready for me by June 1940.

It was about the end of August 1942, I think, that I went to live at Sri Ramanasramam as a permanent inmate. However, for some little time more, I had to go to Chittoor now and then in connection with remaining professional work or my private affairs.

When I had resided in the Ashram I gradually made a routine to sing for about half an hour between 10 and 11 in the morning, that is for the last twenty minutes or half hour between when Bhagavan had finished going through the second mail and when the gong went for lunch. Bhagavan saw that this was my line of approach and was doing me good. Therefore he took care, by the silent working of his grace, that nobody interfered with it.

In the early days Bhagavan encouraged me whenever I was singing with deep feeling. He would have such a look on his face, with his radiant eyes directed towards me, that I would be held spellbound, and not infrequently, at some especially moving words in the songs, tears would come and I would be obliged to stop reciting for one or two minutes. Bhagavan told me that such weeping is good, quoting from *Thiruvachakam*: "By crying for You (God), one can get you."

This seems an appropriate place for referring to another well known characteristic of Bhagavan. To those who have only a very superficial knowledge of him or his works, it might seem that he was a cold, relentlessly logical, unemotional *Jnani*, far removed from the *Bhakta* who melts into tears in contemplation of God's grace and love. But to those who had any real experience of Bhagavan and his ways, and works, it was clear that he was as much a *Bhakta* as a *Jnani*. Often he has told us that only a true *Bhakta* can be a true *Jnani* and that only a true *Jnani* can be a true *Bhakta*. The complete extinction of the ego is the end attained either in *jnana* or *bhakti*.

When touching songs were recited or read out before him, or when he himself was reading out to us poems or passages from the lives or works of famous saints, he would be moved to tears and would find it impossible to restrain them. He would be reading out and explaining some passage and when he came to a very moving part he would get so choked with emotion that he could not continue but would lay aside the book.

Before taking leave of this topic, I must remark that it was not only any moving song about God that had this effect on him but anything grand, magnanimous, noble or generous moved him as few people could be moved. I was often reminded of the sentence, "The finest minds, like the finest metals, dissolve the easiest."

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Many times I complained to Bhagavan that I was not making any appreciable progress, bemoaning the persistence of desires. Bhagavan replied making light of my trouble: "It will all go, all in time. You need not worry. The more *dhyana* (meditation) one performs the more will these desires fall off."

On other occasions when I complained that I was not improving, Bhagavan simply replied, "How do you know?"

Bhagavan, from what little I know of him, was not one who believed in forcing the pace. On the contrary, he gave me the impression that he felt it was not proper and was not for our real good, that he should interfere and do violence to our nature or *Prakriti* by hurrying us at a faster pace than we are built for, even towards realisation.

Once I had planned to carry out something in conjunction with someone else who was then staying permanently near the Ashram. Neither at the time, nor even now according to my lights, was there anything so very objectionable about what we had planned. But suddenly one afternoon, out of a trivial and altogether inadequate circumstance, a quarrel arose between us and what we intended was called off. The next morning I happened to be sitting very near Bhagavan's couch, at his feet, and Bhagavan, apropos of nothing in particular and with an expression of love and pity, turned to me and said in a low voice: "We should not make elaborate plans to get anything. I don't object to your enjoying what comes your way of its own accord."

Then I knew beyond all doubt that it was Bhagavan who, foreseeing some harm for me in what I had planned, brought about the sudden and unexpected quarrel the previous afternoon and aborted our plans. When Bhagavan told me this, I asked him, "Does that mean that if a thing comes to me without any planning or working for it and I enjoy it, there will be no bad consequences from it?"

Bhagavan then hastened to add: "It is not so," and explained: "Every act must have its consequences. If anything comes your way, by reason of *prarabdha* (destiny based on the balance sheet of past lives) you can't help it. If you take what comes, without any special attachment and without any desire for more of it or for a repetition of it, it will not harm you by leading to further births. On the other hand, if you enjoy it with great attachment and naturally desire for more of it, that is bound to lead to more and more births."

About work, Bhagavan used to say: "No sort of work is a hindrance on the spiritual path. It is the notion 'I am the doer' that is the hindrance. If you get rid of that by enquiring and finding out who is this 'I', then work will be no hindrance since you will be doing it without the ego sense that you are the doer and without any attachment to the fruits of your work. Work will go on even more efficiently than before; but you can always be in your own, natural, permanent state of peace and bliss. Further, one should not worry about whether one should engage in work or give it up. If work is what is ordained for one, one will not escape it, however much one may try. On the other hand, if no work is ordained for one, one will not obtain work however much one wishes to strive for it."

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

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

Thereupon I naturally exclaimed: "What becomes then of man's freedom and responsibility for his actions?" Bhagavan explained: "The only freedom man has is to strive for and acquire the *jnana* which will enable him not to identify himself with the body. The body will go through the actions rendered inevitable by *prarabdha* and a man is free either to identify himself with the body and be attached to the fruits of its actions, or to be detached from it and be a mere witness of its activities."

This may not be acceptable to many learned people or philosophers. I recall in this connection the following lines that Bhagavan once quoted to me from Thayumanavar on another occasion: "This is not to be taught to all. Even if we tell them, it will only lead to endless discussion."

It may be well to remind readers that Bhagavan has given his classic answer to the age-old question "Can free will conquer fate?" as follows in his *Forty Verses:* "Such questions worry only those who have not found the source of both free will and fate. Those who have found this source have left all such discussions behind."

A lady Principal asked Bhagavan whether it was not better for people to work and do something for the betterment of the world than to sit in contemplation, aloof from the world, seeking for their own salvation. This was not by any means a new question and Bhagavan had given a very clear answer to it which has already been published in the *Maharshi's Gospel*. In brief, it is that one *Jnani* by his Self-realisation is doing much more for the world than all social workers put together and that his silence is more eloquent and effective than the words of orators and writers advocating any courses for man. On this occasion, however, Bhagavan remained silent. When the lady found that Bhagavan did not answer, she went on speaking for some ten minutes. Even then Bhagavan remained silent. The lady and her sister then left in chagrin.

After they had left Bhagavan said to me: "It is no use telling them anything. The only result would be that it would be published in the papers that such and such are the views of so and so and there will be endless dispute. The best thing is to keep quiet."

His view on the attempts, however well-intentioned, by idealistic reformers, whether socialist or communist or whatever label they may wear, to make all people equally well-placed in life can be epitomized as follows: "There never was and never will be a time when all are equally happy or rich or wise or healthy. In fact none of these terms has any meaning except in so far as the opposite to it exists. But that does not mean that when you come across anyone who is less happy or more miserable than yourself, you are not to be moved to compassion or to seek to relieve him as best you can. On the contrary, you must love all and help all, since only in that way can you help yourself. When you seek to reduce the suffering of any fellow-man or fellow-creature, whether your efforts do succeed or not, you are yourself evolving spiritually thereby, especially if such service is rendered disinterestedly, not with the egoistic feeling 'I am doing this', but in the spirit 'God is making me the channel of this service; He is the doer and I the instrument'." On two successive days, in answer to questions from visitors, Bhagavan said in effect what I have summarised above.

Most of the time I lived with Bhagavan, I used to feel peaceful and absolutely free from care. That, as many can testify, was the outstanding effect of his presence. Nevertheless, it did occasionally happen that something disturbed the peace and happiness for a while. On one such occasion I asked Bhagavan: "Why do such interruptions come? Does it mean that we have ceased to have Bhagavan's grace then?"

With what graciousness did Bhagavan reply: "You crazy fellow! The trouble or want of peace comes only because of grace."

On other occasions also Bhagavan has similarly told me: "You people are glad and grateful to God when things you regard as good come to you. That is right, but you should be equally grateful when things you regard as bad come to you. That is where you fail."

Here I must say the only method I have adopted to achieve liberation or Self-realisation is simply to throw myself on Bhagavan, to surrender to him as completely as lies in my power, and to leave everything else to him. And Bhagavan's teaching, the last I ever got from him before he attained *Mahasamadhi*, was just this: "Your business is simply to surrender and leave everything to me. If one really surrenders completely, there is no room for him to complain that the Guru has not done this or that."

To me and a number of other devotees of Bhagavan, he was God and all in all. We felt as Saint Arunagirinathar felt when he declared to Lord Muruga:

"I rely on none except you and will follow none except you." I have often sung this song before Bhagavan, altering the last two lines in such a way that they would refer to Bhagavan, instead of to Muruga. But about whomsoever we sang, whichever temple we visited, or whatever image we worshipped our homage always went to Bhagavan.

Mother Azhagammal, Her Final Day

Seventy years ago this month, on May 19, 1922, the Mother of the Maharshi breathed her last with her son sitting by her side. She prayed it would happen like this. The marvellous story of how the Maharshi guided her soul to the final shore of emancipation during her last moments is related here by, perhaps, the only living survivor who witnessed it, Sri Kunju Swami. Also, he goes on to describe in detail how the body was interred near the Pali Tirtham.

On that last day from 5:00 a.m. there was a premonition that this was Mother's final day. Bhagavan sat by her side and put one hand on her chest and the other on her head. He was advising everyone to go and eat, because if she died it was considered unclean by orthodox people to eat in a house where a death occurred. Some of the orthodox ones among us went and ate. But others who felt particularly close to Bhagavan didn't think about leaving him to go and eat.

Bhagavan continued to sit by Mother's side and kept his hands on her.

Different expressions of joy and sorrow were passing over her face. Bhagavan was commenting, "Is Mother in this world? No. She is in different worlds going through various births and the consequent experiences."

When her passing seemed imminent, people like Ganapati Muni, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, and others decided to recite from the Vedas. On the other side, Saranagati Ramaswami and a Punjabi gentleman started reciting *Rama Japa*. Without any forethought we joined in with the singing of *Aksharamanamalai* and *Arunachala Siva*.

Amidst this loud singing and reciting of various scriptures, Mother left the body. Still Bhagavan continued to keep his hands on her heart and head. We wondered why he was still seated like that. Then he explained: "When Palaniswami was breathing his last, I did the same thing. I thought the soul had subsided in the heart

and removed my hands. He opened his eyes and the life force left through the eyes. So this time, to be certain, I am keeping the hands on longer than needed." I learned this important secret from Bhagavan that day. He then got up and we all ate. After eating we gathered again near the body without any feeling of pollution.

Ganapati Muni had raised the question about the possibility of a woman attaining the state of Realization in *Ramana Gita*. Bhagavan said that the state of Realization does not relate to the form of the gross body. So we all felt satisfied that Mother had attained liberation and we were happy. Happier, indeed, because we saw that Mother's face and body were now radiating such lustre and light.

Since Bhagavan had given her *mukti*, and her whole body and face were shining, it was decided that the body should be given a ceremonial burial, instead of the customary burning for Brahmin widows.

We then joyfully decorated the body with *kumkum*, *malas* and flowers. After deliberation we decided that Mother's body should be buried near the Pali Tirtham. We decided to keep this decision secret because we knew if this news spreads there would be an unimaginable crowd gathered for the samadhi (funeral).

We decided to bring the body down to the hill before 5:00 a.m. In the meantime, Ramakrishna Swami and Perumal Swami went to town and brought to the burial site two or three cart loads of funeral supplies - cement, camphor, *vibhuti*, etc.

I still remember that the day before Mother's *Mahasamadhi*, Ramakrishna Swami and I had gone up the hill and found many bamboo trees and brought back a good number of bamboo sticks to Skandasramam. It was these sticks that were tied together and used to carry Mother's body down to Pali Tirtham.

I was instructed to remain at Skandasramam because telegrams had been sent to relatives in Tiruchuzhi and other places and they were expected to arrive at Skandasramam that morning.

The body was kept under the *Asavastha* tree and Bhagavan, along with other devotees sat near it. By 7:00 or 7:30 a.m. relatives from Tiruchuzhi and other places arrived and I brought them all down to Pali Tirtham. By this time the whole town heard the news and had come there. Many shopkeepers arrived with supplies of bananas, camphor, etc., pundits were reciting scriptures and Bhagavan sat majestically alongside the body. It looked as if we were in a temple.

There was much wild cactus at this site, and while some of us were removing it, Perumal Swami dug the pit and constructed the samadhi inside of it. About 10:30 or 11:00 a.m. everything was ready.

Bhagavan had already marked the passages in *Tirumandiram*, a text written by the great saint Tirumular explaining how a *Jnani's* body is to be interned. Accordingly, Mother's body was carried to the samadhi pit, placed inside, and Bhagavan poured on the body a large amount of *vibhuti*. Others followed by adding camphor, sandalwood, etc., in full accordance with saint Tirumular's injunctions. The samadhi was then closed, some stones were placed over it, and a small shrine was constructed. It was, indeed, a glorious sight.

After this ceremony we all went to Palakottu where arrangements were made to feed some 200 people. Bhagavan started walking towards Palakottu with the others. Leading the procession was a group of musicians

with drums and horns playing the *nadaswaram*. The distance to Palakottu was only one or two hundred yards, but Bhagavan walked so slowly and majestically it took two hours to cover the distance. It was a sight even for celestial beings to see.

Pranayama and Self-Enquiry

To the visitor who pursued the question about *pranayama* (breath control), Bhagavan said, "The aim is to make the mind one-pointed. For that *pranayama* is a help, a means. Not only for *dhyana*, but in every case where we have to make the mind one-pointed - it may be even for a purely secular or material purpose - it is good to make *pranayama* and then start the work."

"Those who have not the mental strength to concentrate or control their mind and direct it on the quest are advised to watch their breathing, since such watching will naturally and as a matter of course lead to cessation of thought and bring the mind under control. Breath and mind arise from the same place and when one of them is controlled, the other is also controlled. As a matter of fact in the quest method - which is more correctly 'Whence am I?' and not merely 'Who am I?' - we are not simply trying to eliminate saying 'We are not the body, not the senses and so on,' to reach what remains as the ultimate reality, but we are trying to find whence the 'I' thought for the ego arises within us. The method contains within it, though implicitly and not expressly, the watching of the breath. When we watch wherefrom the 'I' thought, the root of all thoughts, springs, we are necessarily watching the source of the breath also, as the 'I' thought and the breath arise from the same source. Retaining breath, etc., is more violent and may be harmful in some cases, *e.g.*, when there is no proper Guru to guide the *sadhaka* at every step and stage. But merely watching the breath is easy and involves no risk."

- Day by Day with Bhagavan

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

(Film description continued from January/February 1992 issue)

We continue with the description of the Golden Jubilee film taken on Tuesday, September 1, 1946, by the Indian Information Bureau. This film was later distributed to cinema houses around the country. During this scene (described in our January/February 1992 issue) we hear the following narration in typical British accent:

"...Ashram of Ramana at Arunachala drew crowds of devotees on September the First to mark the completion of fifty years when Ramana first set foot on the sacred soil of this historic mountain shrine. From far and near they flocked for the *darshan* of the holy sage, who by the severest austerities and profound contemplation has attained spiritual wisdom and serenity unique in the country. Thousands draw comfort by his mere presence, for he neither preaches nor blames, setting all at ease who come to him by the essential goodness he radiates to all around - a good man in a troubled world."

The beginning of the narration has been cut off, perhaps lost, but what remains is sufficient to recreate what many thousands of viewers saw throughout India.

At the end of this newsreel we see the most detailed frontal view of the Maharshi's face on film. He is wearing a short beard, exhibits a calm and distant look, and faces directly into the camera for twelve seconds. His head, which is slightly shaking, nearly takes up all the screen. The last few of these twelve seconds were stilled by an earlier film editor.

Then something interesting takes place. Suddenly we are looking at the Maharshi's back, while a small group of prominent devotees surround him. They also have their backs turned to the movie camera. This is quite unusual, though the reason is soon noticed. Bhagavan is facing a large crowd of devotees and in the front of this crowd, with tripod and camera, stands Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami focusing in on his favourite subject - the Maharshi. Filmed from behind and photographed from the front, Bhagavan displays a typically indifferent but gracious attitude.

We must mention here, that Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami was the ordained Ashram photographer and is responsible for many of the hundreds of photos we have of the Maharshi today. As a young man he first came to Tiruvannamalai in 1930 with his new camera to take photos of the grand Arunachala Temple. While at the temple, someone mentioned that he should go a little distance down the road and take photos of the sage living there. He did. The Maharshi cordially consented, and Dr. T. N. K., as he is often referred to in books, became an ardent lifelong devotee - a devotee with a camera. The walls of his house in Madras (he died in 1975), where his son now lives, are still lined with large framed photos of his Master.

We now come to a two minute 8mm colour film taken by K. K. Nambiar. In his book, *The Guiding Presence of Sri Ramana*, he mentions the details relating to this film. In 1946 the State of Madras sent him abroad to learn certain engineering procedures. Before leaving New York he bought a 8mm colour movie camera with the sole purpose of making a film at Sri Ramanasramam, which he did upon his return in February of 1947. After this, K. K. Nambiar filmed the Maharshi often and is responsible for more than half of all the films that we now have. He rose to the top of his profession and was able to assist the Ashram in many capacities. As both an eminent and active devotee, we are deeply indebted to him.

And although Mr. Nambiar readily handed over all his other films to the Ashram, he was reluctant to hand over this first film he took of Bhagavan in 1947. In fact, he never did: only after he passed away did his son give it to the Ashram in February of 1990. Mr. Nambiar died in 1986.

A clue to why Mr. Nambiar withheld this particular reel is revealed from what his kind wife recently told us. She said that as he lay in bed during his final days, he would often reach over to the projector at his bedside, switch it on and view this film again and again.

While watching this film, and seeing the special indulgence granted to the Nambiars by Bhagavan, we can easily understand Mr. Nambiar's attachment to the film and the emotion it must have evoked in him.

- (to be continued)

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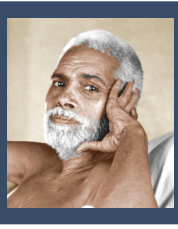

AS I SAW HIM - 9

By

Arthur Osborne

In December of 1941, Arthur Osborne, a university lecturer in Siam, was imprisoned by the Japanese. After three and a half long years, the Japanese were defeated and he was released. He then travelled to India and settled near Sri Ramanasramam, where his wife and children were waiting for him.

He had heard of Ramana Maharshi, read his teachings and seen pictures of him, but doubts remained whether the Maharshi was an actual *Guru* who actively guided seekers to salvation. It wasn't long before this doubt was cleared. He ultimately founded the Ashram journal, *The Mountain Path*, and left a unparalleled legacy of literature on the Maharshi and his teachings.

Let us follow him as he tells how his heart and mind were joined to the silent Sage of the holy Arunachala Mountain.

I entered the Ashram hall on the morning of my arrival, before Bhagavan had returned from his daily walk on the hill. I was a little awed to find how small it was and how close to him I should be sitting; I had expected something grander and less intimate. And then he entered and, to my surprise, there was no great impression; certainly far less than his photographs had made. Just a white-haired, very gracious man, walking a little stiffly from rheumatism and with a slight stoop. As soon as he had eased himself on to the couch he smiled to me and then turned to those around and to my young son and said: "So Adam's prayer has been answered; his Daddy has come back safely." I felt his kindliness, but no more. I appreciated that it was for my sake that he had spoken English, since Adam knew Tamil.

During the weeks that followed he was constantly gracious to me and the strain of nerves and mind gradually relaxed but there was still no dynamic contact until the evening of *Karthikai* when, each year, a beacon is lit on the summit of Arunachala.

There were huge crowds for the festival and we were sitting in the courtyard outside the hall. Bhagavan was reclining on his couch and I was sitting in the front row before it. He sat up, facing me, and his narrowed eyes pierced into me penetrating, intimate, with an intensity I cannot describe. It was as though they said: "You have been told; why have you not realized?" And then quietness, a depth of peace, an indescribable lightness and happiness.

Thereafter love for Bhagavan began to grow in my heart and I felt his power and beauty. Next morning, for the first time, sitting before him in the hall, I tried to follow his teaching by using the *vichara*, 'Who am I?'. I thought it was I who had decided. I did not at first realize that it was the initiation by look that had vitalized me and changed my attitude of mind. Indeed, I had heard only vaguely of this initiation and paid little heed to what I had heard. Only later did I learn that other devotees also had had such an experience and that with them also it had marked the beginning of active *sadhana* under Bhagavan's guidance.

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My love and devotion to Bhagavan deepened. I became aware of the enormous grace of his presence. Even outwardly he was gracious to me, smiling when I entered the hall, signing to me to sit where he could watch me in meditation. His face was like the face of water, always changing and yet always the same. He would be laughing and talking, and then he would turn graciously to a small child or hand a nut to a squirrel that hopped on to his couch from the window, or his radiant, wide-open eyes would shine with love upon some devotee who had just arrived or was taking leave. And then, in silence, a moment later, his face would be rock-like, eternal in its grandeur.

He was unperturbed whatever happened; the majesty of his countenance was inexpressible; and yet it is no less true that he was swift and spontaneous in response and that his face was the most human, the most living, one had ever seen. He attained Realization without learning and never displayed erudition, and yet he made himself better versed in the scriptures than the pundits who came to him for elucidations. He was all compassion, and yet his countenance might appear immovable, like stone. He was all love, and yet for weeks together he might not favour a devotee with a single look or smile. He replied to all graciously, and yet many trembled and feared to speak to him. His features were not good and yet the most beautiful face looked trivial beside him. He often appeared scarcely to notice devotees, and yet his guidance was as unremitting then as it is now.

One day a sudden vivid reminder awoke in me: "The link with Formless Being? But he is the Formless Being!" And I began to apprehend the meaning of his *Jnana* and to understand why devotees addressed him simply as 'Bhagavan', which is a word meaning God. The *vichara*, the constant 'Who am I?', began to evoke an awareness of the Self as Bhagavan outwardly and also simultaneously of the Self within.

Bhagavan sought to free us from psychic as well as physical desires, and he therefore disapproved of all freakishness and eccentricity and of all interest in visions and desire for powers. He liked his devotees to behave in a normal and sane way, for he was guiding us towards the ultimate Reality where perceptions and powers which men call "higher" or "miraculous" are as illusory as those they call "physical". A visitor once related how his Guru died and was buried and then, three years later, returned in tangible bodily form to give instructions. Bhagavan sat unheeding. It was as though he had not heard. The bell rang for lunch and he rose to leave the hall. Only at the doorway he turned and quoted:

"Though a man can enter ever so many bodies, does it mean that he has found his true Home?"

I observed that he shunned theoretical explanations and kept turning the questioner to practical considerations of *sadhana*, of the path to be followed. He never encouraged any to give up life in the world. He explained that it would only be exchanging the thought "I am a householder" for the thought "I am a *sannyasin*." Whereas what is necessary is to reject the thought "I am the doer" completely and remember only "I am"; and this can be done by the means of the *vichara* as well in the city as in the jungle. It is only inwardly that a man can leave the world by leaving the ego-sense; it is only inwardly that he can withdraw into solitude by abiding in the universal solitude of the heart, which is solitude only because there are no others, however many forms the Self may assume.

Daily I sat in the hall before him. I asked no questions for the theory had long been understood. I spoke to him only very occasionally, about some personal matter. But the silent guidance was continuous, strong and subtle. It may seem strange to modern minds, but the Guru taught in silence. This did not mean that he was unwilling to explain when asked; indeed, he would answer sincere questions fully; what it meant was that the real teaching was not the explanation but the silent influence, the alchemy worked in the heart.

I strove constantly by way of the *vichara* according to his instructions. Having a strong sense of duty or obligation, I still continued, side by side with it, to use other forms of *sadhana* which I had undertaken before coming to Bhagavan, even though I now found them burdensome and unhelpful. Finally I told Bhagavan of my predicament and asked whether I could abandon them. He assented, explaining that all other methods only lead up to the *vichara*.

Early in 1948 constant physical proximity had ceased to be necessary and professional work had become urgently necessary. Work was found in Madras. Thereafter I went to Tiruvannamalai only for weekends and holidays, and each visit was revitalising.

I was there at the time of one of the operations that Bhagavan suffered and had *darshan* immediately after it, and the graciousness of his reception melted the heart and awoke remorse to think how great was the reward for so little effort made.

Toward the end, Bhagavan was aged far more than his years. He looked more like ninety than seventy. In one who had a strong constitution, who had scarcely known sickness except for the rheumatism of his last years, and who was impervious to grief of worry, anxiety, hope or regret, this would appear incredible; but it was the burden of his compassion. "He who taketh upon himself the sins of the world."

Devotees came and sat before him, burdened with sorrows, tormented with doubts, darkened with impurities, and, as they sat, felt themselves free and lightened. How many have come and sat there weighed down with the grief of failure or bereavement, and the light of his eyes has dissolved their pain until they have felt a wave of peace flood their heart. How many have come primed with questions which seemed to them all-important and which their thought and reading has failed to solve; it might be in desperate hope or as a challenge that they brought the questions, but as they sat there the questioning mind itself was brought to tranquillity and the questions faded out, no longer needing to be asked. And then, if they opened their hearts, a deeper understanding was implanted there. Those who sought refuge in him felt the burden of their *karma* lifted; and it was he who bore the burden.

I was there that fateful April night of the body's death and felt a calm beneath the grief and a wonder at the fortitude Bhagavan had implanted in his devotees to bear their loss. Gradually one after another began to discover in his heart the truth that Bhagavan had not gone away but, as he promised, is still here.

Since that day his presence in the heart has been more vital, the outpouring of his Grace more abundant, his support more powerful. I have been to Tiruvannamalai since then also, and the Grace that emanates from the tomb is the Grace of the living Ramana.

I have not given a clear picture of the man who was Ramana, but how can one portray the universal? What impressed one was his complete un-self-consciousness like that of a little child, his Divinity and intense humanity.

We shall not see the Divine Grace in human form or the love shining in his eyes, but in our hearts he is with us and will not leave us. His Grace continues to be poured out, not only on those who knew the miracle of his bodily form, but on all who turn to him in their hearts, now as before.

- From Ramana-Arunachala by Arthur Osborne

The Origins of Sri Ramanasramam

In our last issue, Sri Kunju Swami described the final hours of Mother Azhagammal and how, by the special touch of Bhagavan, she was led to emancipation. He also went on the explain how her body was carried down near the Pali Tirtham and buried with all the ceremony and solemnity due to a *Jnani*.

Near the end of the same year, 1922, the Maharshi came down from Skandashram and settled at the Mother's grave. He explained it thus: "It was not of my own volition that I moved from Skandashram. Something brought me here and I obeyed. It was not my decision but the Divine Will."

The Maharshi's total submission to the Divine is unquestionable. The move from Skandashram was not a calculated decision . But how was it observed by the inmates from Skandashram? Sri Kunju Swami was there, and below he relates the chain of events that led to the origin of Sri Ramanasramam after the burial of Mother Azhagammal.

After completing the day's work [the Mother's burial] we, along with Bhagavan, all came back to Skandashram. Some of those who had assembled there felt building a samadhi was not enough. They felt that a *Linga* should be placed over the Mother's grave with daily *puja* performed there and that *Mandala Abhishekam* should also be done on the 48th day. This was discussed and then decided upon.

Chinnaswami began doing *puja* and a *Linga* was erected. After Chinnaswami and others did the *puja* in the morning, they would all come up to Skandashram for lunch. More construction was completed over the samadhi before the 48th day, the day of the *Mandala Abhishekam*. Bhagavan and all of us came down to Pali Tirtham for that ceremony.

There was no place for Bhagavan to rest, as there was only one small room at the Ganapati temple that was used for making garlands. So Bhagavan rested at the Ganapati temple itself. Kumbhakonam Rangaswami Aiyangar made many different kinds of *prasad* for that day, and, in this way, *Mandala Abhishekam* was celebrated on a grand scale. After this ceremony, some of us felt a more elaborate and proper shrine should be built over the Mother's grave.

Chinnaswami and Dandapaniswami (a new arrival and excellent cook) used to go to the site, do *puja*, cook, eat and then come away, and the plans for construction were postponed.

In those days, some devotees from town used to send a bag of daily rations to Skandashram. Chinnaswami and Dandapaniswami used to take most of it down to the Mother's grave site, leaving little for people at Skandashram. Vasudevaswami, who used to send the food, received a complaint from someone regarding this. He sent a written message saying the food sent up is for Vasudeva and not for Vasudeva. Meaning the food was sent for Bhagavan at Skandashram and was to be used there. Bhagavan, who happened to see this note, remarked, "How did Vasudeva come without Vasudeva? Vasudeva is Krishna's father." Bhagavan's remark made it known that he wanted the provisions to be sent down, so all kept quiet.

Eventually Chinnaswami and Dandapaniswami began making elaborate food preparations, and also the morning coffee at the Pali Tirtham. Sri Ramakrishnaswami and others were then tempted to come down. One day Chinnaswami invited me to come down and eat the special Dosai that he was making. He said, "Tomorrow morning you come. We will make enough. After you eat, you can then take some for Bhagavan at Skandashram." I went down the same night, thinking that way I could take *dosai* to Bhagavan early in the morning.

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It seems that night Bhagavan had asked Ramakrishnaswami, who was attending on Bhagavan in my absence, where I went. He was told where I had gone and why.

At that time, it was Bhagavan's habit to come down the Hill to answer the call of nature, and also to visit Mother's samadhi. That day, early in the morning, he covered himself with a shawl, as it was the cold season, and came down. He quietly came up beside me and said, "Is there anything for *Atithi* (guest)?" When I looked up I was surprised and thrilled to see Bhagavan standing there. Observing this, Chinnaswami and others came over and requested Bhagavan to stay and eat the *dosai* and then promised to send some up for the devotees at Skandashram.

There used to be a stream running near the Pali Tirtham. I gave Bhagavan a neem stick to brush his teeth after which he washed in the stream and then came and sat down for dosai. He was offered hot dosai and coffee made with goat's milk. He jokingly remarked, "Now I understand why everyone, one after another, is tempted to come away from Skandashram."

Sadaiappar Chettiar, the trustee of Draupadi koil, and the younger brother of the lady who had the thatched shed built over Mother's shrine came to know that Bhagavan had come down. Shettiyar's sister, now an old lady, could not go up to Skandashram to visit Bhagavan. So Shettiyar decided to bring her for Bhagavan's *darshan*. He went to town to get her. She came with a cart load of provisions and wished to cook and offer *Bhiksha* (food offering) to Bhagavan. She pleaded with him to stay and accept her *Bhiksha*.

Ganapati Muni, who was at Skandashram, heard about this. After having lunch, he also came down. Whenever he came, he used to have at least an hour long discussion with Bhagavan on various subjects. Hearing that Nayana had come, others also came. All of them were seated in front of Bhagavan and Nayana. It became dark. There were no torch lights and, as a general rule, Bhagavan did not go up the hill through town. We therefore decided to spend the night near the Mother's shrine and go up the next morning.

In the morning, when we were preparing to go up, Bhagavan's sister and her husband arrived. They had also brought with them provisions for cooking, and wanted to offer *Bhiksha* to Bhagavan. So, not to disappoint them, he stayed on.

Ramakrishnaswami, realizing Bhagavan had not come up, brought down Bhagavan's *kaupina* and other things. Since Bhagavan used to bathe in cold water in those days, he took a bath in the stream nearby. Consequently, for the next six to ten days, someone or another was offering *Bhiksha*, and Bhagavan stayed on down at the foot of the hill.

Chinnaswami asked me and Gopala Rao to go and stay at Skandashram to guard the property there. We stayed up there for those eight to ten days and food was daily sent up to us. I began thinking that I had come here to be near Bhagavan and not to guard property. As soon as this thought came, Gopala Rao and I came down that very evening.

Chinnaswami wanted to know why we had left Skandashram and I told him what I felt, but also agreed to go back the next morning. The following morning, before I could go back up, someone came down and told me that all of the things at Skandashram were stolen. Bhagavan made the remark, "Now there is no more need for anyone to go and protect the property." This remark made it clear to us that Bhagavan approved of staying on at the Mother's samadhi near the Pali Tirtham, and now there was no need for anyone to invite Bhagavan to stay on. It all happened in the most natural, automatic way.

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

IN OUR LAST issue we explained how, in 1947, the first film of K. K. Nambiar's happened to be taken. As we go on to describe the details of this colour film, you will discover why Mr. Nambiar cherished it till his dying day.

It begins with several shots of the Maharshi walking through the Ashram with his attendant, Sivanandaswami, following close behind.

With a walking stick in his right hand and a clean white towel hanging over his left shoulder, Bhagavan makes his way to the lavatory next to the *goshala* (cow shed). T. P. Ramachandra Iyer is standing near the lavatory door and stares at the camera.

Then appears Chinnaswami looking tall and vigorous and walking straight toward the camera. The scene suddenly cuts to where we see Bhagavan standing to the right of his beloved cow Lakshmi; Chinnaswami stands to her left and both are stroking her. There are children standing about. The camera pans to the right where Bhagavan's sister and Nambiar's wife and son are standing; the camera pans back and forth several times and each time new faces appear: T. N. Venkataraman, his sons, his wife holding a infant, and a dozen others.

All the while Bhagavan stands close to Lakshmi, petting her with affection. She, the centrepiece of the show, looks on with calm dignity. Then the whole group, about twenty in all, casually walk with Bhagavan toward the dining hall.

This whole episode has an air of what we in the West call 'home movies'. Although there are many relatives of Bhagavan in this sequence - perhaps half of the group - we sense an equality and intimacy of a single family unit, gathered under the sole shelter of their benign Father, the Maharshi. And the cow Lakshmi is no less a member, but rather an equal recipient of affection, loyalty and friendship. This footage, the only of the cow Lakshmi, is a fitting tribute to that rare soul who took the shape of a cow, surrendered to a Master in human form, and was forever merged in the formless Reality. Her remarkable story will live on as long as the memory of Sri Ramana Maharshi lasts.

Then a short scene of the flower garden is followed by that of the white peacock. K. K. Nambiar mentions in his writings that the Maharshi pointedly requested him to film this peacock.

Sri Bhagavan is then seen walking out of the dining room and makes his way to near the men's dormitory. There, Mr. Nambiar's memorable plan, now on film, begins to unfold: Mrs. Nambiar quickly approaches Bhagavan, stands in front of him with joined palms, immediately drops to her knees and touches the Maharshi's feet three times, returning her hands to her forehead after each touch. Bhagavan seems surprised, steps back slightly, rubs his thigh with apparent unease and looks on. It all happens so fast he has no time to react. But that is not the end of it. Mr. Nambiar must have immediately handed over the camera to his wife, for in the next scene we see Mr. Nambiar on his knees with his head firmly planted on Bhagavan's right foot. He then lifts his head up and turns to the camera to be sure everything was recorded. Uncertain, he repeats the act and then stands.

A glimpse at the Maharshi's face indicates that he is humoured by this whole affair, though he wastes no time making his escape once Nambiar stands.

This film ends with a close-up of a consenting and cheerful Major Allen Chadwick; then one of a steady, stoic Professor Syed.

- (To be continued)

OBITUARY

We are sad to announce the sudden demise of Thambiah Navaratnam, a senior devotee of Bhagavan who has been residing in Oakville, Ontario for the last two years.

Born in Ceylon, he came under the direct influence of the Maharshi in 1943 when, while sitting in the Old Hall, the Master's gracious eyes turned on him and he found himself absorbed in the Absolute.

He was a quiet man, blessed with many deep spiritual experiences. The local community of devotees will miss his inspiring company.

We extend our sincere consolation to his wife, Srimati Ratna who, in her long, fruitful life, has been equally blessed by Sri Bhagavan.

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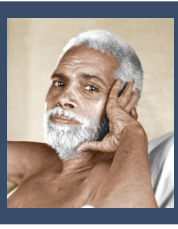

As I Saw Him - 10

By

Sampurnamma

To the poet the Maharshi was an inspired poet; to the scholar, an endless ocean of knowledge; to the *Yogi*, a supreme adept established in Divine Union. Everyone who approached him with humility and faith, saw something of themselves reflected back, with greater insight and clarity. It is no wonder that those uneducated but spiritually mature women who served him by cooking in the kitchen saw him as a flawless cook who taught the highest wisdom in simple kitchen chores.

Sampurnamma diligently served Bhagavan in the kitchen for many years and still lives in Sri Ramanasramam today. She can be seen in the Ashram with cane in hand, walking slowly with short steps, bent, and wearing a well-used white sari which is draped over the top of her head. When you speak to her, a beautiful smile lights up her face.

In reminiscences taken from *Ramana Smriti* and a 1989 video-taped interview, Sampurnamma tells us her story.

Bhagavan was born in the village next to ours and my people knew him from his earliest childhood. When he became a great saint with an Ashram at Tiruvannamalai, my relatives used to go there often, for they were quite devoted to him. I was busy with my household and was not interested in going with them.

When my husband died, I was in despair and thought life not worth living. My people were urging me to go to Ramanasramam to get some spiritual guidance from Bhagavan, but I was not in the mood to go anywhere.

In 1932 my sister and her husband, Narayanan, were going to see Bhagavan and I agreed to go with them. We found Bhagavan in a palm leaf hut built over his mother's samadhi (place of burial). Some devotees and visitors were with him and all were having their morning coffee. Dandapani Swami introduced me to Bhagavan, saying: "This is Dr. Narayanan's wife's sister." As soon as I was introduced, Bhagavan gave a happy smile and said, "*Varatoom, varatoom*. (She is welcome, she is welcome.)"

When I was able to sit for long hours in Bhagavan's presence my mind would just stop thinking and I would not notice the time passing. I was not taught to meditate and surely did not know how to stop the mind from thinking. It would happen quite by itself, by his grace. I would sit, immersed in a strange state in which the mind would not have a single thought and yet which would be completely clear. Those were days of deep and calm happiness. My devotion to Bhagavan took firm roots and never left me.

I stayed for twenty days. When I was leaving, Bhagavan got a copy of *Who am I?* and gave it to me with his own hands.

When I returned to my village I was restless. I had all kinds of dreams. I would dream that a pious lady would come to take me to the Ashram, or that Bhagavan was enquiring after me and calling me. I longed to go again

to Ramanasramam. My uncle was leaving for Arunachala and I eagerly accepted his offer to take me with him. On my arrival I was asked to help in the kitchen because the lady in charge of cooking had to leave for her home. I gladly agreed, for it gave me a chance to stay at the Ashram and to be near Bhagavan.

In the beginning I was not good at cooking. The way they cooked in the Ashram was different from ours. But Bhagavan was always by my side and gave me detailed instructions. His firm principle was that health depended on food and could be set right and kept well by a proper diet. He also believed that fine grinding and careful cooking would make any food easily digestible. So we used to spend hours on grinding and stewing. He would sit in the middle of the kitchen, watching and offering suggestions.

He paid very close attention to proper cooking. I would give him food to taste while it was cooking, to be sure that the seasoning was just right. He was always willing to leave the Old Hall to give advice in the kitchen. Amidst pots and pans he was relaxed and free. He would teach us numberless ways of cooking grains, pulses and vegetables, the staples of our South Indian diet. He would tell us stories from his childhood, or about his mother, her ways and how she cooked. He would tell me: "Your cooking reminds me of Mother's cooking. No wonder, our villages were so near." I think Bhagavan must have learned cooking from his mother, for if I made some dish very well, while testing it he would exclaim, "Ha, you have made this dish just like mother used to make it." And whenever my going home was mentioned he would say: "Oh, our best lady cook wants to go away."

In the kitchen he was the Master Cook, aiming at perfection in taste and appearance. One would think that he liked good food and enjoyed a hearty meal. Not at all. At dinner time he would mix up the little food he would allow to be put on his leaf - the sweet, the sour and the savoury, everything together - and gulp it down carelessly as if he had no taste in his mouth. When we would tell him that it was not right to mix such nicely made up dishes, he would say: "Enough of multiplicity. Let us have some unity."

When I think of it now, I can see clearly that he used the work in the kitchen as a background for spiritual training. He taught us to listen to every word of his and to carry it out faithfully. He taught us that work is love for others, that we never can work for ourselves. By his very presence he taught us that we are always in the presence of God and that all work is His. He used cooking to teach us religion and philosophy.

He would allow nothing to go to waste. Even a grain of rice or a mustard seed lying on the ground would be picked up, dusted carefully, taken to the kitchen and put in its proper tin. I asked him why he gave himself so much trouble for a grain of rice. He said: "Yes, this is my way. Everything is in my care and I let nothing go to waste. In these matters I am quite strict. Were I married, no woman could get on with me. She would run away." On some other day he said: "This is the property of my Father Arunachala. I have to preserve it and pass it on to His children." He would use for food things we would not even dream of as edible; wild plants, bitter roots and pungent leaves were turned under his guidance into delicious dishes.

Once a feast was being prepared for his birthday. Devotees sent food in large quantities: some sent rice, some sugar, some fruits. Someone sent a huge load of *brinjals* and we ate *brinjals* day after day. The stalks alone made a big heap which was lying in a corner. Bhagavan asked us to cook them as a curry! I was stunned, for even cattle would refuse to eat such useless stalks. Bhagavan insisted that the stalks were edible, and we put them in a pot to boil along with dry peas. After six hours of boiling they were as hard as ever. We were at a loss what to do, yet we did not dare to disturb Bhagavan. But he always knew when he was needed in the kitchen and he would leave the Hall even in the middle of a discussion. A casual visitor would think that his mind was all on cooking. In reality his grace was on the cooks. As usual he did not fail us, but appeared in the kitchen.

"How is the curry getting on?" he asked. "Is it a curry we are cooking? We are boiling steel nails!" I exclaimed, laughing. He stirred the stalks with the ladle and went away without saying anything. Soon after, we found them quite tender. The dish was simply delicious and everybody was asking for a second helping. Bhagavan challenged the diners to guess what vegetable they were eating. Everybody praised the curry and the cook, except Bhagavan. He swallowed the little he was served in one mouthful like a medicine and refused a second helping. I was very disappointed, for I had taken so much trouble to cook his stalks and he would not even taste them properly.

The next day he was telling somebody: "Sampurnamma was distressed that I did not eat her wonderful curry. Can she not see that everyone who eats is myself? And what does it matter who eats the food? It is the cooking that matters, not the cook or the eater. A thing done well, with love and devotion, is its own reward. What happens to it later matters little, for it is out of our hands."

It was clear that Bhagavan did not want me to treat him differently from others and would set me right by refusing to touch the very thing I was so proud of and eager to serve.

In the evening, before I would leave the Ashram for the town to sleep, he would ask me what there was to be cooked the next day. Then, arriving at daybreak the next morning, I would find everything ready - vegetables peeled and cut, lentils soaked, spices ground, coconut scraped. As soon as he saw me in the kitchen, he would give detailed instructions about what should be cooked and how. He would then sit in the Hall a while and then return to the kitchen to see how things were moving, taste them now and then, and go back to the Hall, to come again an hour or two later. It was so strange to see him so eager to cook and so unwilling to eat.

In my coming and going I sometimes had to walk in the dark along a jungle path skirting the hill and I would feel afraid. Bhagavan noticed it once and said: "Why are you afraid, am I not with you?" Bhagavan's brother, Chinnaswami, the manager of the Ashram, asked me, when I came at dusk:

"How could you come all alone? Were you not afraid?" Bhagavan rebuked him:

"Why are you surprised? Was she alone? Was I not with her all the time?"

Once Subbalakshmiamma and myself decided to walk around the hill. We started very early, long before daybreak. We were quite afraid of the jungle - there were snakes and panthers and evil-doers too. We soon saw a strange blue light in front of us. It was uncanny and we thought it was a ghost, but it led us along the path and soon we felt safe with it. It left us with daylight.

Another time we two were walking around the hill early in the morning and chattering about our homes and relatives. We noticed a man following us at a distance. We had to pass through a stretch of lonely forest, so we stopped to let him pass and go ahead. He too stopped. When we walked, he also walked. We got quite alarmed, and started praying: "Oh, Lord! Oh, Arunachala! Only you can help us, only you can save us!" The man said suddenly: "Yes, Arunachala is our only refuge. Keep your mind on Him constantly. It is His light that fills all space. Always have Him in your mind." We wondered who he was. Was he sent by Bhagavan to remind us that it is not proper to talk of worldly matters when going around the hill? Or was it Arunachala Himself in human disguise? We looked back, but there was nobody on the path! In so many ways Bhagavan made us feel that he was always with us, until the conviction grew and became a part of our nature.

Those were the days when we lived on the threshold of a new world - a world of ecstasy and joy. We were not conscious of what we were eating, of what we were doing. Time just rolled on noiselessly, unfelt and

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unperceived. The heaviest task seemed a trifle. We knew no fatigue. At home the least bit of work seemed tiresome and made us grumble, while here we worked all day and were always ready for more. Once Bhagavan came to the kitchen and saw the cooking done and everything cleared. He wondered that the day's work was over so soon. "No mere human hands were working here, Bhagavan. Good spirits helped us all the time," I said. He laughed: "The greatest spirit, Arunachala, is here, towering over you. It is He who works, not you."

Once a little deer found her way to Bhagavan and would not leave him. She would go with him up the hill and gambol around him and he would play with her for hours. About a year later she ran away into the jungle and some people must have pelted her with stones, for she was found severely wounded with her legs broken. She was brought to the Ashram. Bhagavan kept her near him, dressed her wounds and a doctor set her broken bones. One midnight the deer crept onto Bhagavan's lap, snuggled up to him and died.

The next day Bhagavan told me that the deer had died. I said: "Some great soul came to you as a deer to gain liberation from your hands." Bhagavan said: "Yes, it must be so. When I was on the hill, a crow used to keep me company. He was a *rishi* in a crow's body. He would not eat from anybody's hand but mine. He also died."

Once a garuda, a white-breasted eagle, which is considered holy in India, flew into the Hall and sat on the top of a cupboard near Bhagavan. After a while it flew around him and disappeared. "He is a *siddha* (a saint endowed with supernatural powers) who came to pay me a visit," said Bhagavan most seriously.

A dog used to sleep next to Bhagavan, and there were two sparrows living at his side in the Hall. Even when people tried to drive them away they would come back. Once he noticed that the dog had been chased away. He remarked: "Just because you are in the body of a human you think you are a human being, and because he is in the body of a dog you think him a dog. Why don't you think of him as a *Mahatma*, and treat him as a great person. Why do you treat him like a dog?" The respect he showed to animals and birds was most striking. He really treated them as equals. They were served food first like some respected visitors, and if they happened to die in the Ashram, they would be given a decent burial and a memorial stone. The tombs of the deer, the crow and the cow Lakshmi can still be seen in the Ashram near the back gate.

Who knows in how many different forms animal, human, and divine beings visited this embodiment of the Almighty! We, common and ignorant women knew only the bliss of his presence and could not tear ourselves away from the Beloved of all. So glorious he was.

It has been sixty years, I think, since I came. The days I spent with Bhagavan are memorable days indeed. Somehow, in my old age, I am pulling on with Bhagavan in my heart and his name on my tongue.

Obituary

We are very sad to announce the passing of Sri R. Gouthama of Glendale Heights, Illinois, an earnest devotee of Bhagavan. His father, Sri K. Ramaswami, has been well known to the circle of devotees for over fifty years and founded Ramana Maharshi Trust in Bangalore.

Sri R. Gouthama came to America in 1969 to complete his Masters Degree in Electrical Engineering. In 1972 he settled in the Chicago area until his untimely passing on June 19th, 1992 at the age of 51. He regularly went

to Sri Ramanasramam since his first visit in 1965, and one can see Sri Bhagavan's grace in his devout life.

His house was a meeting place for devotees where regular *satsangs* were conducted throughout the year. He had the good fortune of being host to many visiting pilgrims from home and abroad.

Prior to and even during his illness, Gouthama took keen interest in the restoration and editing of all the old films from Sri Ramanasramam and the production of the documentary on the life and teachings of the Maharshi. Just days before his passing, after viewing the completed version of the documentary, he called us to express his joy and satisfaction.

Gouthama's courage and devotion in the face of the developing illness has been an inspiration and consolation to all who knew him. In the hospital, on his final day, as friends and devotees gathered at his bedside, he quietly slipped away amidst the chanting of God's holy name.

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

IN 1948, Aravind Bose, a Bengali devotee of long-standing, shot a series of 16mm colour films which were collected together and have been commonly known as the 'Bose film'. This film came into the possession of Sri Ramanasramam only in the 1980's. The camera work done in these films displays a considerable amount of professionalism that is absent in most of the other films taken by devotees. But their real value lies in their content.

The film begins with a series of shots taken from up on the hill. We see the terrain surrounding Sri Ramanasramam as it was a half a century ago. And then from Skandashram we look down on the great Arunachala Temple with a small community surrounding it. Those familiar with Tiruvannamalai will easily observe the sharp contrast to the bustling town of today.

Swami Viswanathan is then seen standing on the overlook at Skandashram and pointing to places of interest. Mr. Bose's daughter, Maya, stands next to him and looks on. Apparently, Swami Viswanathan served as a guide that day, for we see him again in shots at various other places.

What follows is a series of scenes that are mostly connected with the Maharshi's early life. From Skandashram we go to Pachaiamman Koil. We then see various sites inside the Arunachala Temple, and scenes from Pavalakkunru and Virupaksha Cave. We also see, on two occasions, shots taken during the *Karthigai Deepam* festival. There are a great number of pilgrims walking on *pradakshina* near the Pali Tirtham, the large tank next to the Ashram. The tank is full to the brim and many pilgrims are bathing and washing their clothes. We see a man being carried in a palanquin by four bearers and a *bhajan* party with drum and cymbals following. In another scene the images from the Arunachala and the Adiannamalai Temples are seen being carried on procession near the front gate of Sri Ramanasramam. There is one view of the wooded Palakothu where a bearded swami in a loin cloth (Annamalai Swami) walks out of the Ganesha Temple. A short close up shot of the famed white peacock and we come to the Maharshi.

Bhagavan steps out from the southern door of the dining hall, and begins cleaning his teeth while standing on the steps. The attendant Sivananda stands beside him.

Having a short crop of white hair on his face and head, a white towel over his left shoulder, and leaning lightly on his cane, he quickly makes his way east between the dining hall and bathroom. A crowd of devotees follow him.

We soon see him walking again, flanked on both sides by devotees. Then Mr. Bose appears near the *goshala* (cow shed) and seems to be guiding Bhagavan to the *Veda Patasala*. The Maharshi stops and about ten priests and students come out and prostrate before him. One gets the impression that this was not a spontaneous occurrence, but rather an orchestrated act. After they all rise, Bhagavan resumes walking with all the priests and students reverently by his side.

Now we come to the part where Mr. Bose's camera is most effective in capturing the unique qualities of the Maharshi in a very natural manner.

We have all read of Sri Bhagavan's love for animals and how he would occasionally go to the *goshala* to visit those blessed cows whom he looked upon as ashramites, equal to any humans. This next scene takes us there with him on one of his regular visits and we witness, as others did, his love and attention for these often mistreated animals.

Looking somewhat lean and cheerful he walks up to a black cow and begins to gently scratch her back. While doing so he gazes around, looking to see that everything is being done properly. He moves over to a young calf and rubs its back, gives instructions to a worker, turns to the left, takes one step and then a gracious smile adorns his face. The reason is soon apparent. His beloved cow Lakshmi walks straight to him and bends her head down low. He reaches out to her.

At this point, if you slow down the film speed and look at the Maharshi's smiling lips, you can distinctly see him say endearingly "*Amma* (Mother)," as he begins to talk to her.

- (to be continued)

Three Verses on Liberation

Those who are students of the Maharshi's written works are aware that *Upadesa-Sara, Arunachala-Pancaratna*, and the following selection, *Muktaka-Traya*, are the only verses Sri Bhagavan composed in Sanskrit. Each of his compositions, written for whatever reason, exudes a crisp fragrance of truth and experience, guiding seekers to the final state of perfection.

The verses comprising *Muktaka-Traya* (Three Verses on Liberation) were composed on different occasions and later collected together. The first of these, *Ekam Aksaram*, was written when a devotee, Somasundaraswami, went to Bhagavan with a new notebook and requested him to write one letter (*aksara*) in it. Bhagavan replied with the punning Tamil verse, which he later translated into the Sanskrit. The second verse, *Hrdaya Kuhara Madhye*, was written at the request of a devotee and appears in chapter two of *Sri Ramana Gita*. The third verse, written in 1927, later was translated into Tamil and included as verse number 10 of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandha* (*Appendix to Forty Verses on Reality*).

ekam-aksaram hrdi nirantaram
bhasate svayam likhyate katham.

1. The one imperishable (letter) itself shines continually in the Heart. How is it to be written?

hrdaya-kuhara-madhye kevalam brahma-matram
hyaham-aham-iti saksad-atma-rupena bhati

rdi visa manasa svam cinvata majjata va
avana-calana-rodhad-atma-nistho bhava tvam.

2. In the centre of the heart-cave Brahman alone shines in the form of the Self with immediacy as 'I-I'. Enter into the heart by diving deep, with the mind investigating itself, or with control of the movement of the breath and abide in the Self.
Deham mrn-maya-vaj-jadatmakam-aham-buddhir-na tasyastyato naham tat-tad-abhava-supti-samaye siddhatma-sadbhava-tah ko'ham bhava-yutah kuto vara-dhiya drstvatma-nisthatmanam so'ham-sphurti-tayarunacala-sivah purno vibhati svayam.

3. The body, like things made of clay, is insentient in nature and has no 'I'-concept. Also the existence of the Self is admitted at the time of sleep when there is non-existence of the body. Therefore, I am not the body. To those established as the Self and having seen with a sharp intellect adhering to the enquiry 'Who am I?' and 'From whence?', Arunachala-Shiva itself shines full as the manifestation of 'I am that'.

Sanskrit verses and word-for-word meaning have been omitted.

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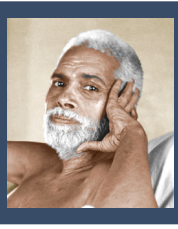
THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 1992 EDITED BY - DENNIS HARTEL & DR. ANIL K. SHARMA VOL. 2 - NO. 6



As I Saw Him - 11

By Krishna Bhikshu

Krishna Bhikshu was a man of insatiable curiosity, keen intellect, enthusiasm and energy. He was a precocious youth whose early studies created a distaste for religious literature. This lasted until he came under the powerful influence of Ganapati Muni, who brought him to the Maharshi in 1929. He was enchanted by the holy presence of the sage, but still wandered about for some years exploring the different spiritual traditions and teachers of the time. As the result of his wide study and long practice, Krishna Bhikshu became convinced of the truths taught and lived by Sri Ramana Maharshi and surrendered to him wholeheartedly.

He authored several important works in Telugu, one being Sri Ramana Leela, the most comprehensive biography of the Maharshi. Amidst the chanting of Arunachala Siva, Krishna Bhikshu breathed his last on December 30, 1981.

Our family was in some way or other always associated with religion and spiritual searching. Brahmarsi Chivukula Venkata Sastri, the husband of my paternal aunt, had asked some of the questions recorded in the *Ramana Gita*. When I was a child I often used to go to his house and there I saw for the first time the photo of Bhagavan Ramana and read *Ramana Gita* and other early brochures.

I went to Arunachala for the first time with Sri Rami Reddi. We had our food in the town and then went to the Ashram. In those days there was very little there - a hut for Bhagavan and another over his mother's samadhi (place of burial). Bhagavan had just finished his food and was washing his hands. He looked at us intently. "Did you have your food?" He asked. "Yes, we had it in town." "You could have had it here," he replied:

I stayed with him for three days. He made a great impression on me. I considered him to be a real *Mahatma*, although his ways were very simple. Most of the cooking was done by him in those days. The Ashram lived from hand to mouth and usually only rice and vegetable soup were prepared. When I was about to leave, I asked Bhagavan: "Bhagavan, kindly show me a good path." "What are you doing now?" he asked. "When I am in the right mood, I sing the songs of Tyagaraja and I recite the holy *Gayatri*. I was also doing some *pranayama* but these breathing exercises have upset my health." "You had better stop them. But never give up the *Advaita Dristhi* (non dual vision)." At that time I could not understand his words.

I went to Benares for a month, returned to Pondicherry and spent five months there. Wherever I would go people would find some fault or other with me: "You are too weak, not fit for *yoga*, you do not know how to concentrate, you cannot hold your breath, you are unable to fast, you need too much sleep, you cannot keep vigils, you must surrender all your property . . ." Only Bhagavan asked for nothing, found fault with nothing. As a matter of truth, there was nothing in me that entitled me to his grace. But it did not matter with Bhagavan. He wanted me, not my goodness. It was enough to tell him "I am yours", and for him to do the rest. In that way he was unsurpassed. The strange people he gathered around him! But those who gave themselves to him and trusted him and did his bidding were overwhelmed by his immense solicitude and kindness.

In 1930 I visited Ramanasramam for the second time, and stayed a month. Our life was very simple at that

time. I would get up early each morning, have my bath near the well at Palitirtham, prepare sacramental food on a small stove and start worshipping the *Lingam* over Bhagavan's mother's samadhi. Chinnaswami helped in the chanting. Bhagavan would make himself generally useful. He would talk quite freely with us every night after food. They would ply him with questions on philosophy and metaphysics. In the evening he would sit on a wooden cot near the well and gaze at Arunachala in deep silence. His face would glow with an inner radiance which would appear to increase with the deepening darkness. We were sitting all around him, either silently, or singing some song. Alamelamma would sometimes sing from *Tiruppughazh*. The silence and peace at those hours was quite remarkable.

At night after dinner all the inmates of the Ashram would collect around Bhagavan, and then he was our own, telling stories, answering questions, dispelling doubts, laughing and joking. We never knew how late it was until Madhavaswami would go behind Bhagavan's back and give us signs that it was time to allow Bhagavan some rest.

B. V. Narasimhaswami took up in those days the task of writing a book on Bhagavan's life and was collecting materials for his work from devotees. The first draft of the book was ready and the author gave it to me to read. The idea came to me that a similar book should be written in Telugu. I got Bhagavan's permission and, using Narasimhaswami's manuscript for an outline, got the Telugu version written within a month.

After that, whenever there was some court holiday and I had enough money for a railway ticket, I would come down to Ramanasramam. Everybody, including Bhagavan, used to say: "Krishnayya has come," and there was always a warm welcome for me.

I asked him once: "You told me to repeat the *Gayatri*. It is too long. Also, I am expected to know its meaning and to meditate on it." "Who asked you to bother about the meaning and all that? I have only asked you to see who is repeating the *Gayatri*, or who is the *japi*," was his kind reply.

On the other hand he did not limit his teaching to the one question "Who am I?" He invariably adjusted his advice to the needs of the devotee. He would say: "Sooner or later the question 'Who am I?' will have to be faced. All that leads to this question is good. By itself nothing else is fully effective, for Self-knowledge comes only through self-enquiry. But other methods purify the mind and help it to see its own limits. When the mind comes to the end of its resources and stands baffled before the unanswerable question, then a Higher Power takes charge of the mind and the Self stands revealed, the Real, the Wonderful."

Once an old woman came to the Ashram. She always carried with her a framed picture of Bhagavan Narayana and she would worship it on every occasion.

She asked Bhagavan whether she was right in doing so. Bhagavan replied:

"Without name and form, on what is one to concentrate? What you are doing with your heart and soul is just right for you."

One night there were only one or two persons in the hall. Madhavaswami was massaging Bhagavan's legs. A gentleman from Kakinada asked Bhagavan's permission to massage his legs. Bhagavan did not reply. The man repeated his request, saying: "At home I am daily praying to Bhagavan and now I have a chance to serve him." Suddenly Bhagavan thundered: "You had all the chances of serving me at home. Why did you come here?" The man became quite frightened and could not speak. Thus Bhagavan taught us not to make a show of our devotion.

Nobody could guess about the way Bhagavan would meet people. The high and mighty of the land would not get even a blank look, while some insignificant looking wanderer would become the object of his concentrated attention for hours and days. On the other hand eminent people would sometimes be taken up by him and given the immense blessing of being the centre of his interest. Once Pranavananda Swami came to the Ashram. He was utterly exhausted. He sat on the steps of the temple and could not move any further. Bhagavan was told about it. He came out at once, sat at the feet of Pranavananda Swami and started rubbing his legs, saying: "You had a long way to walk, Grandpa. Your legs must be paining you very much." The old *swami* protested in vain; Bhagavan had his way and massaged the *swami's* feet.

At food time Bhagavan would ask to be served very little and he would carefully clear the plate of the last grain of food before getting up. Although he never asked us to do the same, I asked him: "If we clear our dining leaves so scrupulously, the dogs, cats, monkeys, rats and the ants will starve." Bhagavan answered: "Well, if you are so compassionate, why not feed the animals before taking food yourselves? Do you think they relish your scraps?"

Once a visitor said: "I have been coming to you, Swami, many times, hoping that something will happen and I shall be changed. So far I do not see any change in me. I am as I was: a weakling of a man, an inveterate sinner." And he started weeping piteously. "On this road there are no milestones," replied Bhagavan. "How can you know which direction you are going? Why don't you do what the first-class railway passenger does? He tells the guard his destination, locks the doors and goes to sleep. The rest is done by the guard, If you could trust your *guru* as much as you trust the railway guard, it would be quite enough to make you reach your destination. Your business is to shut the door and windows and sleep. The guard will wake you up at your destination."

One Rama Rao, an advocate in Nellore, was requested many times by his friends to come with them to Ramanasramam. Invariably he would answer: "I shall go when Bhagavan calls me." Once when he was praying Bhagavan appeared to him and asked: "Why have you not come?" Rama Rao immediately left for Tiruvannamalai. Before reaching the Ashram he had a dream in which a unique *Chakra* (symbolic drawing) appeared before him. He told the dream to Bhagavan, described the *Chakra* and asked who could help him in having one drawn correctly. Bhagavan gave him all the necessary information. When the *Chakra* was ready, Bhagavan examined it carefully and gave it to Rama Rao, telling him to use it in his worship.

A widow arrived one day, entered the Hall and bowed to Bhagavan. He looked at her closely and started laughing. "Oh, it is you." he said. The woman got confused, covered her face with her white widow's sari and hid herself in a corner. Bhagavan continued with a broad smile: "When I was a boy her people were our neighbours and she was their little girl. It was agreed between our parents that she would be my wife in due course. I was very fond of helping my mother in the kitchen and her mother used to grumble that she would never marry her daughter to a fellow who likes to spend his day near the stove, like a woman. Anyhow I was not fated to marry. But had I married her, what would have been my fate!" Everybody had a good laugh at Bhagavan's narrow escape.

Once I said to Bhagavan: "Bhagavan, formerly, whenever I thought of you, your form would appear before my eyes. But now it does not happen. What am I to do?" "You can remember my name and repeat it. Name is superior to form. But in the course of time even the name will disappear. Till then repeat the name," advised Bhagavan.

An inmate of the Ashram who had been serving Bhagavan for many years started visiting a certain woman in the town. Her relatives came to know of it and decided to catch and kill the man. One night they caught him at her house, bound him hand and foot and locked him up in a room, postponing the cutting of his throat until they had found a safe way of disposing of the body. Our man managed to escape and came running to the

Ashram, pursued by his enemies. When he entered the gate they gave up the chase. He entered the Hall trembling and fell on the ground shouting: "Save me, save me." Bhagavan ordered the doors to be shut and said: "Don't fear, tell me what happened." After having been told everything, he looked at the culprit with understanding and pity and said reassuringly: "Don't fear any more. Go and sleep." From the next day the man was at his work and Bhagavan would not mention the matter at all. Everybody in the town came to know what happened. The Ashram people requested Bhagavan to send the man away, for his presence would tarnish the good name of the Ashram. Bhagavan called the man and told him in front of everybody: "You have done some wrong, but you were too foolish to keep it secret. Others do worse things, but they take care not to be caught. Now, the people who were not caught want you to leave the Ashram because you were caught. They will make your life miserable. You had better stay outside for some time, until things settle down." The man stayed with some devotees outside the Ashram and came back after a few months.

When people would complain to Bhagavan about some mischief or other done in the Ashram, Bhagavan would say: "I have not come here to punish people. If I start punishing people, even a black crow would not remain in this place. People come here, each with his own purpose, and each may find his purpose fulfilled. Why don't you take care of your own purpose? Why do you pay attention to what others do?"

On some other occasion Bhagavan remarked about some of the visitors: "On their first visit to the Ashram they seem to be all right; on their second visit they discover that the Ashram is not properly run; on their third visit they start giving advice; on the fourth they know best how to run the place; on the fifth they discover that the management is not responsive and they are very displeased; on the sixth they suggest that the present staff should walk out, leaving the Ashram to them. Finally they become disheartened and blame me for what I have never done." After all it is perfectly true that Bhagavan neither started nor organised the Ashram. It was all done by others who just did what they thought right.

When Bhagavan was still on the hill, a postcard came in which the sender wrote: "I am a poor elementary school teacher. My mother is old and my salary is so small that I cannot look after her properly. Kindly see that I get a raise." Bhagavan laughed and said: "Well, why not?" Another card came after some time in which he wrote: "By your grace my salary was increased. Now there is a vacancy in a higher grade. If I am given that grade, I shall earn more and make my mother very happy." Bhagavan had a good laugh and said: "Good." Again after some days, another card: "My mother is bedridden and there is nobody to nurse her. If I could get married, my wife would look after her. But I am a poor man. Who will give me his daughter in marriage? And where shall I get the money for expenses? Bhagavan may kindly arrange." Bhagavan laughed and said: "Well, let it be so." After some months another postcard came: "By your kindness I was married quite easily. My wife is already with me. My mother wants a grandchild before she dies. Please provide. "Why not?" said Bhagavan. After some months another card: "My wife gave birth to a child, but she has no milk for it. I cannot afford milk for the baby. Please get me a promotion." Then another card: "I got a promotion and an increment. The child is doing well. I owe everything to your kindness." Bhagavan remarked: "What have I done? It is his good *karma* that all goes well with him." After some days another card: "Mother died. She worshipped you before her death. "Well," said Bhagavan. After a month, another card: "Swami, my child has died." "Sorry," said Bhagavan. Another month had passed and a card came saying: "My wife is pregnant again." Then another card: "My wife gave birth to a child. Both died." "*Ram, Ram*," said Bhagavan. "Everything seems to be over." Then another card: "Due to family trouble my work was very irregular and I was dismissed. I am completely destitute now." Bhagavan said, heaving a deep sigh: "All that came has gone; only his Self remained with him. It is always like this. When all goes, only the Self remains."

- The preceding was taken from "The Bhagavan I Knew" in the Ramana Smriti Souvenir.

Sri Kunju Swami

We are very sad to announce the passing of Sri Kunju Swami at 1:30 a.m. on August 7th. He was a living testimony to the efficacy of the Maharshi's teachings and a pure channel of the Master's Grace. None who met him can ever forget his solid, rock-like abidance in the Self, natural devotion, simplicity and humility. His presence at Sri Ramanasramam will be sorely missed.

From Kunju Swami's Tamil book, Enadu Ninaivugal, J. Jayaraman translates some of his reminiscences, beginning from his early life.

The grand opportunity of basking in, and delighting in the tremendous and liberating Grace of Sri Bhagavan who sported in the Self, drinking the nectar at the Feet of Arunachala, was vouchsafed to me.

I was born in January 1897, the third offspring, to a middle-class family in the village Serakkodu, which lies between Paalakkaadu and Chitroor in the state of Kerala. I reached the age of three without much event. I was given to quiet and seclusion and did not indulge either in play or in the tantrums usual to other children of my age. This abnormality prompted my father to show my horoscope to my maternal uncle. The latter, skilled in astrology, examining the data, exclaimed with obvious wonder and delight, "This is an unusual child to be born in our family. It has divine proclivities. Therefore great care should be taken towards his regimen and other matters." My father was thrilled to hear this - he had studied *Kaivalya Navaneeta* and other scriptures of *Vedanta*, and had great devotion to matters of the spirit - hence his abundant joy. From then on I was brought up differently. When I completed five years, I was put in the small school of the village. I learnt, more or less, to read and write in Malayalam, using palm leaves which were in vogue then.

From my seventh year on, I used to go to the village pond for a swim with my father. Noticing the orthodox Brahmins standing in the water and muttering their *mantras*, my young mind too was seized with a longing to do the same. The longing grew intense and continuous. One night Lord Siva appeared before me in dream wearing matted hair and *rudraaksha* beads, and whispered the sacred *panchaakshari mantra* in my ear. Youngster that I was, I could not recollect the *mantra* properly upon waking. When fully awake, I felt as though a great fortune had slipped out of my hands. I was plunged into despair. I went to bed that night with my mind centred on this event. Once again the Lord appeared and initiated me. Being alert and one-pointed, I this time grasped the *mantra*. From then on the mind was engaged in chanting it ceaselessly.

Soon the desire to possess a *vibhuti* bag began to grow in me. In those days none other than Brahmins and some monks (*Pandaarams*) kept this custom. So I was quite depressed, afraid to ask another for a bag and unable to give up this thought. Gangaadhara, the Merciful Lord Siva, took pity on this tender child-mind and, appearing once more in my dream, told me to look for the necessary coins under a particular tree on the banks of the bathing pond. Upon waking the next morning, I secretly left for the said spot and searched. Lo! Hidden amidst the exposed roots were three quarter-anna coins. With glee I picked them up, washed them of the dirt, and returned home. Reluctant to move out during the day, I made my way to the shops at nightfall. When I found that the bag cost exactly three quarter-annas, I happily gave over the coins and took possession of the holy pouch and returned home. One day my father saw it and asked me about it. When I narrated the happenings, he was struck with awe and showered even more care and affection on me. Friends and others who came to know of this became wary of moving with me freely.

A year passed. Yet another wish took hold of me: the unspeakable desire to keep a *rudraaksha* rosary! The omnipresent Lord fulfilled this in an unbelievable way. I used to go often to the pond for a swim with my friend.

On the day of the incident we were both halfway to the pond when my friend said, "I just remembered something my father asked me to do. So I am returning home." I was left alone and went ahead a short distance when I noticed a large lotus on the road. I picked it up only to be struck with awe, for right in the middle of the flower, which was larger than any lotus I had seen thus far or likely to see in the future, was a *rudraaksha* rosary strung on golden thread! Tears of joy filled my eyes as I looked around. There was no one to be seen. With great devotion and care I carried it home and showed it to my father, narrating all that had happened.

My relatives and others who came to hear of this were all awestruck. Since that day the rosary was continually around my neck. At present, it is kept for worship with my brothers. The remembrance of the Lord's compassion in such wondrous fulfilment, fills me with beatitude.

I was about ten years of age when my father took me to a neighbouring village where some Tamil pandits were reciting the *Tiruvilayaadal Puranam* and expounding the meaning in Malayalam. I listened to it with full attention. Reaching home my father asked me to report whatever I had heard to my mother. I then related faithfully all that I had heard and in full. My mother was very pleased and proud of me! Attending the discourses and then returning home to repeat it all, became a daily feature. This was followed by my going to many places to attend such discourses. Impressed with such good memory in a young boy, people in the neighbouring villages used to invite me to hear me speak. Some years passed in this way.

Kodumudi Swami, of great fame, arrived in Kerala. A worshipper of Bhairava, a fearsome aspect of Siva, the Swami wore but a loincloth. He performed many miracles. My father wanted to take me to him. I did not go as I felt no need to see another when the Lord had, as Guru, Himself initiated me with a *mantra* and had even cleared my doubts now and then in dreams.

More years rolled by. I was eighteen years of age. A renunciate arrived at a village about three miles away from us and was teaching *Vedanta* to some elders. My father learnt of this while on a business trip there. He felt that my discoursing and *mantra* chanting were all a kind of *siddhi*, miracle-mongering, which would not last. He felt that lasting benefit would accrue only from a study of *Vedanta* and pondering over it and assimilating it in practice. My earlier refusal to approach Kodumudi Swami, prompted him to meet the renunciate by himself. He appraised the *sannyasi* about me, told him that he would bring me to him and begged him to talk to me and make me consent to a *Vedantic* training under him. I was then taken along with my father on a business trip and there, by the way, visited the *sannyasi* along with my father.

We were seated quietly for a while when my father left me, saying that he would come back soon. Not too happy, I remained seated. Some minutes passed. The Swami turned to me gently and enquired of me. Then, by a sign, sending away the others present there, he told me, "There will be no gain for you in a life of discoursing and receiving adulation. Then quoting from *Kaivalya Navaneeta* to the effect that the *siddhis* of the sages merely afforded diversion but not deliverance, he said, "A study of *Vedanta* and clarity therefrom is alone conducive to Self-experience; so what do you wish to pursue?" I replied, "Please do as you deem fit." He replied, "It is not proper for me to decide this. I must instruct you only in that which commands your keenness. I can teach the *Puranas*, Astrology, Magic, Medicine and *Vedanta*. State your desire." I was unable to decide. The Swami therefore decided to cast lots. This was done and I picked up the slip of paper which bore "*Vedanta*". The Swami was happy and said that the day being auspicious, lessons could start right away. He then wrote out on the palm leaf the following six verses from *Kaivalya Navaneetam* in Malayalam, and asked me to go home and return at the same time the following day after reading it.

- (To be continued)

Advent Day Celebrations

The ninety-sixth anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's arrival at Arunachala was celebrated on Sunday August 30th, 1992 at Arunachala Ashram in Bridgetown Nova Scotia, Canada. Many devotees gathered from far and wide in the Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram to participate in the Advent celebrations and also to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Arunachala Ashram in the Annapolis Valley.

The program was conducted by Dr. J. S. S. Lakshminarayana who also performed *Ganesha Puja*. Further praise to Ganesha was offered by Dennis Hartel who led the singing of "*Gayiye Ganapati Jaga Vandana*."

We were very fortunate to have with us this year Sri J. Jayaraman from Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai. He gave an elucidating talk entitled *Living with those who lived with the Maharshi*. Jayaraman is eminently qualified on this subject, as he has delved deep into the life and teachings of the Maharshi, utilizing his close association with the senior devotees and disciples of the Master. He spoke at length of his experiences with Sri Kunju Swami (*see above*), Prof. N. R. Krishnamoorthy Aiyer, Sri Ramaswami Pillai, and others, all of whom radiate the essence of Sri Maharshi's teachings. He followed this discourse with stirring renditions of *Arunachala Pancharatnam*, at which time he was joined by the enthusiastic and full-throated congregation, and the *Navamani Malai*.

The final fifteen minutes of the Video documentary, *The Sage of Arunachala*, was shown, presenting the glorious last days of the sage, his dramatic demise and continued presence in his Ashram today. This excerpt was followed by *Bhajans* and then *Prasad*, which was prepared by the Ashram residents, guests and devoted ladies of the Halifax area, all of whom served it with enthusiasm and devotion. The remainder of the video documentary was then screened.

The continuing and guiding presence of Ramana Maharshi was felt by all present.

In New York City

At the New York Arunachala Ashram devotees also gathered on Sunday, August 30th to celebrate Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala.

The well-known family of devotees joined in recitation of *Lalita Sahasranam, Upadesha Sarah*, and other works of Bhagavan. Mr. Babubai Parekh recited *slokas* and spoke on the spiritual life. Extracts from Arthur Osborne's biography of the Maharshi was read out and then *Prasad* was served in an atmosphere of warmth, friendship and devotion.

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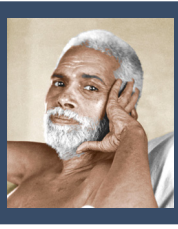

The Maharshi In America

It is well known there from the age of sixteen Sri Ramana Maharshi never left the holy environs of his beloved Arunachala Hill. But what did travel were the tales of his pristine purity, the liberating qualities of his teachings, and the inexplicable power of his presence.

From all over India and the far corners of the world, seekers flocked to his Ashram. In the midst of all these seekers there were those who made their living seeking out and writing on newsworthy stories. Evidently, as time passed, the Maharshi became a newsworthy item, and the media from around the world began making their way to Sri Ramanasramam; of course, the American media didn't fall far behind.

HOLY MAN

"Sri Ramana Maharshi has India's answer to most of man's problems." This was the heading and subheading beneath the large double-paged picture above. It was the largest photo in the May 30, 1949 issue of LIFE magazine. It was also part of the longest article spanning ten pages with eleven photos and over 5,000 words, contributed by the distinguished American writer and musician, Winthrop Sargeant.

Competing for attention in this same popular photo journal-weekly was a ten page photo-biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt's early life. Also seen are news and photos of the weeks events, covering stories like, 'Warsaw rises from its wreckage,' 'John McCloy takes on job as Germany's boss,' 'Monaco buries its sprightly old prince,' and other small articles under the titles of 'Art', 'Education', 'Science', 'Movies', etc.

But by far the most prominent feature in the whole 108 page issue is the *Holy Man* written about the Maharshi. It has four times more written text than the next longest article, which is quite amazing, considering the magazine then had a readership of over 26,000,000. Amazing also for the fact it was written not just by an ordinary reporter, but by a qualified journalist who was also a sincere seeker, capable of going far deeper into Indian philosophical thought than any ordinary foreign newsman.

After introducing himself to a member of Sri Ramanasramam he is candidly asked, "Are you interested merely in something to write for your paper, or have you a deeper purpose?"

He then writes: 'I replied quite shamelessly that I was in search of salvation.' But if this was the true purpose of his visit it is not easily detectable by his observations, which remain for the most part, objective, correct, yet interesting. He was telling a story for a large, uninitiated American audience, and to grab and keep their attention seems to be his primary concern. In this he succeeds very well, even while delving into Hindu Psychology, Theology, Reincarnation, Philosophy, and the intricacies of *Mukti* (final emancipation).

Under the subtitle, **Experiment vs. Contemplation**, he writes: 'To the orthodox Hindu mind, which considers the material world an illusion of the senses, experiment has never seemed important. While the Westerner busied himself with test tubes in an effort to subdue and comprehend his material environment, the Hindu

simply sat and thought .... 'Ultimately, by a process of purification, the soul becomes free of the necessity of repeated rebirths and is permanently united with the vital force itself. This final state is the goal of all human life. . .'

Then for several paragraphs he turns his attention to the *Bhagavad Gita*, a book he undoubtedly has a fascination for:* 'Seldom in the history of religious and philosophical writing has so much profundity been encompassed in a few pages, and the result is a compendium of the essentials of Hindu religion. As Krishna describes it, life is an impermanent dream-like state in which the soul is beset by illusions and desires. Once independent of his desires and unattached to glory, ambition, pride or any other fruit of worldly achievement, he can go through life in complete serenity and pass from it into an eternal union with *Brahman*, the omnipresent spirit of all created things ....'

After explaining the gist of the *Gita* with clarity and conviction, and knowing that he has just indulged upon the reader's limits of reflective thought, he brings us back to the central figure, The Maharshi, and asks: 'Now what has all this ancient doctrine got to do with Sri Ramana Maharshi, the suntanned old gentleman who lives at the foot of the mountain near Tiruvannamalai? *Everything*. Sri Ramana's views are extremely orthodox and correspond exactly with those propounded in the *Gita*. His life of austerity, his renunciation of all worldly desires, his contemplative serenity, his unshakeable peace of mind are all part of the traditional equipment of the Hindu sage .... Sri Ramana's soul is already united with *Brahman*. Only the presence of his physical body, an outer husk connected with the world of appearance, still sustains the illusion that he is a man like other men....'

Any student or devotee of the Maharshi would fully endorse these observations of Mr. Sargeant. He has grasped the essence of the *Advaitic* ideal and how the Maharshi embodied it. But under the subtitle 'Who am I?' his elaborations on the Maharshi's teachings fall short: 'The method is merely a variation on a theme that is at least 3,000 years old. Sri Ramana's favourite point of departure, the question 'Who am I?,' was stated long ago by Socrates as 'Know thyself,' and has been echoed by thousands of great moral teachers everywhere.'

That is as far as the author elucidates on the actual technique of the 'Who am I?' method, which is no elucidation at all. However, the quotation from the Maharshi that follows, does serve to compensate and provide the vast American readership with some thought-provoking concepts: "If only the mind is kept under control," says Sri Ramana, "what matters it where one may happen to be? The mind of the ignorant one, entering into the phenomenal world, suffers pain and anguish. When the world recedes from one's view, that is when, free from thought, the mind enjoys the bliss of the Self. There is no such thing as the physical world apart from and independent of thought. Just as the spider draws out the thread of the cobweb from within itself and withdraws it again into itself, even so out of itself the mind projects the world and absorbs it again into itself. The Self alone is the world." This is the full extent of the Maharshi's teachings given in this article.

What, perhaps, had a greater attraction to the readers of this magazine was the picturesque description of Sri Ramanasramam and the physical appearance of the sage. In this task the author remains respectfully objective, writing kindly without adulation or marked devotion. This results in a lucid, credible and very readable account: 'After some conversation and tea drinking I was led into the presence of Sri Ramana himself. He was a small, thin man of seventy with close cropped white hair and a stubby beard and moustache, an extremely kindly and intelligent face and a deeply tanned body, dad in a loincloth. He reclined on a massive stone couch propped up with pillows. An American alarm clock ticked on a shelf behind him and a calendar hung from one of the posts.... Sitting crossed-legged on the floor about him were two or three dozen people, all gazing

* In 1979, Winthrop Sargeant published a 735 page, word-for-word translation and commentary on the *Bhagavad*

rapturously at the master.... 'Sri Ramana would have looked like a superior human being in any surroundings. He had the quietly assured look of a man who has experienced a great deal and thought everything through to a final, unshakeable conclusion. Even an unbeliever could see that he possessed a sort of personal serenity that is rare even in the contemplative Orient. I mumbled a few words of greeting which I hoped were appropriate and was smilingly waved to a place on the floor. The Maharshi spoke very little, sometimes in English, sometimes in the Tamil language which a considerable pan of his audience didn't understand. But that didn't matter. 'You can attain peace merely by being near him,' the professor of English Literature explained later.

'The Maharshi was presented with an old book of Tamil scriptures from which he read odd passages aloud, commenting on them in a leisurely tone of voice while his listeners gazed raptly. Finally he stopped talking altogether and simply smiled an endless warm-hearted smile. After an hour or so he rose from his couch and, supporting himself with a long cane, was led by a disciple back to his living quarters. The whole scene had a biblical quality about it, like something that might have happened thousands of years ago. It was a re-enactment of the typical scene between master and disciples that has been going on since long before the time of Buddha and that continues in India today as if time stood still and history did not exist.'

Besides valuable observations like the above, and credible explanations about Hindu life and philosophy, Mr. Sargeant did not resist the temptation to dabble in the sphere of incredulous speculation. He indulged in this by comparing the supernatural powers claimed by followers of both Sri Aurobindo and Sri Ramana, creating a sense of competition and obvious foolishness. Perhaps he thought the readers needed this for entertainment and relief from an otherwise serious, impressive and somewhat intrusive Hindu profile upon a powerful Christian nation. A thoughtful and informed reader would easily forgive him for this slight lapse and judge the overall value of his work. And while millions of Americans sat and pondered over these curious photographs and the ancient wisdom from the East, the final year of a glorious testimony to the heights of human and spiritual perfection, in the form of Sri Ramana Maharshi, began.

A Request

While researching the above Life magazine article and several others we happened to discover that the Maharshi's death was reported in the New York Times with a one paragraph notation on April 15, 1950 and an eight paragraph article the following day. The tributes to the sage, albeit well intended, are replete with inaccurate - though interesting - observations. We plan on printing them in our next issue.

We believe that similar reports were submitted to other large city daily newspapers around the country. We ask our friends and readers in these cities to visit their libraries and investigate the matter and, if something is found, to send us a photocopy of it. We will print all received material.

Sri Kunju Swami

In our last issue we regretfully reported the passing of the revered disciple of Sri Bhagavan, Sri Kunju Swami. We also began translations from his Tamil book, *Enadu Ninaivugal*. We continue here with reminiscences from Kunju Swami's early life, translated by J. Jayaraman of Sri Ramanasramam.

The Yelappondi Kuppandi Swami then wrote out on a palm leaf the following six verses from *Kaivalya Navaneeta* in Malayalam, and asked me to go home and return at the same time the following day after reading it.

1. I worship the ever-shining Pure Consciousness, which manifests as Brahma, Vishnu, or Mighty Siva, accordingly as He creates, preserves or withdraws (the universe), and also as the countless individual beings, yet remaining ever-free and perfect as the Blazing Sun over the ocean of Bliss.

2. All the ancient sages drew from the boundless ocean of milk, namely the *Vedanta*, and filled their pitchers (their works). I boiled them all on the fire of the Master's words, churned them with the churn of self-enquiry, and I now present this cream of Emancipation - *Kaivalya Navaneeta* - to all.

3. The sages say that there are four prerequisites for realization of the Truth:

(1) *Viveka*: discrimination between the temporary and the permanent;
(2) *Vairagya*: indifference to the enjoyment of pleasures here or hereafter;
(3) the group of six qualities and
(4) *Mumukshatvam*: the longing for liberation.

4. & 5. The six qualities are *sama, dama, uparati, titiksha, samadhana* and *sraddha*. Of these -

sama - is control of mind;
dama - is control of the senses;
uparati - is cessation of activities (relating to caste, creed, family, etc.);
titiksha - is control of passions, and includes endurance;
samadhana - is, according to the sages, the settling down of the mind to reflect on the Truth, as revealed by the scriptures and the sages;
sraddha - denotes faith in the Master and the scriptures.

Such are the meanings of the six terms of this category.

6. No one can achieve anything in the world without being properly equipped for the task. For the same reason, only those who are equipped with these four categories of prerequisites can gain illumination. A novice cannot get it so readily. If so gained, it follows that the person has been successively purified in countless past incarnations.

I memorised these six verses even on the road towards my home. When reaching home, my father inquired about what transpired during my visit with the Swami. I related what happened, finishing with the recitation of the above six verses.

I visited the Swami every day for the next fifteen days during which time I committed one hundred verses of the *Kaivalya Navaneeta* to memory. My father told me the mere memorizing of the verses is useless and I should ask the Swami for the meaning also. This I did and was taught the meanings.

About this time Rangaswami Gounder of Pollaachi Taluk came to see the Swami. Seeing me there he made inquiries and with my father's permission took me and the Swami to his home. At his home in Puduppaalayam the study of the *Yoga Vasishta* in Tamil verse began. The text abounded with stories of multifarious *samadhi* experiences, of which I had not the least inkling. So I asked the Swami in private if such study of the scripture is enough to gain these *samadhi* experiences, or is there something more to be done. Swamiji replied that mere study was not enough and then taught me certain spiritual practices, which he advised me to perform diligently. Accordingly, I supplemented the *Vedantic* study with the practices.

⇦

When I found that no special experiences were coming my way I again approached the Swami. He told me that I should continue in silence, with greater intensity, and then these experiences would occur. After some months passed in Puduppaalayam, I felt I could return home and continue the practices. So, with the Swami's permission I returned home, practiced hard, but still had no results. Not only that, but my earlier state of peace seemed gone and since no new experiences were coming, I felt distraught. This unsettled condition continued for the next two years.

Meanwhile, the Swami went on a pilgrimage to some places throughout Tamil Nadu. When he returned with the Puduppaalayam Gounder and some other wealthy patrons, he announced that he would enter *Jeeva Samadhi* (conscious death) on a certain day two years hence, and that all these VIP's with him had gathered to handle the arrangements.

At a designated *samadhi* spot, three miles from our village, work began in earnest on a cavernous construction. Swamiji spoke to my father and got me to help him. He began introducing me to all and sundry as his principle disciple and the successor to head his Ashram. All this pomp and arrangements repulsed me. My mind was in great turmoil. One day I laid bare before the Swami all my disappointments and apprehensions, adding, "Alas, I have been singularly deprived of any spiritual experiences. Are there not any living saints or Maharshis like those we read about in the scriptures?"

Immediately came the Swami's reply: "Yes. Why not? There is a great soul known as Ramana Maharshi living in Tiruvannamalai. He shines with the splendourous experience of *Jnana*, which he gained as a mere boy of sixteen. I too have had his *darshan*."

On hearing this, my mind stood still, stunned, as if an electric shock had struck me. I was plunged into a hitherto inexperienced ecstasy. Right then I decided I must go to Tiruvannamalai and asked the Swami for his permission. He exploded with anger: "I am to enter *Jeeva Samadhi* in just six months and you must supervise all the arrangements. How can you go! You may go wherever you please after my *samadhi*." I felt helpless at his reply.

A week later Ramakrishnan, my friend from the neighbouring village, came to see me. He was one year elder to me and, as I seemed to be shaping up to be a *sadhu*, he had affection and respect for me. In fact, he too wished for such a life, though he came from a wealthy family, who were at that time planning his marriage. Detesting his state of affairs, he asked me for some suggestions. I told him that there seems to be a great saint named Ramana Maharshi living in Tiruvannamalai and that he should go immediately to his Ashram, adding that I was also anxious to go there but because the Swami has forbidden me, I must wait six months until his *Jeeva Samadhi*. "Please leave for there now, write to me about the Maharshi's instructions, and I will join you in six months," I told him.

I put him on the train that very day. Two days later his relatives came to me saying, "Where has he gone? Surely you are the one behind all this."

I replied, "I didn't send him away. He simply asked me for the way to Tiruvannamalai and I told him." A week later I received a letter from Ramakrishnan, along with a photo of Ramana Maharshi. The moment I set my eyes on the holy form of Sri Bhagavan I was filled with ineffable joy and peace.

The day of Swamiji's *Jeeva Samadhi* drew near. The crowds began to swell as the news spread throughout the land. With three days left the Swami began taking only milk. On the scheduled day police were called in to

manage the large, unruly crowd of spectators. At 3 p.m. He descended into the *samadhi* cavern. Only family members and his chief disciple, that is myself, were allowed to be near him. He told us that his head would sway for a while, and when it stopped we should immediately close the cave with the large stone slab.

Well, we all waited. A half an hour went by; an hour went by; things did not go as planned. The Swami, with much agitation, fled the cave, merged into the vast crowd and vanished from sight. The crowd resorted to some heckling and abuse, then finally dispersed. Along with a few others I went in search of him and discovered him under a tree in a nearby grove. He was quite distressed and nervous. Devoid of any intention of defrauding the public, he had genuinely felt that he was ready for *Jeeva Samadhi*. He had first deluded himself and then others.

He asked us to return to our homes and left the area the next day. He also advised me to continue with the daily study of *Vedanta* and the spiritual practices. I returned home and my parents where overjoyed to see me. I stayed only two days, as my mind was already in Tiruvannamalai.

- (to be continued)

Films From Sri Ramanasramam

In 1948, Aravind Bose, a Bengali devotee, shot a series of 16mm colour films which were collected together and is now popularly called the 'Bose Film.' In our September/October 1992 issue we began describing this valuable film, noting that it displayed a considerable amount of professionalism absent in most of the other films taken by devotees. It also is the best preserved film, providing us with vivid colour shots, unequalled in our whole collection.

We ended our last description with the Sage's visit to the *goshala*, the cowshed. In this scene we saw his marvellous beauty and grace, expressed with every look, gesture and touch, as he mingled with the innocent born, his children of the animal world; and on this occasion, the lucky cows of Sri Ramanasramam.

Let us repeat the last few lines from our last description and continue on: Looking somewhat lean and cheerful he walks up to the black cow and begins to gently scratch her back. While doing so he gazes around, checking to see that all these four-legged inmates of the Ashram are being cared for properly. He moves over to a young calf and rubs its back, gives instructions to a worker, turns to the left, takes one step and then a gracious smile blossoms and lights his face. The reason is soon apparent: his beloved cow Lakshmi walks straight to him and bends her head down low. He reaches out to her.

At this point, if you slow down the film speed and look at the Maharshi's smiling lips, you can distinctly see him say endearingly, "Amma (Mother)," as he begins to talk to her.

He then raises his right hand and places it on the crown of Lakshmi's head, affectionately rubbing in the small hollow just behind the root of the horns. Anyone who has ever tended cows knows that scratching this particular spot, which is inaccessible to the cow, is a welcomed source of pleasure for the animal. Lakshmi meekly lowers her head out of the camera's view but obviously very near to the feet of her Master.

The camera shifts and we see the Maharshi is still in the cowshed petting and scratching other cows, all the while carefully scrutinising their well-being.

Another blink of the camera and the Maharshi is on the move, surrounded by about a dozen devotees. Leaning heavily on his cane with his right hand and a white towel thrown over his left shoulder, the cameraman films the group from no less than eight different vantage points. Amidst this serene atmosphere in the Maharshi's majestic presence, as the group slowly strolls through the Ashram grounds it is hard to imagine the cameraman and his crew darting here and there, setting up and shooting in a frantic rush. The whole Ashram must have been on high alert, although what we see filmed looks all quite natural and normal, which it was.

In the group we see Swami Viswanathan, Appu Swami, K. Natesan, T. N. Venkataraman and others. The Maharshi seems indifferent to the camera focused on him as he quietly goes about his normal daily amble.

At one point, when walking west near the front of the *Veda Patasala*, Bhagavan seems to be saying something. Turning to Venkataraman's son, Ganesan (only a small boy then), who is shyly walking by his side, he puts his hand on the boy's right shoulder, turns to him and makes an amusing comment, then raises his left hand from his shoulder and stretches it out to indicate something big and smiles broadly. Others smile too. Ganesan briefly smiles in the direction of Bhagavan, looks up at him, then quickly lowers his head, obviously embarrassed by all the attention.

But whatever it was that amused the Sage, however slight the humour, it continues to dance upon his benevolent face, filled with cheer, goodness and grace, as he walks on looking directly into the camera and then passing it. His cheerful charm shines brightly, contrasted by the stoic, sober looks of all his followers and the curious side-glances from the timid boy.

- (to be continued)

Practical Instructions

'When camphor burns, no residue is left. The mind must be like camphor, it must melt away and be wholly consumed by the earnest resolve to find and be the real Self; by this resolve the 'Who Am I?' quest becomes efficacious. When the mind is thus consumed - when no trace of it as mind is left - it has become resolved into the Self.'

People who look for specific results from meditation but do not get them, become discouraged and conclude that meditation has done them no good; to them the Sage says: "It does not matter at all whether these results are attained or not. The attainment of steadiness is the main thing; it is the great gain. Anyhow they must trust themselves to God and wait for His Grace without impatience. The same rule applies to *japa* also; *japa* uttered even once does good, whether the person is aware of it or not."

Meditation and Mind control:

"Meditation (*dhyana*) is a battle; for it is the effort to keep hold of one thought to the exclusion of all else; other thoughts arise and try to sink that thought; when the latter gains strength the others are put to flight. Breath-regulation (*pranayama*) is for him that cannot directly control his thoughts; it serves as a brake serves a car, but one should not stop with breath-regulation; after its purpose is gained - the quieting of the mind's restlessness - one should take up the practice of concentration; in course of time it will become possible to dispense with control of the breath; the mind will then become quiet as soon as meditation is attempted. When

meditation is well established it can no more be given up; it will go on automatically even during work, play and other activities. It will go on even in sleep. The means for getting well-established in meditation is meditation itself. Meditation extinguishes all thoughts and then the Truth alone remains."

"People ask me how to control the mind. I reply: 'Show me the mind.' The mind is no more than the series of thoughts. How can it be controlled by one of those thoughts, namely the desire to control the mind? It is foolish to seek to end the mind by the mind itself. The only way is to find the mind's Source and keep hold of it. Then the mind will fade away of itself. There are just two ways of controlling the mind. Either seek its Source, or surrender it to be struck down by the Supreme Power."

Being asked how one can find his Guru, the Sage said: "By intense meditation."

From Maha Yoga, Chapter 12, titled 'Some More Sayings of the Sage'

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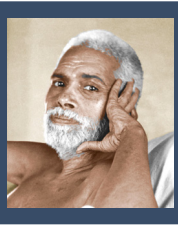

I Saw A God Die

By

Darrell Berrigan

'The holiest man in India, a living god, lay dying. A Post correspondent stood by and watched him leave the mortal world. Here is his eyewitness account of a supreme moment for millions of devout believers.'

The Saturday evening post, like Life magazine, was another popular journal that reached its zenith in the post-television era. Published eight times a year - it was a monthly in 1950 - it still maintains a respectable circulation of 540,000 in the U.S. and abroad. With the distinction of being published since 1728, we can honestly say, by longevity alone, it has established itself as an institution.

Darrell Berrigan, who was a regular contributor to the Post, was raised in California. After a series of disappointing professions in the States, he set out for the Orient as a freelance correspondent in the late 1930s. There, remaining a bachelor, he travelled throughout China, Japan, Thailand, Burma, India and other Far East countries, contributing news and stories to the *United Press International, New York Times* and some other major periodicals. Eventually he settled down in Bangkok and became the editor of what was said to be the best daily newspaper in Thailand - *The World*, published in English. His visit to Sri Ramanasramam was some six years prior to this editorship, and was one of the many stories that took him traversing the Orient.

He arrives at the Ashram about the first of April 1950, and writes, "I had come myself because a great Indian politician, a great scholar and an exceedingly wealthy industrialist had each told me that the Bhagavan was probably the last of an ancient line of *Maha Rishis*, or 'great realized souls,' who were living." After providing us with his pen-picture description of Tiruvannamalai and Ramanasramam, he records how he removes his shoes and sits amidst the large crowd waiting for Bhagavan's *darshan*:

"A young man with the bored face of a stagehand came out of the little room in front of us and placed an alarm clock at the foot of the couch. The crowd seemed almost to suck in its breath, waiting. Then an old man appeared in the doorway. He was naked except for a loincloth and a cotton cloth thrown over a bulging growth on his left arm. His body was the colour of faded leather. His cheeks were sunken and his lower lip was thrust out in a pout. His eyes were bright with a strange light as he stood there looking at us. Then, with his head falling slightly to the side, he tottered unsteadily to the couch, eased himself aboard and settled back among the pillows. One by one, the men and women rose and walked to the little gateway in front of the couch and prostrated themselves before the living god.

'The man beside me relaxed. "See his arm?" he whispered. "Cancer."

"Very bad?" I whispered back.'

'He gave me a long, knowing look. "He will leave his body soon."'

A little bewildered at all the veneration from the multitudes, Berrigan tries to figure out what it is in this old man that deserves it: '... Except for the fact that he seemed to ignore the fact that he was far gone with cancer,

he looked like any other kindly old man not particularly interested in the antics of the younger generation. He reclined on the couch with his strange eyes on us, but apparently not seeing us, his head wagging slightly from palsy. He paid no attention to those who prostrated themselves before him, only occasionally smiling when a mother raised her child for him to bless. At times he would doze off with his head to one side, then he would come awake without any transition, pluck at an ear, rub his hand over the stubble that frosted his chin and head or pick absently at the cloth that covered the blood-stained bandage on his left arm.'

After watching all this for some time Berrigan concludes: 'I could not see what it was that had drawn thousands upon thousands of men and women from all over India to prostrate themselves at his feet.'

In spite of this, Berrigan seems impressed. He stays on at least two weeks, anticipating the Sage's end, perched somewhat like a vulture waiting to feed on his dying prey. During this period he had plenty of time to do research for this lengthy, five thousand word article and, according to his own accounts, spent most of his time talking, arguing with others and wandering about the hill and ancient temples. 'We had little time for contemplating the inner realities,' so he confesses.

In his essay he furnishes a rather long biographical sketch of the Maharshi with some flippant observations and misconceptions that border on the humorous. For example, after explaining in some detail Bhagavan's death experience as a boy, he throws in, 'The young man lost his head completely over the discovery,' which may have been appropriate if the word 'ego' was substituted for the word 'head'. And in another place he mentions, Venkataraman was so lost in his trance that for years he had to be spoon-fed.' Now isn't that interesting?

Of course, Berrigan was a journalist and the story was everything. This being the case, it is easy to imagine how those sincere devotees absorbed in their *sadhana* and grieving over the Maharshi's illness kept a respectful distance from him. Hence, it is obvious from the following quote, he fell into the wrong type of company: 'The Bhagavan himself became a puppet, a prisoner of his brother, exploited for the benefit of the ashram organisation.' By this, and numerous other dubious observations aimed at the administration, we can conclude that gossiping was for him an ongoing pastime.

Somehow, though, it seems he endured to the end, April 14th, 1950. And it is about this end, the end of the Maharshi's bodily life, we obtain a clearer vision by his description of those final, fatal days.

'Every *darshan* period we searched his face for signs of the end. They were there on the evening of the fourteenth of April. He lay stretched out as before, but his jaw was slack, his mouth hung open and his remarkable eyes were firmly closed. Death was so strongly written on his face that hundreds of men and a few bold women who defied the ashram's rule against their presence after dark sat on the porch or clung to its railing waiting tensely for news. A group of Brahman priests from the old temple arranged themselves in a circle around a bundle of incense and began chanting a hymn to the sacred mountain. It was a song written by the Bhagavan himself years ago. A few police from the town below took up positions.

'Everyone kept his eyes on the little window through which we could see the heads of the attendants around the Bhagavan's bed and the fan which one of them moved back and forth over the holy man. We watched the fan, the only sign we had that the Bhagavan was alive.

'The priests sang verse after verse of the hymn to the sacred mountain, whose southern shoulder rose into the blue-black, star-dotted sky above the ashram: 'Arunachala Siva! Arunachala Siva! Arunachala Siva! Arunachala!'

'The devotees stirred uneasily under the whip of the voices. A few stood and pressed against the railing under the little window. The Sarvadhikari and his sister pushed through the crowd and entered the sickroom. The police pushed forward and ordered the people back. The crowd waited tensely.

'Suddenly someone cried, 'The fan has stopped!' 'The crowd moaned and pushed forward. 'My God!' someone said. Then the fan was seen to move again. The crowd's voice grew louder, following the lead of the chanting priests.

'The brother reappeared on the causeway and stood over the devotees, tall, lordly, chewing betel ruminatively. "Don't crowd there!" he yelled hoarsely, waving a limp hand at a group standing under the porch. "Get back!" An attendant walked rapidly past him and disappeared into the crowd. Word went round that the Bhagavan's closest disciples had been called for a last *darshan*.

'A young Indian rushed up to Chadwick. "You can see him now!" he yelled excitedly. "I don't want to see!" Chadwick burst out irritably. He let his head fall into his hands.

'The excitement of the crowd milling around the gate increased. Prayers and shouts and excited questioning boiled up into a hysterical bedlam. Devotees fought through the crowd to the little room. The chant of the priests strained above the confusion, 'Arunachala Siva! Arunachala Siva! Arunachala Siva! Arunachala!'

'And just as the madness reached its peak the fan stopped moving in the little room and a meteor cut a golden path across the sky and faded out over Sri Arunachala at the moment that Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi breathed his last. As I fought my way toward the little room I heard Chadwick groan, "He is gone!"

'An American woman fainted and was carried out. A group of Indian women staggered from the room, clinging to one another, their faces drawn with grief. Behind them came the attendants, carrying the body on its couch, pushing through the hysterical crowd into the hall of the temple. There, banked with pillows and drowned in garlands of jasmine, the body that once housed a god sat all night, giving mock *darshan* to the devotees who sat around it singing hymns.'

Berrigan writes a few more details about the burial procedure and the thousands that passed by to view the Maharshi's dead body. A photo of the body being carried out of the Nirvana Room and another of the burial pit are shown. There is another photo taken of Bhagavan a few days before the last day and also two more photos of devotees outside the Nirvana Room. He didn't fail to include one of the Sarvadhikari with a caustic comment below it.

In the *May 30, 1949 Life magazine*, we have the reverential portrayal of an aged holy man (the Maharshi), written with insight and genuine sincerity by Winthrop Sargeant. Here, we find something essentially different. Although Darrell Berrigan of the *Saturday Evening Post* was impressed by the magnitude and pathos of his story, he never quite fathomed the practical value of the Maharshi's teachings and example. He was a writer first and always, a story-teller. Nevertheless, unwittingly, Berrigan takes us into the emotional and physical environment of Sri Ramanasramam during the final earthly hours of the Maharshi. Cooking his story and serving us his own special hodgepodge of food, we find some portions of it palatable, and these morsels are sufficient to fill us with the wonder of the event.

The research of Kamala Motihar, Geeta Bhatt and Eric Ford made this article possible. We sincerely thank them.

Kunju Swami

Continued from our last issue

Translated from Tamil by J. Jayaraman

Events Of Wonder On My Way To Arunachala

When I reached home my parents were very happy to see me. I stayed for two days, though my mind had already travelled to Tiruvannamalai. While I was occupied with the thought of how to acquire the money for the journey, my father called me and asked, "Do you owe anyone money for the food that you ate when you were with the Yelappondi Kuppandi Swami?" I replied, "Yes, a little." Immediately he handed me five rupees an commanded me to settle my account the next morning. Alas, I had found my way to Tiruvannamalai!

Thinking that a small impropriety could not be counted a sin when it helped to gain a supreme ideal, I consoled my conscience and planned my departure using the five rupees to cover the train fare. Although I went to bed that night with a very peaceful heart, I was unable to sleep. Early in the morning - it was the month of January, 1920 - I left my house at 3 a.m. without telling anyone. As I went out, I turned towards my home and prostrated to it and my dear parents sleeping inside, convinced that I would never return. My heart was now racing for the long-sought *darshan* of Sri Bhagavan.

Afraid of being spotted at the Paalakkaadu Train Station, I went to a smaller railway station en-route. I found upon inquiry that the train to Tiruvannamalai was not due until the evening. Needless to say, I waited anxiously and hoped I would not be discovered. Hunger and thirst was forgotten in my longing for God. Besides, I dared not use the money for anything other than the train ticket, as that was my priority.

The train finally arrived at 6 p.m. When I asked for a ticket to Tiruvannamalai, the ticket clerk sold me a ticket only as far as Kaatpaadi, a station near to Tiruvannamalai. Finally, when it came time to board the train, I was hardly aware of it, as I was almost totally absorbed in the current of Bhagavan's *darshan*.

Alighting at Kaatpaadi at 4 a.m., I learned that the train to Tiruvannamalai left at 6:30 a.m. I sat still and waited. When I went to the ticket counter at 6 a.m. to buy my ticket I was shocked to hear that the train had already left a half hour earlier and the next train wasn't until 6 p.m. I didn't know what to do and was disturbed. I hadn't eaten since the morning of the previous day and so bought a half-anna worth of jujubee fruit. I spent the day munching on these jujubees and sipping tap-water to solve my food problem. My mind calmed as I waited for the evening train.

Taking no chances I approached the ticket counter at 5:30 p.m. to buy my ticket to Tiruvannamalai, but to my amazement the clerk refused to sell me one! Nonplussed, I was standing transfixed when a kind elderly man nearby informed me that the town of Tiruvannamalai is quarantined because of a plague epidemic and so no tickets to that destination can be sold. He advised me to buy a ticket to Tirukkoviloor, and to quietly get off at Tiruvannamalai when the train stops briefly to unload mail. Tirukkoviloor is the next station after Tiruvannamalai. When asked for a ticket to Tirukkoviloor, the ticket clerk asked me for additional money. I didn't have it. Crushed with unimaginable frustration, I stood to one side thinking of Bhagavan and overcome by sorrow.

When there was only a few minutes left before the train to Tiruvannamalai was to arrive - wonder of wonders - the mystery of Bhagavan's grace descended upon me! Between the two rails, just a short distance from

where I stood, a quarter-rupee coin lay glittering. I immediately picked it up and ran to the ticket counter. My train arrived in the station the very moment I was handed the ticket to Tirukkoviloor. Thrilled with the thought of Bhagavan's grace on my poor self, I got on the train and found a seat.

The train arrived at Tiruvannamalai station about 9 p.m. No lights were on in the station. Only from the remarks of the other passengers I understood that I had reached my destination. I looked around to see if anyone was getting off. I noticed one passenger in front of me detraining into the darkness and so I followed him. I blindly continued to follow this passenger without an inkling of where he was leading me. In retrospect, I now realized that missing the first train to Tiruvannamalai was Bhagavan's will, for if I had taken the earlier train I would have faced the problem of arriving in Tiruvannamalai during the daylight hours, with the possibility of facing the authorities.

Finally, reaching a big *Mantap* (wayside rest hall), my guide dusted a bit of the floor with his towel and lay down to sleep. Exhausted after two days of hunger and wandering, but filled with the joy of finally reaching my destination, I also lay down and immediately plunged into deep slumber.

When my eyes opened about 5 a. m. the next morning I looked over to my side and saw that my guide had already left. I looked out of the *Mantap* and had my first glorious *darshan* of the holy Arunachala Mountain. Then, following the directions sent to me by my friend, Ramakrishnaswami, I came to the place behind the west wall of the great temple. The directions said I could reach Bhagavan's abode by following the steps that led up the hill from this spot, but I discovered three different paths with steps leading up the hill and was confused. I decided on the steps to the right, and after climbing a little ways I saw a building. As I came near it I saw an ochre-robed *swami* standing with long matted locks that reached all the way down to the ground. It was my belief then that matted-hair *swamis* were notorious for inflicting curses upon the slightest provocation. When I saw this *swami* standing there I knew it was not Bhagavan, of whom I had seen a photo of, so I immediately fled in fright, came back down the hill and began climbing the middle path, which had large steps. I later discovered the matted-locked *swami* was the well known Jatai Swami.

After climbing a short distance on the middle path I saw a tank (Paada Teertham) and two people standing on its bank (Mudaliar Patti's son and daughter-in-law, Tambiraan Swami and Kaamakshi Ammaal). I approached them and inquired about Bhagavan's abode. My tired face and Malayalam accent yielded a sympathetic response: "Oh, you poor fellow! You must be tired. Please take your bath here and then follow this path and you will see Skandashram where Bhagavan lives. We will soon follow you with some food to eat."

I quickly bathed, removing all the outer dirt but inwardly was seeking purity and the removal of all my inner dirt. I hurried up the trail like a calf racing toward its mother and my mind in ecstasy, hastened far ahead of me to Bhagavan.

I had given some prior thought as to how I should prostrate before Bhagavan, and how I should conduct myself in general. I also resolved that I would take as divine *Upadesha* (personal teaching) the first words Bhagavan directed towards me. Just as I arrived at Skandashram, my friend, Ramakrishnaswami, along with Perumalswami and Akhandanandar were prostrating before Bhagavan. I followed suit, sat down before him and gazed on his holy form. Goose bumps tingled all over me. I was thrilled.

Ramakrishnaswami, who was amazed and happy to see me, informed Bhagavan that it was me who sent him here, that I was from his village, and that I had been a *sadhu* from my childhood. Bhagavan simply nodded his head in acknowledgment. Then Ramakrishnaswami asked me to stay here with Bhagavan while the three of

them went out for some time. Later I found out that they had gone to bury the body of Annamalai Swami, who had died of the plague that very day.

Soon I heard someone weeping convulsively from a room adjacent to the inside of the verandah.

"Such a gem! Oh, Annamalai has gone. How cruel and unjust!" These were the words painfully spoken between the sobs of an old woman. There was a man sitting by her side. Bhagavan turned to them and said, "Why this sorrow?" And pointing to me, as to pacify them, continued, "Look here, another has come to take his place!" I did not realize the significance of those precious and prophetic words until later. The old woman sobbing was Bhagavan's Mother, and sitting at her side was his brother, Niranjanananda Swami.

At 8 a.m., one Turiyananda, placed a mud bowl in my hands, took one himself, and requested me to sit. Sri Bhagavan also sat on a nearby platform with a mud bowl. The three of us were then served rice, *dhal* and *rasam* by Venu Ammal, sister of Echammal, who had already been feeding Bhagavan daily for many years.

- (To be continued)

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

During several visits to Sri Ramanasramam in 1948, Aravind Bose brought with him a cameraman and shot what are now the best preserved colour films of Sri Bhagavan. He took it upon himself to capture the Maharshi in his natural surroundings as he went about his daily routine. Bose's success in this was limited to the available lighting. For instance, we all know that the Maharshi spent the greater part his day in the Old Hall on the sofa reading the newspaper, perusing letters, proof reading, answering questions and sitting silent, looking out into the vast nothingness. Dozens of aspirants would be sitting at his feet, either meditating or simply gazing on his holy form. This was the '*Dubar*' of the '*Maha Rishi's*' kingdom and in it the greatest of all miracles were being performed, secretly. It is here where the Sage entered the hearts of the sincere aspirants and kindled the light of the Self Supreme. But all this could not be filmed or, for that matter, even seen by the naked eye. Moreover, in the Old Hall the lighting was inadequate for filming. Well, Mr. Bose had an idea, and it is in this next scene that it unfolds.

We first see a dozen lady devotees casually gathering in front of the Old Hall. Just at the point when all their attention is drawn towards a single object out of the camera's view, the camera shifts over to that point, which is the Maharshi walking out from under the verandah of the Old Hall. He makes his way to a wooden bed covered with layers of cloth, topped with a woven grass mat, and pillows arranged at one end. Following behind him is Niranjanananda Swami, his brother. Then the numbers swell, as more men begin entering into view, one of whom is Mr. Bose.

We have the devotees, we have the Sage, the throne, and the outside lighting, but where is the stage director to pull all these elements together? Mr. Bose amply rises to the occasion, as we now see him waving his arms, instructing devotees to sit here and there.

Meanwhile, Bhagavan approaches his seat, strokes the top mat twice with the end of his cane (apparently to smooth out the mat) and with an air of disinterest takes his seat. The camera pans slowly to the right where about fifteen men are seated in a row three deep. The panning continues to where the ladies are sitting. Prominent is the English lady, Miss Merston. Ammani Ammal is also there, sitting erect, looking straight ahead

with downcast eyes. Her remote stillness seems to personify a determined aspiration. About a dozen ladies have joined.

To the right of Bhagavan's seat is seen another dozen, consisting of priest (Appichi and Kittu are present), attendants, and relatives of the Maharshi. The attendant, Satchitananda Swami, enters the scene carrying a small, round stool, on top of which is placed a wicker tray filled with shelled peanuts. He sets the stool down in front of the Maharshi, picks up the tray, passes Bhagavan a small plate on which he drops a handful of nuts.

Next we see the attendant moving from place to place doling out the nuts. Occasionally the scene reverts to Bhagavan who is engaged in selecting the peanuts from his plate and popping them in his mouth, one by one. Mr. Bose, now in a relaxed mood, stands behind Bhagavan eating nuts. The Sarvadhikari and his son, T. N. Venkataraman, are at his side.

Then everyone stands. Bhagavan, still sitting, is handed a tooth pick and *kamandalu* (water pot) and begins to clean his teeth and drink water. All are now in a jovial mood. Sundaram, T. N. Venkataraman's son, stands directly behind Bhagavan and smiles unabashedly, looking straight at the camera. We feel that we are watching a large family gathering, picnicking in a country park under a gentle summer sun. Bhagavan relaxes, waves his hand in jest, smiles broadly and then looks toward the ground. There the white peacock has made his entrance. No doubt Bhagavan's smiles and jest were evoked by the bird's timing and subsequent filming. We can almost hear him say, "Oh, Look! He didn't want to miss this!"

All this looks so casual and unpretentious. Who would think that here sits a man whose mere glance has plunged wild and distraught minds into the eternal depths of unrivalled peace and joy. What is this we see? He is fooling us all.

- (To be continued)

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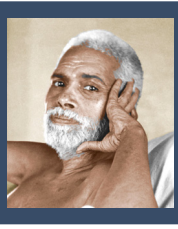

The Matter of a Will

One of the lesser-known documents that has been indispensable to the steady growth and stability of Sri Ramanasramam is the Will of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In our first article, The Matter of a Will, its genesis and contents are described. Ramana Leela is the Telugu biography of the Maharshi. There are many authentic incidents and conversations narrated in it that are not found in English publications. Dr. Lingeswara Rao translates some of the interesting passages for us. Following is the concluding story of Sri Kunju Swami's early life, as he describes his first meetings with the Sage of Arunachala in 1922. And in Films From Sri Ramanasramam we are taken to the December 1948 Jayanti celebrations, the Maharshi's sixty-ninth birthday.

'Born at Tiruchuzi, a village in the present Ramnad District, on the 30th of December, 1879, I left my native home for good in my 17th year under Divine inspiration in quest of Arunachala and reached Tiruvannamalai in the year 1896.' Thus reads the first sentence of the Will of Sri Ramana Maharshi, dated April 6, 1938.

How did one who never touched money from his seventeenth year, never openly claimed ownership of any object, land or buildings, come to sign a document which listed numerous pieces of property, movable and immovable, and even bank accounts as his very own possessions. Did he really desire to do this, or was he duped into it by a management who feared loss of executive powers after his demise. How did this all come about?

Shortly before the Maharshi signed his Last Will and Testament a legal case that had been stuck in the courts for almost two decades was finally resolved. An old devotee of the Maharshi claimed the Ashram property as his own and declared himself to be the only legal manager. This protracted litigation caused considerable worry, and when it was finally settled, a group of senior disciples approached the Sage for help and advice. 'They explained that, even with him there, they had been badgered in this way, and there was no knowing what might happen when he was no longer there to protect them. What would he advise? "What did they suggest?" He asked them. That the Ashram should be controlled by a board of Trustees appointed by him, might be a good idea, they thought. But Bhagavan disagreed. "Trustees would take no real interest in running the Ashram, which they will only use for a milch-cow for their own ends. It would be better that those who are tied to it permanently by blood and sentiment be given the permanent management." The matter was discussed and it was decided that, in that case, the best thing to do was to make a Will. Bhagavan agreed to this suggestion.'

Now the question arises, can a world-renowned renunciate, such as the Maharshi, established a legal claim to property and assets, which he never had previously acknowledged as his? Will the courts accept such a claim. We discover that a precedent in this matter had already occurred on two occasions. First, in 1933, when the Maharshi executed and registered a *General Power of Attorney* in favour of Niranjanananda Swami, his brother and manager of Sri Ramanasramam. And again these same issues were raised on November 15th, 1936 when the Sage was examined on commission for the local District Munsiff's Court, relating to the protracted litigation mentioned above:

"Question: You left home at an early age because you had no attachment for home and property. But here there is property in the Ashram. How is it?

Maharshi: I do not seek it. Property is thrust on me. I neither love nor hate it.

Question: Are they given to you?

Maharshi: They are given to the *Swami*, whoever he may be. But the body is considered the *Swami* in the world. That body is this. It reduces itself to myself . . . .

Question: How did you approve the building of Skandasramam on the Hill which was temple land, without previously obtaining permission from the authorities?

Maharshi: Guided by the same Power which made me come here and reside on the Hill. . . .

Question: You do not touch money nor other offerings, I trust.

Maharshi: People sometimes place fruits in my hands. I touch them.

Question: If you receive one kind of offering, why should you not receive money also?

Maharshi: I cannot eat money. What shall I do with it? Why should I take that with which I do not know what to do?"

During this commission he is also recorded to have said: "Properties came and I accepted them. I agree that owning properties relates to worldly affairs, but I do not hate worldly affairs ... I used to accept anything if given to me. Moneys were given only on my behalf ...." He further declared that persons who were looking after the activities of the Ashram were only doing his will.

So it seems, for the sake of maintaining general order and continuity in the affairs of Sri Ramanasramam, he chose to imply ownership of the properties to himself. And knowing full well a time would come when his physical presence would be withdrawn, he favoured a hereditary form of management to be established. It was believed that there was no other means of ensuring this but through a Will. So a Will was drafted in 1938.

K. Sundaram Chetty, a retired high court judge from Salem, was entrusted with the work. When the draft was ready, the Maharshi was led to the present 'Stores' building where a half dozen senior devotees of social distinction were waiting. Clause by clause the Will was read out, discussed and a few alterations were made. Then the Maharshi was asked if he clearly understood and agreed with each clause. Only when his consent was given did they go on to the next clause. Bhagavan, who was not in the practice of signing his name, affixed a mark (X) on every page of the Will, indicating his approval, and as a final authorisation he made a line (-) in lieu of a signature. The line followed this declaration: 'In token of my execution of this document I affix my mark and also authorise G. Sambasiva Rao to sign for me in my presence as I have not been in the habit of affixing my signature.'

The final document was signed by witnesses and the Maharshi then officially filed the Will for registration by handing it over to the Sub-Registrar of Tiruvannamalai. He actually told this Sub-Registrar that he has executed this Will and then requested him to register it.

It appears that the learned devotees took great pains to insure that no loopholes regarding the Will's authenticity

and powers could arise. But several years later the Ashram authorities decided that there were some apparent loopholes in the document. Another Will was drawn up and the manager, along with his supporters, approached Bhagavan and explained the situation. The Sage was then lying in the New Hall already stricken with his final illness. When he was requested to certify and sign the new Will he flatly refused. "Is there not a Will already?" he asked. And there the matter ended.

The prudence of having such a Will executed was soon realized after the Maharshi's Mahanirvana. Several cases have already gone before the courts regarding ownership and management. This Will has done more to insure the stability and managed growth of Sri Ramanasramam than any other writ.

With Niranjanananda Swami's son, T. N. Venkataraman, and all his three sons, now fully engaged in managing the affairs of Sri Ramanasramam, the benefits of the Sage's decision in having a hereditary management is fully being realized. And who could actually doubt that the Maharshi's decision would not turn out to be the best decision.

The 1,500 word text of the actual Will has two parts. First, a 700 word biographical declaration, and then a nine item *Schedule of Properties*.

'I did not belong to any order of *Sannyasis*, but if a name has to be given for my status, I am an *Atyasramite*. In course of time several contributions in the shape of moneys came to be made as gifts to me, and with those moneys, halls, storerooms and other buildings were built, and also wells and ponds and other amenities came into existence. All the properties hereunder described and comprised in what is called 'Sri Ramanasramam' (and the accretions thereto) are dedicated by me to the Idol already installed and consecrated therein, *viz.*, Sri Mathrubhuteswara Swami and also to the Idol or Statue as my symbol to be installed and consecrated after my demise on my Samadhi at a suitable place in the Asramam itself. I appoint my brother, Niranjanananda Swamy, as the sole manager. After him his son, T. N. Venkatarama Iyer, will be the sole manager. This right of management or trusteeship will vest as a hereditary right in the latter's family so as to devolve successively on his lineal male descendants from generation to generation. As far as possible, make 'Sri Ramanasramam' a centre for the diffusion of spiritual knowledge and a place of sanctity by affording scope for the fulfilment of objects germane to the advancement of spirituality. After meeting the necessary expenses of the Asramam *viz.*, the *Pooja, Naivedyam,* etc., of the Idols, the Manager will take out of the surplus income what is necessary for the maintenance of himself and his family.'

Today, Sri Ramanasramam covers an area of fourteen acres. The sanctified Mathrubhuteswara Temple and the spacious Samadhi Hall are surrounded by guest houses containing about fifty units. Also, there are two dormitories, a dispensary, a Vedic school for boys, a gosala for cows, offices, a book store, a large kitchen and dining hall, the famed Old Hall where the Maharshi lived for over twenty years, wells, gardens, a coconut grove and other structures and facilities all aesthetically arranged and studiously maintained. Another guest-house compound across the street contains two dormitories, guest houses with twenty units, and a three story structure housing Sri Ramana Centenary Library. On the Hill Sri Ramanasramam has custody of Skandasramam and has recently acquired the Virupaksha Cave, where the Maharshi lived for about fifteen years.

The renown of Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Ramanasramam has been steadily growing since the demise of the Sage. This growth will certainly continue, as greater numbers of seekers from around the world experience the efficacy of the Maharshi's teachings, supported by his continued guidance and grace. The Will of the Sage is an important document that will insure the smooth transmission of *Atma Jnana*, Self Knowledge, to a weary world, suffering under the illusion that the Self is limited to this empirical body.

Ramana Leela

B. V. Narasimha Swami wrote the first detailed English biography of the Maharshi in 1931, and Suddhananda Bharati wrote the Tamil biography. *Ramana Leela.* The Telugu Biography written by Oruganti Krishnayya has the distinction of being corrected twice by the Maharshi prior to it being reprinted. It is not only the most objectively-correct biography, it is also the most extensive.

Dr. Lingeswara Rao of Andhra Pradesh, carefully read through *Ramana Leela* and noted down passages not found in English publications. Below, we reproduce some of his English translations.

The Maharshi's Father's elder brother, Venkateswaram Ayyar, renounced at the age of eighteen. He lived at the Chidambaram Temple and worked clearing the premises of thorns, etc.

At birth, Bhagavan was given the name Venkateswaram Ayyar, which corresponded with the name of their family deity, Sri Venkateswara of Tirumala. Later, when he registered for school, the name was changed to Venkataraman.

Bhagavan was called Ramana, or sometimes even Ramani by an elderly relative named Lakshaman Ayyar, who was well-versed in Telugu. Bhagavan, as a boy, learned some Telugu and would converse with this relative in that language. Consequently, he began to call his father Nayana, the Telugu equivalent for 'Daddy'.

The young Venkataraman and his brother Nagaswami were sent to their Uncle's home in Dindigul so they could receive an education in English. When their Uncle was transferred to Madurai the two boys followed.

When Bhagavan first arrived at the Arunachala Temple in Tiruvannamalai in 1896 it was 6 a.m. The Temple was then being renovated and was not open to visitors until 8 a.m. But when Bhagavan arrived all the doors were open and he walked straight to the inner sanctum without seeing anyone.

Bhagavan was initially called Brahmana Paradesi. Mendicant *sadhus* were then normally called *Paradesis*. When he was carried from the *Patala Lingam* to the Subrahmanya Temple and was under the care of Mouna Swami, his greatness was then realized. Then his name was changed to Brahmana Swami.

Nelliapa Ayyar (Bhagavan's Uncle) failed to persuade Bhagavan to return to Madurai. One Narayana Swami Ayyar [Sri P. V. Somasundaram's Father], who accompanied Nelliapa Ayyar, became annoyed and approached the young Swami with the intention of taking him by force. Suddenly he felt a burning sensation all over his body and, because of it, gave up the idea.

One night in the year 1934 someone asked Bhagavan: "Do you have dreams?"

Bhagavan: "Doesn't one dream in sleep?"

Questioner: "Did you ever have seminal discharges during sleep, or in dreams." Everyone present felt disgusted at the question, but Bhagavan without the slightest sign of annoyance, calmly replied: "Yes. What of that? It may happen even if one eats hot foods. How does it matter? You are thinking I am this body. Hence the wrong understanding that if one loses the essential fluid of the body, one shall fall from *brahmacharya* and *tapas*. It occurs to me that I am living simultaneously in twenty different worlds with diverse bodies. How can I worry over such losses or biological changes in all these body parts. The essence is not the body and its various metamorphosis but *Atma Gnana Nishta*, the abidance in Self-Knowledge. We are the Ever-Changeless.

Kunju Swami

This concludes the story of Sri Kunju Swami's early life and how he came to settle in Tiruvannamalai with Sri Bhagavan.

Sri Bhagavan was sitting alone. I thought it was a great opportunity for me to talk to him freely. I told him about my interest in giving religious discourses, doing *japa*, and studying *Vedanta*. I told him that I had not been getting any peace, but the moment I heard about him, I was filled with peace. I also told Sri Bhagavan in Malayalam about how the Swamiji who had taught me *Vedanta* tried to attain *samadhi* (conscious death).

Sri Bhagavan listened to everything with a smile. I asked him what I should do to get mental peace. Sri Bhagavan replied, "You have read *Kaivalyam*. It is clearly stated that if you realize yourself, you will be freed from the cycle of birth and death and be freed from all trouble."

When asked how I could find out who I am, he said, "Find out where thoughts start from." When asked how I should do it, he said, "Turn inward and merge the mind in the heart." After saying this, he fell into his natural silence. Sri Bhagavan's gracious looks were on me. My mental agitation vanished that very moment and I attained a peace and joy that I had not experienced earlier.

As long as I was in the presence of Sri Bhagavan, I enjoyed a blissful experience. Thus I spent the first eighteen days. Because of the gracious presence of Sri Bhagavan, I was able to meditate and attain peace. Suddenly I felt, as I had got the experience, I could now meditate at home without any interruption. I also felt that it was wrong to eat at the Ashram without doing any service to the Guru. I expressed my desire to return home to Ramakrishna Swami and he agreed to my proposal.

After taking leave of Sri Bhagavan, Ramakrishna Swami and I returned home. We decided to meditate in our homes without talking to others, and we also decided not to see each other. My parents, who were still in the dark about my whereabouts, were delighted to see me. Ramakrishna Swami and I observed silence in our respective homes. My parents were happy that I had come back and did not mind my strange ways.

After a few days, I found it difficult to meditate in the same way I had done before Sri Bhagavan and gradually I became my old restless self. I no longer had peace. I realized my folly of leaving Sri Bhagavan. When I was thus utterly depressed one night Ramakrishna Swami came to my house. What a strange coincidence! His experience was just like mine. We thought for a long time. What a shame! We thought we had reached in a few days that stage which people in the past attained only after great efforts made in the immediate presence of realized souls. We realized our foolishness and the greatness of the presence of Sri Bhagavan. We felt it was pointless to remain at home any longer and decided to leave for Tiruvannamalai on a particular day. I informed my parents of my decision. They were taken aback by this. Despite all their efforts to make me stay at home, they could not change my mind. I told them that it was good for them as one of their four children would be following the line of *sadhus*. I could not leave without telling them, "I will be in Tiruvannamalai with Sri Bhagavan. You can come and see me at any time. I will also visit you occasionally." I tried to console them in several ways.

After a couple of days, Ramakrishna Swami and I left our place and arrived in Tiruvannamalai. When Sri Bhagavan saw us, he welcomed us with a smile. We felt happy. When I came the first time, I felt uncomfortable at eating without doing any service to the Guru. Through Bhagavan's grace, this time I was able to serve him in a unique way. Perumal Swami, who used to prepare hot water for Sri Bhagavan's bath, wash his towel and

massage his feet, had to go somewhere two days after my arrival. He asked me to do what he had been doing as he considered me a fit person to do service to Sri Bhagavan. He thought that I would do everything properly as I had moved with *sadhus* since my early childhood. If I had come two days later, I would have lost this golden opportunity. I realized then the significance of what Sri Bhagavan had said when I visited him for the first time. He had pointed to me and said to his mother, who was lamenting over the death of Annamalai Swami, that I had come in his place. I was deeply touched by the solicitude and graciousness of Sri Bhagavan who made use of my services.

Once I asked Sri Bhagavan why I lost the experience I had gained earlier in his presence when I went back home. He said that the answer to the question is given in eleven verses of *Kaivalyam*. He picked up the book and read them out and then explained to me at great length the purport of these verses. They relate to the doubt raised by the disciple about the need to continue spiritual practices even after one has had the supreme experience. The disciple wonders whether the spiritual experience once gained could be lost. The Guru says that it would be until he took care to practice *sravana, manana*, and *nididhyasana*, that is, 'hearing' from the Guru the Truth, 'reflecting' over it and 'assimilating' it. The experience would occur in the presence of the Guru, but it would not last. Doubts would arise again and again and in order to clear them the disciple should continue to study, think and practise. This should be done until the distinction of knower, the object of knowledge and the act of knowing no longer arise. I decided to stay always by Bhagavan's side and to practice *sravana, manana* and *nididhyasana*.

I can never forget the wonderful experience of being drawn to Tiruvannamalai by Sri Bhagavan.

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

Between the years 1947 and 1950, K. K. Nambiar of Madras visited Sri Ramanasramam regularly. As a high-placed and respected engineer for the State of Madras the Ashram authorities wisely utilized his skills during construction projects. At this time he was very active in the construction of the Jubilee Hall, which is attached to the Mathrubhuteswara Temple. And it was during one of Mr. Nambiar's visits in December of 1948 that he brought along with him his 16 mm movie camera. This visit coincided with the sixty-ninth birthday celebration of the Maharshi.

In this film we first see the Sage surrounded by devotees and a number of police officers in beige uniforms. During those years the crowds of devotees and poor people that came for *bhiksha* (food offerings) during the celebrations were large and it was routine to have a number of uniformed policeman to control the crowds and to secure order, if necessary. Even now this practice is continued.

With his typical white towel thrown over his left shoulder, loin cloth and cane, the Maharshi walks, flanking a long line of enthusiastic Boy Scouts standing at attention - yes, Boy Scouts. This organisation is of English origin and established branches in India much earlier than in North America. As we will see later, the Scouts took an active role as volunteers during the day's festivities. One gets the impression that these Scouts, standing straight and proud in their neat uniforms, look upon the Maharshi like a visiting dignitary inspecting an elite regiment of honour guards. Though Bhagavan never looks up at the boys, or even at the camera, he remains the central figure, like the Commander and Chief, so to speak.

Viewing the chronology of films, beginning in 1935, there is one new feature relating to the Maharshi's appearance that immediately becomes apparent in this present film: it is his infirmity. We must remember that

the same month that this film was shot, Dr. Shankar Rao first noticed a small nodule under the skin behind the left elbow. It was this nodule that developed into the fatal sarcoma cancer that eventually brought down the curtain on a unique life of purity and peace.

We see in this December, 1948 film, how the Maharshi, stricken by many years of rheumatism, struggles with each step. His feeble knee joints gravitate inward to the extent he must consciously swing one leg out and around the other before placing it down. By planting his left hand firmly on the back side of his hip, leaning heavily on his walking stick with his right hand, and his head bent down and inclining to the right, he somehow manages to propel himself forward in a steady rhythm. The effort he exerts to walk is painfully evident. I remember an elderly parent of a friend once commenting on this scene: "Why don't they just let that old man sit down." That sums it up perfectly.

The Maharshi is then seen walking through different quarters of the Ashram, surrounded, again, by devotees and relatives. When he arrives in front of the thatched building with the printed sign "Guest House for Gentlemen," he sends his attendant into the building to fetch something. The attendant immediately comes out scooping his hand into a small can and placing some grains on the ground in front of the white peacock. There is an almost imperceptible cut in the film, noticed only if you keep your eyes on the white peacock. It is now eating out of the can itself as Bhagavan stands directly in front of it and talks to it. Then Bhagavan moves away, everyone following.

Now we see vast numbers of local residents, indigent or otherwise, moving about the northern side of the Ashram. Then rows of them are seen sitting, as eager Boy Scouts carry large thatched boxes of food, scooping out healthy portions for each person. The gruel is placed in towels, tied and then carried away by the recipients. In another place a large gathering is seen. Then rows of devotees taking their meals under a thatched roof. Police and Boy Scouts are moving about busily. It is *bhiksha* time and hundreds, perhaps thousands, are being fed.

- (To be continued)

The *Maharshi* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil K. Sharma. Produced and distributed by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, 66-12 Clyde Street, Rego Park, New York 11374, USA. Tel: (718) 575 3215. E-mail: ashrama@aol.com. All editions of this newsletter can be found on the internet at - "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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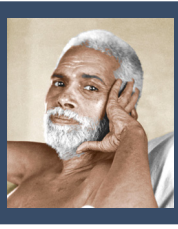

An Interview with Rajapalayam Ramani Ammal

She carries herself with a special dignity, born from the peace of deep devotion. This is what we feel when Ramani Ammal walks past us at Sri Ramanasramam. The spiritual aspirations which consumed her since her childhood have blossomed into a graceful flower of virtue and self poise. In this interview, video-taped in December of 1989, she briefly told us her life story.

Questioner: Please tell us about how you first came to Ramanasramam.

Ramani Ammal: My chosen deity in childhood was Lord Krishna. From my youth I had very pleasant dreams and would sometimes see Lord Krishna or other familiar deities in these dreams. But at the age of sixteen or seventeen I once saw a strange sage-like person coming down a hill and was captivated by his grandeur. I later came to realize that this sage was Sri Bhagavan.

After having that vision of Bhagavan in my dream, a certain fear that had gripped me for some time all of a sudden disappeared. My relatives and others noticed this and commented how I was now moving about freely. This was Bhagavan's first influence on me.

Also, at the age of sixteen I was reading the *Jnana Vasishta*. While reading it I experienced that I was enveloped in *jyoti*, a bright white light. I thought that if this is what happens just by reading it, how much more wonderful would it be if we practised *dhyana* and the other spiritual injunctions taught in the book. I used to be thrilled simply by reading those ancient Tamil scriptures. But it wasn't until I was twenty before I got hold of a book on Bhagavan.

Kumaraswami Raja, the Chief Minister of Madras, who was a cousin of mine, brought me Bharati's biography of Bhagavan, *Ramana Vijayam*, in 1946. Mrs. Kumaraswami Raja was very fond of me, and though other relatives prohibited me from reading spiritual books, she used to stealthily supply me with them. The day she sent this book over with a boy, I was sitting in the house with a friend, a headmistress, who though Christian, was sincerely interested in our religion.

The boy who brought the book said, "Mummy said to hand this book to you." I got up and went up to the gate to receive it. The moment I touched the book I lost body consciousness. My whole body became stiff. I somehow managed to return and sit next to my friend. Noticing my plight, she commented that I shouldn't read such books that make me forget myself. Everyone was complaining about this same thing, for in those days most of the time I would be sitting quietly, alert to my spiritual aspirations. All thought that I was simply idle with no work to do.

With difficulty I opened *Ramana Vijayam* to the first page and was met by the photo of the young Ramana. I became speechless. My friend, who was somewhat alarmed at my condition, had to leave and I somehow saw her off. With great reverence I took the book and started reading it. As I read, my eyes kept closing involuntarily, and I was drawn within, which I later came to know was meditation. Bhagavan taught me meditation in this way. After reading this book, I felt I should leave home and go meet Ramana Maharshi. It is my family custom that women never even leave the house, not to mention leaving the town. That *vairagya*, or desperate determination

to leave my house for spiritual fulfilment, was implanted in me by this book; and I am sure it was by the direct influence of Sri Bhagavan himself.

Because of my intense desire to go and see Bhagavan, my younger brother was moved to help me. He is a very pious person, with a soft nature. With his help I secretly left home and reached Tiruvannamalai and the holy feet of Sri Bhagavan. But after reaching there, I was overcome with a sense of guilt for running away from home. This feeling of guilt, and a sense of bringing ill fame to the respected Rajagopalan family, was uppermost in my mind when I first came into Bhagavan's presence. I felt depressed because of this.

When I arrived I went to the office to inquire where Bhagavan was. I was told that Bhagavan was near the well. When I came near the well, I saw a thatched shed next to it and all I could see in it was a flaming fire. I thought to myself, "I asked for directions to go to Bhagavan and they have sent me to a sacrificial place where there is a fire." It was only after a few minutes that I saw Bhagavan's comely form emerge from those flames. Even when I had the *Jyoti Darshana* I was blaming myself, thinking that I had this delusion of seeing a fire instead of Bhagavan because I was foolish enough to come out into the hot sun. It was only afterwards I realized Bhagavan had bestowed upon me this great boon of *Jyoti Darshana*. Next I heard Bhagavan saying to me, "You have now come home. Why don't you sit down?"

Coming from a family where women never go out, and having never gone out myself, I did not know how to behave in company. When Bhagavan said "You have now come home. You can sit down," I sat down right in front of him and not in the place reserved for women. For three days I kept sitting in front of him and all the while the feeling of guilt for running away from home was haunting me. I kept sitting in front of Bhagavan, not knowing how to act or ask questions, or anything else.

On the third day I heard Bhagavan telling someone: "I also ran away from my home, and at the railroad station I was so frightened that anyone could have identified me as a runaway, caught hold of me and sent me home. I ran away like a thief." When Bhagavan narrated this, it completely wiped out all my guilt feelings from that moment onwards. This was an act of pure grace directed towards me. It is very strange that by those few words Bhagavan entirely removed any residual fear in me. Bhagavan later said that sometimes you have to do a wrong thing to achieve the ultimate right thing. He even commented that there is nothing wrong in a woman running away at the tender age of twenty to come here.

I should narrate how my first *Giri Pradakshina* took place. I was not accustomed to walking at all, but whenever people came to tell Bhagavan that they were going on a *Giri Pradakshina*, I longed to go too. One day Venkataramayya and others were going round the hill, and in this group there were two devotees who were over eighty years old. I did not say anything to Bhagavan, but was all the time praying that I should be included in that party. Immediately Bhagavan said to Venkataramayya "Take this girl - the one seated there - with you." Bhagavan didn't stop there, for he even said, "She will walk very slowly. Will that be all right?" Then Bhagavan turned towards me and said, "These are our own people. Are you prepared to go with them?" Looking at me, he simply said, "Go!"

The *Pradakshina* took almost six hours. At Adi Annamalai I could move no more. I requested the group to proceed without me, and told them I will reach the Ashram later. But they said, "How could we leave you when Bhagavan entrusted you to us? Even if it takes you another day to complete the *Pradakshina*, we will stay with you. Only with you can we re-enter the Ashram."

I was again feeling very guilty when we finally arrived. I was thinking that others take three to four hours to complete the *Pradakshina* and I have taken six hours, wasting not only my time, but theirs too. I felt that they

were all older than me, and a younger person, like me, had caused them so much inconvenience. When I entered the Ashram my heart was heavy with this feeling. With great difficulty we entered into the presence of Bhagavan and as soon as I sat down, Bhagavan started narrating how the *Pradakshina* should be done by walking as slow as a royal queen in her ninth month of pregnancy. "So there is nothing wrong in what she did," he concluded. After this, many times I used to go around the hill all alone.

I used to fast a lot in those days - almost fifteen days out of a month. It was helping in my *sadhana*. One day, with the permission of Chinnaswami, I stayed in the Ashram till 7:30 p.m., which is the supper time. Bhagavan turned to me and said, "Aren't you coming for supper?" Then he said, "*Sattvic* food should be eaten. There is no meaning in mere fasting." Since then I stopped fasting. Even if I wanted to fast, for some reason or other it would be broken. That is a real wonder to me.

I was not aware of this Brahmin-non-Brahmin separation in the Dining Hall. One day I entered and saw the screen dividing the seating area. Some people were already seated. I was in a fix as to where I should sit. Bhagavan saw my plight and asked me to sit right next to him. He said to an attendant, "She doesn't know anything, so put her leaf here." Then he said to me, "Don't worry about these Brahmins." That is how Bhagavan in his kindness used to take care of me, for I was all alone and ignorant of the customs and ways of the world. Since Bhagavan was showering all this personal attention on me, Chinnaswami also took a personal interest in my welfare. As Muruganar was away, Chinnaswami offered me his residence to stay in, and also offered to send someone to guard me. I told him that I was not afraid and would lock the house from inside and needed no one to guard me. Bhagavan overheard this and said, "She is a young girl, and does not know the consequences. Let her sleep indoors, behind closed doors, but you send a servant to sleep outside on the veranda." I did not know anything when I came here. Even cooking I learned here and, of course, Bhagavan taught me many things from within.

Interviewer: Since you used to sit in front of Bhagavan quite often, could you please give a detailed description of what is called 'Bhagavan's Glance of Grace?'

Ramani Ammal: Bhagavan's look was real magic. You could not do anything but just look into his eyes, which would transform you into *Samadhi*. Everyone in the hall used to feel Bhagavan was looking at them alone. This was the true experience of each one of us. In his inimitable way he was giving the glance of grace to each and everyone seated in the hall. Bhagavan's look used to take us deep into *Samadhi*. Just by looking into his eyes, we came to know what meditation is. This was, and is, the common experience of all devotees. You ask anyone and you will get the same reply.

Once he gave me such a look and for a very long time I was absorbed in *Samadhi*. Bhagavan was reading the newspaper, letters were being brought in, normal activity was going on, but I was oblivious of the happenings outside of me. In fact, I was unaware of my body.

I once remember a Harijan lady who for the past twenty-five years was gathering honey to send to Sri Bhagavan. On every occasion she was unable to bring the honey herself and had to send it with someone. After waiting for twenty-five years, she finally found the opportunity to come. The poor lady was in tattered clothes, standing before Bhagavan. Her eyesight was poor and I still vividly recall the unusual way she looked at Sri Bhagavan, calling out "Oh Darling, where are you? I want to see you." Bhagavan in all his graciousness said, "Granny, look this way. I am here." Looking at the honey she had brought with her, he said to me, "They are Brahmins, they won't eat this. We will share it, and eat it."

It is often said, Bhagavan did not give direct *Upadesa*, but what else is all this? Although Bhagavan repeatedly pointed out human frailty, people were not prepared to rectify themselves.

As if talking to himself, he looked at this poor old woman in ragged clothes and said, "Poor lady, she must be hungry. And where will she go for clothes? Who will offer her food and clothes?" Upon hearing this, Ondu Reddiyar got up and said, "We will give her food and also see that some clothes are purchased." Then Reddiyar took the woman to the Dining Hall and fed her sumptuously. He also sent someone to town to buy her a sari. As the old woman had no money, she had walked a great distance to come here. Bhagavan knowing this, said in an impersonal way, "Would anyone be interested in getting her a bus ticket?" Reddiyar again came forward and said, "We will provide her with a bus ticket and see her off." When this lady returned from the Dining Hall she was touching the ground, and then touching her eyes. That is a way of prostration and thanksgiving. It is noteworthy that whenever the poor or untouchables came, Bhagavan took a very personal interest in them, which was a moving sight to see.

Sri Bhagavan had absolutely no connection with either body or mind. People used to be confused by seeing him read letters and newspapers. His inner state never changed since he was sixteen. This was demonstrated repeatedly, but only those who had the eyes to see, could see and realize it. Sri Bhagavan was also a real taskmaster. He used to quietly move around to various places within the Ashram without notice. So every place had to be kept clean and neat because Bhagavan was very particular about cleanliness. He was also particular about punctuality. This kept every member of the Ashram alert and on their toes, ready at all times to do what was necessary. Look how this Ashram has grown. Unless Bhagavan was very careful in his silent supervision, could it have grown to this extent?

Questioner: Where were you at the time of Sri Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana*?

Ramani Ammal: I was at Rajapalayam. That night I saw a blue light beautifully rising up into the sky. I knew Bhagavan had left the body. I felt that I did not want to live after that and started a fast. By fasting I wanted to drop the body. After five or six days of not touching food I had several visions. In one of them I was taken inside the Arunachala Hill and saw there *rishis* performing *yagnas* and *yoga*. I also saw Sri Bhagavan seated there. Some *munis* or *rishis* offered some *prasad* to Bhagavan. Then Sri Bhagavan himself gave it to me, and I was made to eat. I remembered that I was fasting, but couldn't refuse Bhagavan's *prasad*. How can I say that it was a dream? I consider it was Bhagavan's grace alone. He also said to me, "You say and repeat 'I have gone away, I have gone away'. Where have I gone? I am right here. You are not looking inward. If you look within, I am there." For many days afterwards the smell of that *prasad* lingered. The aroma even spread all through the house. My brother and sisters kept talking about it. When I was fasting, my brother and sister were also fasting with me. The morning following that vision we started taking food again.

In the dream I also remember Bhagavan was seated near a tank and *rishis* and *munis* were serving him. He looked splendid, gracious, magnanimous, and magnificent. It was a beautiful sight. I saw there Kamadhenu, the celestial cow, the celestial tree, and many other wonderful things. It was a divine sight indeed. From that day onwards I had no thought at all that Bhagavan had left us. He is all pervading, and I experienced him particularly in my heart. I no longer felt sorrow. He is even here now.

When I came again to Tiruvannamalai I was filled with bliss. You can feel Bhagavan's presence every minute. Right this very minute I feel his Divine Presence. I have no unhappiness. I am happy all the time. Sri Bhagavan's Presence is so overpowering. See how we all are gathered here. What have we done to deserve this?
Interviewer: To my knowledge I haven't done anything good and I also wonder, along with you, how Bhagavan has gathered us here.

Ramani Ammal: I can't say that I have ever done anything bad. From my childhood I didn't know what is good and what is bad either. But doing good or bad has nothing to do with our coming to Bhagavan's

Presence. It is only by his grace that we are filled with his glorious Presence.

** We extend our warm appreciation to J. Jayaraman who was the Tamil interviewer, James Hartel who video-taped it, Sri V. Ganesan who translated the interview into English, and to Geeta Bhatt who kindly typed it.*

Triumphs of the Spirit

"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment." *-Mark 12:30*

The history of Christianity down through the ages has been highlighted by those few blessed souls who accepted Christ's teachings at face value and strove with all their powers to practice them. The unique, unqualifying principles taught by Christ produced spiritual heroes like Francis of Assisi and Therese of Lisieux in this millennium and St. Anthony of Egypt in the last. It was the fame of this Anthony in the fourth century that inspired thousands to renounce everything and join the legion of men and women who lived pure lives of prayer, austerity, and contemplation in the vast remote desert of Egypt. Ironically, this unparalleled flowering of deep spiritual yearning was directly rooted to the oppressive policies of the Roman Empire.

By the year 300 A.D., fractures in the Roman Empire were a serious concern to the Emperor Diocletian. In his efforts to further unite and control his domain, he sought, like other rulers in the past, religious conformity. This resulted in the last great persecutions to the sect known as the Christians.

Religious persecution drove the youthful Paul of Thebes to the Egyptian desert. He is said to be the first Christian documented to devote his life to solitary prayer in the remote parts of the North African desert. Reaching an isolated rocky region he found a large cave containing an open courtyard with a huge palm tree and a spring of running water. Nearby were chisels, anvils, and hammers used for the minting of money. Egyptian records show that this place had been a mint where false money was coined during the time of Anthony and Cleopatra. Paul remained there in solitary contemplation for nearly a hundred years, utilising the palm leaves for his clothes and the palm fruit for his food.

Paul's perfect self conquest and undivided love for God would have never been known to man if not for the Divine revelation given to St. Anthony of Egypt, who was by far the most famous of the earliest holy desert dwellers. It was Anthony's disciple, Pachomius, who founded communities of ascetics in the desert, and from this beginning the tradition of Christian monasticism began.

Once Constantine the Great, the emperor of Rome, formally declared himself a Christian in 324 A.D., the Western civilisation enthusiastically embraced the religion of Rome. The teachings of Christ quickly blossomed, producing a bountiful harvest of deep religious fervour. The tales of the heroic spiritual efforts of the Desert Fathers captured the imagination and hearts of the faithful throughout the Roman Empire and by the fifth century the monasteries of Egypt and the Middle East were crowded with aspirants struggling for perfection. The histories and teachings of many of these illumined souls from this golden era of Christian asceticism were documented and passed down to us through the centuries. The great distance of time hasn't weakened the power and glory of those holy ascetics, both men and women, who strove for perfection.

During this period, the monk Palladius, and several other desert monks, travelled from Alexandria in the north, down through the Nile River region searching out the famous hermits, monasteries, and holy men and women

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of each territory. The record of their travels and interviews, and that of other histories and dialogues from this era, forms a valuable source of inspiration and guidance. An English translation is available in two volumes under the title, *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*.

The extent that Christian charity and ascetic ideals had spread can be appreciated - or truly marvelled at - by the description of the city of Oxyrhyncus: "And we came also to Oxyrhyncus, a great city in the Thebais, but we are not able to relate all the wonderful things which we saw therein; for the city is so full of the habitations of the brethren that the walls thereof are well-nigh thrust out with them, so many are the brethren! And there are so many other monasteries round about the walls, on the outside, that one would think that they were another city, and the sanctuaries of the city, and the temples which are therein, and all the spaces about them, are filled with the monks ... one might think that the monks were not very much fewer in numbers than the ordinary inhabitants of the city .... Now the people said that the monks who lived inside were five thousands in number, and that five thousand brethren lived round about it. And all the inhabitants of the city were believers, and the officers and the princes of the city, who were lavish in their gifts to the congregations, used to place watchers at the gates and entrances thereof that if they saw any needy person or any stranger they might bring him to them, in order that they might supply his need from their gifts. And what shall we say concerning the fear of God which was in these men to such a degree that, when they saw us, who were strangers, passing through the streets, they drew nigh, like angels, unto us and helped us? Now we would make known that which we have learned from the holy Bishop who was there, namely, that he had under his authority ten thousand monks and twenty thousand virgins. I am wholly unable to express how great is the love of strangers and the affection which exists among these men and women, for our cloaks and the other portions of our apparel were well-nigh torn to rags by the force which each one of them, in the ardour of his love, displayed in dragging us to his home. And we saw there multitudes of fathers and great monks who possessed gifts of diverse kinds."

Even allowing for some embellishment in this account, one can imagine the delight of the pious monks upon reaching that blessed city. But, edifying as this description is, it is the struggles, sacrifices, spontaneous acts of charity, spiritual ecstasies, and the sayings of the accomplished ascetics that, if read with devotion and faith, quickly fills the soul with sincere yearning, right direction, and dispassion.

The Paradise of the Holy Fathers speaks to us of the inner 'Paradise', which ever stands before us and within us, and will immediately open up to us if we but seek that 'Paradise' alone.

Blessed Macarius said: This is the truth, if a monk regards contempt as praise, poverty as riches, and hunger as a feast, he will never die.

Abbess Syncletica of holy memory said: There is labour and great struggle for the impious who are converted to God, but after that comes inexpressible joy. A man who wants to light a fire first is plagued by smoke, and the smoke drives him to tears, yet finally he gets the fire that he wants. So also it is written: Our God is a consuming fire. Hence we ought to light the divine fire in ourselves with labour and with tears.

One of the monks, called Serapion, sold his book of the Gospels and gave the money to those who were hungry, saying: I have sold the book which told me to sell all that I had and give to the poor.

Theophilus of holy memory, Bishop of Alexandria, journeyed to Scete, and the brethren coming together said to Abbot Pambo: Say a word or two to the Bishop, that his soul may be edified in this place. The elder replied: If he is not edified by my silence, there is no hope that he will be edified by my words.

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

On June 1, 1949 a simple ceremony was performed at Sri Ramanasramam to commemorate the opening of the New Hall attached to the Mathrubhuteswara Temple. The Maharshi was to shift his residence from the Jubilee Hall to the New Hall on this day. At 9:45 a.m., *pujas* were being performed in the temple, the bells were ringing and priests were waving *arati* (light) with burning camphor when Bhagavan walked into the New Hall, accompanied by Brahmins chanting the Vedas. He was requested to take his seat on the new *Yogasana*, which was aesthetically carved out of a single piece of rock and was highly polished and decorated. In his typically disinterested manner, Bhagavan acquiesced to all the requests.

The New Hall was made out of the same materials as the Temple, with granite walls, floor and pillars. It was a large, imposing structure, equal - everyone thought - to the grand spiritual stature for whom it was built. But, ironically, by the time it was completed and the Sage took up his residence in it, the mortal vitality of the Maharshi was ebbing and all the glory and satisfaction associated with its completion was overshadowed by misgivings.

In July of 1949, K. K. Nambiar brought his 16mm movie camera with him on one of his regular visits to the Ashram. This time he somehow managed to arrange for sufficient lighting to take a rare film of the Sage sitting inside the New Hall.

The Maharshi is seen sitting on the cushioned stone couch. His legs are stretched out with two pillows under his knees, while he sits upright holding a newspaper with both hands. There is one vertical pillow on each side of his back, supporting him. During the fifty seconds of this scene he leisurely flips the pages of the newspaper, scanning the contents from top to bottom, never seeming to read any one news item completely.

By this time he had already undergone two minor surgeries on his left arm, just below the elbow. But, however close we scrutinise his arm in this film, there is no apparent swelling, scar or bandage. During a period in mid-July of 1949, the tumour ceased to ooze blood and the bandage was removed. The film must have been shot at this time. The tumour was said to be still growing, yet it is not visible from the angle of the lens (the tumour was on the inner side of the left arm). Also, the Maharshi seems to be using this arm quite freely, turning the pages of the newspaper without any apparent discomfort, which in no way means that there was no discomfort at all.

A profound scene ensues as he folds the newspaper, lays it on the table to his left, and assumes silence. He lifts his head, opens his eyes wide, and stares into the vast nothingness. The power of that peace which emanated from those unblinking eyes shattered the encrusted layers of many egos, soothed the despairing hearts of the suffering masses, and attracted thousands from the world over.

What we now see is a forty-five second clip of the Maharshi assuming his natural poise. It seems the cameraman filmed him at three or four intervals, in which we later see his eyelids slightly closed, but never shut or blinking. When this film was restored and re-edited in New York in 1978 it was decided to repeat this forty-five second piece seven times, extending its length to five and a half minutes. One of the forty-five second sections was re-edited as a close-up, wherein we see the face of the Sage in detail. Viewers of this film, especially devotees, will find themselves transported to the silent *sannidhi* (presence) of the Maharshi, as his sublime experience of Self-Awareness is easily imprinted on our hearts and minds.

- (To be continued)

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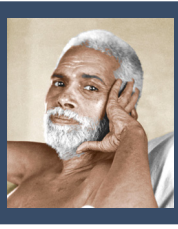

At the Feet of Bhagavan

by

T. K. Sundaresa Iyer

T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, an especially devoted and sincere sadhaka of the highest order, enjoyed in a special way the graciousness and guidance of Bhagavan. Sri T. K. S. lived continuously in the presence of the Maharshi and passed away in 1965 in Sri Ramana Nagar after a lifetime with Bhagavan. In the following article, taken from the book of the same name, his heartfelt devotion is expressed in beautiful, simple language as he pays homage to his Guru.

It was in 1908 that I first contacted Sri Ramana Maharshi, then in the Virupaksha Cave, when I was a boy of twelve. Had you seen him in those days, you would hardly have taken him for a mere human being. His figure was a statue of burnished gold. He simply sat and sat, and rarely spoke. The words he spoke on any day could easily be counted. He had an enchanting personality that shed a captivating lustre on all, and a life-giving current flowed from him charging all those nearby, while his sparkling eyes irrigated those around him with the nectar of his Being.

Peace, peace, peace. Now you have lost your individuality in him; he absorbs you, is your all, is the All. I remember (how well!) the first song I sang before him at that time: it was the famous *Namasivayapadikam* commencing "Matrupatrenakkinri", the gift of the great Saint Sri Sundaramurti Swamigal. From then on he had me linked inseparably to himself. I know one and only one thing, and that is that he alone exists as the Divine and all else has only the appearance of existence, but in reality is not.

I never had to leave Tiruvannamalai after my nineteenth year. Sri Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni was at that time in Tiruvannamalai; his *Vaidika Sabha Society* was very active and he gave a series of discourses on the *Vedas*. His magnetic personality and exposition of the greatness of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi so deeply impressed me that I decided to study the *Vedas* at his feet and was gladly accepted as a student. He was then living in the Mango Tree Cave below the Virupaksha Cave on the hill. For eight years I studied the scriptures under him; daily we visited the Maharshi together and enjoyed the benefit of his presence.

After the Maharshi's mother, Alagammal, passed away, Sri Maharshi came down the hill and the present Ashram came into being. Sri Kavyakantha and his pupils would come down to the Maharshi's abode, where there would be memorable and scintillating discussions. When the Muni was in the hall, Sri Maharshi could be seen in the full bloom of his being. The discussion ranged across various schools of thought and philosophy and it was a period of great literary activity at the Ashram. Besides Kavyakantha, a host of others used to be in the hall which was open all hours of the day and night. Among them were Kapali Sastry, Muruganar, Lakshmana Sarma, Arunachala Sastriar of the *Madras Gita* fame, Munagala Venkataramiah (the late Swami Ramanananda Saraswathi, the author of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*) and Sivaprakasam Pillai. It was then the world of freedom of Sri Ramana, our Lord, Guru and very Self. Our lives were based and turned upon that one central Personality. Nothing gave us greater joy than to be in his presence as often as possible and to do his bidding.

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Thus did time pass until 1929 when, on leaving Tiruvannamalai for good, Sri Kavyakantha made me over to the care of Sri Maharshi and in the very first letter he wrote asked Bhagavan to take particular care of me. I was at school when that letter was received and the Maharshi tucked it under his cushion. He pulled it out, read it to me when I returned from school and said, "Look here, you must not run away from here. I am answerable to Nayana; he may come at any time and claim you from me."

Our happiness in the presence of Sri Bhagavan was comparable to the joy of the hosts of Siva on Mount Kailasa. Sri Bhagavan used to say, "Kailasa is the abode of Siva; Arunachala is Siva Himself. Even in Kailasa things are as they are with us here. Devotees go to Siva, worship Him, serve Him, and hear from him the interpretation of the *Vedas* and *Vedanta* day in and day out." So it was Kailasa at the foot of the Arunachala Hill, and *Arunachala Paramatma* in human form was Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

In May 1933 on my 36th birthday, after the usual bath and prayers, I sat in Sri Bhagavan's presence in a pensive mood. I addressed a prayer in the Tamil *viruttam* style to Sri Bhagavan complaining, "O Bhagavan, I have completed three-and-a- half decades and yet have not had the experience of the real you. Pray let me have this day the touch of your grace." Handing over this slip of paper I prostrated before him. Bhagavan bade me sit down and gazed steadily at me; I was still in a pensive and meditative mood. All of a sudden I lost body-consciousness and was absorbed in Sri Maharshi. I was turned inward and the voice of Bhagavan bade me see whatever I desired. I felt that if I could have the *darshan* of Sri Rama my life would be fruitful, as I was very much devoted to Sri Rama. I had then immediately a *darshan* of Sri Rama, with Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Satrughna and Hanuman. The ecstasy of the vision defied description; I simply sat on with Maharshi perhaps gazing on me without my being aware of his gaze. Two hours may thus have passed in pin-drop silence, lost in the vision, until it vanished. I prostrated at the feet of Sri Maharshi, with tears of ecstasy in my eyes and my hair standing on end. To Bhagavan's enquiry I replied that I, of course, had seen my dear Rama.

Bhagavan asked me to fetch the book *Dakshinamurti Ashtotra*, which I had not read, and opening a page therein he gave it to me to read. The fifth name from the last read "*Om Sri Yoga Pattabhiramaya namaha*." Bhagavan then said, "Sri Rama is Dakshinamurti, and Dakshinamurti is Sri Rama. Do you know where Ayodhya is? The Vedas say it is in the sun, and describe it is as *ashtachakra navadwara devanam purayodhya* (the gods' city is Ayodhya with eight corners and nine gates). Arunachala is also *ashtachakra puri* (eight-cornered city), and Lord Arunachala is Sri Rama as well as Dakshinamurti. One has no need to go to the sun to see Ayodhya or Sri Rama, but one may see them here and now."

Thus did Sri Ramana once appear to me as Sri Rama, proving once again the age-old adage that *Mahatmas* can give *darshan* as any beloved form (see *Sri Ramana Gita, Ch. 18, v. 26*). In the *Sri Krishna Avatara*, did not Bhagavan grant Hanuman the vision of Sri Rama? Later I realised that the vision was given to me as painted in Sri Tyagabrahmam's picture of Sri Rama, though not for a moment can I equate myself with Sri Tyagaraja.

How the Mantra Came

The mantra "*Om namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*" fascinated me greatly in my early days; it so delighted me that I had always a vision of Sri Krishna in my mind. I had a premonition that this body would pass away in its fortieth year and I wanted to have a *darshan* of the Lord before that time. I fasted and practised devotion to Vasudeva incessantly; I read *Sri Bhagavad Gita* and *Srimad Bhagavatam* with great delight. Then when I

read in the *Gita*, "*Jnani tvatmaiva me matam*" ("In my view, the *Jnani* is my own Self") I was greatly delighted. This line of thought came to me: "While I have at hand Bhagavan Sri Ramana, who is himself *Vasudeva*, why should I worship Vasudeva separately?" Be it noted that all this was in my early days before settling with Bhagavan at his Ashram. So I wanted one single *mantra*, a single deity (*devata*), and a single scripture, so that there might be no conflict of loyalties. Sri Ramana Paramatman became easily the God to worship, his collected works easily became the gospel; as for the *mantra*, it struck me intuitively that "*Om namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya*" might be an exact parallel to "*Om namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*."

I counted the letters in this new *mantra*, and was very happy to find it also contained twelve letters; I told this all to Sri Bhagavan, and he gave the *mantra* his approval.

Advanced practicers (*sadhakas*) and thinkers may laugh at this and say, "Why do you need a *mantra* while the Ocean of Bliss is there to be immersed in directly?" I confess that in this I was trying to conform to the traditional method of practice (*upasana*) which forms one of the main elements in *bhakti* (devotion). Bhagavan has revealed his true nature as the All-Witness, yet there is the explicit injunction that Advaita must be only in the attitude and never be interpreted in outer action. This is how the *mantra* first came out.

Where is the Divine World?

When studying the *Upanishads* in my early days, I always visualised the divine abode in the sun god and was performing the practices enjoined in certain texts. Even later, after settling at the abode of Sri Maharshi, I continued this practice (*upasana*). It proved very hard to succeed in this process and I had to undergo very trying experiences, so I referred the whole matter to Bhagavan. "So you want to go to the divine world?" asked he. "That is what I am trying to obtain; that is what the scriptures prescribe," I answered. "But where are you now?" the Master asked. I replied, "I am in your presence." "Poor thing! You are here and now in the divine world, and you want to obtain it elsewhere! Know that to be the divine world where one is firmly established in the Divine. Such a one is full (*purna*); he encompasses and transcends all that is manifest. He is the substratum of the screen on which the whole manifestation runs like the picture film. Whether moving pictures run or not, the screen is always there and is never affected by the action of the pictures. You are here and now in the divine world. You are like a thirsty man wanting to drink, while he is all the time standing neck deep in the Ganga. Give up all efforts and surrender. Let the 'I' that wants the divine world die, and the Divine in you will be realised here and now. For it is already in you as the Self, not different from the Divine (*Brahman*), nameless and formless. It is already in you, and how are you to obtain that which ever remains obtained? The Self (*atman*) in you is surely not different from US." Thus spoke Bhagavan.

"So then, Bhagavan says that he is the Self, (*kutastha*) in this, the field of this soul (*jiva*), that this is already established in Bhagavan as such, so this soul need do nothing but give up the sense of being a separate soul?" I asked, prostrating before Bhagavan.

"Yes, yes," he replied, "that is what one must do to drop the ego-sense. If that is done the Self will be experienced as 'I-I' here and now and at all times. There will be no going into the divine world or coming out of it. You will be as you really are. This is the practice (*sadhana*) and this is the perfection (*siddhi*) too."

This teaching of Sri Bhagavan, himself being the divine world, is recorded for the benefit of all who are ever in Him. Our hearts were kindled to deep affection while he taught us by word and example, while he silently

showered the nectar dew of grace upon us all. Today they turn to Him within, by day and night, no less of old; and they rejoice to find that grace wells up from the fountain of the one Self who alone is all wisdom, love and power.

Letter From A Friend

The following letter was sent recently by Yolanda Levi to Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagwat of the New York Arunachala Ashrama. It describes how Sri Bhagavan's influence is not limited by time and space, and how his grace is readily available to all sincere seekers.

Dear Bhagawat,

Thank you so much for your beautiful letter which touched me profoundly. I am sorry my reply is so late, but right now we are very busy travelling back and forth from Italy. Giovanni is setting up his own new laboratory in Italy. We will move to Genoa in September, or soon after.

First, I would like to tell you a little story which made me wonder how life can be sometimes unpredictable and yet so beautiful. There is a friend of mine in Romania who is a fully qualified medical doctor. She earns about $50 a month, which is almost less than what a person needs to live on in Romania. She is working about two hundred miles from Bucharest in the only office which services a group of villages. Every day she wakes up at 5 a.m., takes an unheated train, changes two buses, or hitch-hikes on trucks to travel to those remote villages. Her husband left her and went to France four years ago. Lately, she had been suffering with headaches, anxiety and increasing moments of depression. One day she happened to read a book wherein something about Bhagavan was mentioned. Other names were also mentioned in that book, but somehow only Ramana Maharshi's name kept coming back to her. When she told me briefly about this experience I had the sudden idea to send her my photo of Sri Ramana.

And one day (this was when she had just started to take some antidepressant medicine), exhausted, she felt like sitting on the floor. She then shifted into the *padmasana* position - without really knowing what she was doing - and gazed at that photo of Ramana, which she had come to love dearly. She then gave over all her pain and suffering to Bhagavan and was immediately filled with so much peace and love that she at once quit the medicine and felt at peace and at ease. She now gathers the necessary courage and strength each day by simply gazing into the eyes of Bhagavan.

I wanted to write this to you and share my wonderment at how a sincere call of the heart can be responded to even when the person lives far away in a remote area, knows no English, knows nothing of the spiritual teachings which have been, in fact, forbidden in her country for almost fifty years. She didn't really talk much about what she experienced. She said with these things it is better to remain silent, with which I totally agree.

As for the tapes, it is kind of you to say you can send them. Please send them to my address, for the Romanian post delivery is not yet safe. I will give them to my friends there when I visit in the summer. Thank you also for sending three more photos. Please take good care of your health.

The fondest memories from the three of us,

- *Yolanda Levi, Viroflay*, France

Triumphs of the Spirit

After Christ, the single most divine personality to shine out through two thousand years of Christianity was the "Little Poor Man of Assisi", St. Francis. His brief, inspired life transformed thousands during his time and remains an unshakeable example to all those who wish to ". . . seek first the kingdom of God. . . ."

Great personalities have the power to manifest the potential greatness in others. In the fertile company of St. Francis, his first twelve intimate companions blossomed into spiritually fragrant flowers. Their intense aspiration, perfect renunciation and ecstatic love of God has been a source of inspiration to the faithful down through the centuries.

Tales from the lives of these first exalted followers were compiled into a book by a devout Franciscan monk who lived during the early years of the Order. In this great Christian classic, the *Fioretti*, or *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* (translated by Raphael Brown New York: Image Books, 1958), one of the most unforgettable characters is the guileless child of God, Brother Juniper. His utter simplicity, complete self-effacement, compassion and sincerity are delightfully portrayed in about a dozen stories and anecdotes. His life unfolds a picture of a liberated soul playing about the world for the glory of God.

How Brother Juniper used to give whatever he could to the poor for the Love of God

Brother Juniper had so much pity and compassion for the poor that when he saw anyone who was badly clothed or bare, he would immediately rip off his sleeve or cowl or some piece of his habit and give it to that poor man. And so the guardian ordered him under obedience not to give all or part of his habit to anyone.

A few days later it happened that he met a poor man who was almost naked and who begged Brother Juniper to give him something for the love of God. And Juniper said to him very compassionately, "My dear man, I have nothing to give you except my habit - and my superior has told me under obedience not to give it or part of it away to anyone. But if you pull it off my back, I certainly will not prevent you."

He was not speaking to a deaf man for he immediately pulled the habit off inside out and went away with it, leaving Brother Juniper naked.

When he went back to the place, the friars asked him where his habit was. And he answered, "Some good person pulled it off my back and went away with it."

And as the virtue of compassion grew in him, he was not satisfied with giving away only his habit, but to the poor he used to give books and ornaments from the altar and cloaks of the other friars and whatever he could lay his hands on. Consequently, when poor people came to Brother Juniper to beg, the friars used to take and hide the things they wanted to keep so that Brother Juniper should not find them, for he used to give everything away for the love of God and for His praise.

How Brother Juniper cut some ringlets from the Altar and gave them away

Once when Brother Juniper was at the friary in Assisi for the Feast of the Lord's Nativity, he was in the church near the main altar which was very beautifully draped and decorated. At the request of the sacristan, he stayed to guard the altar while the sacristan went to get a bite to eat.

While he was devoutly meditating, a poor little woman begged him to give her something for the love of God. And he answered, "Wait a minute. I'll see if I can find anything to give you from this richly decorated altar."

Now there was on the altar a very costly frontal from which were hanging some silver ringlets. And when Brother Juniper looked at the ornate altar, he saw the silver ringlets and said, "These ringlets are superfluous." And taking a knife, he cut all of them off the frontal and gave them to the poor little woman out of compassion. Meanwhile the sacristan, after eating three or four mouthfuls, began to remember the ways of Brother Juniper and to fear that in his zeal for charity he might do some damage to the richly decorated altar which he had left in his guard. So he quickly rose from the table and went to the church. And when, on looking over the ornaments of the altar, he saw that the ringlets had been cut away and stripped from the frontal he became exceedingly angry and indignant.

Brother Juniper saw how excited he was and said, "Don't be upset about those ringlets because I have given them to a poor little woman who was in great need. They were good for nothing here except to make a display of worldly vanity."

On hearing this, the sacristan became furious and immediately ran through the church and the whole city anxiously trying to find the woman. But not only did he not find her, he could find no one who had seen her. So he returned to the friar and angrily took the frontal to the Minister General John Parenti who was then in Assisi and said, "Father General, I demand justice from you against Brother Juniper who has destroyed this frontal for me - and it was the finest one in the sacristy. Now look how he has ruined it and stripped away all the silver ringlets! And he says he has given them to a poor woman."

Brother John the General answered, "Brother Juniper did not do this, rather it was your foolishness because you assigned him to guard the altar! Don't you know his ways? I tell you I am surprised he did not give away the rest. However, I am going to correct him severely for this fault."

And after vespers were chanted, he summoned all the friars in the chapter, and calling Brother Juniper before him, in the presence of the whole community, he rebuked him very strongly about the ringlets. And as his anger increased, he raised his voice until he became rather hoarse.

Now Brother Juniper did not particularly mind those words as he rejoiced in being blamed and humiliated, but he began to worry more about the General's hoarseness and to think of some remedy for it. So after receiving the scolding he went into the city and had a bowl of porridge prepared with butter.

He returned late that night. And lighting a candle he took the bowl of porridge to the General's cell and knocked. On opening the door and seeing him holding the lighted candle and the dish, the General asked quietly, "What do you want at this hour? What is it?"

Brother Juniper answered, "Father, when you were scolding me in chapter for my faults, I noticed that your voice became hoarse from over-strain, I believe. So I thought of a remedy and had this porridge made for you with butter. Please eat it. I am sure it will relieve your throat and chest."

The General said, "What an hour for you to bother people!"

Brother Juniper replied, "Come - it was made for you. Please eat it. It will do you good."

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But the General was angered by the lateness of the hour and his insisting and said, "Go away, you brute! Do you think I am going to eat at this hour?"

As Brother Juniper realised that neither begging nor persuading would help, he said to him: "Father, since you do not want to eat - and this porridge was made for you - at least do this for me: hold the candle and I will eat."

Then the General, who was a very pious and devout man, was won over by Brother Juniper's great compassion and simplicity and charity - for he had done it out of devotion - and he answered, "Well now, Brother, since you want to, let's both eat it together!" And because of Brother Juniper's insistent charity they both ate the bowl of porridge. And they were refreshed far more by their devotion than by the food.

To the glory of Christ. Amen.

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

In our concluding instalment of "Films" we review a short segment of film which documents the *Mahasamadhi* of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi.

The film is complete with a narration which runs throughout its fifty-five second length. The narration is done in the newsreel style typical of the day with the narrator declaring ". . . he [Bhagavan] prayed and meditated to realize himself, to know the meaning of life and work and sacrifice. Having obtained peace in the stillness of divine communion, he proclaimed and propagated the eternal truth - "Know Thyself". For thousands of devotees this embodiment of inner peace is no more. The mortal life of Ramana Maharshi has come to an end . . . but his transcendental message lives for all time, beckoning humanity to seek, to strive, to stop not till the goal of emancipation from the bondage of life and death is obtained."

The opening scene of this film shows the entrance to Sri Ramanasramam, the gate to the Ashram holding centre screen, and a large crowd of people is seen both entering and exiting the compound. A quick scene change brings us directly in front of the Nirvana Hall and again shows a large number of people present. It is apparent that some organisation has taken place, as the crowd is cordoned off into different sections, making it easier to accommodate all those who are present. It is also readily apparent that a momentous event is taking place.

A young lady leans with her head on her hand, tears in her eyes. There is a close-up view of Sadhu Arunachala (Major Chadwick) sitting with knee bent, speaking some slow, deliberate words, perhaps of condolence, to the person next to him. A devoted woman is seen gazing at Bhagavan with a folded paper in her hand, with the concerned expression that a daughter has for her father, as Bhagavan was that, and more.

The following scene is, we believe, in front of the garlanded body of Sri Bhagavan after his *Mahasamadhi*. The camera angle is from the posterior left, so it is difficult to actually see Bhagavan's body. What we do see is a steady stream of devotees and pilgrims giving their sincere respect to and having their final *darshan* of the body of the great Sage. The priests are present, officiating at this solemn moment, and thick clouds of incense bellow forth. We see people from all walks of life - *sadhus*, businessmen, mothers with their children and other village folk - all paying their respects to one who looked upon them all as equals, as manifestations of the One Eternal. A frontal view shows a well-organised queue filing past, and to the far right of the screen a policeman keeps watch. An elderly woman is seen sitting on the ground, quietly wiping a tear from her right eye with her cloth.

The concluding scene shows Bhagavan's garlanded body seated upright in a palanquin, being brought out of the Nirvana Hall. There is an immense crowd of people present; some wave sacred fans while others carry lighted torches in front of the procession. Many people are throwing flower petals onto the palanquin. The palanquin itself is covered by a large umbrella which is being carried by one of the attendants. The footage abruptly ends at this point.

So concludes the recorded film footage of Sri Bhagavan. These priceless films have been retrieved, restored and catalogued by Sri Ramanasramam and Arunachala Ashrama for the benefit of future generations. They enable us to see a *Jnani* in his natural environs, to view the divine form of Ramana Maharshi, and inspire us further to the goal of Self-Realisation.

- (To be continued)

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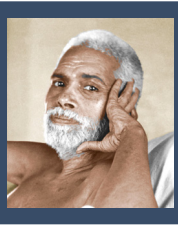

How The Maharshi Came To Me

By Chhaganlal V. Yogi

What does Sri Bhagavan mean to me? After many years of experiencing his grace I can now reply, "He is everything to me. He is my Guru and my God." I can say this with confidence because, had I not had the good fortune of seeing him and thereafter getting into closer contact with him, I would have been still groping in the dark. I would still have been a doubting Thomas.

How did it all begin? When I was eighteen I read a lot of books by Swami Vivekananda and Swami Rama Tirtha. This reading generated a desire in me that I should also become a *sannyasin*, like the authors of these books. Their writings also implanted in me the ideal of plain living, high thinking, and a life dedicated to spiritual matters. Somehow, my desire to become a *sannyasin* was never fulfilled, but the ideal of a dedicated life made a deeper and deeper impression on my mind. At the age of twenty I had the good fortune of contacting Mahatma Gandhi. His ideals won my heart and for several years I faithfully tried to put them into practice.

I was doing my duty to the best of my ability and leading, as best I could, a pure and dedicated life until the age of thirty-eight. Around that time scepticism began to assail me and my mind became a home for all kinds of doubts. I began to doubt the ideals of Gandhiji; I began to doubt *sadhus* and *sannyasins*; I doubted religion, and I even began to doubt the existence of God.

It was in this darkest period of my life that I first heard of Sri Ramana Maharshi. At that time I seemed to be heading swiftly towards total scepticism. The world appeared to me to be full of injustice, cruelty, greed, hate and other evils, the existence of which logically led me to a strong disbelief in God. For, I argued, did He truly exist, could anything dark or evil ever have flourished? Doubt upon doubt assailed me like dark shadows which dogged my footsteps. I had, as a consequence, lost whatever little reverence I might have had for *sadhus* and *sannyasins*. I found myself slowly but surely losing my interest in religion. The very word itself eventually became a synonym in my mind for a clever ruse to delude the credulity of the world. In short, I began to live a life lacking optimism and faith. I was not happy in my disbelief, for my mind took on the aspect of turbulent waters, and I felt that all around me there was raging a scorching fire which seemed to burn up my very entrails.

One day, while travelling as usual on the train to the office, I happened to meet a friend who had spent over a decade in Europe and America. I hadn't met him for quite a long time and sometimes used to wonder where he had disappeared to. In answer to a query about his recent activities he said that he had been to Sri Ramanasramam and immediately launched into a description of what went on there. While he was trying to describe to me his experience of the *darshan* of Sri Bhagavan he drew out from his pocket a small packet which he extended to me. I wondered what it contained. He explained that it contained something extremely precious - some *vibhuti*, holy ashes brought from the ashram. He insisted on my accepting them. His kind invitation did not interest me in the least. On the other hand, it amused me.

I said scornfully, "Pardon me, but I think that all this sort of thing is mere sham and humbug, so I trust you will not misunderstand me if I refuse to accept."

He then argued that by refusing his gift, I was not merely insulting him, I was also insulting the *vibhuti*.

I thought that this was rather comical, but to placate him I replied, "Well, if that be so, to please you I will take a pinch of these ashes on the condition that you will allow me to do whatever I like with them."

Unsuspectingly, he nodded his head in assent and passed the packet over to me. A smile appeared on his lips as he watched me take a pinch out of it. This smile was the preface to a zealous exposition on Sri Bhagavan and his miraculous greatness. While he was lost in his missionary enthusiasm, I surreptitiously let the ashes fall onto the floor of the compartment. To be quite frank, it was a relief when my friend had concluded what I had then considered to be a puerile and unnecessary lecture. At the end of it I remarked, "I have an utter contempt for these so-called saints."

My friend refused to give up. He insisted on impressing on me that Sri Ramana Maharshi was not a 'so-called' saint, but an authentic sage acknowledged as such by great savants all over the world. He suggested that for my own benefit I read about him in some of the available literature. To start me off he gave me a book entitled *Sri Maharshi*, which had been written by Sri Kamath, the editor of *The Sunday Times* in Madras.

I must confess that despite my prejudices the book evoked in me an interest in Sri Bhagavan. After completing this small book, I was sufficiently curious to borrow another book about him from a different friend. It was the second edition of *Self-Realisation*, the earliest full-length biography of Sri Bhagavan. From then on, my interest grew without my being aware of it. A little later I felt compelled to write to Sri Ramanasramam to ask for all the literature on Sri Bhagavan that was available in English. As I began to study it with great avidity, I found that my outlook on life began to undergo a subtle transformation, but only a partial one. At the back of my mind there still lurked a heavy doubt, resembling a cloud, that stained the gathering illumination. My old scepticism did not wish to yield place so easily to this new faith, which was apparently being inculcated in my mind. My scepticism tried to challenge my new faith by arguing, "So many books are wonderful to read, but their authors, more often than not, are not as wonderful to know. It is possible for men to teach truths which they are unable to live themselves. What, then, is the use of books, however wonderful?"

To counter this doubt I decided to correspond directly with Sri Bhagavan. Over the next few months I wrote several letters to him, all of which were answered by his ashram with a rare punctuality. However, although they breathed the teachings of the Master, they hardly gave me a glimpse into the nature of the daily life lived by him. Because of this I began to be haunted by a desire to visit the ashram to see for myself what went on there. To fulfil that desire I paid my first visit to Sri Ramanasramam in the Christmas holiday of 1938.

At first I was terribly disappointed because nothing seemed to strike me in the way I had expected. I found Sri Bhagavan seated on a couch, as quiet and unmoving as a statue. His presence did not seem to emanate anything unusual, and I was very disappointed to discover that he displayed no interest in me at all. I had expected warmth and intimacy, but unfortunately I seemed to be in the presence of someone who lacked both.

From morning till evening I sat waiting to catch a glimpse of his grace, of his interest in me, a stranger who had come all the way from Bombay, but I evoked no response. Sri Bhagavan merely seemed cold and unaffected. After pinning such hopes on him, his apparent lack of interest nearly broke my heart. Eventually, I decided to leave the ashram, knowing full well that if I did, I would be more sceptical and hard-headed that before.

The *Veda Parayana* was chanted every evening in Sri Bhagavan's presence. It was considered to be one of

the most attractive items in the daily program of the ashram, but in my depressed state it fell flat on my ears. It was the evening of the day that I had decided to leave. The sun was setting like a sad farewell, spreading a darkness over both the hill and my heart. The gloom deepened until the neighbourhood disappeared into the blackness of the night. In my sensitive state the electric light which was switched on in the hall seemed like a living wound on the body of the darkness. My mind, which was deeply tormented, felt that the psychic atmosphere in the hall was stuffy and choking. Unable to bear it any longer, I walked outside to get a breath of fresh air. A young man called Gopalan came up to me and asked me where I had come from.

"Bombay," I replied.

He asked me if I had been introduced to the Master, and when I replied that I had not, he was most surprised. He immediately led me to the office, introduced me to the *Sarvadhikari* and then proceeded with me to the hall where he introduced me to Sri Bhagavan. When he heard my name Sri Bhagavan's eyes turned to me, looked straight into mine and twinkled like stars. With a smile beaming with grace he asked me if I were a Gujerati. I replied that I was. Immediately he sent for a copy of the Gujerati translation by Sri Kishorelal Mashruwala of *Upadesa Saram*, a few copies of which had only just arrived. He then asked me to chant the Gujerati verses from the book.

"But I am not a singer," I answered, hesitating to begin. But when it became clear that I was expected to perform, I got over my initial hesitation and began to chant verses from the book. I had sung about fifteen when the bell for the evening meal rang. All the time I was chanting I could feel Sri Bhagavan keenly observing me. It seemed that the light of his eyes was suffusing my consciousness, even without my being conscious of it. His silent gaze brought about a subtle but definite transformation in me. The darkness, which a few minutes before had seemed heavy and unbearable, gradually lightened and melted into a glow of well-being. My erstwhile sadness completely disappeared, leaving in my heart an inexplicable emotion of joy. My limbs appeared to have been washed in an ocean-tide of freedom.

That evening I sat close to Sri Bhagavan in the dining room. In my exalted state the food I ate seemed to have an unusual and unearthly taste. I quite literally felt that I was participating in some heavenly meal in the direct presence of God. After having such an experience I, of course, abandoned all thought of leaving the ashram that night. I stayed on for three days longer in order to widen the sacred and extraordinary experience which had already begun, an experience of divine grace which I felt would lead me in the direction of spiritual liberation.

During the three days of my stay in the proximity of the Divine Master, I found my whole outlook entirely changed. After that short period I could find little evidence of my old self, a self which had been tied down with all kinds of preconceptions and prejudices. I felt that I had lost the chains which bind the eyes of true vision. I became aware that the whole texture of my mind had undergone a change. The colours of the world seemed different, and even the ordinary daylight took on an ethereal aspect. I began to see the foolishness and the futility of turning my gaze only on the dark side of life.

In those few days Sri Bhagavan, the divine magician, opened up for me a strange new world of illumination, hope and joy. I felt that his presence on earth alone constituted sufficient proof that humanity, suffering and wounded because of its obstinate ignorance, could be uplifted and saved. For the first time I fully understood the significance of '*darshan*'.

While I lay in bed in the guest room of the ashram, the encounter which had taken place on the train in

Bombay replayed itself in my mind. I recalled the blind audacity which had prompted me to drop the thrice-holy *vibhuti* in contempt onto the floor of the railway carriage. Today, even one speck of such *vibhuti* is a treasure to me.

"O Master," I thought to myself, "what a miracle of transformation! Why did it take half a lifetime before I could meet you? Half a lifetime of blundering, of failing and falling. But I suppose, my Master, that you would say that time is a mental concept. For I feel that in your sight your *bhaktas* have, throughout all time, always been with you and near you. As these thoughts were passing through my mind, I slowly fell into a deep sleep. The next morning I arose in a rejuvenated state; there was a new vigour in my limbs and an awareness that my heart was permeated with light. On the third day of my visit I sadly took leave of Sri Bhagavan. I was still human enough, still caught in the sense of time and space, for the parting to leave me with a feeling of aching and emptiness in the heart. But there was no despair. Something assured me that I would be returning to the feet of the Master sooner than I could imagine.

My intuition turned out to be correct. In the following years repeated visits seemed to be miraculously and easily arranged by the Master. He seemed to know that I felt an occasional need to be close to him physically. In the years that followed, each succeeding visit deepened the light within, toned up my nerves and suffused my senses with an increasing experience of exhilaration.

In 1945 I decided to wind up my printing press in Bombay in order to go and settle at Sri Ramanasramam. I had no prearranged plan for closing down my business; I merely relied on Sri Bhagavan. And he in turn responded to my devout prayer.

In the early hours of the morning, while I was still in my bed and only half awake, I saw a vision in which Sri Bhagavan appeared before me. By his side stood a gentleman whom I recognised as a friend of mine. He had neither been to the ashram nor had he ever exhibited any faith in Sri Bhagavan or me:

Bhagavan: You want to sell your press, don't you?

Me: Yes, Bhagavan, but I must find a buyer.

Bhagavan: (showing my friend standing by his side) Here is the buyer. He will buy your press, so sell it to him.

Me: Since Sri Bhagavan has been kind enough to show me the buyer, may he also favour me by stating the amount at which I should execute the sale?

Sri Bhagavan then showed me five figures on the opposite wall which were shining like a neon sign. The amount indicated to me was quite reasonable, neither low or exorbitant.

Sri Bhagavan and my friend then disappeared from my sight and the vision ended. By itself the vision was astonishing enough, but there was more to come. When I entered my press that day at 11 a.m., my friend from the vision was waiting there for me. Of course, he had come to see me about some other work and had no idea that he had been singled out as a prospective buyer. Feeling that Sri Bhagavan had sent him to me, I told him about the vision that had come to me a few hours before. He listened to me very attentively. When I had finished my tale he simply commented, "I will buy your press at the price indicated by your Guru."

There was no limit to my joy. My desire to sell was fulfilled by his grace and the sale was completed in less than a minute.

- (To be continued)

Brother Juniper

This is one of a dozen stories from the *Little Flowers of St. Francis*, relating the extraordinary life of Francis' childlike disciple, Brother Juniper.

How the Devil Plotted to Have Brother Juniper Condemned to be Hanged

Therefore the devil, wishing to make Brother Juniper suffer by some worldly means, went to a very cruel tyrant named Nicholas, who was the lord of a castle and village and who was then at war with the city of Viterbo. And he said to him: "Sir, watch out for this castle of yours, because soon a great traitor will be sent here by the men of Viterbo to kill you and set fire to your castle. And I give you these clues that this is true: he goes round dressed like a poor man with tattered and patched clothes and a torn cowl hanging on his shoulders, and he is carrying an awl with which to kill you, and he has with him flint and steel to set fire to this castle. And if you do not find this to be true, punish me any way you wish."

Nicholas the tyrant was very much surprised and frightened by these words, because the man who said them seemed to be trustworthy. So he immediately ordered that the gates should be carefully watched and that if a man with those signs should come, he should be brought before him at once.

Meanwhile, Brother Juniper came to that village, and he was alone, for owing to his perfection he had been given permission by his minister to go about and stay without a companion as he pleased. And he met some rowdy boys who as a joke dared and tore his cowl. He did not mind, but rather encouraged and helped them to make even more fun of him.

While the guards were watching at the gate, Brother Juniper came up with his habit mostly cut off, for he had given parts of it to some poor man along the way. Also, with his cowl torn and not looking at all like a Friar Minor, he clearly showed the signs that had been given them. So they quickly rushed upon him, seized him, and led him before the tyrant. And when they carefully searched him for offensive weapons, they found in his sleeve an awl with which he used to mend his sandals, and also a flint which he carried to light a fire, because he used to have headaches and often lived in the woods and solitary places.

On seeing the signs in him which agreed with the devil's statement, Nicholas immediately ordered them to twist a cord around his head and tighten it with a bar. And they did so with such cruelty that the cord was almost buried in his flesh. Then they put him on the rack, and pulled and wrenched his arms and disjointed his whole body, without showing any mercy.

And when in that condition he was questioned as to who he was, he answered:

"I am a very great sinner." And when he was asked whether he wanted to betray the castle and give it over to the people of Viterbo, he replied: "I am a great traitor and do not deserve any good." And when asked whether he wanted to kill the tyrant Nicholas with that awl and to burn the castle, he answered: "I would do much greater and worse things if God would allow me to."

Then Nicholas overcome by his fury, did not wish to continue the questioning, but without further delay, angrily sentenced Brother Juniper to be tied to a horse's tail and dragged through the village to the gallows and there to be hanged by the throat at once. Now, at all this, Brother Juniper did not offer any excuses and he showed no sorrow, but rather, like someone who rejoices in tribulations for the love of God, he looked very

joyful and glad. And when the tyrant's order was being carried out, and Brother Juniper's feet were tied to the tail of a horse and he was dragged over the ground to be hanged, he did not complain or lament, but went along in all humility, like a gentle lamb being led to slaughter.

This sight and the sudden sentencing brought a great crowd of people on the run to see the prompt and cruel execution. And no one knew him. However, as God willed, a certain good man who had seen Brother Juniper being arrested and then sentenced, ran to the place of the Friars Minor of that village and called the guardian, saying: "For God's sake, please come quickly, because a poor man has been arrested and immediately sentenced and is being led to execution! Come, so that he can at least commit his soul into your hands - because he seems like a good man to me and he has not had time for confession. And they are taking him to be hanged - but he does not seem to care about death or the salvation of his soul. Please come quickly!"

The guardian, who was a zealous and compassionate man, immediately hastened to him, to persuade him to confess and to try to save his soul. But when he arrived, the crowd that had gathered to see this execution had grown so large that he could not make his way through it. So he stood there and waited. And while he was waiting, he heard a voice in the crowd shouting:

"Don't do that, you naughty fellows! That rope is hurting my leg!"

On hearing this, the guardian thought he recognised Brother Juniper's voice. He strenuously pushed his way through the crowd and succeeded in reaching him. And when he tore away the linen cloth which usually covered the face of the person to be executed, he realised at once that it was indeed Brother Juniper, and he was understandably amazed.

Then Brother Juniper, paying no attention to his sufferings and wounds, saw the guardian and said to him half smiling: "Oh guardian, how fat you are!" Grieving and weeping, the compassionate guardian wanted to take off his own habit and give it to Brother Juniper, but the latter said with a smile and cheerful expression: "No, guardian, you are fat, and you would not look good without your habit. I don't want it."

Then the guardian tearfully asked the executioners and all the people standing around to wait a while for pity's sake, until he went to beg the tyrant Nicholas to have mercy on Brother Juniper. The executioners and the people sympathised with him, thinking that he was related to the prisoner, and they agreed to wait for the tyrant's answer.

Then the devout and compassionate guardian went to the tyrant Nicholas and said to him, weeping bitterly: "Sir, I can't tell you how amazed and how sad I am, because I believe that today in this place a greater sin and a greater wrong has been committed than was ever done in the days of our ancestors. But I believe that it was done through ignorance."

Nicholas listened patiently to the guardian and asked him: "What is the great crime and evil that has been committed in this place today?"

The guardian answered: "That one of the holiest friars in the whole world living today in the Order of St. Francis (for whom you have a special devotion) has been sentenced by you to a very cruel punishment - I fully believe without justification."

Nicholas said: "Now tell me, guardian, who he is. For perhaps without knowing it I have done a great wrong."

The guardian said: "He whom you condemned to death is Brother Juniper, the companion of St. Francis!"

Nicholas the tyrant was utterly astounded, because he had already heard about Brother Juniper's fame and his holy life. Overcome with horror, he trembled and turned pale. Then he ran quickly with the guardian to Brother Juniper and untied him from the horse's tail and set him free. And before all the people he threw himself on the ground in front of Brother Juniper, and weeping bitterly he humbly admitted his guilt for the harm and offence which he had caused to be done to this holy friar, and he begged to be forgiven: "I truly believe that the end of my evil deeds and my life is approaching. For since I have treated this holy man so cruelly without his being guilty - although I did not know it - God will not tolerate me any longer and I will soon die a violent death."

Brother Juniper generously forgave Nicholas the tyrant and went away, rejoicing in the Lord because he had conquered himself and had been willing to be despised for the love of Christ. And he left all the people very edified.

To the glory of God. Amen.

From: Raphael Brown, The Little Flowers of St. Francis - (New York: Image Books, 1958)

Obituary

Srimati Ratna Ma Navartnam

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Srimati Ratna Ma Navaratnam, beloved wife of the late Mr. Kasipillai Navaratnam. She was a distinguished scholar on Saivaite Hindu philosophy and a former Regional Director of Education, Jaffna, Sri Lanka. She passed away peacefully early in the morning on Sunday, June 13,1993 at her niece's home in Oakville, Ontario, Canada.

Smt. Ratna Ma was the daughter of Sangarapillai and Katpagam Chelliah, a distinguished family known for its cultural background in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. She was born on November 6, 1910.

She had a brilliant academic record, first at the Presidency College, Madras, then at Annamalai University, Madras, and later at the University of London, England. She was the principal of Jaffna Ramanathan Girls' College from 1933 to 1943, the first Ceylonese to hold that position. She served with the Department of Education in various capacities until her retirement as the Jaffna Regional Director of Education in l969. Smt. Ratna Ma had travelled widely in India, the United Kingdom and Europe. She was a delegate to the Geneva Conference on International Understanding in 1951.

Smt. Ratna Ma was an active member in many educational and cultural organisations. She was a life member of the Royal Asiatic Society, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, and co-founded Sivathondan Nilayam with her husband, Mr. Kasipillai Navaratnam, after they had come under the spiritual influence of Yogar Swami in Jaffna.

Smt. Ratna Ma was a prolific writer and authored nearly twenty books on various aspects of Saivite philosophy, beginning with *A New Approach to Thiruvachagam*, which was published by Annamalai University in 1951. She wrote several books on the works of Yogar Swami and finished her last work, titled *Call of Maha Sakthi*: Mother Divine, only days before her death. This book was dedicated to her beloved husband who passed away last year. The book will be published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, India. Smt. Ratna Ma spent the last

few years of her life in Canada, actively promoting Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. On behalf of the Hindu Temple Society of Canada she gave popular discourses on Hindu traditions and practices on Vision TV.

Her husband, Kasipillai Navaratnam, made his first visit to the Maharshi in 1935. After that he continued to spend his annual leave at Sri Ramanasramam. After he was married his wife naturally joined him on his visits to the ashram and consequently became an ardent devotee of the Maharshi. Smt. Ratna Ma cherished her memories of Sri Ramana and held fast to his words, as she continually searched to discover "Who am I".

She is survived by her sister, Mrs. Alagaratnam Thevathasan (Oakville, Canada), and predeceased by her sisters, Mrs. Rasaratnam Veerasingam, Mrs. Thangaratnam Muthukumar, her brother, Mr. Chelliah Thurairasasingam, and husband. She will lovingly be remembered by her nieces, nephews and their children, and all those sincere seekers who were touched by her long life of service.

Quote

Devotee: What is the purpose of life?

Maharshi: To seek to know the significance of life is itself the result of good *karma* in past births. Those who do not seek such knowledge are simply wasting their lives.

Devotee: People give some names to God and say that the name is sacred and repetitions of the name bestows merit on the individual. Can it be true?

Maharshi: Why not? You bear a name to which you answer. But your body was not born with that name written on it, nor did it say to any one that it bore such and such a name. And yet a name is given to you and you answer to that name, because you have identified yourself with the name. Therefore the name signifies something and it is not a mere fiction. Similarly, God's name is effective. Repetition of the name is remembrance of what it signifies. Hence its merit.

- Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi

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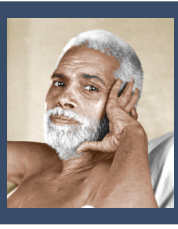

Returning to Ramanasramam

By

Dennis J. Hartel

It is 3:30 a.m. I switch off the lights and leave my room, sliding the door bolt and fixing the padlock as I go. It is quiet and dark. I walk east, passing the line of attached guest rooms for single men. I was told that the Maharshi rises at 3:30 a.m. and I am eager to begin my day by resting my eyes on his holy form.

Arriving at his residence, the Old Hall, I find the door is shut. I peek in through the barred window and see into the large room, which is dimly lit by the glow of a hanging *deepam*. The Maharshi is quietly reclining on the couch facing east, away from me. I join my palms in salutation.

The attendant Brahmachari Ratnam makes his appearance. He opens the door, switches on the light and stands before the Master with palms joined. Imploring the Maharshi's grace, he falls to the floor in full prostration.

I now enter the hall, offer my obeisance, and take my seat against the west wall. Bhagavan's eyes are fixed on me. A shower of peace drenches all the pores of my body; it soaks my mind. This is what is called the *sannidhi* of the Master, or the holy 'Presence' of the Master. The year is not 1943 - it is the month of July and the year is 1993, fifty years later. And the one whom I call the attendant, Brahmachari Ratnam, is by every means an attendant, servant and devotee of his Lord Ramana. That which is not present now in 1993, but was present then in 1943, is the physical body of the Master. That which the Master repeatedly declared not to be his true form, was the body. My imagining that the Maharshi is still residing in the Old Hall, as he did fifty years ago, is not much different than those who lived with him back then and imagined him to be the body. What is not imagination, now or then, is the reality of the spiritual force of his Divine Presence. That Presence shone forth through the body of the Maharshi and continues to shine forth today in his bodilessness. This is what attracts thousands to Ramanasramam every year, and this is what draws me here again and again.

Every morning Brahmachari Ratnam arrives at the ashram between 3:00 and 4:00 a.m. After passing through the ashram gate in the early morning, he will first prostrate before the closed doors of the Mother's temple, then before the closed doors of Bhagavan's shrine and, just before entering the Old Hall, he will reverently salute the holy mountain, Arunachala. His eyes look straight ahead, his steps are quick and movements controlled and exact. Wearing a white *dhoti* with a collarless, white, short-sleeved shirt, barefooted, with closely cropped hair this *bhakta* of Bhagavan quietly moves about the ashram unnoticed. He immediately reminded me of the Maharshi's attendant Madhava, who died in 1946 and is briefly seen in the ashram's archival film and other photographs. For Bhakta Ratnam, Bhagavan's disembodied state is immaterial. His every movement and look proclaims his unalloyed devotion to his Master.

Once inside the Old Hall he follows a consistent routine. With sincere devotion he cleans around Bhagavan's couch, sweeps the hall and then performs *arati* to the Maharshi's photo. Throughout it all he is seen to be supplicating the Master's grace. Though there was rarely anyone other than me witnessing this scene, it made no difference to Brahmachari Ratnam, for in his vision of the world only he and Bhagavan existed.

Never did I see him speak to anyone unless he was spoken to, and this I saw on only two occasions. Never did I see him idle for a moment. In the early mornings until breakfast he would remain in the Old Hall in prayer and meditation; in the afternoons and nights I would see him sitting in the Samadhi Hall. For many hours each day, in a consistent manner, I saw him sitting in prayer and meditation. If he moved about, it was only to attend the *pujas* in the Mother's shrine and to ring the bells at Bhagavan's shrine during worship. His whole life is directed to Bhagavan and his *sadhana*. He is a rare example of one-pointed dedication and devotion, an invaluable asset to the ashram, and an inspiration for all.

It once happened that for two successive days he was absent from the Old Hall in the mornings. Nor did I see him meditating in his regular spot during the day. In his place, an ashram worker would come in the morning, unlock the door of the Old Hall, casually turn on the light, ignite some incense and leave. Feeling his absence, I asked the ashram office manager where he had gone. He was surprised to hear from me that he was gone and mentioned that he is so quiet we hardly know when he is around. Inquiries led to the news that he left for his home to look after his sick Mother and was expected to be away for a week or two.

In the evening, an office assistant gave me the key and asked me if I would open the Old Hall in the mornings during Brahmachari Ratnam's absence. Officially, the hall would be open only at 5 a.m., but during all my visits to the ashram I noticed there were always some aspirants who desired to come to the Old Hall earlier, and it would invariably be open. The Old Hall is the one place in the ashram where most visitors and devotees prefer to sit and meditate. The Maharshi lived there for nearly twenty-five years and the atmosphere still breathes of his Presence. Balaram Reddy, an eighty-five-year-old devotee living in the ashram, described to me his experience in the Old Hall: "There was something tangibly distinct in Bhagavan's hall. When we walked into it and sat down we immediately felt like we had entered a different sphere of existence. It was like the world we knew did not exist there. Bhagavan's Presence, his other-worldliness, would so envelop the atmosphere. When we walked out of the hall we again would be confronted with the old world we knew too well."

On this visit I requested the ashram manager to provide me with a room inside the ashram. On most of my previous visits I had stayed across the street in the Morvi guest house compound. He kindly granted my desire and accommodated me with a quiet room on the north side of the ashram, just at the foot of the holy Arunachala Mountain. Here, there are a line of rooms connected in motel-fashion and used by single men. My room was at the end of a group of six rooms.

Looking out my door to the north, sixty-year-old *banyan* trees lay out their branches and drop their swaying vines. These trees border the new ten-foot wall running east and west along the northern border of the ashram. Only one step beyond the wall the hill begins its 2600 foot ascent. As my room was at the end of the line of rooms, I had the good fortune of having a side, or west window. Looking out this window I could see straight into the door of the cottage built by A. Devaraja Mudaliar in 1940. Residing in this cottage, which is one of the older buildings of the ashram, is the oldest devotee of the Maharshi - Ramaswami Pallai at the age of ninety-seven. Gazing out my window into that room I usually would see this old, sturdy, resolute devotee sitting quietly in an easy chair.

He first came to Tiruvannamalai and visited the Maharshi as a teenager in 1911. After this, he attended college in Madras and settled down permanently with Bhagavan in 1922.

At the advanced age of ninety-seven, he is free from both mental and physical troubles. He can still walk a little, speak fluent English, and will at least once a day - usually during the middle of the night - burst out with

recitations and songs composed by Bhagavan or in praise of him. His room is almost completely bare: not one book, no chest of clothes or paraphernalia. What he has gained by his seventy-year association with the Sage of Arunachala is secretly locked up in the interior of his heart chamber.

I would sometimes go and sit in his room. He would welcome me and readily speak of the efficacy of the practice of Self-enquiry. With short, direct and forceful sentences he would enliven my determination and fan the fire of devotion.

For about two weeks during my visit he was suffering from a bad cold. I would hear him coughing during the night and trying to sing with a gruff voice. Earlier, someone had given me a small quantity of ginger powder, mentioning that Bhagavan often prescribed it for colds. I passed this powder over to Ramaswami Pallai and asked him to use it in his tea or coffee. I told a friend of mine about Ramaswami Pallai's bad cold. This friend, who has known him for many years, went to his room and inquired about his health. In his old age, Ramaswami Pallai's hearing has faltered, so anyone speaking to him has to speak loud and clear. I heard the following 'loud and clear' conversation of my friend with Ramaswami Pallai:

Friend: How are you Swami?

R. P.: Oh, I am fine, by Sri Bhagavan's grace.

Friend: But your voice sounds like you have a cold or something.

R. P.: No. I am quite all right.

Friend: But Swami, someone told me you are having a bad cold and you are not well.

R. P.: Who told you that? I am quite fine! There is nothing wrong with me!

It must be this stubborn indifference to his body and physical wants that has resulted in his contentment, peace and long life. It was a stubborn determination that brought him here seventy years ago on the day of his marriage. His father had forced him into submitting to the marriage proposal, but he fled.

One day sitting beside him in his small room he turned and intently looked at me - mostly with his right eye, as the other is failing him - and asked, "Do you repeat it?"

Me: Repeat what?

R. P.: The Prayer. Do you constantly repeat it? You have to constantly repeat it.

Me: What prayer?

R.P.: Akshara Mana Malai, the 108 verses Bhagavan wrote on Arunachala. This itself is a powerful *mantra*.

He was not just talking theory to me that day. In earlier years I would hear him sing this Tamil hymn over and over again for hours. And this, to the displeasure of some visitors and residents, would often go on in the middle of the night. But others within hearing range would welcome this nightly outpouring of devotion, taking it as a reminder that night and day we have to keep up the remembrance of God and abide in Him. Ramaswami Pallai occupies a permanent place in the history of Ramanasramam and the Maharshi's disciples.

The *banyan* trees near my room were the favourite haunt of the resident monkey tribe of Ramanasramam. The sprawling trees with their numerous hanging vines were the playground for the younger monkeys and the tangled boughs heavy laden with fresh green leaves served them all as a shady retreat from the hot afternoon sun. In town I had bought fried split peas and puffed rice, which I reserved for the monkeys and peacocks. Both of these, being quite aware of this cache, would regularly appear at my door. Two peacocks would daily visit and produce a loud honk, announcing their presence. The monkeys, some with infants clinging to their stomachs, would whine or shake the screen door.

Every morning after breakfast I would stroll over and visit the *goshala* (the cow shed), which has expanded considerably over the last few years. Seventy head of cattle occupy a couple acres of land: the new calves in the *goshala* building, yearlings and heifers in two open, fenced-in pens attached to shelters, and mother cows occupying other stables, all spotlessly clean and efficiently maintained. I am sure Bhagavan would have taken great delight to see it. (But how can I say that he is not taking delight even now?) I soon became intimate with several of the mother cows and calves. They would eagerly move toward me - as much as their tethers allowed - when I came. It wasn't just the few small lumps of brown sugar I saved from my breakfast that they were after. Since we kept cows at the Nova Scotia ashram for ten years, I was quite familiar with all those special spots around their head and back which are most welcomed to be rubbed and scratched. I had watched Bhagavan stroking the cows in these very same places on the ashram archival films.

The ashram has, with government assistance, installed a large bio-gas plant. Daily, fresh manure is put into it and the gases produced are piped into the kitchen and dining hall, providing fuel for cooking and emergency lighting. The used manure that flows out of the tank is later applied to the numerous trees (now sixty varieties!), shrubs and flowers as fertiliser. Over the last seven years the ashram has been transformed into a virtual garden with flowering vines, trees, potted plants, grasses and shrubs everywhere you look. The ashram management, V. Subramanian in particular, has taken keen interest in developing the ashram grounds in an ecologically sound and aesthetic manner.

Silence

Maharshi: Language is only a medium for communicating one's thoughts to another. It is called in only after thoughts arise; other thoughts arise after the 'I-thought' rises; the 'I-thought' is the root of all conversation. When one remains without thinking one understands another by means of the universal language of silence.

Silence is ever speaking; it is a perennial flow of language; it is interrupted by speaking. These words obstruct that mute language. There is electricity flowing in the wire. With resistance to its passage, it glows as a lamp or revolves as a fan. In the wire it remains as electric energy. Similarly also, silence is the eternal flow of language, obstructed by words.

What one fails to know by conversation extending to several years can be known in a trice in Silence, or in front of Silence, as was the case with Dakshinamurti and his four disciples.

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Chhaganlal V. Yogi - Part II

In our last issue we read how Chhaganlal Yogi, the sceptic, became a believer, and how the Maharshi showed him in a dream to whom he should sell his business, and for what price. As the story continues, we now read how he is led into a different business: printing for Sri Ramanasramam.

My original plan had been to sell all my property in Bombay and move directly to Sri Ramanasramam. However, when the devotees heard what I was planning to do, it was suggested to me that I could be of more use to the ashram in Bangalore. I was asked to start a printing press there which could execute all of Sri Ramanasramam's printing work. I agreed to the idea and soon found myself in Bangalore, looking for suitable premises. I began to suspect that Sri Bhagavan had assisted the sale of my original press because he had work for me to do in Bangalore.

I was a stranger in the city but I soon located an old press which had been lying idle for the previous six months. It was for sale. I saw its proprietor and told him why I wished to buy his business. He agreed to sell it to me but we were unable to agree on a price. To break the deadlock I proposed that both of us should visit the ashram and suggested that we could talk about the deal after we had had Sri Bhagavan's *darshan*. I thought that since Sri Bhagavan wanted me to do this work in Bangalore, his *darshan* might help to lubricate the wheels of the transaction.

The owner agreed to the idea, so we set off together for Sri Ramanasramam. On arrival, I took him into the holy presence of Sri Bhagavan and informed him that I proposed to buy the press of the gentleman who was accompanying me, and that I planned to do all the ashram's printing work there. Sri Bhagavan did not say anything; he just nodded his head.

Within a few hours of having had Sri Bhagavan's *darshan*, there was a wonderful change in the attitude of the owner of the press. He approached me and agreed to sell his press for whatever price I was willing to pay for it. I stated a reasonable amount since I did not want to exploit him, and he happily accepted my offer. When he had agreed to come and see Sri Bhagavan with me he had made a stipulation that no business talks should take place at the ashram. However, after seeing Sri Bhagavan, he proposed that we settle our business immediately. We drafted and signed a sale agreement in the ashram itself and within a week of our visit the press came into my possession.

It was a fairly big press which enabled me to do all kinds of printing work in several languages. Because of the good facilities that were available there, I undertook to print ashram books in English, Tamil, Hindi, Gujerati and Kannada.

The press, which was given the name '*Aruna Press*' by Sri Bhagavan, had been idle for six months. It needed a lot of work to get it functioning again, but by Sri Bhagavan's grace I was soon able to take up the ashram work that had been given to me.

In 1946, the devotees of Sri Bhagavan decided to celebrate a golden jubilee to commemorate Sri Bhagavan's fifty years at Arunachala. He had arrived on September 1, 1896, and on that same date in 1946 the ashram proposed to mark the occasion by a number of special events, one of which was the publication of a book entitled *The Golden Jubilee Souvenir*. The printing of this souvenir was entrusted to my press. Up till then, the press had only printed small books for the ashram. Since this was going to be a big volume of several

hundred pages, I was initially reluctant to accept the work because I felt that I would not have enough time to complete it. However, once I overcame my diffidence and accepted the commission, help and co-operation began to pour in. Since some of it was wholly unexpected, I suspected that Sri Bhagavan's divine grace was again at work.

At first, my initial fears appeared to be justified. When only ten days remained before the publication date, I had still not managed to print more than a small part of the book. I temporarily lost my courage and rushed off to the ashram. I prostrated before Sri Bhagavan, told him about the lack of progress and informed him that unless the help of some other press is taken, the volume will not come out on the first of September.

I sat before him enjoying his *darshan* waiting for his reply. After a few moments of silence he said in a low melodious tone, "Do your work."

These three simple words had a magical effect on me. They fired me with fresh vim and vigour and there arose in my heart a strong belief that the volume would surely be out on the scheduled date. I had received my orders from my Master. I had simply to obey and "do my work". I had faith that all the other details would be looked after by him.

I returned to Bangalore and told the story of my experience at Sri Ramanasramam to my co-workers in the press. All of them accepted Sri Bhagavan's order in the same spirit as I had done. For the next few days all of us worked day and night with full faith, zeal and enthusiasm. The amount of work turned out in those last ten days was, in retrospect, quite astonishing. Then, when three days remained till our deadline, a party of about ten devotees came to my house on its way to the ashram. They were going there to attend the golden jubilee celebrations. Three of them turned out to be expert book-binders. I immediately enlisted their aid and managed to complete the work of the souvenir a day early.

Between 1945 and 1947 the Aruna Press printed all the publications of Sri Ramanasramam. The work was complex and I often found myself having to argue with the official at Sri Ramanasramam who had been put in charge of the publications. The tension between us increased to the point where both of us decided that we should go to Sri Bhagavan to get our differences resolved.

The rest interval between noon and 2:30 p.m. was chosen for our meeting because we wanted to be alone with him. We went to the hall at noon and waited outside for him to return from lunch. On his way back he saw both of us waiting for him. Sensing that we had some business to discuss, he took his seat on the big stone couch outside the hall. My friend immediately started to present his side of the dispute. However, it soon occurred to him that Sri Bhagavan was not comfortable sitting outside on this stone bench. He stopped in the middle of his plea, folded his hands in a respectful way, and requested Sri Bhagavan to go inside the hall. He said that the business should be conducted with Sri Bhagavan seated comfortably on his sofa.

Sri Bhagavan dismissed the appeal with a smile, saying, "What is wrong with the seat? Was there a soft bed and sofa when I was up there (pointing to the hill)? Up there the bare stones served as my bed as well as my seat."

It was clear that in our unseemly haste and our anxiety to plead our respective cases we had been responsible for causing this discomfort to him. Feeling very guilty about this, I felt very embarrassed when my friend's request was turned down. In an anguished voice I begged Sri Bhagavan to follow the advice.

"No, Bhagavan, no. That won't do," I said. "It is our earnest prayer that you should not sit here in the hot sun.

We will resume our talk only after you go into the hall and sit comfortably on the sofa."

This time he accepted the advice. He got up, went inside and, as requested, sat on his sofa. Both of us then placed our cases before him. He quietly listened to us and gave his verdict in the language of silence. Smiling with great charm he maintained complete silence, both during and after the presentation of the arguments. The judgement was the best possible one for both of us. Sri Bhagavan's silence had healed the breach. As we emerged from the hall both of us had a spontaneous impulse to embrace the other. In those few minutes our hearts had changed. We separated with the resolve to bury the past and to treat each other in the future with love and friendship. The silken tie with which Sri Bhagavan bound us on that day has never snapped again.

Sometimes in life there is a clash between two competing obligations, especially if both seem to be equally important. At such times it is rather difficult to arrive at the right decision. It has been my experience that at such times our gracious Master leads us to the proper decision. I will give an example from my own life.

At one time I felt that my political duty as a Gandhian demanded that I should court arrest, but my domestic duties bade me otherwise. As I was eager to go to jail as part of the independence struggle, it pained me that, out of regard for my family, I was not able to do so. I found myself in a dilemma and I could not of my own accord see the way out. The situation was so unbearable for me that I had to turn to the Master for help and relief. I therefore set out for Tiruvannamalai.

After reaching there I went and sat in the holy presence of the Master. While I was sitting there I began to wonder how I should place my difficulty before him because I did not feel like broaching the subject verbally. I finally decided to pour forth my prayer from my heart in silence in the form of a plea for Sri Bhagavan to extend his benign help to me. I began to pray and while I concentrated on my mental plea I watched his radiant face and his sparkling eyes, which were full of love and kindness. And then, astonishingly, something like a miracle began to happen. Sri Bhagavan's face transformed itself into that of Mahatma Gandhi, while his body remained the same. As I stared at it with awe and wonder, the two faces, those of Sri Bhagavan and Gandhiji, began to appear to me alternately in quick succession. I felt my heart filling with joy and yet at the same time I was wondering whether what I saw was real or not. I turned my eyes away from Sri Bhagavan and looked around me to see if others were seeing what I saw. Seeing no sign of wonder on their faces, I concluded that what I saw was a picture from my own imagination. I closed my eyes and sat quietly for some time. Then, as I began again to look at Sri Bhagavan's face, the vision immediately reappeared, but this time with a slight change. In addition to the two faces of Sri Bhagavan and Gandhiji, those of Krishna, Buddha, Kabir, Ramdas and a host of other saints began to show themselves in quick succession. Now all my doubts vanished and I began to enjoy this grand and divine show. The vision lasted about five minutes. My mind dropped all its worries and I found myself able to hand over my problem to the capable hands of the Master. Though he spoke no words to me, it came to pass that the problem was solved without infringing either of my two duties. In fact, both duties were fulfilled satisfactorily.

I had another vision of Sri Bhagavan in 1943. During my visit to Sri Ramanasramam that year, I visited the temple of Sri Arunachaleswara with my family and a friend who was a devotee from Madurai. This is the main temple in Tiruvannamalai, the same one which Sri Bhagavan stayed in when he first arrived here.

While we were walking through the spacious courtyards towards the sanctum sanctorum, I did not have any inkling of the wonderful experience I was to pass through when I finally saw the deity.

On reaching the innermost shrine we discovered that we were early, for the doors of the shrine had not been

opened. We decided to wait there till someone came to unlock them. I leaned back against a pillar and began to think about Bhagavan's early life. Suddenly my thoughts started to materialise physically as scenes from his early life began to appear before my eyes as vividly as if I were watching a cinema film.

I saw very clearly Venkataraman writing the imposition in his uncle's house in Madurai. Leaving it aside, he sits bolt upright, closes his eyes and becomes absorbed in the more congenial practice of Self-absorption. His elder brother Nagaswami is watching him and rebukes him for neglecting his lessons. Venkataraman then decides to leave the house. He takes three rupees from his brother's college fees and departs after leaving a short note. He reaches the railway station. He buys a ticket to Tindivanam, gets into the train and sits quietly in one corner. A *moulvi* who is discoursing to other passengers notices him and asks him where he is going . . . . Scene by scene, I was enjoying this wonderful divine vision when the doors of the shrine opened and my vision was interrupted by the loud blowing of pipes and beating of drums. The people who were waiting with us stood up to get the Lord's *darshan*. I too mechanically stood up with the others. After this short interruption, my vision continued. Though the idol of Sri Arunachaleswara was before my eyes, I could clearly see Venkataraman getting out of the train at the Tiruvannamalai station. He then ran towards the temple. As he was coming nearer and nearer, the noisy music rose to a higher and higher pitch. Venkataraman entered the temple, ran to the shrine and embraced the *lingam* with both his hands. My feelings were ecstatic. My whole body experienced a divine thrill and tears of joy rolled down my cheeks. This state of sublime joy lasted a long time and was both indescribable and unforgettable.

- (To be continued)

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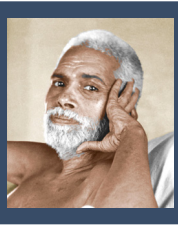

Living with the Master - Part III

By
Chhaganlal Yogi

For most of the day Sri Bhagavan used to sit on his sofa, which was adjacent to a window. Squirrels would occasionally come in through the window and run around near him. Sri Bhagavan would often respond to them by lovingly feeding them cashews or other foodstuffs with his own hand.

One day Sri Bhagavan was feeding the squirrels when a Muslim devotee, who had been watching him, gave him a note in which was written: "The squirrels are very fortunate because they are getting the food from your own hands. Your grace is so much on them. We feel jealous of the squirrels and feel that we also should have been born as squirrels. Then it would have been very good for us."

Sri Bhagavan couldn't help laughing when he read this note. He told the man, "How do you know that the grace is not there on you also?" And then, to illustrate his point, he started to tell a long story.

"One saint had the *siddhi* of correct predictive speech. This is, whatever he said came true. In whatever town he went to, the local people would come to him to have his *darshan* and to get his blessings. The saint, who was also full of compassion, removed the unhappiness of the people by blessing them. Because his words always came true, the blessings always bore fruit. That is why he was so popular.

"During his wanderings he came to a town where, as usual, a lot of people flocked to him to get his blessings. Among the blessing seekers there was a thief. He went to have *darshan* of the saint in the evening and asked for his blessings. When the saint blessed him, the thief was very happy. He felt certain that because of these blessings, when he went out to steal at night, he would be successful. But it turned out otherwise. Whenever he went to break into a house, somebody or other from that house would wake up and he would have to run away. He tried in three or four places but he could not succeed anywhere.

"Because of his failure, the thief got very angry with the saint. Early the next morning he went back to him and angrily said, 'You are an impostor! You are giving false blessings to the people.'

"The saint very peacefully asked the reason for his anger. In reply the thief narrated in detail how unsuccessful he had been during his attempts to steal the previous night. Having heard his story, the saint commented, 'In that case, the blessings have borne fruit.'

"How?" the thief asked with astonishment.

"Brother, first tell me, being a thief, is it a good or a bad job?"

"It is bad," the thief admitted, but then he defended himself by saying, "but what about the stomach that I have to feed?"

The saint continued with his explanation: "To be unsuccessful in bad work means that the blessings have indeed borne fruit. There are so many other ways of feeding the stomach. You should accept any one of them. To come to this conclusion it was necessary that you be unsuccessful in your thieving work."

"The thief understood and informed the saint that in future he would take up some other honest work. He prostrated before the saint and left."

Having narrated the above story, Sri Bhagavan asked the Muslim devotee, "Do you mean to say that if everything goes according to your desires, only then is it possible to say that the grace of a saint has worked?"

"I don't understand," replied the Muslim.

Sri Bhagavan explained in more detail: "The blessings of a saint perform the purificatory work of life. These blessings cannot increase impurity. One whose understanding is limited will ask for blessings so that he can fulfil certain desires, but if the desires are such that their fulfilment will make the seeker more impure rather than purer, the saint's blessings will not enable him to fulfil the desires. In this way the seeker is saved from further impurities. In that case, are not the saint's blessings a gift of compassion?" The Muslim finally understood and was satisfied by these words.

As Sri Bhagavan's fame began to spread, the number of visitors to the ashram increased. Many of them tried to offer him presents such as fancy sheets for his sofa, curtains for the doors and windows, embroidered carpets, etc. In order to satisfy the devotees who offered these things, Sri Bhagavan would usually allow his attendant to substitute for a short period of time the new offerings for the ones which were already in use. After a few hours they would be removed and sent away to the ashram storeroom, and the old, still-serviceable items would be brought back into use. Sri Bhagavan would briefly utilise these presents merely to strengthen the devotion of the donors. Left to himself, he would use cheap or old items, and never claim that they were his own. Devotees who tried to get him to use newer or better-made products could always count on resistance from Sri Bhagavan himself. I discovered this for myself when I tried to give him a new pen.

Sri Bhagavan generally used two fountain pens: one contained blue ink, the other, red. Both of these pens were quite old and looked, to me at least, worn out. One day the top cover of the red-ink pen cracked, so a devotee took it to town to have it repaired. It was gone for several days. During this period Sri Bhagavan reverted to an old-fashioned nib pen which had to be dipped in an ink pot of red ink. Since this seemed to cause him some inconvenience, I decided to get him a new pen. I wrote to a friend in Bombay and asked him to send one immediately. A few days later the pen arrived by post. I went straight to Sri Bhagavan and handed over the unopened parcel containing the pen.

Whenever a parcel or letter bore the name of the sender on the cover, Sri Bhagavan never failed to notice it. As soon as he received the packet from me, he turned it over and read the name of both the recipient and the sender. Having deduced that the parcel had been sent at my instigation, he took out the pen, carefully examined it, and put it back in the box. He then tried to hand the box to me.

Allowing it to remain in his hand, I explained, "It has been ordered from Bombay especially for Sri Bhagavan's use."

"By whom?" he asked.

"By me," I said, not without some embarrassment because I was beginning to feel that Sri Bhagavan did not approve of my action.

"What for?" demanded Sri Bhagavan.

"Sri Bhagavan's red-ink pen was out of order," I said, "and I saw that it was inconvenient to write with the nib pen."

"But what is wrong with this old pen?" he asked, taking out the old red-ink pen which had by then been

received back in good repair. "What is wrong with it?" he repeated. He opened it up and wrote a few words to demonstrate that it had been restored to full working order. "Who asked you to send for a new pen?" demanded Sri Bhagavan again. He was clearly annoyed that I had done this on his behalf.

"No one asked me," I said, with faltering courage. "I sent for it on my own authority."

Sri Bhagavan waved the old pen at me. "As you can see, the old pen has been repaired and writes very well. Where is the need for a new pen?"

Since I could not argue with him, I resorted to pleading and said, "I admit that it was my mistake, but now that it has come, why not use it anyway?" My plea was turned down and the new pen went the way of all its forerunners: It was sent to the office to be used there.

Sri Bhagavan gave us an example of how to live simply by refusing to accumulate unnecessary things around him. He also refused to let anyone do any fund-raising on behalf of the ashram. In this too he set an example. He taught us that if we maintain an inner silence and have faith in God's providence, everything we need will come to us automatically. He demonstrated the practicality of this approach by refusing to let anyone collect money for the construction of the temple over his mother's samadhi. Though large amounts of money were being spent on it every day, we had to rely on unsolicited donations to carry on the work. I knew this from direct experience because one day the ashram manager asked me to get permission from Sri Bhagavan to go to Ahmadabad to ask for a donation from a rich man I knew who lived there. Sri Bhagavan, as usual, flatly refused. No amount of persuasion could move him from his categorical "No."

"How is it," he complained, "that you people have no faith?" He pointed to the hill and told us, "This Arunachala gives us everything we want."

In his early years on the hill Sri Bhagavan and his devotees lived on begged food. He had no objection to this form of begging. Indeed, as a teenager he had walked the streets of Tiruvannamalai, begging for his own food. What he objected to, when devotees went out to beg for their food, was asking for specific items. Devotees could only eat what was freely given.

In the period that Sri Bhagavan lived in Virupaksha Cave, visiting devotees would often leave food for the people who lived there. The resident devotees would beg for additional food if the donated food was not enough. If the combined total was insufficient to make a good meal for everyone, Sri Bhagavan would mix all the food together, add hot water and make a kind of porridge which would then be shared equally among all those present.

Devotees who found this home-made gruel unappetising would sometimes request that at least some salt should be added to the mixture.

"But where are we to get the salt?" Sri Bhagavan would ask. "Who will give us salt unless we specifically ask for it? If once we relax our rule of non-begging in order to get salt, the palate that craves for salt today will next cry out for *sambar*, then for *rasam*, then for buttermilk and so on. Its cravings will thus grow endlessly. Because of this we should stick to our rule of non-begging."

It was certainly no joke to live with Sri Bhagavan in those early days. Sometimes the devotees had to do without salt, at other times without a substantial meal. There were even days when there was no food at all.

When Sri Bhagavan's mother came to stay with him she insisted on starting a kitchen. Utensils were needed for it, but how to get them without asking or making the need known? Some things were acquired easily. When the word spread that a kitchen had been started, many of the necessary items of equipment arrived

unasked from devotees who lived in town, but some useful utensils were not forthcoming.

Sri Bhagavan's mother solved the problem merely by bringing it to his attention. It was well known that if Sri Bhagavan suddenly became aware that some needed item was not available in the ashram, it would often appear, unasked, soon afterwards. This happened far too often for it to be a coincidence.

One day, for example, a ladle was required. Instead of asking for it from some devotee, his mother told Sri Bhagavan about it. He merely replied "We'll see," but he didn't ask anyone to bring one. How could he, who had taken to non-begging, ask even for a ladle? But within a couple of days a devotee, of his own accord, brought half a dozen ladles and placed them at his mother's feet. When other vessels or utensils were needed, she would inform Sri Bhagavan and he would give his usual reply: "We'll see." Within a short space of time the required item would arrive. So, without breaking or relaxing Sri Bhagavan's strict 'no specific begging' rule, the kitchen at Skandashram expanded and thrived.

This did not only happen with kitchen items. During his stay at Virupaksha Cave Sri Bhagavan often developed a severe cough. During one of these attacks he took a *bala harade* (a small *myrobalan* or cherry plum) as a remedy, chewing it and swallowing its juice. This treatment lasted for a considerable amount of time, as a result of which the entire ashram stock of *bala harade* was consumed. When there were none left, the cough returned with more violence and vigour. Palaniswami, Sri Bhagavan's attendant, asked for permission to buy more *bala harade* from the town. Of course, the permission was not granted.

A few minutes later Sri Bhagavan casually remarked, "*Harade* (big *myrobalan*) is a better remedy than *bala harade* for coughing." Shortly afterwards a devotee entered the cave with a small bundle in his hand. He had come to pay homage to Sri Bhagavan.

Holding the bundle before him he said, "As I was coming here from my village, I saw a man sitting on the roadside selling big *myrobalans*. It struck me that it was good for coughing, so I brought some for Sri Bhagavan's use."

He opened the bundle and placed it before Sri Bhagavan, who asked him with a smile on his face, "But why did you buy so much?" The devotee replied, "It was quite cheap and the seller wouldn't agree to sell me a small amount. I had to buy all of them. Let them be here. Since I don't want any myself, let them stay here.

The idea of buying and bringing *harade* to the ashram thus coincided with the utterance of Sri Bhagavan's words. Can this coincidence be attributed to anything else than his strict observance of the rule of non-begging?"

At times, also to cure his cough, Sri Bhagavan used to chew black raisins.

These also ran out while Sri Bhagavan was still having coughing attacks. Palaniswami again requested Sri Bhagavan to allow him to buy more from the town, but his request was summarily turned down with the remark, "Let's see. Where's the hurry?"

A few minutes later Sri Gambiram Seshayya entered with a packet in his hand. "What have you brought?" someone asked.

"Raisins," was the reply.

"Then you must have known about our talk here," said Sri Bhagavan with a laugh.

"No Bhagavan!" said Sri Gambiram, folding his hands in *namaskar*, "How could I know in advance what was being talked about here? It just occurred to me when I started out from my house that I should bring something to offer here. When I went to the market, only one shop was open. In that shop only a small

quantity of black raisins was available. There was nothing else there which could be useful here. So, I had to buy these black raisins. The thought of buying them never occurred to me before I entered the shop."

If there is a moral in these stories it is that all things flow towards the person who adheres strictly to the resolve of non-begging. Or, one could say that if one abides as the Self with the conviction that there is a Higher Power which arranges for all the necessary things to be supplied, then one need not go looking for them because they will arrive unasked.

- (To be continued)

Returning to Ramanasramam - Part II

by

Dennis J. Hartel

"She was one of the luminaries that revolved around the sun, which Sri Bhagavan is for the world," said K. Venkataraman, popularly known in Sri Ramanasramam as K. V. Mama. He was telling me about someone he knew intimately, so intimately that he had always called her mother, even though she wasn't his mother. She was his grandmother, and Echammal was her name.

Anyone who has ever read about the string of tragedies that befell Echammal before she came to the Maharshi can only remotely imagine her grief. Think of it: you are happily married and well placed at the age of twenty-four; blessed with two lovely children, one girl, one boy; your husband falls ill and within a short time dies; before you are able to recover your mental balance from this loss, your son falls ill and dies; and even while you are still in a state of shock, your dearly loved daughter, your sole remaining child, is also taken away in the same manner. If you have a family, think about it . . . . What would be your condition after such a series of tragedies within a lapse of less than one year?

Yes, that was Echammal's condition when she walked up to the Virupaksha Cave to meet the young sage, then called Brahmana Swami. She stood before him for one hour, and in that one hour her tormented heart and shocked mind were transformed. A wave of peace gently rolled into her heart and the dark cloud of anguish dispersed from her mind. K. V. Mama joyfully recalls this event as if it was his own birth. And, in a way, it was.

After this meeting with the Maharshi, Echammal settled down at Tiruvannamalai in 1907. Subsequently, her niece, who Echammal adopted, came to live with her. Chellamma was her name and, like Echammal, she looked upon the Maharshi as her Saviour and Lord. In K. V. Mama's words:

"Chellamma was a ripe soul, recognized by Echammal, and completely surrendered to Bhagavan." Chellamma was K. V. Mama's mother.

Added to the list of Echammal's tragedies was the death of Chellamma soon after she had given birth to her first child. The Mother's dying wish was that her boy should be raised by Echammal. That is why K. V. Mama doesn't remember calling anyone by the name of mother other than Echammal.

While I was in Ramanasramam I began re-reading about Echammal's life. She was perhaps the most prominent woman devotee of the Maharshi, serving him and his devotees for nearly forty years. I looked through all the ashram publications and found that there wasn't much printed about her. From the few anecdotes I read, it became clear that her real, or complete, story is yet untold, and there was no one more qualified to tell it than

K. V. Mama. Ten years ago K. V. Mama retired from government service, and since then he is regularly seen working in the ashram office, serving the needs of devotees and guests.

I had read that Echammal, after meeting Bhagavan, returned to her village, collected all her belongings, came back to Tiruvannamalai and rented a house in town. "Where was that house?" I asked K. V. Mama. Bubbling over with enthusiasm and love, he said, "It is at 42 Car Street, near the eastern gate of the Arunachala Temple. I will take you there." Then he went on to explain: "At the time she settled here, Bhagavan was coming down the hill to beg his food. She then got the idea that there was no need for Bhagavan to make this trip into town to beg his food, as she was prepared to take cooked food up to him every day. Thus began her daily food offering to Bhagavan that continued uninterruptedly until her death thirty-eight years later.

"Echammal used all her resources to serve Bhagavan and his devotees. When Bhagavan's mother came to spend her last years with her son on the hill, the devotees staying with Bhagavan didn't agree with the idea of having a woman living in the ashram, even if that woman was the Maharshi's mother. Bhagavan was then living in Virupaksha Cave.

"Echammal took Alagammal (Bhagavan's mother) to live with her in town. For one week Alagammal and Echammal walked up the hill every day to see Bhagavan. Although Alagammal would live seven more years, her health was not robust and the daily climb up to Virupaksha Cave was wearing her down. Seeing this, Echammal took up Alagammal's case before Bhagavan and his devotees. She told them that it wasn't right to make Mother suffer in this way, as she had left everything and had come to take refuge in her son;

"And yet you will not permit her to stay with him," she said.

"Bhagavan's disciples countered her arguments, saying that if they allowed the Mother to stay, next Echammal and other woman devotees would be demanding the right to stay also. 'Then what kind of ashram will this be?' they asked.

"Echammal then told them, 'Can I, or any other person on earth, be as blessed and fortunate as the Mother of Bhagavan? She cannot be looked upon as an ordinary woman. Right here, standing before Bhagavan, I make the pledge that I will never request to stay in the ashram, nor will I ever ask permission for any other woman to stay in the ashram.' Even after hearing all of this from Echammal, Bhagavan's disciples still refused to relent to her request.

"Throughout this whole discussion Bhagavan remained silent. His silence was interpreted by the men devotees to mean that he agreed with them and didn't support Echammal's view. But, after Bhagavan heard Echammal's appeal, he quietly rose and walked over to his mother, took her hand in his, and said, 'Let us go. We can find some other place to stay. They do not want us here.'

"Of course, all the men devotees immediately withdrew their objections and Mother was accepted into the ashram. Thus Echammal played an important role for securing the comfort of Bhagavan's constant company for Alagammal in the final years of her life."

K. V. Mama took me by auto rickshaw to the house where he lived with Echammal at 42 Car Street. He knows the present owners intimately, as they are the descendants of those who lived there when he was a boy. With evident glee he showed me the rooms throughout the large complex: "This is were Echammal slept . . . where she cooked for Bhagavan . . . the well she drew water from . . . ." In this manner he went on telling

many stories, remembering how Ganapati Muni, Seshadri Swami and others would come to this house to take food from Echammal. With joy and affection he narrated whatever he could remember. One could not mistake how at the centre of his life, his mother's life, and Echammal's life, Bhagavan was the guiding force and source of inspiration. Like the links of a chain, these three generations have been united and locked together in the love of their Lord, Ramana. Bhagavan seemed as much present now for K. V. Mama, as when he was a boy riding on the bullock cart taking food to Bhagavan with Echammal. Before leaving I took photos of the house wherever I could find adequate lighting.

I later asked K. V. Mama about the death of Echammal. He related some events not recorded in any of the ashram books. It seems that, though Echammal was not suffering from any illness, about two weeks before her death she travelled to Madras and asked one of her nephews if he would conduct the obligatory ceremonies upon her death. She even discussed the matter with Bhagavan at this time. Surely she must have felt a premonition. Bhagavan was told by several devotees how Echammal lapsed into unconsciousness two days prior to her death. In spite of this, when Bhagavan was question whether she was conscious at her death, he said, "Yes, she was. She remained as in *samadhi* and passed away. It is even said they did not know when exactly life expired." This was recorded in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*.

When I had heard so much about Echammal from K. V. Mama, I began wondering about her ashes, which I understood to be buried in her village. I asked K. V. Mama how far away was her village and if there was a monument at her grave site. K. V. Mama sadly confessed that the land where her ashes were buried was sold long ago by her brother. Also, he was uncertain about the fate of the ashes. Then I said, "Shouldn't her ashes be brought here and buried near her Master? Who will remember her in the village? She will always be remembered here. Can't we go dig up those ashes, bring them here, and place a small memorial over them?" K. V. Mama was immediately enthused by the idea. Already he had constructed a two storey cottage in the ashram in memory of Echammal. Returning her physical remains to the place where her whole life was centred, certainly would be the final consummation of her devotion and dedication.

Two days later I walked into the ashram office and saw K. V. Mama quietly sitting at his desk. When I looked closer at his face I saw a teeming excitement bristling just below the surface. I sat next to him and asked him if he had any news. He warmly took hold of my left hand and clapped my palm saying, "Kumar, my son, and his family are coming here from Bangalore tomorrow. He will do *pradakshina* and leave on Sunday. Before he leaves I want him to take us in his car to Valapakkam, Echammal's village."

On Sunday morning, September 31, 1993, at 6 a.m. I was in the ashram kitchen drinking coffee, while K. V. Mama packed *iddlies* into his tiffin carrier. J. Jayaraman, the ashram librarian, was also accompanying us on the trip. Kumar arrived and we joined him. We first drove around the holy hill and then joined the Vellore road, driving north. It was thirty miles to Valapakkam and it took us about one hour to reach there.

It had been twenty years since K. V. Mama had visited Echammal's village, and his son, Kumar, last saw the place when he was eight. Echammal's nephew, who now resides in the ancestral home, is 90 years old. He and all the household were surprised and happy to see K. V. Mama and his son. The old man of the house was still quite alert and could speak both Tamil and English. He, in fact, is K. V. Mama's uncle, being the brother of his mother, Chellamma. He remembered Echammal very well. His daughter brought out an ochre-coloured sari that belonged to Echammal which they were preserving. I asked for a piece of the cloth to keep as a relic in memory of her. They gladly ripped a strip from its hem and handed it over to me. We inquired about Echammal's ashes. K. V. Mama's uncle said he also was interested in digging them up a few years back. The land where they had been buried was sold in 1956. In 1957 his father went on a pilgrimage to north India, and

only recently he was told that when his father visited Varanasi he scattered the ashes of his cherished daughter (Echammal) over the holy waters of the Ganga. That meant the ashes were gone.

Nevertheless, we decided to take a ten minute walk through the fields and farmlands to the site where her ashes were once buried. Standing there and looking south at the horizon, a slim outline of a solitary, symmetrical hill can be seen. It is Arunachala, the holy hill that drew this grieving mother, Echammal, to His divine son, Ramana. And as long as the son, or "the sun, which Sri Bhagavan is for the world" is remembered, Echammal will be remembered.

Jayanti Celebration in New York

Sri Ramana Maharshi's 114th *jayanti* was celebrated on January 1, 1994 by the devotees of Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center in New York City, USA. More than fifty devotees attended.

The celebration began with *Ganesha puja*, performed by the children, though led and elucidated by Smt. Geeta Bhatt. By way of welcome, Evelyn Saphier read Sri Bhagavan's poem "All you who would a birthday celebrate ..." and Sadhu Arunachala's rejoinder. All were then treated to a reading of the story of Sri Bhagavan's birth.

The program continued with many enthusiastic *bhajans* offered by those in attendance. Mr. Babubhai Parekh gave his prayerful recitation and commentary of verses by Ganapati Muni, and also some selected stanzas of *Siva Tandava Stotra*. Raju Parekh led *Namamisamisam*. Radha and Savitri Ramaswamy led a few *bhajans* as did several other ladies. Everyone sang *Aksharamanamalai*, *Upadesha Saram,* and *Sri Arunachala Pancharatna*, which was followed by a period of silence.

Also, several readings were offered: Arunachala Bhakta Bhagavata read the story of the incarnation of Sri Ram from Sri Ramacharitamanas. Arthur Coucouvitis read several of his favourite verses on Sri Bhagavan. The program finished with everyone performing *arati*.

Then meals and *prasad* were served, while all shared the warmth of each others' company. On this holy day the ennobling presence of Sri Bhagavan saturated all the devotees who had gathered together.

Dennis Hartel

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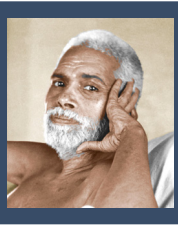

Living with the Master - Part IV

By

Chhaganlal Yogi

ONCE when Sri Bhagavan was very debilitated, the doctors recommended that he take some nourishing food. But he would not listen to them or the devotees who appealed to him to follow the advice. Some of them were earnestly begging him to eat thickly-buttered bread, others were trying to make him drink milk and orange juice. But to all of them he had only one answer to give. With his usual genial smile he would say, "But how can we afford to have such a luxurious diet? For us there can only be the poor man's rations."

"But what is the harm in changing one's diet for the sake of one's health?" ventured one devotee in a plaintive tone. "Even Mahatma Gandhi takes a special diet and Sri Aurobindo too does the same, to keep up their health. Please, therefore, take a tumblerful of orange juice, at least for our sake."

"But do you know the cost of a tumbler of orange juice?" asked Sri Bhagavan.

"Oh, only four annas," rejoined the devotee, with hope gleaming in his eyes.

"No, It won't be four annas. We will require about 200 tumblers of juice. Do you want me alone to gulp down the drink with all of you watching, empty-handed? Moreover, how can poor people like us provide for 200 tumblers of juice, costing fifty rupees daily?"

This answer checked the devotee's pleas for a while, but he would not give up so easily. He still had a lingering hope that if once Sri Bhagavan started to take the nourishing diet, he would continue to do so for at least enough days for his health to improve a little. So, the next day, he quietly prepared hot *rotis* well smeared with *ghee*, and filled two tumblers, one with milk and the other with orange juice. Then, with the assistance of a few other devotees, he took all these things to Sri Bhagavan on a tray.

"What's all this?" he inquired as he saw them walking towards him. The devotees placed the tray before him, uncovered it and begged him to accept the offering. He refused point-blank even to touch the food, asking instead that the devotees should consume it. Repeated appeals to him from other devotees were also of no avail.

Then, in the heat of the moment, a woman devotee who was present at the time burst out, "O Bhagavan! Just as you are kind enough to agree to sit on your sofa - instead of on the floor like everyone else - for our sake, why not also favour us by taking this special diet?" Though the woman spoke these words in good faith, the outcome was quite the reverse of what was expected.

Hardly had she finished when, to her and the other devotees' dismay, Sri Bhagavan got down from his sofa and squatted on the floor. The woman was horrified by the consequences of her suggestion. She called out with anguish in her heart and tears in her eyes, "Bhagavan! No! Please don't! What a stupid woman I am!" Then she got hysterical and started screaming.

All the others stood around, aghast at what had happened. The remedy had turned out to be worse than the disease. The *rotis*, the milk, the juice were abandoned as everybody racked their brains to find a way out of this impasse and re-seat Sri Bhagavan on the sofa.

It was certain that no appeal or argument would move Sri Bhagavan to change his decision. Eventually a devotee who had been associated with Sri Bhagavan for over thirty-five years resolved to take a desperate step. Without any fuss, he simply started lifting Sri Bhagavan bodily. Seeing this, one or two other devotees joined him and together they succeeded in placing Sri Bhagavan's body back on the sofa. Sri Bhagavan did not resist, nor subsequently did he try to come down from the sofa. But the devotees had been so upset by the incident that even after seeing Sri Bhagavan sitting quietly on the sofa again, they began to beseech him not to get down again.

Sri Bhagavan accepted the new situation graciously. Thus, a loving attempt by devotees to make Sri Bhagavan agree to take a special diet came to a fruitless end.

"From anger proceeds delusion; from delusion confused memory; from confused memory the destruction of reason; from destruction of reason one perishes."

So says Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita, Ch. 2, v. 63*. Anger is often the root cause of man's decay because it makes him devoid of humanity.

Sri Bhagavan conquered his own anger by abiding as the Self. Since this is a seemingly impossible short-term goal for most people, I will offer an alternative method which Sri Bhagavan himself once suggested. A young man once came to Sri Ramanasramam and entered the hall. After prostrating to Sri Bhagavan he told him what he had come for: "Bhagavan, my senses are turbulent and fickle. Whatever I try to do, I cannot keep them under control. Please bestow your grace on me and show me the way to control them."

"Fickleness is due to the mind," replied Sri Bhagavan. "Once the mind is controlled, the senses will automatically be controlled."

"True, Bhagavan," said the young man, agreeing to the principle, "but I get excited even at trifles. The more I try to control my anger, the tighter becomes its grip on me."

"Is that so? But why on earth should you be angry at all? And if you want to be angry, why not get angry with your own anger." Explaining further, Sri Bhagavan said, "Whenever a fit of anger comes to you, direct it against your own self instead of wasting it on others. Be angry with your own anger. If you do this, your anger against other people will subside. This is the way to conquer it." Sri Bhagavan concluded by laughing, suggesting thereby that he was not being entirely serious.

Most of the devotees sitting in the hall joined him in his laughter, thinking that he had uttered the words as a joke. Only a few of those present seriously pondered over these valuable words and grasped the wisdom of this novel but useful way of controlling anger. We can remove a thorn in the foot by the means of another thorn. Then, when the first thorn is out, we can throw them both away. In the same way, Sri Bhagavan advises us to remove our anger against others by using it on ourselves. Then, afterwards, we can dispense with both angers.

Though he would usually get annoyed if devotees tried to give him special treatment, or if he saw people needlessly inflicting suffering on others, Sri Bhagavan could never be provoked to anger by any amount of criticism or personal abuse. Two separate incidents illustrate this very well.

Once when Sri Bhagavan was sitting in his cave on Arunachala, a *sadhu* who was jealous of his increasing fame urinated on his back as a deliberate act of provocation. Sri Bhagavan remained as unperturbed and Self-absorbed as ever. Not a tinge of anger rose in him. The *sadhu* was baffled by his calm response. Realising that nothing could irritate Sri Bhagavan, the poor *sadhu* quietly went away.

On another occasion, many years later, a young man visited Sri Ramanasramam with an evil purpose. After entering the hall and taking his seat in the front row, he began to put all kinds of aggressive questions to Sri Bhagavan. We found out later that he wanted to extort hush-money from the ashram by trying to expose Sri Bhagavan as a hypocrite and a fraud. He had already successfully tried his trick elsewhere, and by repeated practice he had cultivated this art into a paying profession. Having gained successes in other ashrams, he had come to Sri Ramanasramam to try his tricks there.

Sri Bhagavan's own method of meeting insolence, malice, jealousy and misbehaviour in general was the observance of complete silence. This powerful weapon baffled and disarmed all aggressive and insolent visitors.

When the youth tried to draw Sri Bhagavan into a controversial discussion so he could catch him when he made a potentially embarrassing answer, Sri Bhagavan remained completely silent. The poor man could make no headway at all. He tried insults, he tried belching out foul language, but Sri Bhagavan did not utter a single word. He did not accept any of the insults or respond to them in any way. He merely remained calm, unperturbed and smiling. The young man, after exhausting all his insults, saw the impossibility of achieving his object. He had to admit defeat and quit the ashram.

What we call miracles would sometimes occur in Sri Bhagavan's presence. Faith in Sri Bhagavan has produced many a miraculous cure, but he would never accept responsibility for any miracle. For him, all these things went on automatically and were part of the natural activity of the Self. I can illustrate this very well by retelling a story which was told to me by an old devotee who had known Sri Bhagavan from his earliest days on the hill.

In 1908 Sri Bhagavan was staying in Pachaiamman Temple on the north-eastern side of the mountain. There were many tamarind trees nearby. The municipality gave the highest bidder the contract to collect tamarind from these trees every year. That particular year a Muslim had got the contract. Since these trees gave an unusually rich yield, the contractor himself used to protect them from the monkeys, driving them away by shooting stones at them from a catapult. Because he only wanted to scare them away, he took care to see that they were not injured. However, by some ill chance, a stone from his catapult hit a monkey on its head so hard, it died on the spot. Immediately, a large number of monkeys surrounded the corpse and began to wail and lament the death of their relative. Then, by way of complaint, they took the dead body to Sri Bhagavan in the Pachaiamman Temple.

These monkeys considered Sri Bhagavan as a friend and arbiter. He frequently settled their internal disputes and even acted as an honest broker when rival tribes were having territorial disputes. He could communicate with them quite easily and he did his best to establish peace and harmony among the warring tribes and their fractious members. So, at this time of anger and grief, it was quite natural for the monkeys to bring both the corpse and their complaints to Sri Bhagavan.

As soon as they came near him they burst into angry cries and tears. Sri Bhagavan, whose heart registered and mirrored the emotions of those around him, responded to their anguish with tears of his own. Gradually, though, his emanations of sympathetic love soothed and calmed the turmoil within the monkeys' hearts.

Then, by way of consolation, Sri Bhagavan told them, "Death is inevitable for everyone who is born. He at whose hands this monkey died will also meet with death one day. There is no need to grieve."

Sri Bhagavan's words and his loving kindness pacified the monkeys. They went away, carrying the corpse with them.

Two or three days later the Muslim contractor became bedridden with some serious malady. The story of the *upadesa* given by Sri Bhagavan to the aggrieved monkeys spread from mouth to mouth till it reached the home of the Muslim contractor. The members of his family became convinced that his sudden illness was due to the saint's curse. They therefore went to Pachaiamman Temple and began to plead for Sri Bhagavan's pardon for the ailing contractor.

"It is certain that your curse has affected him," they began. "Please save him from death. Give us some *vibhuti* (sacred ash). If we apply it to his body, he will surely recover."

With a benign smile, Sri Bhagavan replied, "You are mistaken. I never curse or bless anyone. I sent away the monkeys that came here by telling them the simple truth that death inevitably occurs to all those who are born. Moreover, I never give *vibhuti* to anyone. So please go home and nurse the patient whom you have left all alone."

The Muslims did not believe his explanation. They announced that they were not going away unless they received some *vibhuti* to cure their relative with. So, just to get rid of them, Sri Bhagavan gave them a pinch of wood ash from the outside of his cooking fire. On receiving it, their faces beamed with joy. They expressed their hearty gratitude to the sage and returned home.

The family and the contractor had great faith in this *vibhuti*. Soon after it was applied to the ailing man, he began to recover. Within a few days he rose from his bed, fully recovered.

- (To be continued)

One Has To Renounce Worldly Links, Hasn't One?

Tapas Swami - Bhagavan's devotee, Sri Toppayya Mudaliar, was so named by Sri Ma Anandamayee Ma when he was introduced to her - is now very old and is confined to his house at Naduvakkalappal village. He is a staunch devotee having come to Bhagavan in the thirties. Bhagavan expressed approval when he was chosen to supervise the *Kumbhabhishekam* ceremonies of Mother's Shrine in 1949. After repeated requests, he sent these reminiscences of the Master.

In 1930, one afternoon, when I entered the Hall I found Bhagavan all alone. Those were the days when I was disgusted with life, as I had to face too many family problems. In addition, I was entrusted with the supervision of a temple renovation which was a very tedious job. I was depressed and miserable, and had a longing to renounce the world and lead the life of a recluse. Summoning my courage, I approached Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, to pursue spiritual *sadhana* one has to renounce worldly links, hasn't one?" His answer was a motionless silence!

After some time I broached the subject again and said, "I am not yet blessed with a reply by Bhagavan!" Bhagavan looked stern and said, "What do you mean by 'giving up' (something) and 'taking up' (something) else? Where to go, what to take? Everywhere, everything is only the 'I'. Who is to give up what and who is to go where?"

He uttered these words with such sternness that I took it as a reprimand and went out and started crying. After fifteen minutes, when I had calmed down, I became aware of the surroundings and wondered whether Bhagavan would have watched my crying. I was unnerved to see that Bhagavan was looking at me without any change in his stern face. When I went into his presence again, Bhagavan turned to Muruganar and said, "Look at him! He wants to give up everything and run away. From where have we come to think of going elsewhere? What is, always exists. Where to go, and who goes?" But then, suddenly, Bhagavan's face changed into one of love and compassion. He looked at me with tender affection and asked me in a sweet voice, "Who are you? Tell me."

Again, I gathered courage and said: "I know, Bhagavan, that I am the Self alone." Then, full of grace, He uttered the following words: "That is all that is to be understood. This intellectual conviction now is *athida jnana* (infirm knowledge). In due course, you will be established in *thida jnana* (firm abidance). That is the Final Truth - to be what you ARE!" I was fortunate indeed to get these words of assurance from the Master. What more do I want?

- From the Mountain Path, January, 1985

A Dream, A Visit, And Faith

Wednesday, March 10, 1993, Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, New York City.

This morning I woke after the following dream. I was driving the ashram station-wagon on a country road. Seated to my side in the front seat were my mother and father. In the rear seat were friends from Arunachala Ashrama, one of which was Bhagawat, the ashram founder. I seemed to have been driving to a particular destination somewhere out in the country of New York State. Where this destination was, I am not clear, for we didn't discuss it in the car, nor did I question anyone about directions. I must have understood where we were going and the route to take. We departed on this trip from my hometown, Tonawanda, New York.

After a long drive we reached a complex of buildings that looked like some kind of an institution. I parked the car and asked everyone in the car to follow me into a building. We went inside and I, leading the group, walked down a long corridor, or hallway, that had rooms on both sides. I came to a door at the end of the hallway, walked outside, and then entered into another adjacent building. Soon after entering the hallway of this other building, I entered through a door of a room that was to my left. Upon entering the room I was surprised to see that it was very large, like a gymnasium. Everyone followed me into the room. We stood near the entrance inside the room and I said that there was no need for us to walk through this room, and then asked everyone to turn around and walk out.

After passing out through the door of this large room I glanced at the hallway that stretched out to my left. There, nearby, reclining on his couch, was Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. With his right hand supporting his head he was reclining on his right side in a relaxed and peaceful pose. People were walking by him without giving him much more attention than a side-glance. Then I saw one man go up and stare into the Maharshi's face. I also did likewise. I could see that although Bhagavan's eyes were open, he was lost to all outer sense. The man standing near me looked at him queerly, trying to figure him out. He somehow deduced there was something holy about him and joined his palms together, bowed his head slightly, and then walked away.

As I was watching all of this, I was saying within me, "What is Bhagavan doing here? This is not Ramanasramam. No one even knows him here." I was perplexed and wanted to question him, but I could not because he was

so absorbed within. Standing there, looking at him and wondering about his presence in this unfamiliar place, I woke up. It was 4:10 a.m.

About 7 a.m. on this same morning, Bhagawat and I left for a day-trip to Scranton, Pennsylvania. There, being treated in the Allied Services Rehabilitation Hospital, was our old friend and Bhagavan's devotee, Roy Colonna. He was just transferred to this new facility for treatment a few days earlier.

Two months ago Roy had met with a serious car accident which left him paralysed from the neck down. He was presently struggling through "unbearable pain" to regain at least some movement in his arms and legs. His success till now had been very slow, but hopeful.

After arriving and entering into the main lobby of the hospital we inquired and found Elizabeth (Roy's wife) with Roy in the occupational therapy room. When Roy saw Bhagawat, tears filled his eyes and he was unable to talk to express his feelings. Elizabeth asked the therapist to continue the treatment while she took us through the halls of the facility to her room, a place where accommodation is provided for relatives of the patients. Her intent was to serve us the rice, vegetables, *dhal*, yogurt, mango and tea she had affectionately prepared for us in the spacious kitchen attached to the guest rooms.

While we were slowly eating and Elizabeth was serving us in her usual wholehearted and devoted manner, and, as she was also engaging Bhagawat in conversation, the vivid memory of my early morning dream came to my mind. Like one dozing in a classroom and suddenly awakened by the teacher calling his name, I suddenly woke up to the fact that the very buildings I walked through in my early morning dream were those of this rehabilitation centre. The large gymnasium-like room was the same occupational therapy room where we first saw Roy when we arrived. And the hallway in which Bhagavan was reclining on his couch was the same hallway just outside this therapy room. I saw Bhagavan reclining and facing the room where Roy receives his therapy.

I sat there eating in a reflective mood, visualising the dream and comparing it with the details of this building. Everything was exactly the same. I realised that Bhagavan must have given me this dream to strengthen our faith in him and also to relate it to our dear friend Roy who was now passing through the greatest crisis of his life. If this dream and the waking experience did not agree so precisely, I probably would not have mentioned it to anyone. But I believe that by such dreams, and other experiences, Bhagavan lets us know that he is always there guiding us to his supreme abode in the Heart.

Returning to see Roy after our meal, I stood near his bed and slowly related the dream to him. Roy listened quietly. I saw tears welling up and falling from his eyes. Bhagawat also listened and, after hearing all the details of the dream, he turned to Roy and said with enthusiasm, "You see Roy, Bhagavan was here even before we arrived!"

- by Dennis Hartel

A Retreat in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia

This time of year people begin planning their summer vacations to resorts, home-towns, or some other interesting destinations. We would like you to be aware of the facilities offered by this ashram and to think of it as a destination that will serve to strengthen your inner life and fulfil your noble aspirations. We would also like you to think of us as friends and family members who, like you, are aspiring for inner strength and peace in our daily lives.

In Nova Scotia, Canada, Arunachala Ashrama has been maintaining a retreat in the scenic Annapolis Valley since 1972. It is open year around and offers to guests a sanctuary of peace, dedicated to the ideals lived and taught by Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Below is an excerpt from a standard letter we often send to those inquiring about the Nova Scotia Ashrama. Please accept it as your personal invitation.

Dear Friend,

In Nova Scotia, Canada we maintain retreat facilities for those earnest seekers who wish to deepen their spiritual experience and stabilise themselves in the practice of Self-awareness and surrender. The retreat is open to all, regardless of religious beliefs or creeds adhered to - even to those of no particular faith who sincerely seek peace. The only requirement is a sincere desire for peace and truth.

In the quiet, idyllic Nova Scotian countryside, a daily schedule of prayer, recitation and silence is conducted in the Temple. A period is also set apart for light work (if desired), meals and quiet time alone for individual study or walks. A minimum visit of one or two weeks is recommended to absorb the full effect of the Ashrama environment.

Arunachala Ashrama is a non-profit organization serving the needs of sincere seekers. Facilities are provided to guests without any formal rate of charge. We do accept donations from those who value our work and ideals.

For more information, please write or call:

The *Maharshi* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil K. Sharma. Produced and distributed by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, 66-12 Clyde Street, Rego Park, New York 11374, USA. Tel: (718) 575 3215. E-mail: ashrama@aol.com. All editions of this newsletter can be found on the internet at - "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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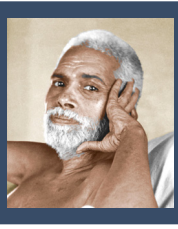

Living with the Master - Part V

By

Chhaganlal Yogi

This is the fifth and final chapter of Chhaganlal V. Yogi's remarkable reminiscences of Sri Ramana Maharshi. They were originally written and published in Gujerati. We express our appreciation to David Godman who skilfully edited the English translation.

Jagadisha Sastri

Jagadisha Sastri was a distinguished Sanskrit scholar whose association with Sri Bhagavan went back to the days when the latter lived in Virupaksha Cave. He told me the following two stories - neither of which has been recorded before - when I met him years later in Bombay.

In the early years of this Century, Jagadisha Sastri went to see Sri Bhagavan in Virupaksha Cave to listen to him giving a spiritual talk. Everyone was so engrossed in listening that no one was aware of the passage of time. As the talk did not end till well after midnight, Jagadisha decided to sleep in front of the cave instead of returning to town. This was considered a brave act because in those days there were still wild animals on the hill.

Around 2 a.m. Sri Bhagavan began to feel concerned about his safety. He went out of the cave and put a pinch of snuff up the nose of Jagadisha Sastri, who was snoring in deep sleep. Jagadisha woke up startled and began to sneeze uncontrollably. Sri Bhagavan laughed heartily and Jagadisha said the mountain reverberated with the noise of his laugh.

Once he had managed to stop laughing, Sri Bhagavan affectionately told Jagadisha, "You were sleeping so soundly. Don't you know that this is not a house but a hill? It is the home of wild animals and here their kingdom prevails. Suppose some tiger were to come here? What would happen to you? Go and sleep inside the cave."

Jagadisha told me that he was so sleepy at the time that he stumbled inside the cave and immediately fell asleep again. On hearing this story it did not surprise me that Sri Bhagavan had shown such concern towards one of his devotees. However, though I knew that he had laughed and joked and enjoyed playing games with devotees' children, I was astonished to hear that his humour had erupted in such a mischievous and childlike way in the middle of the night.

Many years later, when Jagadisha Sastri and I were walking down a street together in Bombay, it occurred to me that I had never seen him wear any kind of footwear. The black tar roads of the city got very hot in the summer and I found it hard to believe that anyone could walk comfortably without wearing sandals or shoes.

I turned to him and asked, "Sastriji, your feet must have got burned a lot walking on these roads, isn't that so?"

"No, no," he answered, "I have already got *ravi raksha* (protection from the sun) from Bhagavan. I may walk in any amount of heat but nothing ever happens to me."

I naturally asked, "How did you get this *ravi raksha*?"

By way of an answer, Sastriji told me a long story. "One day, right in the middle of the afternoon, Bhagavan took his *kamandalu*, got up and told me, 'Jagadisha, come with me to walk about on the mountain.'

"But it's so hot," I protested. "How can we move about in such weather?" I argued like this because I wanted to escape from the trip. Bhagavan found my excuse unsatisfactory. "You can move about in just the same way that I move about," he said.

"But my feet will burn!" I exclaimed. I didn't have any footwear with me and I didn't relish the idea of walking about over the burning rocks.

"Will my feet not burn as well?" replied Bhagavan, obviously feeling that this was not a serious obstacle. Bhagavan never wore any kind of footwear. He could walk on the toughest terrain in any weather without feeling the least discomfort.

"But yours is a different case," I answered, alluding to the fact that Bhagavan never needed footwear.

"Why? Am I not a man with two feet, just like you?" asked Bhagavan. "Why are you unnecessarily scared? Come on! Get up!"

Having realised that it was useless to argue any more, I got up and started walking with Bhagavan. The exposed stones had become so hot because of the severe heat of the sun that walking on them made my feet burn. For some time I bore the suffering, but when it became unbearable I cried out, "Bhagavan, my feet are burning so much! I cannot walk one more step. Even standing here is difficult. On all sides it is raining fire!"

Bhagavan was not impressed. "Why are you so scared?" he asked.

"If I remain in this terrible heat for any more time," I replied, "my head will crack open because of the heat and I will definitely die!" I was not joking. I really was afraid of dying.

Bhagavan smiled and said in a very quiet and deep voice, "Jagadisha, give up your fear and listen. You must have the *bhavana* (mental conviction and attitude) that you are the sun. Start doing *japa* of the *mantra suryosmi* (I am the sun) with the conviction that it is really true. You will soon see the effect of it. You yourself will become *surya swarupa*, that is, you will have the characteristics of the sun. Can the sun feel the heat of the sun?"

I followed this instruction of Bhagavan and started doing *japa* of this *sun mantra* because there was no other way to be saved from the burning heat. In a short time I began to feel the effect of the *japa*. The severity of the heat lessened and eventually I began to experience, instead of the severe heat, a pleasing coolness. As the burning sensation diminished I found that I was able to walk quickly alongside Bhagavan. By the time we had both reached Skandashram I found that my feet were not at all burnt as I had continued the *mantra japa* right up till the end of the walk.

Later, I was astonished to discover that the effect of chanting this *mantra* was permanent. Though I no longer chant it, I have never again suffered from the heat of the sun. I can now walk in the summer on the tar roads of a city like Bombay with bare feet."

One day an old lady came into the hall at Sri Ramanasramam. After prostrating to Sri Bhagavan she placed a slip of paper in his hands. I guessed that it contained a prayer or doubt of some kind because it was the custom of many devotees to offer their prayers or place their doubts before Sri Bhagavan in this manner. However, in this particular case, it turned out to be quite a different matter.

This old woman lived in town in a dilapidated temple and she needed money to repair it. With this purpose in mind she had got someone to prepare a draft of an appeal for funds. In order to collect the required amount more easily, she had hit upon the idea of having the appeal signed by eminent persons of the town. She had come to the ashram because she wanted Sri Bhagavan's signature at the top of the appeal. This was the piece of paper which she had presented to him. Sri Bhagavan read it and then returned it to her without uttering a single word.

"My work will be done if you will only put your signature on this appeal," the old lady said, urging him to sign.

Sri Bhagavan replied by saying, "It is well known that I never sign anything." She would not accept his refusal. Repeatedly she pressed him to sign, but she could not make him change his decision.

Finally Sri Bhagavan told her, "Yes, yes, you want me to sign your appeal, but how can one sign who has no name? What name will one sign?"

The old woman was puzzled. What did Sri Bhagavan mean by saying that he had no name? Was not his name Sri Ramana Maharshi? Since everyone knew him by that name, why could he not write these three words on her paper? Because she could not understand the significance of Sri Bhagavan's reply, she persisted in pleading with him to sign. Sri Bhagavan remained unmoved and kept silent. After some time the old woman gave up her attempts and left the hall, without, of course, having obtained Sri Bhagavan's signature.

Sri Bhagavan's language was that of silence. The speech delivered through this medium was full of miraculous potency, as the following anecdote reveals.

When he was staying in Virupaksha Cave, a District Collector and a Deputy Collector came there for his *darshan*. After prostrating to Sri Bhagavan, the District Collector began to speak, narrating at length all the *sadhanas* he had done and all the spiritual literature he had read. At the end of his speech he confessed that in spite of all these activities peace was as far from him now as it had ever been.

As soon as he had finished, the Deputy Collector began to tell his own story, which was equally long. These two speeches took quite a long time to deliver, but Sri Bhagavan did not interrupt them even once. He continued to remain in silence even after the speeches had ended.

The senior Collector gave up waiting for a reply and delivered yet another long speech. Sri Bhagavan listened in silence and continued to remain in silence when the speech was over.

The officer, not surprisingly, was a little put out by Sri Bhagavan's unresponsiveness. He said in an aggrieved tone of voice, "We have been speaking to you for a long time, but you don't open your mouth at all. Please tell us something. Anything, however brief, will do."

Sri Bhagavan finally spoke to them saying, "All this time I have been speaking in my own language. What can I do if you won't listen to it?"

The Collector was an intelligent man, well versed in spiritual matters. He caught the meaning of Sri Bhagavan's cryptic reply. Suddenly overpowered with devotion, he fell down at the feet of Sri Bhagavan and chanted a Sanskrit verse from Sankaracharya's *Sri Dakshinamurty Stotra*:

"Look at the wonder under the banyan tree! While the disciples are old and grey-haired, the teacher is a blooming youth. And though the Master's speech is simple silence, the doubts of the disciples are all resolved!"

Both of the visitors then abandoned their speeches and questions, preferring instead to sit before Sri Bhagavan in silent meditation. They got the peace they had come looking for and departed fully satisfied.

The greatness of silence as a medium of instruction can be further illustrated by another dialogue on this subject which took place between Sri Bhagavan and a devotee. Though it took place on a different occasion, it can serve as a commentary on the encounter between Sri Bhagavan and the two officials.

Q: What is the fruit obtained by *mouna* (silence)?

B: Anta mouna is self-surrender only. That means living without the ego sense.

Q: What is the meaning of *mouna*?

B: The state which is beyond speech and thought is called *mouna*. This is *dhyana* (meditation) without mental activity. *Dhyana* means controlling the mind; deep *dhyana* means permanent speech.

Silence is eternal speech; that is, the perpetual flow of language. By speaking, this flow is broken because the words create an obstacle to that silent language.

People may listen to discourses for hours, and may feel happy doing so, but still not improve. But silence, the eternal speech, enhances the welfare of all humanity. *Mouna* only means 'proficiency in speech'. Oral discourses do not have the 'proficiency of silence'. Silence is the eternal, unobstructed flow of speech. That is the supreme language.

A Long Life with the Maharshi

by Sri K. Natesan

I was born into a very orthodox Brahmin family on November 26, 1913 in the village of Mondakurathur, near Polur, North Arcot District. That was also the birthplace of the Maharshi's renowned devotee, Echammal, who was related to me on my mother's side of the family. My father, Brahmasri Krishna Ganapati, was a great *Vedic* scholar who taught *Krishna Yajur Veda* for thirty years in the local *Vedapatasala*.

I had my first *darshan* of Bhagavan Maharshi at Skandashram in 1921 when I was eight years old. Sri Vasudeva Sastry, one of the earliest devotees of Bhagavan, took me to see him. Vasudeva Sastry was at that time teaching me Sanskrit in the *Patasala* of the Arunachaleshwara Temple.

Later in 1923, when Bhagavan came down to the present ashram, I used to visit the ashram often and sit in front of the Maharshi. At that time I was studying in the Municipal High School where Sri T. K. Sundaresa

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Iyer was a teacher. After completing high school in 1930, I waited two years before joining an engineering college in Madras. During those two intervening years I was at the ashram almost daily, along with T. K. S. I used to spend time there even at odd hours of the day or night.

In 1936, after earning a diploma in civil engineering in Madras, I worked for six months under Sri K. K. Nambiar. K. K. Nambiar, already a staunch devotee of Bhagavan, had at that time the good fortune of being posted as the District Board Engineer right in Tiruvannamalai itself. By Bhagavan's grace, I was almost constantly at the ashram between 1935 and 1945, though I was employed off and on in various places. I often quit jobs to come to Sri Ramanasramam and be near Sri Maharshi. My attachment to Bhagavan was such that I could not remain employed continuously until, by Bhagavan's grace, Sri K. K. Nambiar, who was then the Chief Engineer of the Madras Corporation in 1945, got me employed by that Corporation. That ended the rolling-stone phase of my life, as I retained this job until my retirement in January of 1969. Throughout all these years I would never miss an opportunity to come to Bhagavan's ashram.

After Ganapati Muni became the recipient of the Maharshi's grace, all his doubts were dispelled at one stroke by the vision of Central Reality. The Muni surrendered to the Maharshi on Monday, November 18, 1907. This event has been described in detail by various writers. What is not very well known is that on the afternoon of that November day in 1907 at the Virupaksha Cave, Nayana wrote five verses in Sanskrit lauding the Maharshi, proclaiming him as Ramana. He gave the paper containing the verses to the Malayalee attendant Palaniswami. It is our bad luck that these verses were lost due to the negligence of the attendant.

In the beginning, the Maharshi used to address Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni as Ganapati Sastrigam, which the Muni did not like because it was a respectful form used to address elders. The Maharshi was his chosen guru and he felt uncomfortable being addressed by the sage in this manner. Understanding the Muni's objection, the Maharshi compromised and thereafter called him 'Nayana', the same name by which his disciples endearingly addressed him. In Telugu, the word 'Nayana' means both child and father.

In 1908, from January to March, Nayana lived with the Maharshi at the Pachai Amman Temple. One early morning Nayana and other disciples were all sitting in front of the Maharshi who was, as usual, indrawn. The Muni saw a sparkling light come down from the sky and touch the forehead of the Maharshi six times. The Maharshi also was aware of what was happening. Immediately the Muni had the intuitive realization that the Maharshi was none other than an incarnation of Lord Skanda. The seer-poet, Nayana, gave expression to this revelation through his famous eight verses, *Ramana Asthakam*, beginning with "*Yanayatra*. . . ." This was later included in the *Forty Verses in Praise of Ramana* that were compiled by Bhagavan himself after Nayana's passing in 1936.

When Nayana had known Bhagavan for some years he questioned him one evening as to whether he was correct in recognising him as Skanda and extolling him in the *Ramana Gita* as Lord Subramanya. Though the Maharshi heard the question he remained silent. Nayana then mentally prayed to Bhagavan to answer his question at least by the next day. Consequently, when Nayana went to him the following day, the Maharshi looked at him and said, "Ishwara Swami (a devotee of the Maharshi) wrote a verse in praise of this Vinayaka (Ganesha) image sitting in a niche in the Virupaksha Cave. At his request I also wrote a *venba* verse on that Pillayar (Ganesha)." Then Bhagavan explained the meaning of that *venba* to Nayana. In the verse, Bhagavan entreats Lord Ganesha to look after him, because he is a younger brother who has come after him. Nayana was much gratified to hear this as he felt it was a confirmation that the Maharshi was an *avatar* of Skanda.

On April 16, 1922, when the Maharshi was still living in Skandashram, Nayana composed the following verse in praise of Bhagavan:

"May the ascetic wearing only a white loincloth, who once used to ride on the celestial peacock and has now come down as a man on earth, reign over the world as its unique Master!"

This shows that Nayana had foreseen as early as 1922 that the Maharshi would shine forth as the world teacher of the age. Many of Nayana's declarations were prophetic.

In 1923, on January 3, when the first *Jayanti* of Bhagavan was celebrated in Ramanasramam, Nayana composed this verse:

"There is the light of Uma in your eyes for dispelling your devotees' dark ignorance. Your face gleams lotus-like with the grace and brilliance of Lakshmi. Your words contain the secret lore of Saraswati. Preceptor of the worlds! Ramana the great! How can a mortal sing your glory?"

Again, in this verse, Nayana hailed Bhagavan as vishvacharya, world teacher. Once Bhagavan was engaging himself in collecting the Sanskrit verses written by devotees in praise of him. I happened to be present there at the time and mentioned to Bhagavan that Ganapati Muni had composed the following verse:

vande sri ramanarser-acaryasya padabjam,
yo me'darsayad-isam bhantam dhvantam atitya.

Then Bhagavan asked me where I got the verse and where and when it was written by Nayana.

In 1936, after Nayana's death, Bhagavan collected all the verses Nayana wrote on him and entitled it *Forty Verses in Praise of Sri Ramana*. This was published by the ashram in the same year. Bhagavan had no knowledge of the above verse. I explained to him that Kapali Sastry and S. Doraiswamy Iyer requested Nayana to translate into Sanskrit verse Sri Aurobindo's English poem titled *Mother*. After hearing the gist of the poem, Nayana started the translation on May 18, 1928, under the heading (*Matrvyuhacatuskam*). However, it was never completed. In this translation Nayana wrote the above verse as an invocation to Bhagavan.

Bhagavan requested to see the manuscript with the verse. The next day the notebook containing the verse in Nayana's own handwriting was shown to him. He copied it and said that it should be added as the invocation to the next edition of *Forty Verses in Praise of Sri Ramana*. In all the subsequent editions the verse can be seen.

Between 1935 and 1945, though employed off and on in various places, I often quit jobs and left for holy places without informing anyone. Eventually I would end up back at Ramanasramam. Once on my return Bhagavan asked me which places I visited. I replied that I had been to Tiruttani, Tirupati, and Padaiveedu (Renukamba Kshetram). Then the Maharshi pointedly asked me what was in my mind at that time. Straight away I gave a spontaneous answer in the form of the following verse from *Ramana Gita*:

"Lord, not on Swamimalai, nor on Tiruttani Hill, nor on top of Venkatachal (Tirupati) do you now dwell. In reality you are in Arunachala!"

The Maharshi smiled.

On the occasion of my wedding on July 5, 1942, T. N. Venkataraman, now the President of Sri Ramanasramam, came straight to Vellore from Karaikudi to attend the ceremony. The train passed through and stopped at the Tiruvannamalai station, but T. N. V., along with his eight-year-old son, stayed on the train and came straight to my marriage. When T. N. V.'s father, Chinnaswami, heard about it he began to scold his son and criticised him for going to Vellore to attend the wedding. Bhagavan overheard this from the Old Hall and said, "Why is he shouting? Ambi (T. N. V.) has gone to attend his friend's marriage. There is nothing wrong in this."

After I got married I came to the ashram with my new wife and did *pranams* to Bhagavan in the Old Hall. My wife, Jnanambal, was already deeply devoted to Bhagavan and had had his *darshan* even as a girl of eight.

That day, after leaving the Old Hall, my wife and I went and visited Major Chadwick in his cottage. I had known Chadwick since his arrival in the ashram in 1935. He congratulated us on our marriage and remarked about the appropriateness of the bride's name, saying, "*Jnana* you wanted and *Jnana* you have gained."

Major Chadwick was one of the very few souls who moved closely with Bhagavan. One day he called me and requested me to show Sri Bhagavan a piece of paper in which he had given a definition for Self-realization. Sri Bhagavan read it and appreciated it very much. Chadwick wrote:

"Self-realization: It is the death while yet alive of that which lives after death."

In the earlier days some people used to sleep in the Old Hall. Once I slept there near the southern door at the west side of the hall. I did not get up even after 5 a.m. Bhagavan came near me and touched me with his right toe saying, "Get up. Day has already broken." I immediately got up and had the *darshan* of Bhagavan. This is called *Visva-rupadarshanam*, the first *darshan* of the chosen deity in the morning.

There was *Veda Parayana* every evening at the hall in the presence of Bhagavan. He would be mostly indrawn at that time. Following the *Veda Parayana*, from 7 to 7:30 p.m., recitations of the Maharshi's works in Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit, and Malayalam would take place. Devotees like Ramaswamy Pillai, Kunjuswami, T. K. Sudaresa Iyer and some others used to take part in it. In the earlier days I was also participating. During Tamil *Parayanam* I noticed Bhagavan appeared quite unconcerned with things around him, though he remained fully attentive to the recitation. He wouldn't hesitate to correct our pronunciation of the verses, as he was particular to obey all the rules of prosody. Once I recited incorrectly the last verse in *Arunachala Pancharatnam* and Bhagavan pointed it out to me, demonstrating how it should be pronounced. He was satisfied only when I repeated it to him correctly.

Once when I was in Madras, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer's father was writing a letter to the ashram. In it he was including a certain Sanskrit verse. Because he was not familiar with the Sanskrit alphabet he asked me to write it for him. I did so, and when the letter reached the ashram and Bhagavan saw the verse he looked up and told the devotees in the hall, "Oh, now K. Natesan has gone to Madras."

Bhagavan was so keen and alert that he could recognise even my Sanskrit handwriting. I felt blessed to be remembered by him, even though I was away from the ashram.

Another time I was sitting before Bhagavan and Vaidyanathan Stapati was showing Bhagavan the sculpture he was making of him. The Stapati asked Bhagavan for his opinion as to whether it was a good likeness of him. Bhagavan said, "I can't say. Only Natesan knows."

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Vaidyanathan Stapati looked at me and Bhagavan said, "Not that Natesan, the barber Natesan." He considered the barber to be the best authority on artistic representations of his body.
After retirement from service I have come back to the ashram to serve the devotees. The ashram President, Sri T. N. Venkataraman, being a close friend of mine since 1934, found me very useful to the new devotees since I could function as both a receptionist and an instructor. The president had entrusted me with the accounts of the *Mountain Path* magazine, etc. I served in the office until 1987. I ceased to work in the office due to glaucoma and cataract. Again, by the grace of Sri Bhagavan, I was completely cured of my eye trouble and normal sight has been restored. Since I am getting aged, the ashram president was kind enough to accommodate me as an old resident devotee in the ashram.

I realise that I do not have the power to relate in writing what the Maharshi is, or what he has done by living in our midst, or what he will be to future generations. Let all those who aspire for liberation and eternal happiness turn to him for guidance and grace, and then, I am sure, his unique mission to mankind will be known in the hearts of the seekers.

To try to introduce Sri Ramana Maharshi to the world at large is just like trying to introduce the sun to the solar system. Sri Maharshi is Self-effulgent like the sun. The Masters who appeared on earth before the advent of Sri Maharshi have shown several paths to get a vision of God or gods. But the Maharshi, by his unique, direct method of Self-Inquiry 'Who am I?', has shown that realization of the Self alone is God-realization. And it is he that shines forth as the Self. Today the whole world has come to realize the greatness of the Maharshi on account of his direct path to realize the Self.

At one time the world was attracted like a magnet by the *atmic* force of Gautama Buddha, and at another time the world was drawn by the pure, selfless life of Jesus Christ. At present the life and teachings of the Maharshi have spread widely to all the corners of the world as the Supreme Light of *Advaita Brahman*. It is my belief that the Maharshi has now become the Universal Master.

The *Maharshi* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil K. Sharma. Produced and distributed by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, 66-12 Clyde Street, Rego Park, New York 11374, USA. Tel: (718) 575 3215. E-mail: ashrama@aol.com. All editions of this newsletter can be found on the internet at - "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

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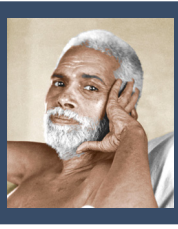

Here Lies The Heart

It is not uncommon to hear from those who had the good fortune of visiting the Maharshi, that their visit, however brief it may have been, was the most outstanding event in their lives. This may not have been true with everyone, but it was certainly true for a good percentage of earnest seekers who came to him for spiritual guidance and grace.

Mercedes de Acosta, a Spanish born American, made only a three-day visit to Sri Ramanasramam in November of 1938. She was at the time a Hollywood socialite and script writer for films, who was passing through both middle age and a series of disappointments in her career, life and marriage.

Near the end of her eventful life she wrote an autobiography, which was published in the United States by Reynal & Company, Inc. in 1960, and was titled *Here Lies the Heart*. In 1962, twenty-four years after she met the Maharshi, she sent the book to Sri Ramanasramam, inscribing it as an offering to Bhagavan. On the first page of the book, the formal printed dedication reads:

To
Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi
The Only Completely
Egoless, World-Detached, and Pure Being
I Have Ever Known

Continuing, she writes about a fascinating life, hobnobbing with the elite of Hollywood, famous artists, writers and celebrities of her day. The intimate accounts of her friendship with Greta Garbo and a few other famous actresses probably provided the publisher with the incentive to take on her book.

But what may seem curious to most readers - though logical to others who are alert to look beyond the superficialities of life - is that after intimately knowing many celebrated personalities of her day, travelling the world and experiencing what most people can only dream about, it was the Maharshi and her three day visit to him that remains in her memories as the most valuable experience in her life.

At one of the regular social dinners she attended in Hollywood, she met Paul Brunton. He presented her with his book, *A Search in Secret India*, which made a profound impression on her. Taking excerpts from *Here Lies the Heart*, we will let Mercedes de Acosta tell us what happened next.

A SEARCH IN SECRET INDIA had a profound influence on me. In it I learned for the first time about Ramana Maharshi, a great Indian saint and sage. It was as though some emanation of this saint was projected out of the book to me. For days and nights after reading about him I could not think of anything else. I became, as it were, possessed by him. I could not even talk of anything else. Nothing could distract me from the idea that I must go and meet this saint. From this time on, although I ceased to speak too much about it, the whole direction of my life turned toward India and away from Hollywood. I felt that I would surely go there, although there was nothing at this time to indicate that I would. Nevertheless, I felt I would meet the Maharshi and that this meeting would be the greatest experience of my life.

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I had very little money, far too little to risk going to India, but something pushed me towards it. I went to the steamship company and booked myself one of the cheapest cabins on an Indian ship, the S. S. Victoria, sailing from Genoa to Bombay toward the beginning of October. In the meantime I flew to Dublin to see my sister.

I had booked passage to Ceylon intending from there to cross over to southern India and go directly to Tiruvannamalai, where Ramana Maharshi lived. But when the ship called at Bombay, Norina Matchabelli came on board to see me with a message from Meher Baba saying that Consuelo [a lady travelling companion who was a follower of Meher Baba] and I must get off the ship and come to see him in Ahmednagar, about two hours from Bombay. I did not want to do this as my real purpose in India was to see the Maharshi, and I was impatient to get to him.

[The author had met Meher Baba in California and for some time evinced considerable respect for him. However, her faith in him waned prior to coming to India, and once there, it all but evaporated. At Meher Baba's request - one of the few she consented to - she first made a tour of India, delaying her visit to the Maharshi.]

In Madras I hired a car, and so anxious was I to arrive in Tiruvannamalai that I did not go to bed and travelled by night, arriving about seven o'clock in the morning after driving almost eleven hours. I was very tired as I got out of the car in a small square in front of the temple [Arunachaleswara Temple]. The driver explained he could take me no farther. I turned toward the hill of Arunachala and hurried in the hot sun along the dust-covered road to the abode about two miles from town where the Sage dwelt. As I ran those two miles, deeply within myself I knew that I was running toward the greatest experience of my life.

When, dazed and filled with emotion, I first entered the hall, I did not quite know what to do. Coming from strong sunlight into the somewhat darkened hall, it was, at first, difficult to see; nevertheless, I perceived Bhagavan at once, sitting in the Buddha posture on his couch in the corner. At the same moment I felt overcome by some strong power in the hall, as if an invisible wind was pushing violently against me. For a moment I felt dizzy. Then I recovered myself. To my great surprise I suddenly heard an American voice calling out to me, "Hello, come in." It was the voice of an American named Guy Hague, who originally came from Long Beach, California. He told me later that he had been honourably discharged from the American Navy in the Philippines and had then worked his way to India, taking up the study of *yoga* when he reached Bombay. Then he heard about Sri Ramana Maharshi and, feeling greatly drawn to him, decided to go to Tiruvannamalai. When I met him he had already been with the Maharshi for a year, sitting uninterruptedly day and night in the hall with the sage.

He rose from where he was sitting against the wall and came toward me, taking my hand and leading me back to a place beside him against the wall. He did not at first speak to me, allowing me to pull myself together. I was able to look around the hall, but my gaze was drawn to Bhagavan, who was sitting absolutely straight in the Buddha posture looking directly in front of him. His eyes did not blink or in any way move. Because they seemed so full of light I had the impression they were grey. I learned later that they were brown, although there have been various opinions as to the colour of his eyes. His body was naked except for a loincloth. I discovered soon after, that this and his staff were absolutely his only possessions. His body seemed firm and as if tanned by the sun, although I found that the only exercise he ever took was a twenty-minute walk every afternoon at five o'clock when he walked on the hill and sometimes greeted *yogis* who came to prostrate themselves at his feet.

He was a strict vegetarian, but he only ate what was placed before him and he never expressed a desire for any kind of food. As he sat there he seemed like a statue, and yet something extraordinary emanated from him. I

had a feeling that on some invisible level I was receiving spiritual shocks from him, although his gaze was not directed toward me. He did not seem to be looking at anything, and yet I felt he could see and was conscious of the whole world.

"Bhagavan is in *samadhi*," Guy Hague said.

I looked around. Squatting on the floor or sitting in the Buddha posture or lying prostrate face down, a number of Indians prayed - some of them reciting their *mantras* out loud. Several small monkeys came into the hall and approached Bhagavan. They climbed onto his couch and broke the stillness with their gay chatter. He loved animals and any kind was respected and welcomed by him in the ashram. They were treated as equals of humans and always addressed by their names. Sick animals were brought to Bhagavan and kept by him on his couch or on the floor beside him until they were well. Many animals had died in his arms. When I was there he had a much-loved cow who wandered in and out of the hall, and often lay down beside him and licked his hand. He loved to tell stories about the goodness of animals. It was remarkable that none of the animals ever fought or attacked each other.

After I had been sitting several hours in the hall listening to the *mantras* of the Indians and the incessant droning of flies, and lost in a sort of inner world, Guy Hague suggested that I go and sit near the Maharshi. He said, "You can never tell when Bhagavan will come out of *samadhi*. When he does, I am sure he will be pleased to see you, and it will be beneficial for you, at this moment, to be sitting near him."

I moved near Bhagavan, sitting at his feet and facing him. Guy was right. Not long after this Bhagavan opened his eyes. He moved his head and looked directly down at me, his eyes looking into mine. It would be impossible to describe this moment and I am not going to attempt it. I can only say that at this second I felt my inner being raised to a new level - as if, suddenly, my state of consciousness was lifted to a much higher degree. Perhaps in this split second I was no longer my human self but the Self. Then Bhagavan smiled at me. It seemed to me that I had never before known what a smile was. I said, "I have come a long way to see you."

There was silence. I had stupidly brought a piece of paper on which I had written a number of questions I wanted to ask him. I fumbled for it in my pocket, but the questions were already answered by merely being in his presence. There was no need for questions or answers. Nevertheless, my dull intellect expressed one.

"Tell me, whom shall I follow - what shall I follow? I have been trying to find this out for years by seeking in religions, in philosophies, in teachings." Again there was silence. After a few minutes, which seemed to me a long time, he spoke.

"You are not telling the truth. You are just using words - just talking. You know perfectly well whom to follow. Why do you need me to confirm it?"

"You mean I should follow my inner self?" I asked.

"I don't know anything about your inner self. You should follow the Self. There is nothing or no one else to follow."

I asked again, "What about religions, teachers, gurus?"

"If they can help in the quest of the Self. But can they help? Can religion, which teaches you to look outside

yourself, which promises a heaven and a reward outside yourself, can this help you? It is only by diving deep into the spiritual Heart that one can find the Self." He placed his right hand on his right breast and continued, "Here lies the Heart, the dynamic, spiritual Heart. It is called *Hridaya* and is located on the right side of the chest and is clearly visible to the inner eye of an adept on the spiritual path. Through meditation you can learn to find the Self in the cave of this Heart."

It is a strange thing but when I was very young, Ignacio Zuloaga said to me, "All great people function with the heart." He placed his hand over my physical heart and continued, "See, here lies the heart. Always remember to think with it, to feel with it, and above all, to judge with it."

But the Enlightened One raised the counsel to a higher level. He said, "Find the Self in the real Heart."

Both, just at the right moment in my life, showed me the way.

People would say to Bhagavan, "I would like to find God." His answer was:

"Find the Self first and then you won't have to worry about God." And once a man said to him, "I don't know whether to be a Catholic or a Buddhist."

Bhagavan asked him, "What are you now?"

He answered, "I am a Catholic."

He then said, "Go home and be a good Catholic and then you will know whether you should be a Buddhist or not."

Bhagavan pointed out to me that the real Self is timeless. "But," he said, "in spite of ignorance, no man takes seriously the fact of death. He may see death around him, but he still does not believe that he will die. He believes, or rather, feels, in some strange way that death is not for him. Only when the body is threatened does he fall a victim to the fear of death. Every man believes himself to be eternal, and this is actually the truth. This truth asserts itself in spite of man's ignorant belief that the body is the Self."

I asked him how to pray for other people. He answered, "If you are abiding within the Self, there are no other people. You and I are the same. When I pray for you I pray for myself and when I pray for myself I pray for you. Real prayer is to abide within the Self. This is the meaning of *Tat Twam Asi* - That Thou Art. There can be no separation in the Self. There is no need for prayer for yourself or any person other than to abide within the Self."

I said, "Bhagavan, you say that I am to take up the search for the Self by *Atma Vichara*, asking myself the question *Who Am I?* May I ask who are you?" Bhagavan answered, "When you know the Self, the 'I' 'You' 'He' and 'She' disappear. They merge together in pure Consciousness."

Noticing one time what I thought were some evil-looking priests who had come from the temple, I remarked on them to Bhagavan. He said, "What do you mean by evil? I do not know the difference between what you call good and evil. To me they are both the same thing - just the opposite sides of the coin." I should have known this. Bhagavan was, of course, beyond duality. He was beyond love and hatred, beyond good and evil, and beyond all pairs of opposites.

To write of this experience with Bhagavan, to recapture and record all that he said, or all that his silences

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implied, is like trying to put the infinite into an egg cup. One small chapter cannot in any way do him justice or give an impression of his enlightenment, and I do not think that I am far enough spiritually advanced - if at all - to try to interpret his supreme knowledge. On me he had, and still has, a profound influence. I feel it presumptuous to say he changed my life. My life was perhaps not so important as all this. But I definitely saw life differently after I had been in his presence, a presence that just by merely "being" was sufficient spiritual nourishment for a lifetime. It may have been that when I returned from India, undiscerning people saw very little change in me. But there was a change - a transformation of my entire consciousness. And how could it have been otherwise? I had been in the atmosphere of an egoless, world-detached, and completely pure being.

I sat in the hall with Bhagavan three days and three nights. Sometimes he spoke to me; other times he was silent and I did not interrupt his silence. Often he was in *samadhi*. I wanted to stay on there with him but finally he told me that I should go back to America. He said, "There will be what will be called a 'war,' but which, in reality, will be a great world revolution. Every country and every person will be touched by it. You must return to America. Your destiny is not in India at this time." Before leaving the ashram, Bhagavan gave me some verses he had selected from the *Yoga Vasishta*. He said they contained the essence for the path of a pure life.

"Steady in the state of fullness, which shines when all desires are given up, and peaceful in the state of freedom in life, act playfully in the world, O Raghava!"

"Inwardly free from all desires, dispassionate and detached, but outwardly active in all directions, act playfully in the world, O Raghava!"

"Free from egoism, with mind detached as in sleep, pure like the sky, ever untainted, act playfully in the world, O Raghava!"

"Conducting yourself nobly with kindly tenderness, outwardly conforming to conventions, but inwardly renouncing all, act playfully in the world, O Raghava!"

"Quite unattached at heart but for all appearance acting as with attachment, inwardly cool but outwardly full of fervour, act playfully in the world, O Raghava!"

I sorrowfully said farewell to Bhagavan. As I was leaving he said, "You will return here again." I wonder. Since his physical presence has gone I wonder if I shall. Yet often I feel the pull of Arunachala as though it were drawing me back. I feel the pull of that sacred hill of which he was so much a part and where his mortal body lies buried.

- (To be continued)

Extracts

21- 22 November, 1938

583. Mr. V. Ganapati Sastri showed Sri Bhagavan a letter from a Spanish lady, Mercedes De Acrorta [sic], saying she would be coming here the next day. Sri Bhagavan remarked: "See the trouble to so many because I am here."

24 November, 1938

587. The Spanish lady and her lady friend have come. They asked: "You say the Heart is on the right. Can you explain how it is so?" Sri Bhagavan handed over the extract from the *Psychological Review of Philadelphia* for her to read. He also added the Heart is the place wherefrom the 'I'-thought arises.

D.: So you mean the spiritual Heart as distinguished from the physical heart?

M.: Yes. It is explained in *Chapter. V of Sri Ramana Gita.*

D.: Is there any stage when one might feel the Heart?

M.: It is within the experience of everyone. Everyone touches the right side of his chest when he says 'I'.

Both the ladies kneeled before Sri Bhagavan, one after another, and asked for blessings. Then they left for Pondicherry on their way to Colombo.

- Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

Roaming and a Death Experience in 1912

By Arthur Osborne

There was a time when Sri Bhagavan used to roam the hill frequently as well as climbing to the summit and making *Pradakshina* (circuit), so that he knew every part of it. And then one day, when he was wandering alone, he passed an old woman gathering fuel on the hillside. She looked like a common outcast woman, but she addressed the young Swami fearlessly, as an equal. Beginning with the rough cursing common to such people, she said: "May you be put on the funeral pyre! Why do you wander about in the sun like that? Why don't you sit quiet?"

"It can have been no ordinary woman," Sri Bhagavan said when he told the devotees about it; "Who knows who she was?" Certainly, no ordinary outcast woman would have dared to speak to a *Swami* like that. The devotees took it to be a manifestation of *Arunagiri Siddha*, the Spirit of Arunachala. From that time Sri Bhagavan gave up roaming the hillside.

When Sri Bhagavan first went to Tiruvannamalai he sometimes moved about in a state of trance. This did not completely end until about 1912 when there was a final and complete experience of death. He set out from Virupaksha Cave one morning for Pachaiamman Koil, accompanied by Palaniswami, Vasudeva Sastri and others. He had an oil-bath there and was nearing Tortoise Rock on the way back when a sudden physical weakness overcame him. He described it fully afterwards.

"The landscape in front of me disappeared as a bright white curtain was drawn across my vision and shut it out. I could distinctly see the gradual process. There was a stage when I could still see a part of the landscape clearly while the rest was covered by the advancing curtain. It was just like drawing a slide across one's view in a stereoscope. On experiencing this I stopped walking lest I should fall. When it cleared I walked on. When darkness and faintness came over me a second time I leaned against a rock until it cleared. The third time it happened I felt it safer to sit, so I sat down near the rock. Then the bright white curtain completely shut off my vision, my head was swimming and my circulation and breathing stopped. The skin turned a livid blue. It was the regular death hue and it got darker and darker. Vasudeva Sastri, in fact, took me to be dead and held me in his arms and began to weep aloud and lament my death.

"I could distinctly feel his clasp and his shivering and hear his words of lamentation and understand their meaning. I also saw the discoloration of my skin and felt the stoppage of my circulation and breathing and the increased chilliness of the extremities of my body. My usual current of awareness still continued in that state also. I was not in the least afraid and felt no sadness at the condition of the body. I had sat down near the rock in my usual posture and closed my eyes and was not leaning against the rock. The body, left without circulation

or respiration, still maintained that position. This state continued for some ten or fifteen minutes. Then a shock passed suddenly through the body and circulation revived with enormous force, and breathing also, and the body perspired from every pore. The colour of life reappeared on the skin. I then opened my eyes and got up and said, 'Let's go.' We reached Virupaksha Cave without further trouble. This was the only fit I had in which both circulation and respiration stopped."

Later, to correct wrong accounts that began to be spread, he added: "I did not bring on the fit purposely, nor did I wish to see what this body would look like after death, nor did I say that I will not leave this body without warning others. It was one of those fits that I used to get occasionally, only this time it took a very serious form."

What is, perhaps, most striking about this experience is that it was a repetition, heightened by actual physical demonstration, of that certainty of endurance through death which had constituted Sri Bhagavan's spiritual awakening. It recalls the verse from *Thayumanavar*, the Tamil classic which Sri Bhagavan often quoted: "When overpowered by the wide Expanse which is without beginning, end or middle, there is the realization of non-dual bliss."

It may be that this marked the final completion of Sri Bhagavan's return to full outer normality. It is hard to give any impression of how normal and how human he was in his mode of life and yet it is necessary, for the description of his previous austerity may leave the idea of someone grim and forbidding. On the contrary, his manner was natural and free from all constraint and the newcomer immediately felt at his ease with him. His conversation was full of humour and his laughter so infectious, so like that of a child, that even those who did not understand the language would join in.

- From Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge

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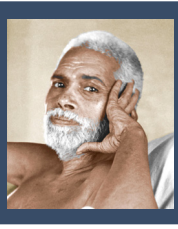

Here lies the Heart - Part II

With this article we conclude Mercedes de Acosta's account of her experiences with the Maharshi, as related in her autobiography, *Here Lies the Heart*, which was published in the USA in 1960. The questions she sent Guy Hague to ask Maharshi, and the Maharshi's replies, are also included. It must be noted that these are different from other questions Hague put to the Maharshi on de Acosta's behalf and are recorded in *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*, under the date 15th December, 1938.

Before leaving the ashram I wrote down several questions for Guy Hague to ask Bhagavan that I had not had a chance to ask myself. I had been bothered by the fact that so many saints and enlightened people had been ill and suffering physically. I asked, "Should they not have perfect bodies and why do they not cure themselves?" In Europe I got a letter from Guy saying he had discussed my question with Bhagavan. He wrote: "Bhagavan told me to tell you that the spiritually perfect person need not necessarily have a perfect body. The reason, as he explained it, is very simple.

"You see, the ego, the body and the mind are the same thing. The spiritually perfect person, like Bhagavan, is above these three things. Consequently he has no body to heal, neither a mind - or ego - to heal it with. He is beyond all this because it is illusion. He is living in Reality. Christian Scientists can take the mind and heal the body - for they are the same thing. American Indians heal, too, in this manner. It is faith healing.

"But if the spiritually perfect person is sick in body it is because the body is working out its *karma*. Bhagavan gave an illustration of *karma*, which he says is like an electric fan and must just run its course, only gradually ceasing even after it has been turned off. He says the mind is born into illusion and builds a body and a world to suit it - that is, a world that it has earned and deserves (by its *karma*). Bhagavan, knowing the body and the mind to be illusion, cannot experience any bodily ailment or discomfort. We make him suffer pain, loss of weight, etc. It is in our minds, not his. He is actually bodiless, though you and I cannot realize this as a fact."

In another letter Guy answered my questions, which led to others. He wrote down my questions and Bhagavan's answers.

Question: Is reincarnation a fact?

Bhagavan: You are incarnated now, aren't you? Then you will be so again. But as the body is illusion then the illusion will repeat itself and keep on repeating itself until you find the real Self.

Question: What is death and what is birth?

Bhagavan: Only the body has death and birth, and it (the body) is illusion. There is, in Reality, neither birth nor death.

Question: How much time may elapse between death and rebirth?

Bhagavan: Perhaps one is reborn within a year, three years or thousands of years. Who can say? Anyway

what is time? Time does not exist.

Question: Why have we no memory of past lives?

Bhagavan: Memory is a faculty of the mind and part of the illusion. Why do you want to remember other lives that are also illusions? If you abide within the Self, there is no past or future and not even a present since the Self is out of time - timeless.

Question: Are the world, the mind, ego and the body all the same thing?

Bhagavan: Yes. They are one and the same thing. The mind and the ego are one thing, but there is no word to explain this. You see, the world cannot exist without the mind, the mind cannot exist without what we call the ego (itself, really) and the ego cannot exist without a body.

Question: Then when we leave this body, that is when the ego leaves it, will it (the ego) immediately grasp another body?

Bhagavan: Oh, yes, it must. It cannot exist without a body.

Question: What sort of a body will it grasp then?

Bhagavan: Either a physical body or a subtle-mental body.

Question: Do you call this present physical body the gross body?

Bhagavan: Only to distinguish it - to set it apart in conversation. It is really a subtle-mental body also.

Question: What causes us to be reborn?

Bhagavan: Desires. Your unfulfilled desires bring you back. And in each case - in each body - as your desires are fulfilled, you create new ones. You must conquer desire to be absorbed into the One and thus end rebirth.

Question: Can sex change in rebirth?

Bhagavan: Oh, surely. We have all been both sexes many times.

Question: Is it possible to sin?

Bhagavan: Having a body, which creates illusion, is the only sin, and the body is our only hell. But it is right that we observe moral laws. The discussion of sin is too difficult for a few lines.

Question: Does one who has realized the Self lose the sense of 'I'?

Bhagavan: Absolutely.

Question: Then to you there is no difference between yourself and myself, that man over there, my servant - are all the same?

Bhagavan: All are the same, including those monkeys.

Question: But the monkeys are not people. Are they not different?

Bhagavan: They are exactly the same as people. All creatures are the same in One Consciousness.

Question: Do we lose our individuality when we merge into the Self?

Bhagavan: There is no individuality in the Self. The Self is One - Supreme.

Question: Then individuality and identity are lost?

Bhagavan: You don't retain them in deep sleep, do you?

Question: But we retain them from one birth to another, don't we?

Bhagavan: Oh, yes. The 'I' thought (the ego) will recur again, only each time you identify with it a different body and different surroundings around the body. The effects of past acts (*karma*) will continue to control the new body just as they did the old one. It is *karma* that has given you this particular body and placed it in a particular family, race, sex, surroundings and so forth.

Bhagavan added, "These questions are good, but tell de Acosta (he always called me de Acosta) she must not become too intellectual about these things. It is better just to meditate and have no thought. Let the mind rest quietly on the Self in the cave of the Spiritual Heart. Soon this will become natural and then there will be no need for questions. Do not imagine that this means being inactive. Silence is the only real activity." Then Guy added, "Bhagavan says to tell you that he sends you his blessings."

This message greatly comforted me.

On my way back to Europe my boat stopped at Port Said. I landed there and motored across the desert to Cairo where I stayed three days and then caught the ship again when it docked at Alexandria.

In Cairo I stayed at the old famous Shepherd Hotel. I spent one day in the museum seeing the Tutankhamen collection, and the second day I rode out by camel to see the Sphinx and the Great Pyramid. When I reached the Pyramid it was nearly sunset. There was no one around except my own *dragoman* and one or two Arabs sleeping against their kneeling camels. I decided to climb to the top of the Pyramid. Although it towered above me, tapering off into the sky, and looked terribly high, I did not realise how high it was until I started climbing. I started out briskly but after a certain distance I grew tired and my pace slackened. The steps of the Pyramid are very narrow and eroded, but I was determined to reach the top. Thoroughly exhausted, I finally did. The sun had already gone down. I turned and looked down the steep and awesome slope of the Pyramid. Suddenly I was overcome by the most frightful vertigo. My head swam and I felt that I was going to plunge to my death. I crouched on the narrow steps and clung to the top of the Pyramid so fiercely that my nails broke against the stone and my fingers bled. I could not bring myself to look down again. An agonising fear took hold of me. I felt cold sweat pouring over my face, neck and back. I became hysterical. What was I to do? I knew if I let go I would fall, but I also knew I could not hold on much longer. I closed my eyes. I remembered what the Maharshi said - to dive deep into the Spiritual Heart. I summoned every faculty and all power within me and concentrated on the Heart. Suddenly I saw it, like a great light in my mind's eye. In the centre I saw the Maharshi's face smiling at me. Instantly I felt calm. I turned and looked down. Far below I saw a man waving at me. I loosened one hand and held it over my head, then I waved back. The man began calling someone else. Another man ran to him. Swiftly they began to climb. They climbed expertly and fast but it seemed hours to me. Probably it took them about thirty-five minutes to reach me. One man had a rope. He tied it around my waist and gently stroked my face. He mumbled some words that I could not understand, but I knew they were kind words to encourage me. Between them, each one holding the rope as though we were mountain climbing, we began to descend. Eventually we reached the bottom safely. Some time after this I was told by an enlightened person that climbing the Great Pyramid was considered in ancient Egypt one of the "fear tests" which students had to pass in order to be initiated into the great religious mysteries. Aspirants were required to climb to the very top of the Pyramid, and if on reaching the top of it he or she could conquer fear, this particular test was won.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi died on April fourteenth, 1950. He had said, "I am going away? Where could I go? I am here." By the word "here" he did not imply any limitation. He meant rather, that the Self 'is'. There is no going, or coming, or changing in that which is changeless and Universal. I should not have regarded his death as a blow. How could I lose him? How can one lose anyone? How can one lose that which is Eternal? It is only in the first shock, and gripped in the illusion of death, that one grieves for the physical presence.

Yet, millions in India mourned the Maharshi. A long article about his death in the *New York Times* ended with, "Here in India, where thousands of so-called holy men claim close tune with the infinite, it is said that the most remarkable thing about Ramana Maharshi was that he never claimed anything remarkable for himself, yet became one of the most loved and respected of all." - *Mercedes de Acosta died in New York City in 1966.*

Sri Ramana Bestows His Grace

In 1937, T. S. Anantha Murthy was a judge working in a remote area of Mysore State when he noticed newspaper articles almost every week on Sri Ramana Maharshi and his teachings. Even in this faraway place he heard stories from scholars and pilgrims who had visited the Sage of Arunachala. Intrigued by what he had read and heard, it wasn't long before he and his wife made arrangements to make a visit to Ramanasramam. This visit is graphically described by Anantha Murthy in a biography he published of the Maharshi in 1972. The detailed account of his visit is simple and captivating, taking us into the ashram during those early days when there were few visitors and the Sage was easily accessible to all. What is particularly interesting is that Anantha Murthy, not knowing Tamil, talked to Bhagavan only in English, and also received replies directly from him in English.

Soon after his book, 'Life and Teachings of Sree Ramana Maharshi', was published, the author kindly sent a complimentary copy to our New York City Ashram. The following has been taken from Chapter sixteen, titled "Sree Ramana Bestows His Grace on the Present Biographer in 1937."

With bare feet, my wife and I and a companion entered the hall of the ashram. It was filled with devout men and women, who were all squatting on the floor. The hall had two entrance doors and half a dozen large windows. We entered through the door which was just opposite to the sofa on which Sri Ramana Maharshi was found seated. He was quite naked except for the white cotton *koupina*, or loincloth. His sofa was in the north-eastern corner of the hall. There were heavy pillows covered with white cotton covers at the eastern end of the sofa and the sage was reclining on them with his two legs fully stretched towards the western wall. His large head was held erect and his large eyes were beautiful to look at. The eyeballs were milk white in colour. His eyes appeared to be looking at some spot on the opposite wall and his eye lids were not winking at all. Incense and sandal sticks were found burning in his vicinity and there was a pleasing perfume which we smelt. There was an unlighted petromax lamp hanging from one of the crossbeams of the hall. My wife and I felt awe as we stood and looked at the great sage. It was a memorable experience to behold a *mahatma* of his eminence. We humbly conveyed our reverence and then sat down. Women devotees were found seated separately and so my wife sat in their group. I sat down among the men.

For about thirty minutes, three or four brahmins, who were seated at some distance from the sofa, continued to recite verses from *Taittiriya Upanishad*. In fact, the recitation had started a few minutes before we had entered the hall. Sri Ramana continued to sit in the same posture till it ended. There was no movement of his limbs at all. His eyelids too did not move. He seemed to be listening to the recitation of the sacred verses.

Though he appeared to be looking at the wall, he was not seeing any particular thing. His mind was, as we

could easily realise, absorbed within. I was astonished to see the sage keeping his eyes wide open without winking or moving the eyeballs for such a long period of time. Men and women who sat in the hall belonged to all castes and nationalities. Two or three devotees who sat near me were foreigners, sitting uncomfortably with their trousers. However, all were listening to the recitation with rapt attention. The brahmins concluded the recitation by chanting,

"Twameva pratyaksham brahmasi,
twameva pratyaksham brahma vadishyami,
satyam vadishyami, rtam vadishyami, tanmamavatu,
tadvaktaramavatu, avatu mam, avatu vaktaram,
aum santih, santih, santih."

This recitation was part of the *Veda Parayanam*, which was a daily function there. Those who recited the verses then stood up and prostrated to the sage and went out of the hall through the more distant door. I was familiar with the verses of *Taittiriya Upanishad*. The chanting was in the right style and I was thrilled while listening to it. I further felt that Sri Ramana, who sat in front of me in such an engrossed manner, was Brahman in human form and that spiritual illumination was enshrined in him. He was not only august to look at but also an inspiring figure. His ascetic garb and his well-chiselled face commanded awe and devotion. When such feelings were passing through my mind, Sri Ramana moved his head and looked around, and while doing so, he looked at me. There was benignity writ large on his broad forehead. There was simplicity and innocence in his movements. He picked up his walking stick and slowly moved out of the hall. I too came out and watched him walking slowly towards the hill on the northern side. The hill was the background of Ramanasramam. A half-naked, young attendant, carrying water in a *kamandalam*, followed the sage a few yards behind. Sri Ramana was tall and his arms long. His legs had lost their normal strength and so he carried his heavy body with some effort. His neck wobbled now and then, indicating that the muscles were weak. His age was just fifty-six years and three months and the hair on his head had turned grey. He and his attendant went away behind a boulder of the hill.

The *Sarvadhikari* of the ashram then approached me and said, "No ladies are allowed to stay in the ashram during nights, so your wife cannot stay with you in the guests' room. We have a house in town. Some ladies will accompany your wife and will also take care of her. She will be served a night meal there. Our ashram cart will take her and also bring her back in the morning." My wife and some other ladies sat in the ashram cart and in a few minutes left the premises. By that time it had become dark. Kerosene lamps were lighted here and there in the courtyard. It was the night of 31-3-1937.

After the ladies had gone away to town I was taken into the dining room of the ashram. It was a small tiled building in those distant days. It was situated a few yards to the south of the hall and it was lighted with some kerosene oil lamps.

On going into the dining room I saw some other visitors sitting on the floor in front of plantain leaves spread along the walls of the room. I too followed their example and sat in front of a leaf. There were no women among the people who sat for the night meal in the ashram. There was a slightly raised brick platform built on one side of the room. On it a plantain leaf was spread by one of the servants of the ashram. I guessed that it was intended for the use of the sage himself. Within a few minutes Sri Ramana walked into the dining room from another adjacent room, which then served as a kitchen. He sat in *padmasanam* on the platform in order to eat his supper, along with the visitors of that day. There was complete informality among the guests assembled there, though everyone of us looked at Sri Ramana with profound reverence. Devotees of the sage

were serving as voluntary cooks and attendants. Some of them were young and some old. I was delighted to sit and take food sitting about five feet to the right of Sri Ramana on that memorable night. It was his grace that had enabled me and my wife to undertake the pilgrimage.

The meal served to everyone was quite simple. It consisted of rice, one vegetable curry, pickle, *dahl*, water and buttermilk. Sri Ramana ate his meal slowly. He did not leave any remnants of food on his plantain leaf. He did not speak with any one of the guests, though he looked at them. He was wearing only his usual *koupina*, while the visitors sitting that night before him were wearing shirts and *dhotis*. The servers were wearing only *dhotis* and they had no covering on the upper part of their bodies. Dim kerosene oil lamps were found burning in both the small kitchen and in the dining room. The supper was finished within fifteen minutes. It was about 7:30 in the night.

After the meal was finished, Sri Ramana stood up and walked out into the courtyard and washed his hands and feet with water that had been kept there in a vessel. I followed his example and washed my hands with water taken in a mug from the same big vessel. The other visitors too helped themselves in the same manner and dispersed. Sri Ramana then picked up his stick and slowly walked into the hall. I was eager to talk to him. So, I went behind him and entered the hall through the same door which I had used about two hours previously. Sri Ramana sat down on the sofa. A bright petromax lamp was then burning about twenty feet away from him. It illuminated the hall with sufficient brightness. I stood about three feet from him. There was no one else in that big hall. In fact, I longed to talk to him when there was nobody with us. The kind of opportunity which I was longing for was thus available to me without any special effort on my part. There was no need to draw his attention towards me. The merciful sage lifted up his face and smiled slightly. He did not utter even one word. He did not also make any other gesture. However, his gentle smile gave me sufficient courage to address him.

With folded hands, I said to him as follows: "Sir, I have come from Bangalore. I do not know Tamil. Please permit me to talk in English. I have not been in good health for some months. Dyspeptic troubles are the cause of my physical suffering. Doctors have not been able to cure me. My eyes are always burning and I feel giddy now and then. I have come here to obtain your blessings."

Sri Ramana heard these words patiently. He immediately lifted up his serene face once again and replied as follows: "All your troubles will disappear of their own accord."

These were the nine English words uttered by him in his mellow voice. I was filled with delight and gratitude on hearing the words of benediction so readily vouchsafed by the great sage. I prostrated to him and left the hall with my heart filled with joy and relief. I entered the guests room and slept by the side of another gentleman who had also come to the ashram to obtain *darsan* of the sage. It was a memorable occasion indeed. My long cherished desire to obtain *darsan* of Sri Ramana had thus been fulfilled. In addition to it, about two hours after I had set foot in Ramanasramam all my bodily troubles ceased to torment me as the result of the great blessing which I so readily received from the sage.

On the morning of April 1, 1937, all the women visitors who had been sent into town arrived in the same bullock cart. My wife also came with them and reported that arrangements at the women's lodge were satisfactory and that she had slept with five or six other ladies who had come from distant places. She and I entered the hall and sat down on the floor after prostrating to Sri Ramana, who was seated on the sofa in a state of *samadhi*.

The hall was more full with devotees than on the previous evening. Some of them were meditating with closed

eyes. By then I had read the small book 'Who Am I?' and understood the method of *vichara* described in it. I too closed my eyes and started Self-enquiry within my own mind. The hall, though filled with men and women, was free from noise and peace reigned in the surroundings. I drove away my thoughts as and when they crossed my mind, saying to myself, "I am not this," and "this thought is not I," and so on. This is the kind of instruction found in that small book. My wife sat among the ladies and meditated in her own way and I engaged myself for a long time in the kind of meditation described above. More than one hour passed away. I then experienced a sense of total blankness.

At about 10 a.m. Sri Ramana moved his limbs and sat in *padmasanam* on the sofa. Taking advantage of that opportunity I approached the sofa and addressed Sri Ramana in English thus: "Bhagavan, I have till now been conducting self-enquiry as taught in 'Who Am I?'. I do not see anything. I see a blank. May I know if *Atman* is seen as a light, or is it a blank?" Sri Ramana heard this question put by me. He sat up smartly on his seat and with a serious countenance replied thus: "What? Is THAT a blank?" He laid emphasis on the demonstrative pronoun 'THAT', which he had used in his reply. He did not say anything more. He sat as serenely as before and closed his eyes. I did not have the courage to put any more questions to clear my doubt.

- (To be continued)

Advent at Arunachala Celebrations

In New York City and Nova Scotia, Canada the ninety-eighth anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's arrival at Arunachala was celebrated on Sunday, September 4, 1994.

At Arunachala Ashrama, Nova Scotia, one hundred and twenty-five friends and devotees gathered into Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram on this pleasant and warm day. Some had travelled from New York and some from Boston, but most of the participants had come from the Maritime Provinces on the East Coast of Canada.

Dr. J. S. S. Lakshminarayana conducted the program and *pujas*. He began the service at 11:00 a.m. with *Ganesha Puja*, followed by *Sri Ramana Ashtotaram*. All assembled repeated the names of Ramana Maharshi as lead by Dr. Lakshminarayana.

Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, the founder of Arunachala Ashrama, then gave a few welcoming remarks, which was in no way unfaithful to his simple village background and reliance on the unceasing repetition of the name of God.

Dennis Hartel then described, for the benefit of the new guests, some background history of Arunachala Ashrama in New York and Nova Scotia. He invited all to utilise the facilities of the Ashrama, and thanked everyone who had helped in preparing for that day's event and for travelling so far to attend it.

Michael Fahey, a professional musician who has channelled his talent into singing devotional *bhajans*, entertained the guests for about twenty minutes. He delighted everyone with his singing and playing of the dulcimer and mandolin string instruments.

P. E. Narasimahan then gave a talk on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, tying in the ancient teachings of this sacred text to the Maharshi teachings in the 20th Century. His daughter Jyoti joined him in reciting this *Upanishad*. Sri Ramana's Sanskrit composition, *Upadesha Saram*, was recited by all present. This was followed by the

chanting of Arunachala Siva and many contributed *bhajans* from the devotees gathered. All were filled with devotion and peace.

Arati was performed and a meal was served to the guests. As the weather was pleasant, everyone gathered outside, sitting on picnic tables or blankets spread over the spacious lawn of the Temple. A warm breeze blew from the east, the sky was clear, the sun bright, while the surrounding Annapolis Valley warmed and cheered the hearts of all.

In the New York City Arunachala Ashrama, about thirty devotees attended that day's function, which was conducted by Evelyn Kaselow-Saphier.

They began with the recital of the *Marital Garland of Letters*. *Ganesha Stuti* followed. Margo Martin read out from Arthur Osborne's book the description of the Maharshi's arrival in Tiruvannamalai in 1896, at the tender age of sixteen.

Sri Babubai Parekh then sang *Siva Tandava Stotra* and recited verse 22 from *Chatvarimsat* of Ganapati Muni. Inspired by the elevating description of Bhagavan in Ganapati Muni's verse, he translated and commented on it for the benefit of all present. The translation is:

"Salutations to Sri Ramana, the universal Master, the dispeller of misery from the world, the One Who chases away the darkness of his devotees and displays Himself as the Eternal Consciousness inhering in the heart, blazing both within and without, bereft of the least trace of ignorance - the One who shines as the Transcendental Truth underlying the world and beyond!"

Bhajans followed. Everyone recited *Upadesha Saram*. Bhaskar Singh read out the Maharshi's spontaneous praise of Arunachala in the form of eleven verses. *Arunachala Pancharatnam*, another composition of the Maharshi, was recited, and *arati* concluded the program.

With unreserved friendliness and warmth the devotees sat together and ate the *prasad* offered to them at the conclusion of the function.

[comments and inquiries are welcome]

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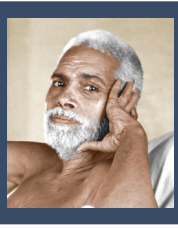

Sri Ramana Bestows His Grace – II

In 1937, T. S. Anantha Murthy visited Sri Ramanasramam for ten days. He gave a detailed account of this visit in his book the *Life and Teachings of Sree Ramana Maharshi*. With this issue we conclude his story related in chapter sixteen, titled "*Sree Ramana Bestows His Grace on the Present Biographer in 1937*."

At about noon, devotees began to disperse one after another. Only visitors like me and my wife remained in the hall. At about 12 o'clock the dinner bell was heard. Sri Ramana got up from his seat, picked up his stick and walked into the dining room. My wife and I and some other guests followed him and sat in front of plantain leaves spread on the floor by the attendants.

There were more guests than on the previous night. Some were women. Among men, some were Christians. One Mussalman guest was also sitting along with us. Some were foreigners. All castes of Hindus were represented in that dining room. Sri Ramana's habits were cosmopolitan. Cooks and servers were, however, all brahmins. Among cooks, there was a woman cook also. All were old devotees of the sage and they had volunteered to serve in the ashram by way of spiritual *sadhana*. Sri Ramana was seated on the raised platform and a leaf was spread in front of him.

During morning hours, there was no restriction of women's movements in the ashram. When all the guests were seated, the servers began to serve the midday meal. Echammal, a woman devotee of the sage, had brought cooked rice from her house in a vessel. She served a handful of it on Sri Ramana's leaf. She then served small quantities of it to the other guests of the day. She had been permitted to perform this kind of service, and I learnt that she had been doing so for many years. Her ancient story was ascertained by questioning some of the attendants of the ashram. She was old in years. She was dignified and quiet and did not speak with anyone. After rendering this kind of service, she went back to the town to take her own meal.

Though there was complete informality in the dining room, every guest ate food respectfully, looking at Sri Ramana at frequent intervals. Some of the guests were orthodox brahmins. They did not like to mingle with the non-brahmin guests. So they were made to sit in an adjacent room and the same articles of food were served to them by the same servers. The midday meal too was simple. It consisted of rice, pickles, vegetable curry, chutney, *sambar*, and buttermilk. The meal was finished in fifteen minutes. Sri Ramana stood up after he had finished the meal and walked out into the courtyard and washed his hands and feet and then went into the hall and reclined on the sofa for rest. His attendants closed the doors and asked visitors not to cause any disturbance.

My wife and I then went to the guests' room and rested there till about 4 p.m. Then we walked into the hall, which had been opened for visitors a little earlier. We humbly prostrated before the sage, who was seated on the sofa. He was looking around and he was in *jagrat* (waking) state. Devotees began to arrive and the hall was filled up within a short time. Then three or four brahmin pundits arrived. They first prostrated to Sri Ramana and sat down on the floor and began to recite or chant sacred verses just as they had done on the previous evening. As soon as they started to chant, Sri Ramana changed his posture and sat motionless. His lustrous eyes were open and he appeared as though he was staring at infinity. To borrow Paul Brunton's

metaphor, Sri Ramana's bright eyes looked like two stars. Every one in the hall heard this *Veda Parayana* in strict silence. The chanting ended, as on the previous evening, with the recital of the following *shanti mantra* namely, *Aum sam no mitrah sam varunah . . . Aum shantih, shantih, shantih*.

Then, the pundits, who had chanted the *mantrams*, stood up and prostrated to Sri Ramana and walked out of the hall. It was his usual hour for the evening stroll on the slopes of the hill. He picked up his stick and walked away in the northern direction, attended by the same devotee, whom I had seen on the previous evening. All the ladies came out of the hall and most of them went away to their houses. My wife and other women visitors like her were sent away, as on 31-3-1937, in the ashram bullock cart into the town for spending the night in the town lodge referred to earlier. At about 7 p.m., a frugal evening meal was served in the dining room. After Sri Ramana sat down in front of his leaf, which was spread on the brick platform, I sat down along with ten or twelve guests and ate the same kind of meal as on the previous night. Strict silence was observed by all the guests and by the servers too during the meal. Sri Ramana looked at us now and then, but he did not talk with anyone. Talking with him in the dining room was not allowed. After the supper was finished, Sri Ramana walked back to his seat in the hall and sat down at ease.

A few minutes afterwards, some devotees and I entered the hall and sat for practising meditation. One big petromax light was brightly illuminating the hall as on the previous night. After some time had been spent in silent meditation, I felt the need to put a question to the sage. I stood up and noticed that Sri Ramana was sitting with his eyes closed. His benevolence gave me the necessary courage to go near him. When I went near the sofa with my hands folded in reverence, he looked up. I assumed that he had accorded permission to me for putting a question. I then said, "Sir, may I know what is meant by saying that *Atman* is light? May I know if *Atman* looks like the petromax light which is burning in this hall?" Sri Ramana was pleased to give me the following reply in English. He said, "*Atman* is not a light like the petromax light. It is called light because everything else becomes known through It."

These simple words in English, employed by the gracious sage, cleared the doubt which had arisen in my mind. Sri Ramana became silent after instructing me in this manner. I then walked out of the hall and retired to the guests' room for the night.

At about 9.00 a.m. on the next morning, I was sitting in the hall of the ashram a few yards in front of Sri Ramana, who was seated in *samadhi* state on the sofa. Many men and women devotees were also sitting on the floor with their eyes closed. Perfect silence prevailed. We were all watching the sage, who was effortlessly sitting absorbed in the Self. To watch him was itself a great inspiration. An old brahmin pundit, who was till then sitting with his eyes shut, stood up and walked one or two steps forward and stood near Sri Ramana's sofa. This pundit was clad in silk upper *anga-vastram* and a *dhoti* beneath his waist. He wore two diamond rings on two of his fingers of the left hand. He had diamond-set earrings also. His tall forehead was marked by *vibhuti* stripes. There was also a big *kumkum* mark between his two eyebrows. He was a well built old man. He loudly addressed Sri Ramana in Telugu and spoke with a stentorian voice. He said, "Swamiji, many men and women are now sitting before you in order to get some instruction. You do not speak even one word. They too do not put any questions to you. They are all silently sitting to learn something. What are you teaching them? What are they learning from you? Please explain this secret to me."

Sri Ramana did not stir. He did not open his eyes or make any gesture to indicate that he had heard the loud words uttered by the old pundit. All of us were eager to listen to any answer that the great sage might give. The questioner stood for five minutes hoping that the sage would give a reply. However, the sage continued to sit with his eyes closed as before. The old pundit started to speak again and said in Telugu as follows: "My two

questions have not been answered by you, Swamiji. I too cannot discover the answers. Please explain the matter by word of mouth." After having thus spoken, he continued to stand. Sri Ramana then opened his bright eyes and looked at the old pundit and replied in Telugu as follows: "What are you asking me? Is there any one here to teach others?" Unable to give an answer to the questions put by the sage himself, the Telugu pundit said again as follows: "If it is so, why are so many men and women sitting patiently in front of you? What profit do they derive by sitting in this hall?"

Sri Ramana, with a slight smile on his serene face, gave the following instructive reply. He said in Telugu, "The question must be put *there*. Why are you putting that question *here*?" When he used the adverb *there*, the sage stretched his hand towards the assembled devotees. When he used the other adverb *here*, he turned his hand towards himself. Such were his suggestive gestures and answers. From the words and gestures of Sri Ramana, I realised a profound secret. Other devotees assembled in the hall must have also realised the same thing. That was this: Sri Ramana had no notion or idea that he was a teacher or a *Guru*. Likewise, he had no notion or idea that the men and women sitting in the hall were ignorant and that they needed enlightenment. From the great sage's point of view, every one in the hall was *Brahman* or *Atman*. His *drishti* was that of a knower of *Brahman*. Knowers of *Brahman* have *Brahman drishti*.

On another day, I approached Sri Ramana and begged him to explain the following verse of the *Kathopanishad*, namely:

yame vaisha vrunute tena labhyay,
tasyaisha atma vivrunute tanum svam.

"It can be known through the Self alone that the aspirant prays to; this Self of that seeker reveals Its true nature."

In particular, I asked him to explain the significance of the verbs *vivrunute* and *vrunute* used in this verse. These verbs have been commented upon at great length by the ancient commentators. Sri Ramana was pleased to explain the matter in the following manner. He said, "This verse means that God will disclose his form to the devotee who surrenders himself completely. God is not partial to anyone. God confers His grace on all who surrender themselves to Him. God is the *Atman* in everyone." Sri Ramana's succinct exposition of this complex verse solved my doubts, which I had entertained till then. Scholars are aware that this verse is the second half of the twenty-third verse of the second *valli* of the first chapter of *Kathopanishad*.

I stayed for ten days at Ramanasramam, even though I had gone there with the idea of staying only for three days. My wife could not stay for so long a period because our children had to be looked after in Bangalore. They were all young boys in 1937. So, she returned to Bangalore after three days. The *Sarvadhikari* generously permitted me to be the guest of the ashram during that period. One morning I was sitting in the hall and meditating in the presence of the sage, just like other devotees. One verse of *Kenopanishad* had long been baffling my understanding. That verse runs thus:

Pratibodha viditam matam amrutatvam hi vindate,
atmana vindate veeryam vidyaya vindate amrtam.

"It is really known when it is known in and through every modification of the mind, for by such knowledge one attains immortality. By Atman one attains real strength, and by Knowledge, Immortality."

- Kenopanishad (2-4)

I stood up and walked towards the sofa and drew the attention of the sage, who was sitting in the normal waking condition at that time. When he was pleased to look at me, I told him in English that I had difficulty in comprehending this verse of *Kenopanishad* and that I needed his help understanding it. Since I knew the verse by heart, I recited it. Sri Ramana heard the verse with attention when I recited it slowly. Then he desired to read the verse in the book itself. I did not have that book with me at that time. He asked his attendant to go to the library of the ashram and get a copy of the book. The attendant, who knew Sanskrit, went to the library and brought a copy of the said *Upanishad*. Sri Ramana took it in his own hands and then gave it to me and directed me to show the page on which it was found printed. I looked into the book and found the verse and showed it to him. The great sage read the verse silently and looked at me. I said that I had two difficulties in relation to that verse. The first question was if every *vritti* of the mind was *Brahman*, as indicated in the first half of the verse. The second question was if physical strength was attainable by a person who realizes the *Atman*, as indicated in the second half of the verse. I expressed these two doubts to him in simple English.

Sri Ramana then replied as follows: "Yes, everything is *Brahman*. Every *vritti* of the mind including grief or sorrow is *Brahman*. Every kind of strength, including physical strength, will be obtained by a person when he realizes his *Atman*." In this clear-cut manner, the merciful sage set at rest my doubts and answered my two questions.

I recall one or two more conversations I had with Sri Ramana. One day when practising meditation in the hall along with many other devotees of the sage, I could not concentrate my mind and I discovered that unwanted thoughts were disturbing my serenity. I desired to bring it to the notice of the sage and to learn how to surmount the difficulty. So, I went near the sofa and said in English, "Bhagavan, my mind is not steady today. What is to be done?" The great sage raised his head and recited the following verses of the *Bhagavad Gita*:

"One should raise oneself by one's Self alone; let not one lower oneself; for the Self alone is the friend of oneself, and the Self alone is the enemy of oneself." Chapter 6, Verse 5

"From whatever cause the restless and unsteady mind wanders away, from that let him restrain it and bring it under the control of the Self alone." Chapter 6, Verse 26

After quoting these two verses for my guidance, the benevolent sage, in his infinite mercy, added the following English words: "These two verses contain all the necessary instructions for gaining serenity of mind. All efforts must be made to become effortless." He then closed his eyes.

The last day of my sojourn at Ramanasramam arrived. On that morning, I took my breakfast sitting in front of Sri Ramana in the same dining room. Many other guests were also present. Some of them were newcomers. The usual breakfast of *iddli* and *sambar* and hot coffee was finished in ten minutes. Sri Ramana sipped the coffee slowly after reducing its temperature. On that morning, one or two fried *vadais* were also served by the attendants. I imagined that fried *vadais* were indigestible and so I told Sri Ramana that I was afraid to eat *vadai*. That was the first occasion when I had the courage to talk to him in the dining room. The sage looked at me with his delightfully pleasing eyes and said, "You will digest it. You may eat." Then my fears fled away and I ate the *vadais* without suffering any indigestion.

After the breakfast was finished, I purchased a photo of Sri Ramana from the bookstall of the ashram. I desired to get it from the hands of the sage himself. Carrying it in my hands I went into the hall and prostrated to Sri Ramana, who was seated in *jagrat* state. There was no one else in the hall on that occasion. That was a surprise to me. I told him that I had purchased his photo and that I desired to receive it from his hands. Having

said so, I gave the photo to him. He graciously stretched his hands and took it from me and looked at it for half a minute without saying any word by word of mouth. He was pleased to give it back to me. I received it with great satisfaction.

Then, I wanted to obtain his blessings before I left the ashram. So, I went near him once again and stood for a minute looking at him. I addressed him and said in English, "Bhagavan, I have enjoyed great peace in your presence. Permit me to return to Bangalore. May I know if I can receive your help when I reach Bangalore? I pray for your benediction." The benevolent sage was till then reclining on the sofa. He dramatised the parting scene. He sat up vertically on the sofa and with a kind but loud tone he said in English as follows: "What? Is there time, place or distance for me?" After putting this question to me, he reclined on the pillows of the sofa and closed his eyes. His words and gestures were charming, instructive and benevolent. They indicated perpetual compassion and love of all who pray for his aid. His gracious words are ringing in my ears, even after thirty-four years.

Personal Touch

D.: Is the study of science, psychology, physiology, philosophy, etc. helpful for this art of *yoga*-liberation and the intuitive grasp of the unity of the Real?

M.: Very little. Some knowledge is needed for *yoga* and it may be found in books. But practical application is the thing needed, and personal example, personal touch and personal instructions are the most helpful aids. As for the other, a person may laboriously convince himself of the truth to be intuited, *i.e.*, its function and nature, but the actual intuition is akin to feeling and requires practice and personal contact. Mere book learning is not of any great use. After realization all intellectual loads are useless burdens and are thrown overboard as jetsam. Jettisoning the ego is necessary and natural.

- Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi, No. 28,

A Tribute to K. Venkataraman

K. Venkataraman, endearingly addressed as K. V. Mama by those in Sri Ramanasramam, suddenly expired at 2:45 a.m. on November 23. He was 70 years old and the only child of Chellamma, who was the adopted daughter of Echammal.

V. Subramanian (Mani), Sri Ramanasramam's manager, told me on the phone that he died just as he wished: residing in the ashram, without the burden of a prolonged illness, and while repeating his God's name, Ramana. Sri N. Balaram Reddy wrote in a letter dated November 30: "You must have known by now that K. V. passed away in the ashram a few days ago due to a massive heart attack, which took him away within 10 minutes, or so." J. Jayaraman, the ashram librarian, wrote on November 26 giving more details: "K. V. Mama passed away after a heart attack on November 23 at 2:45 a.m. with "Ramana" audibly on his lips in an unbroken stream. He had visited my home in Madras on November 6 to join my mum and I in the taxi returning to the ashram. . . . K. V. Mama sat right next to me at lunch on November 21st with the first batch of diners. Something unusual: Sundaram [Sri Ramanasramam's president] remarked I was being honoured because he was sitting next to me. K. V. Mama told me then he had been having some pain in the chest area which he attributed to a gastric source. Now he is gone! I had a wild thought of calling you at 8 a.m. to inform you by telephone. Then comes your letter! K. V. Mama was a blessed child of Bhagavan."

While I was visiting Sri Ramanasramam in October of 1993 I had the good fortune of spending time with K. V. Mama. With unbounded enthusiasm he immediately agreed to take me to Echammal's house in Tiruvannamalai and also to her village, which was about thirty miles from the ashram (see March/April 1994 issue). Bubbling with genuine warmth and devotion he poured out numerous stories of Echammal and her experiences with Bhagavan. "Echammal was one of the illuminaries that revolved around the sun that Ramana Maharshi was for the world," he told me. And about his mother Chellamma: "She was a ripe soul, recognised by Echammal, and completely surrendered to Bhagavan."

K. V. Mama was no less surrendered and no less blessed. His mother died when he was only an infant, and it was her dying wish that he should be raised by Echammal in Tiruvannamalai. Echammal, whose life in the world was a succession of tragedies, went and brought the motherless child directly to Bhagavan and placed the boy in his hands. "On seeing the babe, tears trickled from my eyes," Bhagavan later said, recalling the occasion.

The Maharshi looked after that child and protected him from harm. To illustrate this we need only relate the following story told to us by K. V. Mama: "Once when I was a young boy, a friend and I were in the Arunachala Temple. As it was very hot we went to the tank in the temple and began splashing and playing in the water. I inadvertently went into the water over my head and began sinking. I came to the surface a few times but was unable to stay afloat. My friend got scared seeing me in distress and ran off. Just before I went under for the last time I remember distinctly seeing Bhagavan's face, and then everything went blank - I became unconscious.

When I later regained consciousness I found that I was lying on a step just near the tank. I asked someone nearby how I got out of the water. I was told that an old man had come and pulled me out, laid me down on the step and then went away. Somehow I survived the ordeal. After nearly drowning, I went to the ashram and sat in the hall without telling anyone what had just happened. Bhagavan turned in my direction and said with a gentle smile on his lips, "Did you have a nice swim?" I put my head down, as I felt extremely guilty and thought that everyone was watching me. Who else was it than Bhagavan who saved me?"

We will all miss seeing this exemplar devotee of the Master. To his family we express our deepest condolences. He, his mother and grandmother were three generations of flowers offered at the feet of their Guru. To future aspirants and devotees, their lives will ever remain a true example of wholehearted devotion and surrender.

- By Dennis Hartel

The *Maharshi* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil K. Sharma. Produced and distributed by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, 66-12 Clyde Street, Rego Park, New York 11374, USA. Tel: (718) 575 3215. E-mail: ashrama@aol.com. All editions of this newsletter can be found on the internet at - "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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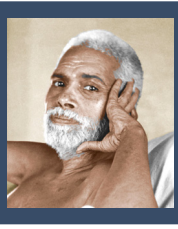

The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy

Introduction

Soon after Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Mahasamadhi* in 1950, a committee was formed to collect written reminiscences from the Master's devotees. Committee members approached those devotees who were intimate with Bhagavan, had a first-hand experience of his ways and understood his teachings. Arthur Osborne and S. S. Cohen, who were members of the committee, met with N. Balaram Reddy and wasted no time in requesting him to write his reminiscences. Balaram Reddy declined. He told them he mostly sat silently meditating in Bhagavan's presence and never took notes of what he heard or saw.

This does not mean that Balaram Reddy had nothing to relate. On the contrary, he had plenty to tell, and over the years he did convey bits and pieces of it to devotees who sincerely questioned him. But, because of his humble and reticent nature, he never agreed to put his stories down in writing to be published; and it must be added, that during the last forty-five years since the Maharshi's passing, Balaram Reddy was often requested to do so.

During a visit to Sri Ramanasramam in 1993, my name was added to the list of devotees who entreated him to write. After all, he was then in his eighty-fifth year, and how much longer could he delay? I reasoned with him, explaining that where would be the Christ of the Christians if not for Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? I pleaded and said that it was only through his eyes that we, the second generation of devotees, can see and know about the personality that captivated his heart; the same personality that would undoubtedly captivate the hearts of countless future generations. "After you go, this wealth within you will be lost. You must write now while you are still able," I beseeched him.

Balaram Reddy is a kind man, intelligent and wise. If he didn't exactly agree with my argument, he sympathized with my sincerity, and in his goodness agreed - not to write, but to relate to me whatever stories about his life and experience with the Maharshi he could remember. These stories went on to include meetings with Ananda Mayi Ma, Swami Ramdas and other personalities. He fixed a time, between 6:30 and 7:30 in the evening, to meet with me. So I began meeting with him in his room every day for the purpose of hearing his reminiscences. After we met I would put down a few brief notes on the topics of our conversations, and in the morning, following breakfast, I would sit at the small desk in my room and use these notes to recall all I had heard the previous night.

I found this daily exercise to be an exhilarating experience, as I would be so caught up in the flow of the incidents relating to Bhagavan, that I felt as if they were taking place before my own eyes. Balaram Reddy has the power to draw out from his memory, like a spider drawing out his web, the dynamic personality of the Maharshi's presence. He easily caught me in this web, and I sincerely hope these recorded recollections catch many others.

I bow to Balaram Reddy and thank him a million times for kindly dipping into his storehouse of memories and scooping out glassful after glassful of this nectar for me, and all, to drink.

Dennis J. Hartel - 1 September 1994 - Nova Scotia, Canada

⇦

N. Balaram Reddy's First Meeting with the Maharshi

On a sunny South Indian morning in the month of March in 1933 I first walked into Sri Ramanasramam. It was just before breakfast and I was immediately welcomed and lead into the dining room. Of course, the dining hall wasn't the large structure we see now, but a single-room thatched building just south of the Old Hall, which also served, by turns, as the kitchen, office and the Maharshi's bathroom. I was asked to sit behind a certain leaf plate. Other visitors and inmates were seating themselves, some behind a wall panel (the brahmins) and others near me. To my surprise, I found myself seated immediately next to the Maharshi, on his right. I felt blessed and fortunate to be given this seat and looked on the whole scene, wondering at the intimacy and informality of it all. But what I felt most, amidst the quiet and orderly movements of the ashramites, was the penetrating silence of the atmosphere. A deep penetrating silence seemed to be pushing my mind deeper and deeper into my inner being.

The food was served and the Maharshi turned his head to the right and nodded - a gesture indicating that we should begin eating. That nod, or gesture, had the effect of prompting my mind to sink even deeper into silence.

Meals finished, I went and sat in the hall and waited for the Maharshi to return. He generally went out for walks after rising early in the morning, after his noon meal, and at 5 p.m. I had read and heard from others that he rarely put questions to visitors. Therefore, I was not disappointed when he returned to the hall, sat and remained silent. I also did not feel like asking questions or breaking the silence with words.

At 11 a.m. I was called for lunch. Once more I witnessed the same intimacy, informality, quiet orderliness and the nod from the Maharshi to begin eating. After lunch I once again returned to the hall. About 1 p.m. an old and long-standing devotee of Maharshi arrived at the ashram from some distant place. He walked into the Old Hall, saluted the Master and lay down on the floor near Bhagavan's couch. Within moments he fell sound asleep. I sat wondering: "This Maharshi is accessible at all hours; his presence evokes a deep inner stillness; everything is so serene, natural and informal." I concluded that there was something here clearly unique.

At 5 p.m. I had to leave to catch the train back to Pondicherry. I stood up and approached the Maharshi to take leave. He asked me where I had come from. I told him and, since he had on his own began talking with me, inquired of him if I could ask a couple of questions. "Yes, of course," he said.

Now, after the passing of sixty years, I can recall only one of the two questions I first asked him. I said, "There is a teacher and his disciples. The teacher gives the same instruction to all the disciples sitting before him. How is it that some disciples hear the teachings, put them into practice and make fast progress, while others hear and apply the same teachings and make little or no progress?"

The Maharshi replied: "Some must have followed that line of teaching in their previous lives, while others may have just begun. Also, some are born more advanced and fit than others."

That was my first visit to the Maharshi in 1933 when I was 24½ years old, and although that visit made a deep impression on me, I didn't arrange to go back until two years later. I now believe that during those two years the Maharshi's force was silently working on me from within, without my being aware of it.

Bhagavan, as we usually called the Maharshi, often quoted this *stanza* of Saint Thayumanavar's in praise of the Guru: *"Oh Lord! Coming with me all along the births, never abandoning me and finally rescuing me!"* I find this *stanza* truly reflects the way I feel about Bhagavan.

Early Life

I cannot say anything about my previous births, but in this birth I have been spiritually inclined since my childhood. You could say it is because of the legacy passed down to me from my father and my own inherited tendencies.

My father was a serious *sadhaka*. He practiced austerities in his youth, studied the scriptures and even observed *mouna* (silence) for one year. He also went on a pilgrimage to the holy places in North India, visiting ashrams and sacred shrines in the Himalayas. After this pilgrimage he decided to take up the life of a *grihastha* (a householder). But in spite of marrying, having a secular occupation and raising a family, my father always cherished spiritual ideals. A life centred on God as the ideal was the essential element of our daily life in my father's house.

I was born on October 30, 1908. From my birth, my father was eager that I should imbibe spiritual values, and he was very concerned that secular studies might smother my spiritual inclinations.

In my teens, I was inspired by the life and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. I regularly read his monthly magazine, *Young India*, and moulded my life accordingly. Gandhi introduced the "*Salt Satyagraha*" in 1930, and this caused a great stir throughout the country. I was then a postgraduate student at the Hindu University in Benares. Later, during the summer break when I was at my home in Andhra Pradesh, the police arrested the president of our Nellore District Congress Committee. The committee met and decided to ask me to take over the position of president. I accepted and, when this fact was published in the newspapers, the police wasted no time in arresting me. For four months I remained incarcerated.

At that time I had an idealistic view of politics, Mahatma Gandhi's goals, and the volunteers who worked to achieve them. I was under the impression that all those selfless workers arrested in the freedom struggle were naturally endowed with saintly characteristics, much like their leader, Gandhiji. In prison I had a disappointing awakening to the real nature of many of these jailed nationalists. I soon became disenchanted with the ideal of political activity for attaining freedom, especially when I arrived at the understanding that spiritual freedom, or Self-realization, was the highest goal of life and political freedom would not actually change us spiritually.

When I was studying in the Benares University, the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna also exerted considerable influence on my spiritual ideals. By the time I was in the middle of an M. A. degree in Benares, I began to seriously question the use of all these degrees in the light of an ever-deepening desire to follow wholeheartedly a spiritual path. I concluded that the purpose of life was not to attain material goals, but rather to realize God and experience the truth of a universal, underlying Reality. When this conviction became firm, I decided to leave the university and dedicate my life to the spiritual ideal.

In all the scriptures, I read that a *guru* was necessary to guide one on the spiritual path. I thought that I should also find a *guru* to lead me to liberation. In search of one, I first travelled to North India, visiting all the celebrated saints and *yogis*. I would spend some days or weeks at their ashrams and then move on to the next one. Throughout this trip I was unable to find any teacher that captivated my heart and mind to the extent that I could honestly surrender myself as a disciple.

I remember being asked by the disciples of the leader of Radhasaomi Movement to take initiation from their *guru*. I had been residing at their Centre for three days. I expressed my disinclination, stating that I didn't believe the time had come for me to choose a *guru*. When this information was passed onto the head of the ashram, he entirely agreed with me, saying that it had taken him twenty years to choose his *guru*.

Aurobindo Ashrama

In 1931, after reading about Sri Aurobindo, and also hearing about him from others, I made my way to his ashram in Pondicherry. Immediately upon my arrival I was struck by the spiritual atmosphere of the place. On August 15th of that year, I had my first *darshan* of Sri Aurobindo. This was one of three times in a year that he gave *darshan*. I found Sri Aurobindo and Mother to be powerful spiritual personalities, as they seemed to have the ability to work on the development of their disciples in a silent and invisible manner. All of Aurobindo's philosophical writings cannot convey his or the Mother's power as spiritual embodiments.

In his ashram I pursued the same spiritual ideals that I had already formulated. I was required to do two hours of work every day and selected garden work from the options available. We would daily have *darshan* of the Mother and sit before her in meditation. But since the Mother's schedule would sometimes fluctuate, this routine varied at times. Generally we were left to ourselves to study Aurobindo's writings and pursue our spiritual practices, although we normally had to take permission of the Mother when doing anything out of the ordinary.

At the three annual *darshans*, Mother and Aurobindo would sit side by side on a couch and we would approach them, one by one, and touch their feet. I made it a practice not to miss any of these *darshans* and would sometimes visit my village between these events. In my village, I lived in a hut built in a garden about two hundred meters from the main house. Whenever I resided there my family regularly sent me food and gave me freedom to pursue my *sadhana* in solitude. In this manner, travelling between Pondicherry and my village, I earnestly was engaged in spiritual practice year round.

Second Visit to Sri Ramanasramam

While I was in Aurobindo Ashram I met Kapali Sastriar, the esteemed disciple of both Aurobindo and Ganapati Muni. As he was now and then visiting Sri Ramanasramam, he would describe to me the Maharshi and his ashram. His intriguing descriptions, along with the reading of B. V. Narasimhaswami's biography of the Maharshi, is what prompted my first visit to Ramanasramam in 1933.

When I visited Sri Ramanasramam the second time in March of 1935, I decided to make it a three-day visit. In those days there was no bus transportation between Pondicherry and Tiruvannamalai and travellers had to go by train. I boarded the train at Pondicherry at 9 p.m., got down in Villupuram Junction and then waited a few hours before catching the train to Tiruvannamalai. Though the total distance to travel was only sixty-five miles, the whole trip took me nine hours. I arrived in Tiruvannamalai at 6 a.m., made my way to the ashram and was provided accommodations in the small room next to the well.

Soon after my arrival I saw Yogi Ramiah. He was a close disciple of the Maharshi whom Paul Brunton wrote about in his book, *A Search in Secret India*. Yogi Ramiah, being from the same area of Andhra Pradesh that I was from, somehow immediately recognised me. He took me to Bhagavan and formally introduced me to him. Though the Yogi was then observing silence, with him gesturing and me filling in the words, we were able to convey to Bhagavan our connection. I later discovered that Yogi Ramiah knew my father very well and had even stayed overnight at my family's house on some occasion.

Before this second visit to Ramanasramam I once again read Bhagavan's biography. In it I found a passage relating to the possibility of changing one's *guru*. I had a doubt about this and addressed it to the Maharshi. He told me, "Yes. Certainly. One can change his *guru*. What of that?"

In Aurobindo Ashram our daily life, to a large extent, was regulated and controlled. For instance, even to take a simple trip into town we had to obtain permission. In contrast, here in Ramanasramam it was totally different. I experienced a liberating feeling of freedom, informality and spontaneity. Everything was so natural and at the same time elevating.

Also, in Aurobindo Ashram, disciples were generally permitted to visit all other saints and ashrams, with the exception of the Maharshi and Sri Ramanasramam. It was believed that the Maharshi had the power to undo years of spiritual preparation that the Mother and Aurobindo were effecting on the psyche of their followers. In other words, they considered the Maharshi too powerful an influence. Bhagavan was aware of this and once when I was alone with him he told me, "Yes, I know of that place. They are afraid of me."

On this second visit I would sit daily in the Maharshi's serene presence. I was again struck by his deep penetrating silence. I lost all interest in everything but the Maharshi and his presence. I somehow felt by merely sitting near him all my aspirations could be fulfilled.

At the end of this three day visit I began to feel that perhaps my place was there with the Maharshi. The idea of having Bhagavan as my *guru* and Ramanasramam as my home began revolving in my mind.

Taking leave of the Maharshi, I approached him while he was sitting on his couch, which was then positioned outside on the verandah. His feet were softly resting on the ground. He had just returned from an afternoon stroll, following the midday meal. I fell to my knees and bowed before his holy feet. I was aware of the ashram rule that prohibited devotees from touching Bhagavan's body, so I kept a slight distance. But, as I lowered my head near his feet, in the twinkling of an eye, Bhagavan's feet ever so gently raised from the ground and the large toe of each foot somehow very lightly touched the closed eyelids of each of my eyes. It happened all in an instant; no one even noticed. I was thrilled.

- (To be continued)

Quote

Someone asked, "It is stated in the scriptures that the Self will reveal itself only to one whom it chooses. Then what is the use of our effort?" Sri Bhagavan replied: "The Self will draw unto itself an aspirant only when he becomes introverted. So long as he is extroverted, Self-Realization is impossible. Many people try to define the Self instead of attempting to know the Self and abide in it."

- Sri Ramana Reminiscences

Viveka Chudamani

India in the eighth century AD was a honeycomb of conflicting sects. Also during this period, Hinduism was finally reasserting itself over Buddhism, which had become plagued with decadence and disorder. At this critical juncture, Shankara appeared on the scene and provided the needed leadership and inspiration to resurrect the Vedic culture of the land and re-establish the supremacy of the Non-dualistic *Vedanta*.

While traversing the country, discoursing and establishing monastic centres, he took the time to write commentaries, compose treatises and hymns. His written work serves as the foundation rock upon which rest the present-day '*Sanatana Dharma*', the Eternal Religion of India. One of Shankara's major philosophical works is his *Viveka-Chudamani* (*The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*).

Not too long after Sri Ramana Maharshi arrived at Arunachala as a boy-sage he was shown this text by one of his disciples, who, in all likelihood, asked him to elucidate certain points not understood. The Maharshi found the text so much agreed with his own experience that he made a Tamil prose rendering of the *Viveka-Chudamani's* 580 Sanskrit verses. The English translation of this work can be found in the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*. Most of the serious students of the Maharshi's teachings are aware of this fact. What is not so well-known, is that out of the 580 verses in the *Viveka-Chudamani* the Maharshi selected ten that appealed to him most. These he translated and reset. They clearly mirror the Maharshi's own experience and provide direct guidance to mature seekers.

Verses From Sri Sankara's Viveka-Chudamani

Selected and Reset by Sri Ramana Maharshi

1. Among all the means for Liberation pre-eminent is Devotion: and the quest for one's own Reality (the Self is called Devotion.) (31)

2. The Supreme Self, the eternal, indivisible, non-dual Consciousness, the Witness of buddhi and the rest, is other than Sat and asat, and is the ultimate significance of the notion conveyed by the term 'I'. It is the immediate Reality, the Bliss Incarnate. (351)

3. The Supreme Self of pure Consciousness, different from prakriti and its modifications, shines as the 'I-I', the direct Witness of buddhi during the wakeful and other states, and lights up this entire manifestation of Sat and asat. (135)

4. That which clearly manifests itself within during the wakeful, dreaming and sleep states, which is directly perceived within as the 'I-I' of continuous awareness, which perceives the ego, buddhi, etc., that are of diverse forms and modifications, and which reveals itself as the Atman of Eternal Consciousness-Bliss - know thou this, thine own Self, within the Heart. (217)

5. By direct experience know thou this, thine own Self within thyself, as "This is I", with the mind regulated and the intellect pure and clear; (thereby) cross the boundless ocean of samsara of which the waves are the (succession of) births and deaths: thy aim thus fulfilled, be established as the Absolute. (136)

6. In the sheath of intelligence shines eternally Atman, the self-effulgent Witness of all. Making that thy lakshya, which is quite different from the unreal - enjoy it by experience, through unbroken awareness, as thy own Self. (380)

7. Extremely subtle is the Truth of the Self Supreme, and it is not discernible to the gross vision (of the mind). It is knowable to the noble minded of perfectly pure intellect, through very subtle Self-awareness during Samadhi (the State of Transcendental Peace). (360)

8. When the mind, qualified thus through incessant practice, is merged in Brahman, then the Samadhi getting rid of its savikalpa character leads of its own accord to the Experience of Bliss of Oneness (i.e., of Nirvikalpa Samadhi). (362)

9. By the Samadhi are destroyed all the knots of vasanas and all karma is destroyed. There remains, within and without, everywhere and at all times, the effortless manifestation of one's Swaroopa, the Self. (363)

10. In the cave of the buddhi is the Supreme Brahman, one without a second, distinct from Sat and asat. For him who abides in this cave as verily that Self, there is no rebirth. (266)

115th Jayanti Celebration at the New York Ashrama

On January 7, 1995, a small group gathered at Arunachala Ashrama, 72-63 Yellowstone Boulevard in Queens, New York to celebrate the 115th birth anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi. To a casual passer-by, the gathering was no more than a random group of people, but to everyone there from the 4 year old grandson of Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata (the 82 year-old founder of Arunachala Ashrama) and up, this was a special day charged with the power and presence of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

The remarkable quality of Sri Bhagavan is that when anyone sits down in His presence with mindfulness and devotion, He electrifies the atmosphere and permeates it with a peace and joy that can only be felt, but never described.

This year's celebration began with a group recitation of

"*Aksharamanamalai*" - the Maharshi's 108-versed "*Marital Garland of Letters*." The voices of thirty people singing in unison brings everyone closer to the glory of Arunachala. The mood of this recitation was maintained and carried further by the young devotee Radha Ramaswamy, a 7 year old with a crystal clear voice and equally transparent devotion to match it. She led everyone in a *bhajan* to Sri Ganesha, followed by a simple song in praise of Bhagavan, arranged and also sung by her mother, Savithri Ramaswamy.

Mr. & Mrs. P. E. Narasimhan from Boston and their daughter Jyoti, recited "*Ganesha Pancharatnam*," adding a particular fervour to the celebration. When Indira and Jyoti sing, it is a feast for the ears and the soul. The spiritual offerings concluded with the group singing "*Shiva Stuti*" by Tulsidas, led by the Parekh family. With *arati* the worship was ended and *prasad*, along with a full meal, was served to all the devotees.

Many devotees from far and near were able to attend this year's Jayanti Celebration. The presence of Jim Hartel from Franklin, NY, the Narsimhan family, Dr. Raj and others is yet further proof of the far-reaching pull of Sri Bhagavan. The gathering restated and reaffirmed the mission of this small, quiet Ashrama - to maintain a sacred place for seekers to gather, reflect and meditate in the presence of Bhagavan, while treasuring the *satsang* of fellow *sadhakas*.

- by Geeta Bhatt

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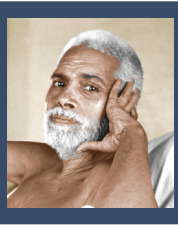

The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy - Part II

Third visit to Sri Ramanasramam

About a year later, in April of 1936, I had to leave Aurobindo Ashram and return to my village in Andhra Pradesh for two months. My plan was to travel to Ramanasramam at the end of those two months and stay there for seven weeks.

In June of 1936, I arrived at the Maharshi's ashram for a third visit. I was accommodated in the cottage next to Yogi Ramiah's. This cottage is on the west side of the ashram near Palakothu and was built by one of the Yogi's disciples with my namesake - Balaram Reddy. This same Reddy was also responsible for building Yogi Ramiah's cottage.

One afternoon about 2:30 p.m. I casually strolled out of the north gate of the ashram and onto the hill. Observing the majesty of the Holy Hill and studying the summit, a desire arose in me to climb up and see it. I was new in the ashram and had no idea how difficult this endeavour would be, especially since I decided to climb straight up from where I was.

I mentally drew a straight line over the rugged slope and began my ascent. When I reached about halfway up, I met a group of ladies carrying firewood on their heads. They asked me where I was going. After hearing of my plan they tried their best to dissuade me, saying, "The wind is very strong on the upper slopes and you will be blown off and fall to your death, or at least be seriously injured. No one frequents that area of the hill and so you will not be found or saved. Please go back."

I listened to their warnings, which they offered in all sincerity, but as I was still a young man and felt strong, and as I had already climbed more than halfway up, I was loath to turn back in spite of all the dangers they described. Needless to say, after the ladies left I continued my climb.

It wasn't too long before the slope became very steep and, while it slowed me down, this did not discourage me in any way. I came to one point where I had to pull myself up on a narrow ledge. Sitting on that ledge facing the plains I realised that I was unable to stand without losing my balance. In other words, I could not continue my ascent from where I was. On one side of me there was a dangerously steep precipice of more than one thousand feet. On the other side I saw an insurmountable vertical wall of rock. Then, to my great dismay, I realised that not only was I prevented from standing to ascend, I was so precariously positioned on this ledge that it was impossible for me to retrace my steps downward without tumbling head over heels to my death. And to top off all this distress, my sandals were now causing me to slip from the very ledge I was clinging to for my life. I carefully removed the sandals and let them fall down the slope. Sitting with my knees close to my chest and my feet up against my buttocks, I pondered my ill fate. I soon lost all hope of coming out of this ordeal alive. Closing my eyes I began to think of Sri Bhagavan and the Mother of Aurobindo Ashram.

For about ten minutes I sat in this sad condition. While my eyes were closed my head involuntarily turned to my left side. I opened my eyes and saw a clump of vegetation firmly rooted between some rocks. I looked at

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it and thought that perhaps I could grab onto that vegetation and pull myself up to a standing position. I caught hold of the growth and, to my surprise, executed the feat without much difficulty. And when I did stand up I was utterly amazed when I looked over this ledge and saw that I had reached the summit. Slowly I pulled myself up onto the summit and immediately exhaled a thankful sigh of relief. I walked over to the peak, looked around and soon began my descent down on what appeared to be a frequently used path. Without difficulty I reached the main road and followed it back to the ashram, arriving there just as the evening meal was being served. Without saying anything to anybody about my exploits I sat down with the others and ate.

This event, which was known to me alone, served to deepen my faith in the intervention of the Divine hand. I saw it as an unforgettable milestone in my life of faith and devotion.

During this visit I carefully observed how the ashram was managed and how guests were accommodated and served, and seriously thought about what it would be like to live in the ashram permanently. The presence of the Maharshi, with all his majestic dignity and grace, was a force I could no longer resist. The thought that I might later regret such a move carried little weight when I contemplated the accessibility and spiritual power of the Maharshi. I thought to myself that even if it turns out to be a great mistake, I must not miss this opportunity. I became convinced that my place was there with the Maharshi. I then decided to return to Aurobindo Ashram, wrap up my affairs, obtain the blessings of Mother and Aurobindo, and return to Ramanasramam as soon as possible.

Leaving Aurobindo Ashram

I had been with the Mother and Aurobindo for five years. During those years they showered me with kindness and love, while guiding me on the spiritual path. My gratitude and regard for them compelled me to obtain their permission and blessings before leaving. This turned out to be much more difficult than I imagined.

In Aurobindo Ashram, it was the practice of the disciples who had doubts or questions to write them in the form of a letter to Sri Aurobindo. All the letters were daily collected and taken to Aurobindo, who would sit with the Mother during the nights and promptly answer them in writing. Sometimes we would see the lights burning all night as they were engaged in this work.

Upon my return from Ramanasramam I wrote a letter stating my desire to receive their blessings and permission to live at Ramanasramam. In the letter to Aurobindo I wrote that since your *yoga* begins with Self-realization, kindly permit me to go to Ramana Maharshi who emphasises only Self-realization, a state I have not attained, or may not even be worthy of attaining. Aurobindo's reply was affectionate, but negative in regards to my leaving his ashram. He wrote, "Both Self-realization and the supramental state can be simultaneously developed and achieved here. There is no need for you to go there."

I was extremely disappointed at his response and consequently became frustrated, restless and discouraged. I soon began to have sleepless nights and felt distraught. I then wrote a second letter to Aurobindo with the same request. Again I was denied permission. It took a long five months and a third letter before Aurobindo and the Mother finally agreed, giving me their permission and blessings. Perhaps they realised I was determined to go and they saw no other recourse but to grant my request.

In Aurobindo's final letter to me he wrote, "Since you are determined to follow a path in which you can achieve only partial realization, we give you our blessings, though we believe it would be better if you stayed on here and pursued your *sadhana* where both the Mother and I can help you."

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It was the rule in Aurobindo Ashram that any letter written to or received from Aurobindo should not leave the ashram premises. So, to comply with this rule, I burnt all my letters, except the final letter I received from Aurobindo. This I kept with the view of showing it to Bhagavan.

Settling at Sri Ramanasramam

On January 5, 1937 I finally arrived at Sri Ramanasramam for good. This happened to be the day after the Maharshi's fifty-seventh birthday was celebrated. As there was still a crowd gathered there for the festivities, I was accommodated with many others in the common guest room for men. Soon after, when nearly all the guests dispersed, I was given Yogi Ramiah's cottage to use. I then thought that I would use this cottage while the Yogi was absent from the ashram, which was most of the time, and find other accommodations during his visits. This seemed to me to be a convenient arrangement. After all, I had now come to settle down there permanently with the Maharshi as my *guru*. But after only one month had passed, the ashram management informed me that though they didn't want me to leave Bhagavan's holy presence, it was not the practice of the ashram to accommodate devotees permanently. They respectfully requested me to find a place outside and gave me a fifteen day extension to arrange it.

During the early years there were no houses anywhere near the ashram, as it was mostly jungle or forest. I eventually found an upstairs room in a brahmin's house near the Arunachala Temple in town. For my meals I would sometimes cook small items in my room, sometimes obtain food from somewhere outside, and somehow manage without feeling inconvenienced.

Daily I would rise at about 3 or 4 a.m., walk to the ashram, stay in the hall with Bhagavan until 10 a.m., return to my room, come back again to the ashram at 3 p.m. and stay there until 8 p.m. It went on like this during the first year. If possible, I would always sit close to Bhagavan so I could hear all of his precious utterances.

Soon after settling in Tiruvannamalai and surrendering to Bhagavan as my *guru* I wrote in English, on legal-size paper, a rather long, detailed history of my life and handed it over to Bhagavan. In that letter of several pages I poured out my heart to Bhagavan, withholding nothing. He carefully read through all the pages and then returned them to me.

For the first few months after my arrival Bhagavan would frequently start up conversations with me. With no apparent reason he would start explaining to me a verse, some aspects of a certain philosophy, or a certain spiritual practice. This went on to such an extent that S. S. Cohen, in a light way, complained to me, saying, "Why do you always make Bhagavan talk? I think I am getting jealous."

I naturally protested, "I am not making him talk. For some reason or other he simply looks at me and starts talking."

Often during these discussions Aurobindo's philosophy would come up. And on some occasions Cohen and Chadwick would also join in and try to dismiss any validity to Aurobindo's path. To my surprise, I would find myself defending his philosophy and easily crushing their arguments*. With them I had an easy time, but with Bhagavan it was a different matter. Whatever he would say on the matter was nearly impossible to dispute.

** S. S. Cohen, after repeatedly hearing about Sri Aurobindo, decided that the Yogi from Pondicherry must have some greatness. Consequently, one day he travelled to Pondicherry and while there wrote a note to Aurobindo describing who he was, what he wanted from life (Self-realization) and where he was then residing (Sri Ramanasramam). Cohen later showed me the reply he got from Aurobindo. It said, in brief, that all his aspirations could be fulfilled at Sri Ramanasramam, where he was then living.*

I remember during my second visit to Ramanasramam the Maharshi was one day reading a lengthy book review from a newspaper. The book being reviewed was Aurobindo's *Lights on Yoga*. The reviewer was Kapali Sastri and the editor of this newspaper was Bhagavan's devotee, S. M. Kamath. Bhagavan seemed to take great interest in the review and would occasionally stop reading and comment on what he had just read to those sitting around him. When he had concluded reading it, someone who was aware that I had that very book with me, said to Bhagavan, "This man has come from the Aurobindo Ashram and he has that book with him." Bhagavan turned to me and said, "Oh, is that so? Let me have a look at it."

I went back to my room, fetched the book and handed it over to Bhagavan. Immediately Bhagavan began reading it intently. He kept on reading it well into the night, with the help of a small oil lamp, until he finished it.

When I came into the hall the next day he began discussing the book with me, telling me that a certain term used in the book might look like something new, but it is actually the equivalent of this other term used in such and such ancient text, etc. Like this, he went on discussing and comparing Aurobindo's philosophy for some time. So Bhagavan thoroughly understood Aurobindo's philosophy both intellectually and also from the standpoint of experience.

One evening I said to Bhagavan that the major attraction of Aurobindo's teachings is that it professes that immortality of the body can be achieved. Bhagavan made no comment.

The next day, as soon as I walked into the hall and sat down, Bhagavan looked at me and began saying, "In *Kumbhakonam* there was one *yogi*, C. V. V. Rao, who was proclaiming to all, his doctrine of the immortality of the body. He was even so bold as to declare that Dr. Annie Besant (a distinguished public and spiritual personality in India) would have to come to him to learn how to make her body immortal. But, before he had a chance to meet Dr. Annie Besant, he died." This brief story clearly illustrated his point.

On another day, not too long after settling near Sri Ramanasramam, I approached Bhagavan when no one was in the hall and showed him that last letter I had received from Aurobindo. Bhagavan asked me to give it to him to read. I told him he would be unable to decipher Aurobindo's handwriting, as it was very illegible and only those who have studied it for sometime could read it. He said, "Give it to me. Let me try."

After looking into it and realising he could only make out a few words, he returned it and asked me to read it out. I began reading it and when I came to the sentence, "Since you are determined to follow a path in which you can achieve only partial realization . . .", Bhagavan stopped me and said, "Partial realization? If it is partial, it is not realization, and if it is realization, it is not partial."

This was the final blow that silenced all my doubts. I then destroyed this letter, like all the rest. And because of all the discussions I had had with Bhagavan I soon felt perfectly established in his teachings, having a clear understanding of where the Maharshi's path and Aurobindo's path diverged and went different ways. When all the clouds of doubts and distractions dispersed, so did our discussions. Bhagavan then knew that I understood and the foundation work had been done. The purpose of all our discussions were served and so they stopped automatically.

- (To be continued)

Talk in Jagannath Puri

The following is an informal talk given to a gathering in Jagannath Puri by Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata, the 82 year old founder of Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center in New York and Nova Scotia. Arthur Coucouvitis, who accompanied Bhagawata on a pilgrimage to India last year, recorded and transcribed this address, given on July 1, 1994.

When the land became filled with the dense darkness of dubiousness and doubts, dissension, debates and dialectics, Sri Bhagavan took pity on the land. And then He appeared.

Sri Arunachaleswara Shiva picked up a sixteen year old boy in Madurai, named Venkataraman, and gave him the death experience in July, 1896. The boy thought he was going to die, but only the body was going to die. The body will be cremated, but the 'I-I-I-I-I-I-I' is eternal. It remains. He became a Self-realized boy.

Soon after, one Saturday morning, August 29th, 1896 he wrote a letter for his brother, took three rupees and went to the Madurai railroad station to catch the train. He was late. Fortunately, the noon train was also late. He bought the ticket and got on the train. In Villupuram junction, near Madras, he got down. He went to the town, stood before a hotel and looked. Food was not ready at the hotel. The hotel owner saw him; he served him food at noon; the boy tried to pay him - two or three annas. The hotel owner was touched by the youth's face or appearance, his innocence or simplicity, his approach and attitude. He refused payment.

Venkataraman walked and walked on the railroad track. Somewhere he came during the night to a temple; he stayed; he saw the Arunachala Mountain shining twenty miles away in Tiruvannamalai. He was hungry; he was tired. The priest, the temple worshipper, wouldn't serve him food. The priest crossed the river and went to another temple to do the worship. The boy followed him. The temple drummer took pity on him and gave him his share of food. He ate, and while walking fell down. He was tired. In the morning he got up, approached a door of a house. It was Lord Krishna's birthday. The lady thought Sri Krishna had appeared! She fed the boy. The boy was wearing gold ear rings. He mortgaged both gold earrings with the man of the house. The man wrote down his name and address so the boy could redeem the earrings later. Venkataraman took the change and went to the railway station on the night of Monday, 31st August, 1896. Early Tuesday morning, September first, 1896 he arrived at the Tiruvannamalai railway station.

He was not walking; he was not thinking; he was being blown like a dry leaf in a heavy wind, typhoon or tempest, whatever you may call it. He approached the great temple early in the morning. The whole town, the whole world was asleep. He found the gates unexpectedly open. He walked in. He went to the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Lord Arunachaleswara. Even the doors there, unattended, were open. He went, presented himself: "At Thy command, Oh my father, I have come." On that day the boy threw away all his clothes, except the loin cloth. The money, the earring slip - everything - he threw in a tank. The barber saw him: "Hey! Hey, boy! You want to be shaved? Come on!" His head was shaved. After the shave and while walking back into the temple, a heavy rain came down. So in this way, he bathed and was washed. From then on for two years he remained in the Arunachaleswara Temple, in the underground *Patala Lingam*, or in other solitary places outside the temple. Children threw stones at him. His body became the home of insects, blood, pus and other things. Then someone picked him up from the underground cellar, began to look after him, began to serve him the *prasad* (the milk that was offered to the Lord). He became known as the Brahmanaswami.

His father, Sundaram Iyer, was a very famous lawyer in Tiruchuzhi, which is about thirty miles from Madurai. He was known as a pious lawyer. Even when the robbers and thieves would see him riding in his bullock cart, they would leave him alone. His wife, Azhagammal, kept her home open for all people, providing food and shelter. Sundaram Iyer passed away in 1892 while Venkataraman was still a student.

For two or three years after Brahmanaswami came to Arunachala his mother did not know where he was. Then some visitor from Madurai saw him talking, discoursing, teaching *Vedanta*, *Bhagavadgita*. He said, "Oh! This boy! He is just a boy, and he is talking so high! So deep! Without the least hesitation!" He reported the good news to his mother.

The Mother came, wept, entreated, and wept, "Come back." Maintaining silence he refused. Someone nearby watching the scene was moved and requested the Brahmanaswami to at least say something to Mother. He wrote:

"The Lord controls the whole thing ..." He soon moved onto the Sri Arunachala Mountain. This is the oldest mountain - I cannot say in the whole world - in India. Very old. Scientists and others have tried to examine its stone and have come back declaring it very old. This Mountain is Lord Shiva Himself, appearing so that people can worship Him and abide in Him. Around that area there was a Ganapati, a Ganesha, named Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. As a five year old boy, his father named him Ganapati. He became a treasure house of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and other Sanskrit literature, and Sanskrit poetry was on the tip of his tongue. He had done plenty, plenty, plenty of *mantras, japa, tyaga, tapasya*. Still, he was discontented, not at peace.

He had met Brahmanaswami on the southern slopes of Sri Arunachala. One day he was assailed by pains, troubles, doubts. He remembered that Brahmanaswami was on the hill, and at midday, a little after noon, he climbed and found Brahmanaswami sitting outside, alone. He prostrated and said, "All the scriptures that have to be read, I have read. All the *mantras* and *japa* that have to be done, I have done. Still I have no peace. Please save me." The Brahmanaswami took a little time. For at least fifteen minutes he silently gazed at him. Then in Tamil, he spoke. The English translation is simple, "If one watches whence the notion 'I' arises, the mind is absorbed in That; that is *tapas*. When you recite a *mantra*, watch where the sound is coming from, within you; when you sing a song or prayer, watch where it is emanating from: your Heart. Put your attention on That. That is *tyaga*, that is *tapasya*, that is all." All his doubts and delusions were washed away that day.

From the attendant Ganapati Muni inquired about the Swami's former name, Venkataraman. He cut out Venkata, added Maharshi and thus renamed him Sri Ramana Maharshi, or Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Sri Bhagavan's teaching is simple: Ask "Who Am I? (*Mai Kaun Hun?*)." Put your attention on that. In whatever land, whatever name, to whatever clime, club, caste, creed you belong, there is something within you when you speak, you breathe, you talk, you think. That comes from the Heart, the spiritual Heart on the right side. Do your duty, do your work, but put your attention on That.

It is said that when the forests of darkness covered the land, Adi Shankara, Bhagavan Sri Shankaracharya, was born to lift India from that grave of darkness. And so in the 19th Century Lord Arunachaleswara brought Sri Bhagavan Ramana into the world to teach. Not by preaching! Not by talking! Simply by sitting, calm and quiet. He welcomed people. He did talk to them, removed their doubts. People for whatever reasons, from whatever levels, came to Him. He gave to all.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi emphasised, "Take one Name. Whatever Name you take, concentrate on that. Whatever form of God you worship, God will appear to you in that form!" What more! You don't have to retire to the forest or renounce your work.

Out of the seven hundred verses Lord Sri Krishna gave the world through Arjuna, Sri Bhagavan has given me this: Hey Arjuna! What! Wake up! March! Move! Don't sit idle! What to do? "*Tasmad sarvesu kalesu, mam anusmara yudhya ca...*" So, at all times, remembering me, march on, work on, move on. There is no time to spare. That is the whole meaning, the gist of the *Bhagavadgita*. There is no time to sit idle, to cry, to waste time. That is it.

So, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi came to REMIND mankind to "Wake up!"

Sir! We are in Sri Jagannathji Puri, the holy city where that Englishman lived who showered light, plenty of light on India, who has written books on India, on *Bharata Shakti, Bharata Dharma*, on *Tantra* - the *Tantra* which had become a black magic, a black discipline. He worked as a chief justice of the Calcutta High Court during the British rule. But in his private life he quietly studied and translated the ancient text on *Tantra*,

Mother worship, a path he himself devoutly followed. And all Indians should be very proud and feel very fortunate to read his writings. He travelled all over Europe and England. The Britons resented him and tried to prevent him from talking about the heights of spiritual life in India. And here he was, Sir John Woodruffe, in Sri Jagannath Puri. He declared, "India is the Heart of the world. Look at the map!" he said. "India is the Heart; India is the Spiritual Centre." The whole world has branched out, but this is the root, this is the centre from which it grows. Why say so? So many invasions came. They cut down peepul trees, they demolished temples and other structures, but *Sanatana Dharma* is like the grass we call *dhul*. No typhoon, no tempest can wash it away. It is stuck! Stuck to the ground. It remains like the faith. In India, it remains stuck that way with people, with the villagers, with all.

Then the incarnation of Gandhiji came to liberate India from foreign rule. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi said on the death of Gandhiji: "You know, when the time came, Lord Rama was reminded, 'Now Sir, your mission is up! You should return!' The same happened with Sri Krishna. So, also with Gandhiji. The time came and he was born for the liberation of India. And also the time came when there was no more purpose, no meaning for him to be in the body. Then the Lord called him back to His place."

There is a story about my father. I am now already eighty-one-years old. I remember my mother used to talk in my childhood of how the pilgrims would come walking to Sri Jagannathji on foot from my home in Bihar. Once they were returning home to Bihar when my father suffered from diarrhoea and fell down. Mother used to say that the large vultures would fly around those pilgrims who fell down and, even if they were still alive, they would pounce on them and eat them up! I remember hearing this from my mother very clearly in my childhood. She told me my father fell unconscious, but the Divine Mother slapped him. In Hindi we say, "*He tapar mara*." He fell down unconscious but the Mother brought him back, gave him energy and he rejoined his fellow pilgrims. That is how he was returned to us in Bihar. She also used to say, "Jagannathji brought him back!"

Recently, I read a children's book to my grandchildren - Saraswati is ten years old. The other girl is named Parvati; she is six and a half years old. The third is a boy, Sri Ramachandraji; he is three and a half years old. From the age of one, he would sit with us in the shrine with his eyes closed. He never looks to me like a child or a boy! Although these three are in America, they hear stories of the *Mahabharata*. They always talk and ask questions. They will ask many questions of me when I return.

So this visit to Sri Jagannathji is not a tour for us. He pulled us here from New York. Without knowing anything we came. Jagannathji is not a stone or a statue for me. People go on thinking very much and talk about God. In a simple way I say: "What! Are you dead? You are talking about God? What makes you talk? What makes you think? Where does that power come from?" In a simple way, not in an angry way do I say this. Sri Bhagavan says, "*Ajnanascha ashraddhanashca samshayatma vinashayati...*" "The ignorant man without faith goes to destruction."

Shraddha, faith. So it is Sri Jagannathji who has brought us here. We never speak much. We are not used to talking. My friends say that it is very difficult to make me talk. But they also say, it is very difficult to stop me from talking once I start. No storm, no hurricane, can stop me. East or west, north or south, it does not matter what goes on in all directions I continue... Done.

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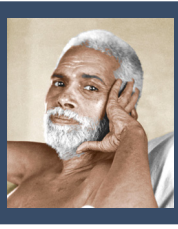

The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy
Part III

Entering upon the third instalment of Sri N. Balaram Reddy's recollections, we are sad to announce the news of his sudden passing on May 11 in Bangalore. Sri V. S. Ramanan, the President of Sri Ramanasramam, informed us that for two months prior to his death Sri Reddy was saying that he did not feel well and had already lived long enough, being in his eighty-eighth year. Sri Reddy's relatives came to the Ramanasramam and took him to Bangalore on April 24. There he underwent many medical tests, and on May 10 a doctor reviewed all the results and said that Mr. Reddy was quite fit and could easily live for four more years. On May 11, the very next day, Balaram Reddy was absorbed into his Master, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

When I had observed Bhagavan closely for some time I discovered that he would never openly say that he was our *guru* and we were his disciples; in fact, he would sometimes say things that sounded contrary to this. But for us close devotees there was never a doubt that he was our *guru*. He loved us like a mother, protected us like a father, guided us like a teacher and moved with us like a friend. We constantly felt his guidance and grace.

Where do we read in the annals of the spiritual history of India about a sage like Bhagavan, living in one place for fifty-four years, making himself available at all times and embodying such divine qualities? We would sit in the hall and meditate with our eyes closed, or just rest our vision on his form, which we believed to be the form of God. He would teach us orally, or in silence, or again by deed; sometimes in subtle ways, and at other times directly.

When I initially came to Tiruvannamalai and was living in town I would come to the ashram very early in the morning. When the attendant first opened the doors of the hall I would be waiting there. His opening of the door meant that Bhagavan had risen and was about to come out. Before Bhagavan had a chance to come out I would walk into the hall and find him on the sofa preparing to leave. He would often cover himself with a shawl at night and when I would see him removing his shawl I would take it from him and fold it. He was kind enough to allow me this little service.

In those days I was coming to the hall and sitting before Bhagavan in both the mornings and afternoons. During the late afternoons larger crowds were coming into the hall for *darshan* and causing some disturbance. I then discovered that I could meditate in my room with less distraction in the afternoons and, consequently, began omitting my afternoon visits to the ashram.

One afternoon G. V. Subbaramayya arrived at the ashram and not seeing me in the hall inquired from Bhagavan where I was. The next morning when I was folding Bhagavan's shawl he mentioned about what G. V. Subbaramayya had asked him on the previous day. By this comment I could understand that Bhagavan wanted me to resume coming to the hall in the afternoons, though he did not say so explicitly. In spite of this, I still remained in my room that afternoon.

The next morning when I entered the hall and went over to Bhagavan to take his shawl and fold it he didn't

give it to me. He quietly folded it himself. I then realised Bhagavan was admonishing me in this way. After this I saw my error and resumed the afternoon visits to the ashram. From this I realised that Bhagavan wanted us to benefit from his company. But how could he say it openly?

In the first year of my settling in Tiruvannamalai, I remember one afternoon I was sitting in the hall and Bhagavan was explaining to me some particular point on a spiritual matter. During the discussion he asked me to go to one of the two *almirahs* that were up against the west wall, open it and bring him a certain book. I searched for the book but was unable to find it. I returned to Bhagavan and informed him of my failure to locate the book and then again sat down against the south wall facing him.

Presently, I saw Bhagavan alight from his couch, slowly and majestically walk over to the *almirah*, open it, and immediately pull out the book he asked me to find. He closed the *almirah* and, to my surprise, instead of walking back to the couch, he came and sat on the floor right next to me, on my left. He opened the book to the page he wanted me to read and, holding it in his right hand, held the opened book before my face and asked me to read the particular passage.

Attendants of Bhagavan had earlier told me that Bhagavan's body was like a furnace. Only then, when he sat so close to me, could I understand what they meant. I felt like there was an electric dynamo of spiritual power emanating from his body. I was thrilled to the core of my being.

I believe the most unique characteristic of Bhagavan was the power of his presence. Much of what he taught had already been transmitted to the masses down through the ages. In Bhagavan we found a being that was surcharged with the Reality to such an extent that coming into his presence would effect a dramatic change in us. This Divine Power of his presence was something remarkable, entirely outstanding in this century. But why just this century? It must be so for many centuries.

I always felt there was something tangibly distinct in Bhagavan's hall. When we walked into it and sat down we immediately felt like we had just entered a different sphere of existence. It was like the world we knew did not exist there - Bhagavan's presence, his other-worldliness, would so envelop the atmosphere. When we again walked out of the hall we were confronted with the old world we knew all too well. Nowadays we see many spiritual teachers opening schools, hospitals and the like. All this philanthropy has a purpose, no doubt, but Bhagavan never asked us to do such things. He wanted us to do one thing only, that is to know who we are, to know the Self. He believed this to be the panacea for all human suffering and the goal of life. But how many of us are adequately earnest to seek the Self alone? We are continually diverted and distracted by what we call "helping the world". Where is the world? And who are we? This is what we should be looking into.

In January of 1938, after staying with the Maharshi for one year, I returned to my village. I was planning to go again to the ashram after a couple of months, but before returning I decided to make a trip to North India.

After hearing very favourable remarks about Sri Krishnaprem from Dilip Kumar Roy in Aurobindo Ashram, I had a desire to visit him at his ashram in the Himalayas. He lived about eighteen miles from Almora.

I left my village and travelled by train to Delhi. From there I immediately boarded another train for Barelly, Uttar Pradesh, where I changed to another train that took me north to Kathgodam. I was advised to get down at Haldwani, one stop before Kathgodam, and board a bus for Almora. Following this advice, I arrived at Almora in the evening and spent the night in a *dharmashala*. About 8:30 a.m. I hired a coolie to carry my luggage and then began the eighteen mile trek through the forest and hills to Sri Krishnaprem's ashram in

Mirtola. We covered about two miles every hour and reached the ashram by 4:30 p.m.

Approaching the ashram I could see from a distance his tall figure standing outside. I had not written him prior to this visit, nor did he have any idea who I was or where I was coming from. Nevertheless, he greeted me warmly, asked me to take my things to an adjacent guest room and then return to him for refreshments.

Krishnaprem was living there with his guru, Yashoda Ma. When Swami Vivekananda was still an unknown wandering monk, he chose the young daughter of a gracious host at Ghazipur for symbolic worship in *Kumari Puja*, as observed in Bengal. That same little Brahmin girl would one day become Yashoda Ma, the *guru* of Krishnaprem.

Krishnaprem's pre-*sannyasa* name was Ronald Nixon. He was a brilliant graduate of Cambridge, who came to India drawn by a spiritual thirst unquenched in England. He taught English literature at the universities of Lucknow and Benares before renouncing and becoming a Vaishnava monk. Krishnaprem spoke fluent Hindi and Bengali, and he was also a serious student of Sanskrit and Pali.

Their ashram building had a shrine room, kitchen, library and a couple other rooms on the ground floor. One additional room was built upstairs. The land they bought was three miles in circumference. Krishnaprem told me that the broker who arranged the purchase deceived them on some details. They, however, decided to make the best of it and appeared to be quite settled when I made this visit in May of 1938. To me the ashram was like an isolated oasis, surrounded by trees and hills, and far removed from the scorching summer heat I had just experienced in the plains.

I had brought with me two *sapota* fruits from my village garden, which I offered to them. They had never seen this variety of fruit and became extremely interested to know all about it. After eating the fruit they saved its black seeds with the intention of planting them in their garden. I saw that they were growing many fruits and vegetables and, I was told, had even tried their hand at starting a tea garden, but because of the excess of humidity in those hills it failed.

When Krishnaprem and Yashoda Ma came to know that I had spent five years in Aurobindo Ashram and one year in Sri Ramanasramam they became keen to hear all about Bhagavan and Aurobindo. I had planned on staying with them for only three days, but when I started telling them stories about Bhagavan and Sri Ramanasramam they decided I should stay a month - so intrigued were they on hearing about the Maharshi. I was not prepared to make a longer stay and so left them as scheduled.

During this short visit I was able to observe that they were living an exemplary life of one-pointed devotion and intense spiritual practice. Apparently, the weather of this mountain retreat favoured Yashoda Ma's health, whereas the weather near the sea favoured her husband's. Thus, for health reasons, they lived separately. Yashoda Ma's daughter was also then living at the ashram, and Yashoda Ma had so much faith and trust in Krishnaprem, she had given her over to his care. He, on his part, looked after her like his own ward.

When Krishnaprem asked Yashoda Ma to initiate him and make him her disciple, she said, "Yes, I will. But there is one condition. That is, that you never complain about your spiritual progress." He consented and till his end was fully satisfied with the stature and grace of his *guru*.

Many years after this visit I received a letter from him wherein he wrote that we were both blessed: me, because I had Bhagavan as my *guru*, and he, because he had Yashoda Ma.

I stuck to my plan and left their ashram after the third day, returned to Almora and then travelled to Dehra Dun. From there I boarded a bus for Rajpur, which is just seven miles south of Mussoorie. A one mile walk up the hill from Rajpur was the ashram of Dr. K. D. Sastri. In 1931, after leaving my studies in Benares, I visited this ashram. Even when I had come here seven years earlier, its founder was already deceased and his American wife was managing the institution. It was founded for the purpose of teaching young people spiritual traditions, Indian History and other cultural subjects. When I first went there in 1931, T. L. Vaswani was a resident teacher. He was then a popular author of many respected books, an acclaimed public speaker and an esteemed spiritual personality in his own right. Prior to teaching in this ashram he was the chancellor of a college, a job he resigned for the purpose of becoming a *sadhu*; a title which later became a prefix to his name - Sadhu Vaswani. He was not teaching in this ashram when I came there this second time.

Soon after arriving at Dr. K. D. Sastri's ashram someone asked me if I had met the Bengali mystic-saint who lived just four miles south of there. I had not, and so was encouraged to again take the return bus and get down at Kishenpur, which was just halfway between this ashram and Dehra Dun.

Alighting there I inquired and soon found the house of the saint. I was met at the entrance and escorted to a room where I was asked to enter and take a seat on the floor. Before me sat a remarkable looking woman, clad in a white sari, sitting on a white sheet that was spread over a thin mattress laid on the floor. Her spiritual charm and the cool breeze of peace and harmony that she radiated had an extraordinary effect on me. I almost felt as if I was sitting before the Maharshi himself. And in many ways similar to the Maharshi, glowing with warmth and illumination, sat a rare spiritual personality of the twentieth century, Ananda Mayi Ma. She was then 42 years old.

In an endearing manner she made kind inquiries about matters concerning my life. As we were talking the room slowly filled up with visitors. I told her that I had just come from Krishnaprem's ashram. After hearing that she said that Krishnaprem and Yashoda Ma had created an Uttar (north) Vrindavan in Almora.

When I looked around the room again I saw many devotees had gathered. Some were meditating, some were talking quietly among themselves and others began questioning Ananda Mayi Ma on certain matters. Everything seemed to be going on spontaneously in a natural manner. There appeared to be no enforced code of behaviour in Ananda Mayi Ma's presence, which immediately reminded me of the Old Hall at Sri Ramanasramam.

At about noon the saint stood up and walked out of the room. A few of the devotees followed her and I decided to do likewise. She walked to a doorway of another room and stood there looking in. I also looked into that room and saw a bearded, middle-aged man lying on the floor writhing in pain. I was surprised to have recognised this man from an incident that occurred two days earlier, while I was travelling to Rajpur:

When I was in Dehra Dun and boarded the bus for Rajpur, this same bearded man had entered the bus and sat next to me. The bus was nearly full and, although it was the scheduled departure time, the bus driver and ticket collector had not yet made their appearance. Consequently, most of the passengers began to show signs of impatience, especially this bearded gentleman seated beside me. He went to the point of getting off the bus and shouting out loud for the driver, imagining that he was in some building nearby neglecting his duties. I later discovered that this might have been true. Probably for financial reasons, dictated by the bus owner, the bus personnel were notorious for not showing up till the bus was filled to capacity, regardless of the scheduled departure time. Eventually the driver appeared, the passengers grumbled a bit and we left Dehra Dun.

Standing in the doorway, seeing this same bearded man terribly ill, I was told that he was the husband of

Ananda Mayi Ma. How Ananda Mayi Ma happened to marry him, the relationship they had together and how they came to move from Dacca to this place makes quite an interesting story.

I was later informed that on the day of my first visit to Ananda Mayi Ma, her husband was ill with smallpox. Knowing this, Ananda Mayi Ma asked her mother and a resident disciple known as Didi to leave the house and live elsewhere. Of course, they objected. She then told them if they did not leave, she would. Ultimately, they were persuaded to leave and Ananda Mayi Ma was left alone to attend to the needs of her sick husband.

Her husband was a good man, loved by all of Ma's followers. He was even looked upon as a father figure in the ashram and, although he was well served by his wife during this illness, he eventually succumbed to the disease. Perhaps she had anticipated this and wanted to be alone with him during his last days. Just before dying he joined his palms together in salutation and said to his wife, "You are my Mother." There is little doubt that Ananda Mayi did more than attend to just his physical needs during those last days. The time she spent alone with him certainly must have brought him far along on his spiritual journey.

In the afternoon I returned to Dr. K. D. Sastri's ashram. A younger American sister of K. D. Sastri's widow was also in the ashram at this time. She was interested in studying music and was taking lessons in Lucknow. She was also quite interested in coming to Tiruvannamalai to meet Bhagavan. Before leaving there I told her to write to me and come to Ramanasramam when I was present in the ashram. She somehow came when I wasn't present, stayed in the Morvi Guest House and was relieved of over four hundred rupees by a thief. She had no idea of what security precautions to take. In due time she left India and returned to America.

After a two or three day visit to the Rajpur ashram I left for Vrindavan. I had no special desire to visit Vrindavan at that time, but Krishnaprem made me promise that I would stop there while returning south. Yoshada Ma's guru, a *sannyasi*, lived there and they wanted me to meet him. Also, they wanted me to visit a few of Krishnaprem's disciples who lived in a house they owned in Vrindavan. When I arrived I immediately went and visited the *sannyasi* and disciples and was able to board a departing train the very same day. Although I was then feeling eager to return to Ramanasramam, I decided I would break my journey once more before reaching Tiruvannamalai.

- (To be continued)

Quote

"As often as one tries to surrender, the ego raises its head and one has to try to suppress it. Surrender is not an easy thing. It is only when God Himself by His Grace draws the mind inwards that complete surrender can be achieved. But such Grace comes only to those who have already, in this or previous lives, gone through all the struggles and *sadhanas* preparatory to the extinction of the mind and killing of the ego."

- Day by Day with Bhagavan

Thayumanavar

Although Thayumanavar lived less than 300 years ago and remains the most popular Tamil poet-saint, there is no authentic record of his date of birth or death. What is known to have transpired between these two events can be summed up briefly:

At an early age he began working in the service of a king. When the king died he left this work because of the amorous advances of the king's widow. He then travelled in search of a *Guru*. At Tiruchilapalli he met Mouna

Guru Arulananda Sivachari. He asked to be taken as a disciple, but the saint answered '*chumma iru*', meaning 'be still' or 'be quiet' or 'just be' (a phrase which Ramana Maharshi also used on a number of occasions). However, the saint said that when the time was ripe he would initiate him.

Thayumanavar then returned home and married. Soon after his wife delivered their first child, a boy, she died. That again prompted Thayumanavar to leave home in answer to his spiritual calling. He once more approached Arulananda Sivachari and, true to his word, the guru fulfilled his promise and initiated Thayumanavar into *sannyas*.

Thayumanavar followed the discipline of silence (*mouna*), which he describes as: "that state which spontaneously manifests after the annihilation of the ego." He says: "It is a state beyond light and darkness, but it is called light, since language is inadequate to express it. The ego disappears and 'I' spontaneously manifests in full glory." The Maharshi particularly singled out this verse of his for admiration.

Thayumanavar was equally great as a saint and a poet. Often he would retire to the forest or public gardens and remained for days absorbed in the bliss of the Self. Legend has it that he was sitting thus, immobile in *samadhi* in a public garden in Ramnad when the gardeners, not noticing him, piled a heap of dry leaves and twigs about him and set fire to it, and thus his body was consumed and he merged in the Supreme.

His mystical and devotional lyrics continue to inspire devotees and aspirants. The profundity of their meaning is matched by their beauty of form, so that they appeal to simple and learned alike. Although no English translation can do justice to the Tamil original, a careful reading of the following will at least reveal the great depths of Thayumanavar's experience. Ramana Maharshi was often heard quoting from his exquisite verses. The following are ten verses especially selected by the Maharshi:

1 & 2. The individual ego known as "I" having manifested and troubled everyone, the universal Maya, the diversifying agency, spontaneously follows in its wake. Who can possibly describe the vast ocean of misery consequent upon it? It appears as the flesh, the body, the senses, interior and exterior, as the all pervading ether, air, fire, water and earth, as mountain, forest, huge visions like hills physical and subtle, as forgetfulness and memory, and so on, rising up wave after wave and beating against man, bringing pleasure and pain, which are the result of his past actions, and also their remedies known as creeds, religions, God-Seeker, and the testimonies and sanctions found in various sciences, and explained by logic. All these are more numerous than even the fine grains of sand on the seashore.

3. Unaccountable troubles crop up spontaneously, sheaf upon sheaf. How to root them out wholesale, even as burning up a hill of camphor without residue in a vast blaze of fire? In order to achieve this miracle, and to enlighten me, Grace took shape. In every respect, like my self, eating and sleeping, suffering and enjoying, bearing a name and born somewhere, it appeared as the Silent Guru, like a deer used to decoy another of its species.

4. And claimed my body, possessions and life itself and consistently with the process of elimination, signified "you are not the five senses nor the five elements, nor the limbs, nor the mind, nor their attributes, nor all these collectively, nor the body nor knowledge nor ignorance. You are pure consciousness, unassociated like a crystal, but reflecting the background to lookers-on; whereas we (*guru*) are only the inherent nature revealing the truth on finding you ripe for it."

5. "If eager to reach Consciousness-Bliss-Eternity innermost in all, which is also the inner abode of refreshing Grace, listen to the course I indicate. May you reach the Pure Heart and abide there forever! May dense ignorance vanish for you! May you attain to Bliss-Consciousness! May bondage cease for you!" Communicating thus,

6. "And dispensing the true knowledge of the Natural and Unique Silence which destroys all bondage and where there is no meditation nor the ego, no space, no time, no direction, no association, no elimination, no differentiation, no expression, no phenomena of night and day, no end, no beginning, no middle, no interior or exterior, nor an aggregate of all these."

7. (The Guru indicated further) that, though all these are eliminated, "It" is not void, but is Natural, Eternal Be-ing inexpressible by words, not manifesting as ego, but is the Reality engulfing all, having swallowed all ignorance like day covering night, and absorbing unhindered all knowledge, metamorphosing the person into Itself, It shines in Silence, Self-effulgent;

8. With its emergence, It prevents any other from appearing; and all else is put out suddenly like burning camphor blown away without residual flicker or glow; and in its place It shines beyond the senses, and apart from the knower, known and knowledge; and yet It is there, though who can speak of it and to whom? For if It arises, the individual is metamorphosed; It will assert Itself (*Literally: It Speaks Itself*),

9. (And further on), if it is said to be "It," the question arises "which," though such doubt about the non-dual One is illogical; so transcending it also, King Janaka or Suka and others remained like the bee intoxicated with honey in that state. (The same Guru's) blessing helped me to reach it. Grace is needed in order to reach the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and attain absolute Bliss. I will not rest nor attend to my wants until I attain it.

10. On the "I" idea of the individual ego vanishing, there springs up within me a current of "I-I" endless indeed. This confers bliss engulfing all my knowledge, unique and transcendental, ending in Silence! How then can Silence be expressed?

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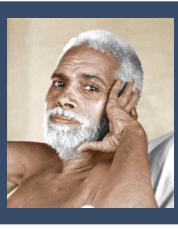

The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy
Part IV

About a year earlier I had left Tiruvannamalai for a month and visited Swami Ramdas at his Ananda Ashram in Kanhangad, Kerala. The Swami's brother-in-law was an officer in the revenue department and the land allocated by the government for Swami Ramdas to set up his ashram was acquired through his intervention. In fact, his brother-in-law's property bordered the ashram.

After Ramdas left his home and became a mendicant *sadhu*, his wife and daughter came to live here with his wife's brother (the same brother-in-law). Even at the time of my first visit to Ramdas in 1937, his wife had already passed away, but other relatives, including his daughter, would visit the ashram daily.

Amongst all these family members and devotees the Swami would cheerfully move about, never putting on the airs of a *sannyasi* or even that of a householder. He treated everyone as if they were all part of the same family, in a very natural, affectionate and, above all, detached manner. It was a delight to watch him. In all guilelessness and humility he would sit down with anyone and begin narrating one story after another, all from his personal life and experience. On my first visit in 1937 there was only Mother Krishnabai and two or three *sadhus* living in the ashram. Ramdas would be engrossed in telling me some story or reading from his manuscripts when Mother Krishnabai would appear with cooked food and feed us. In the course of one of these stories Ramdas told me how he came to Arunachala and saw Bhagavan. When he was a mendicant and was travelling to all the holy places, he heard of Arunachala. He had also heard of Ramana Maharshi, but to see him was not the main purpose of his visit to Tiruvannamalai.

Soon after reaching there he came to Ramanasramam and stood before the Maharshi, who was then sitting on a raised platform. Ramdas said that he felt Bhagavan's grace pouring out through his eyes and filling him. After having Bhagavan's *darshan* he went up on the hill and resided in a cave and performed continuous round-the-clock *japa*. He said that by doing this constant *japa* he lost his mind and after two weeks the universal vision of God appeared to him. In other words, he saw everything as God. Since that day, he said, he has been living in Ram. Ramdas had received the *Ram Mantra* from his father and he was one of those few great souls who could execute his *sadhana* to completion without the help of a physical *guru*.

During my first visit, Ramdas was present for only two of the four weeks I stayed in his ashram. Devotees from Maharastra were eager to see him and so he had travelled there. After he left, Mother Krishnabai was kind enough to tell me some stories from her life, describing how she came to Ramdas and other personal matters. It was all very interesting and elevating. When I returned to Ramanasramam I received a letter from Ananda Ashram wherein they requested me to write in English all I had heard from Mother Krishnabai relating to her personal life and experiences. I did this for them and it was included in a biography they published of her. Also, when I was in Ananda Ashram in 1937, I had written to my family in Andhra to send a certain quantity of rice to this ashram for their use. Later, when I returned to Ramanasramam, a letter arrived from Swami Ramdas in which he wrote they had received the rice and that it was much superior to the scented rice they were presently using. I showed the letter to Bhagavan.

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Not long after that, when I was alone with Bhagavan, he asked me about Swami Ramdas. He wanted to know his daily schedule and, in particular, what he did in the mornings. It was unusual for Bhagavan to inquire about others in this manner. I then told him that someone had suggested to Ramdas that he should daily practice a certain *pranayama* exercise, as it would be good for his health. It simply involved inhaling slowly and deeply, and exhaling slowly, without any breath retention. He was doing this for one hour every morning. I also told Bhagavan other matters concerning his daily routine. When I visited Swami Ramdas on my return from North India in 1938 I only stayed a few days. Upon leaving, Mother Krishnabai gave me some food items to offer to Bhagavan. The practice of sending certain food items to Ramanasramam from Ananda Ashram became an established tradition which continues to this day. For Bhagavan's *Jayanti* celebration Krishnabai would send a large quantity of dried banana chips and *kanji*. Even after her passing these generous offerings continue, not only for *Jayanti*, but at other times as well.

It was near the end of May in 1938 when I returned to Ramanasramam from North India. When my bus was approaching the ashram on the Chengam Road I asked the driver to stop and let me off near Palakothu, just west of the ashram. S. S. Cohen occupied a small cottage there and during my previous stay in Tiruvannamalai he often requested me to come and live with him in Palakothu. I decided to take him up on the offer. Leaving my luggage in his room, I walked over to the ashram, entered the Old Hall, prostrated before the Maharshi and sat down until 11:00 a.m., which was the dinner time. I then returned to Cohen's cottage to eat. I didn't realize at the time that devotees just arriving after a long absence were usually requested to take their first meal with Bhagavan, even though, as in my case, they may be living outside the ashram. When Bhagavan came to Palakothu on his walk after lunch, his attendant stopped and told me that Bhagavan, not seeing me in the dining hall, had inquired as to my whereabouts. The attendant stayed and talked to us as Bhagavan continued on alone. I was very touched by the Maharshi's solicitude. I met him as he was returning from his walk and told him about my North Indian trip. I began narrating my visit to Krishnaprem and told Bhagavan how keen he was to hear all about him and Ramanasramam. It was then the month of May, the hottest time of the year. I explained to Bhagavan how delightfully pleasant and cool the climate of Almora was, especially compared to the present weather in Tiruvannamalai. Bhagavan said, "The real coolness is within. If we have that coolness it will be cool wherever we go. Similarly, if you want to protect your feet from the rough ground, you don't try to cover the earth with a piece of leather. You simply put leather shoes on your own feet and the job is done."

Mouna

One night, not too long after moving in with S. S. Cohen at Palakothu, some time after 9 p.m., I had an urge to go on *pradakshina* around Arunachala. I was then staying on the verandah of his cottage near the outside door, which enabled me to come and go without disturbing him. He probably didn't know I went out that night.

I was slowly walking around the hill when I came near the Kanji Road. This is just halfway around the hill and near what is now called "Sri Bhagavan's Bridge," named because Bhagavan would often stop there and rest on it. I was looking at the holy mountain, surcharged with peace and silence, when a strong feeling arose from within to take a vow of *mouna* (silence). On the spot I resolved to stop speaking to anyone, except those occasional exchanges I may have with Bhagavan. In the morning, when Cohen met me he began talking to me in his usual way, he soon discovered I was not responding. I wrote on a piece of paper about my decision to observe *mouna*, which took him by surprise. It was not long before everyone in the ashram knew.

Swami Viswanathan was at that time translating Swami Ramdas' book, *In the Vision of God*, into Tamil. He was corresponding regularly with Ananda Ashram, and in the course of this correspondence he had written

about my observing *mouna*. Soon after this, he received a letter from Ramdas wherein the Swami wrote: "Balaram Reddy is observing *mouna*? That is very good. He is a pure soul."

A day or so after this letter arrived I was entering the ashram one afternoon at about 5 p.m. by way of the stairs on the north side. One has to ascend a few steps and then descend a similar number of steps which takes you down to the ashram level. These steps take you over the bund on the side of a small canal bank where water would flow during the rainy season. When I had reached the top of the stairs I met Bhagavan and his attendant proceeding in the opposite direction. I stood aside to let them pass. Bhagavan looked at me and said, "Viswanathan received a letter from Swami Ramdas and Ramdas wrote: 'Balaram Reddy is observing *mouna*? That is very good. He is a pure soul.'" Bhagavan repeated this quotation to me in English.

Bhagavan's mentioning this, provided me with the assurance that my decision to observe *mouna* was correct. It was sometimes difficult to tell if Bhagavan approved of a certain act or discipline, as he interfered very little in our outward lives. But if we kept alert, he would somehow let us know in one way or another - often in a subtle manner - that what we were doing was correct or incorrect.

Once Major Chadwick decided that he too would observe *mouna*, but Bhagavan made it clear to him that it wasn't necessary or advantageous in his case.

I continued observing silence from June 1938 to September 1939 when something Bhagavan said induced me to end it. In September of 1939, I was sitting near the end of Bhagavan's couch, where his feet rested. There wasn't a fence around the couch in those days and we could easily sit close to him. It was about 7 p.m. when I opened my eyes from meditation and saw sitting before me T. L. Vaswani and his nephew, J. P. Vaswani. T. L. Vaswani recognised me and I joined my palms and saluted him in greeting. As I was still observing *mouna*, I didn't say anything to him. The dinner bell rang, everyone got up and left and I returned to my residence. After breakfast the next morning, I told Bhagavan the identity of our guests and inquired about where they had gone. T. L. Vaswani was renowned all over India but, like many famous people back then, very few could recognise him by sight. I was surprised to hear from Bhagavan that he and his nephew had already departed. I was disappointed that I had no chance to communicate with them or inform anyone who they were before they left. When I had expressed all this to Bhagavan he told me that I could have said something to him on the previous evening. Bhagavan's mentioning that I could have said something, gave me an indication that my silence was now not necessary in his view and I should end it, which I did. I later wrote to T. L. Vaswani and expressed my disappointment at his early departure from the ashram, and explained how I had been then observing *mouna*. I also related to him my conversation with Bhagavan after his departure and how it resulted in my abandoning a vow of silence. He wrote back praising Bhagavan, expressing how blessed I was to be sitting at the feet of a sage like the Maharshi.

In this same year, 1939, I occupied another hut near Cohen's in Palakothu. This hut consisted of two small rooms, about six feet by eight feet each. I stayed in one of these and Swami Prajnanananda, a westerner, was using the other. One night before I returned from the ashram, someone broke the lock on the door and made off with my suitcase and some other things. The next day I searched in the nearby woods and found the suitcase, which contained mostly books. The books were scattered around near the suitcase. I collected them and returned to my room. A short time later there was another robbery. Someone pounded a hole in the mud wall near the window frame. At this exact place I kept some money in a jar. Somebody must have seen me taking money from there and got the idea of stealing it. The next day when Bhagavan came to Palakothu on his walk I told him about the theft. He looked over the scene and explained to others how some of these local people keep an eye open for such opportunities, and how they must have seen me take money from that jar and decided to pound a hole in the

wall to get at it. He then told me that I should not keep anything in this place that would be desired by others. I therefore shifted my belongings to town and gradually moved back there myself.

My Father's Death

Not long after I ceased my *mouna* I received a letter from my mother asking me to come home for a visit, since she had not seen me for a long time and was missing me. I returned home and just four days after my return, on November 10, 1939, my father unexpectedly collapsed with a heart attack and died. It was about 9 p.m. on the night of *Deepavali* when someone came running to my garden cottage and told me to come immediately to the main house. By the time I arrived at the house it was all over: my father had expired. It seems he took his evening meal as usual and was relaxing when he experienced a sharp pain in his chest. As he lay there suffering he told my brother and mother that he felt his *prana* (life force) leaving his body. He first described to them how it was leaving his lower extremities and was slowly working its way upwards. When it had reached his chest he said he would now die and gave instructions as to where his body should be buried. All this happened within half an hour.

I wrote to the ashram and informed them of my father's demise. Viswanathan later told me that Bhagavan read the letter and commented to those around him "that it was all over in half an hour." Two years earlier my father had come to Sri Ramanasramam and had Bhagavan's *darshan*. The fact that I was able to return home just a few days before my father's end - and many other such incidents in my life - instilled in me faith in the guiding presence of the Maharshi. I also felt assured that surrendering to him as my *guru* and master was the best decision I had ever made.

Soon after my father's demise I left my village and returned to the ashram to attend Bhagavan's sixtieth birthday celebration, which fell on December 27, 1939. In our Indian tradition the sixtieth birthday is considered an important event in one's life. It is called *Shashti Purthi*, and many devotees attended the occasion.

- (To be continued)

A Retreat with Sri V. Ganesan

You are cordially invited to retreat with Sri V. Ganesan at Arunachala Ashrama in Nova Scotia from October 5 to October 13, 1995. Sri V. Ganesan, a relative of Sri Ramana Maharshi, moved closely with the Sage in his youth and served in the administration of Sri Ramanasramam for thirty-five years before retiring. He affectionately served many of the old, intimate disciples of the Master and is a wellspring of anecdotes and teachings that continue to inspire and guide seekers.

For more information please write or call:

The Manager, Arunachala Ashrama, R. R. 1, Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, Canada B0S 1C0, Tel: (902) 665-2090

The All-Important Science

SRI Venkateswara Sarma, fondly known as Sastrigal Mama in Sri Ramanasramam - during Sri Bhagavan's lifetime he was called Adi Annamalai Sastrigal - was an exceptional and astounding astrologer. From childhood he exhibited a rare genius in this field. While still very young, his extraordinary intelligence enabled him to master the most abstruse and difficult branch of astrology. All, including his guru, declared him as the wisest student.

Prasna is an astrological science based on a perfect fruition between mathematics and intuition. With just some meagre information from the questioner, which includes only the first word of the question, a *Prasna* astrologer can, within seconds, draw up mentally a horoscope. This requires great mathematical precision and perfection. Having drawn the horoscope within his mind, and in a flash also having studied it, the astrologer will have to wait, prayerfully. Then, from the depths of his inner intuition words gush forth, forming the astrological predictions for the questioner. As this *Prasna* process is not merely based on mathematical horoscopes, it culminates in intuitional revelation, and the predictions are said to be amazingly accurate and correct to the minutest detail. Sri Sastrigal Mama was highly proficient in this system of astrology. He once described it to me by citing this example: One day a merchant came to his house while he was engaged offering worship in his *puja* room. His wife informed him that one Nagappa Chettiar was waiting on the verandah and that he seemed worried about some urgent matter. Not willing to interrupt his worship, and by merely listening to the name and the few details given by his wife, Sri Sastrigal Mama, within a minute, began giving the following prediction:

"Tell Nagappa Chettiar that he has come to inquire about his lost, costly diamond ring. He suspects his servant. Assure him that no one has stolen it. In his garden, near the well, there are two rows of plantain trees. On one side there are only two trees; on the other there is a cluster of trees. Let him search under the two trees and the diamond ring will be found there. While he was cleaning his clothes on the washing stone the ring slipped off his finger and fell to the ground." Nagappa Chettiar returned home and found the ring exactly where Sri Sastrigal Mama had said, and because of this and similar astounding predictions Sri Sastrigal Mama became quite famous. He also became convinced that the Prasna branch of astrology was the most perfect science. At the height of his career he heard about Sri Ramana Maharshi. When he first saw Sri Bhagavan's picture he was immediately captivated and travelled to Arunachala to see the Sage. He climbed up to Skandashram, where Bhagavan then resided. On the very first look that the Maharshi gave him, Sri Sastrigal Mama became his slave. He had a strong desire to stay with the Maharshi permanently, renouncing everything he held dear. Yet, there was still his lifelong attraction to the science of astrology. He felt distracted by it and did not know how to proceed. One day, gathering courage, he approached Sri Maharshi in all humility and said, "Bhagavan, is not astrology the best and most accurate of all sciences?"

In silence Bhagavan looked at him deeply for some time. Then, slowly but firmly, he replied: "The science of the Self is superior to all other sciences."

It was the peak period in Sri Sastrigal Mama's life. For every prediction he was richly rewarded and was consequently acquiring immense wealth. Nevertheless, the words from the Master convinced him immediately to renounce his lucrative profession and pursue the science of the Self. His wife too fully supported him in this decision. The remainder of their life they lived in utter poverty at the holy feet of the *Sat-Guru*, under the protective shade of the Sacred Mountain, Arunachala. What is this all important science of the Self?

To know oneself as one really is, denuded of all that is artificial and impermanent, is as exact a science as physics, astronomy, mathematics, chemistry and all the rest. It solves all man's problems and allows him to abide in his true nature, which is peace, stillness and happiness.

- By V. Ganesan

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THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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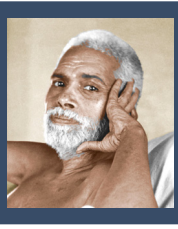

The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy Part V

Bhagavan's Love and Care

It is hard to describe, and it was a wonder to see, how Bhagavan bound all with his love. Between Bhagavan and some of his long-standing devotees words would never pass. Nevertheless, these devotees, whether men, women or children, knew that Bhagavan's love and grace was being showered on them. By a single glance, a nod of the head, or perhaps by a simple inquiry from Bhagavan - sometimes not even directly but through a second person - the devotees knew that he was their very own and he cared for them. In his presence all distinctions and differences were resolved. We lived together like a huge family with Bhagavan at the center, guiding us and shedding his grace and blessings on all.

Bhagavan was most considerate and kind-hearted, but at the same time he was a strict disciplinarian. Even if he appeared indifferent to the onlookers, he still took a keen interest in the progress of seekers, particularly if they happened to be youngsters. Many times I was helped by Bhagavan.

Later, for instance, due to a crisis in my home, I was informed that my continuous presence in the village was now required. That meant I would have to leave Bhagavan for good. When I received this news I went and explained it all to Bhagavan, who kindly listened and then simply nodded his head. The meaning of this nod I understood only upon receiving a letter from my mother, who wrote that I need not leave the presence of Bhagavan and that she would attend to all the affairs in the village. This was a turning point in my worldly life and it was due, no doubt, to the direct intervention of Sri Bhagavan's Grace. When I showed my mother's letter to Bhagavan, he read it and gave me a benign smile, as if to say: "Are you now satisfied?"

It was a mystery to see how he was so detached from the ashram and its operation, but yet was still somehow getting everything done as he wished. The *Sarvadhikari*, Sri Niranjanananda Swami, once told me, "It is difficult for others to understand, but sometimes I feel there is something like a wireless connection between me and Bhagavan."

Niranjanananda Swami

Bhagavan's brother had to endure considerable criticism while managing the ashram. Even so, there is little doubt that Bhagavan used him as his instrument. When Niranjanananda Swami felt an inner prompting from Bhagavan, he confidently acted on it. The following may be an example of one such occasion.

It is widely known that Paul Brunton's book, *A Search in Secret India*, did much to make known to the world that the Maharshi, a unique sage of this century, was living in Tiruvannamalai. Brunton was a professional writer and in those days wherever he would go he would often be seen taking notes on bits of paper. While in the Old Hall listening to questions put to Bhagavan and his replies, he would be eagerly taking notes. After the success of *A Search in Secret India*, he began writing many other books in which he would sometimes adopt

the Maharshi's teachings without giving due acknowledgement. When the ashram authorities realised this they decided to stop him from taking notes in the hall.

One day in 1939, Brunton was sitting next to me taking notes as usual when Niranjanananda Swami boldly walked into the hall, stood next to Bhagavan and told Munagala Venkataramiah to tell Brunton in English that he is no longer permitted to take notes while sitting before Bhagavan. Brunton was told accordingly. Brunton looked at Venkataramiah and said, 'Is this also Bhagavan's view?' Venkataramiah did not reply to this question and Bhagavan who was quietly sitting there didn't say a word either. A few tense moments passed. Then Brunton stood up and left the hall. That was the last time he took notes in the hall, and that was also when Brunton began distancing himself from the ashram.

It was very unusual to see the *Sarvadhikari* appear so bold and authoritative before the Maharshi. He must have felt that this exploitation should stop and was confident that Bhagavan was behind him.

Correcting Proofs and Settling in the Ashram

It was perhaps a year or two later, when I was preparing to make a trip back to my village, when Bhagavan asked me to check through the proofs of the fourth edition of *Self Realization*, written by B. V. Narasimhaswami. I was in the hall and getting ready to take leave of Bhagavan when the final proofs - we called them "strike forms" back then - for the fourth edition of *Self Realization* were handed over to Bhagavan. He called me, handed over the proofs and requested me to go through them. I thought it odd that although Bhagavan knew I was planning to leave that day, he would detain me with some work. It is said in the scriptures that the *guru* blesses his *sishyas* (disciples) by giving them work to do, and so I naturally felt blessed at his request, especially because he would rarely ask any one of us to do anything for him.

When I had gone through one proof, another would arrive, and in this way my trip home kept getting delayed. When I had finally finished all the strike forms and showed Bhagavan the errors, he expressed surprise and said, "I have gone through these proofs, others have gone through them, and after all of this Balaram Reddy finds more errors!" The corrections I found had to be added in the end of the book under the title 'ERRATA.'

Completing this work, I returned to my village for the summer months. While I was there the newly-printed fourth edition of *Self Realization* arrived at my house by post. The book was inscribed: 'With the blessings of Sri Bhagavan.'

Perhaps Bhagavan had reminded the office that I had worked on the proofs and requested them to send me the new release. I have preserved that book in my village.

When I returned at the end of the summer, the ashram administration, for some reason, made a change in their policy regarding my residence in the ashram. It was my regular practice to stay a few days in the ashram and then settle into some rented room in town. This time the management favoured me by letting me remain in the ashram itself. I placed my things in the north-east corner of the Guest House for Gentlemen. The ashram kindly gave me a very large, thick Malaysian mat, woven with split bamboo, to spread on the floor. I hung carpets on the west and south sides and thus created my own simple room, which I found quite comfortable. I believe I may have been at that time the only devotee allowed to live in the ashram and not required to do some form of service or make payments.

All this happened in a natural, spontaneous manner. It was as if the ashram had accepted me as a family

member, and when we visit our home where do we stay - not in some rented room? How fortunate I felt. It was all Bhagavan's grace.

Sanskrit

In my youth, when I was attending a Christian school, I began to study Sanskrit. However, the school decided to drop this subject from their curriculum soon after my studies began. Later in life, when I left the university and directed all my attention toward the spiritual ideal, I resumed studying Sanskrit on my own. But for some reason or other, these studies didn't proceed well either and I soon dropped them. Then, when I settled down at Aurobindo Ashram, I again thought I should take up the study of Sanskrit. The main focus in language at Aurobindo Ashram was to improve our proficiency in English, not Sanskrit; and although I did improve my English considerably at Pondicherry, Sanskrit studies remained an unfulfilled aspiration.

One evening, after I had settled in Bhagavan's ashram, I saw two large volumes and an oil lamp on the stool next to Bhagavan's couch. I asked Bhagavan what those books were. He told me that they were two volumes of *Yoga Vashistam*, a famous Sanskrit text, and then went on to extol the wisdom of the verses in the books. Regretting my inability to learn Sanskrit, I told Bhagavan that although I had attempted to learn the language three times, to that day I had learned very little. He kindly replied, "I don't know much either. I don't even know *rama sabda* - the first rule of Sanskrit grammar." This encouraged me to learn more Sanskrit in Bhagavan's presence, especially as I noticed how Bhagavan took great interest in Sanskrit compositions and was all praise for Ganapati Muni's mastery over the language.

One time a Sanskrit professor from Annamalai University was in the hall speaking to Bhagavan in Sanskrit. Bhagavan could understand spoken Sanskrit, but didn't speak it himself. He was closely following what the professor was saying and I, sitting nearby, was also able to grasp most of what was being said. When this had gone on for some time, all of a sudden, I lost the thread of the conversation. At that very moment Bhagavan turned to me and asked, "Did you follow that?" I was amazed how he caught me at the very moment I got lost.

Once Bhagavan mentioned about a Sanskrit biography of Saint Manikkavachakar. The particular book he was speaking about was a transliteration of the Sanskrit text into Telugu. Some of us devotees took it upon ourselves to locate this book and bring it to Bhagavan. We searched long and hard, as it was out of print for many years. Finally we were able to secure a copy from the estate of an influential *zamindar* (landholder). When we presented it to Bhagavan he seemed pleased and then asked me to begin reading aloud in the hall. I began and, as the time passed, Bhagavan's head leaned back on the pillow and his eyes shut. An old devotee of Bhagavan, one Subba Rao sitting by my side, signalled me to stop reading, as it looked obvious that Bhagavan had dozed off. I didn't stop immediately, but after his repeated silent requests, I stopped. The instant I stopped Bhagavan opened his eyes, looked at me and asked why I stopped. Usually we could not tell if Bhagavan was asleep or awake, though, in reality, he was always awake, awake to the Self.

Sometimes we would approach his couch, see him reclining with his eyes shut and softly say, "Bhagavan." I suppose we thought if we spoke softly and he didn't hear us, it meant that he was sleeping and, if he did hear us, he would respond without us disturbing him, as he was obviously awake and just resting his eyes. But however we reasoned, whenever we approached him in this manner, he would immediately open his eyes and say, "Yes, what is it?"

The Sanskrit recitation of the Vedas morning and evening in Bhagavan's presence was usually well attended. Initially, some priests from the main temple in town began coming and reciting before Bhagavan, thinking, perhaps, it was edifying for them to do this in the august presence of the Maharshi. Although everyone liked

this, it was not performed with any consistency, depending mostly on the whims of the priests. The *Sarvadhikari* thought the ashram should have similar daily *parayanas* in a routine way. With this end in mind, a *Veda Patasala*, or Vedic school, was established in the ashram. The students, much like today, would come twice a day and recite before the Maharshi. Now the only difference is that they recite before Bhagavan's tomb. Bhagavan often commented on the value of listening to the Vedic chants. We would normally see him sitting fully alert and absorbed throughout the duration of these recitations.

In 1942, Bhagavan was near the back steps of the ashram when he abruptly placed his stick before the path of a dog that was in hot pursuit of a squirrel. In this successful attempt to save the squirrel, he lost his balance and fell, fracturing his right shoulder. Soon after this incident, when I was taking leave of Bhagavan to visit my village, I looked at the bandaged shoulder and wanted to ask him how he was feeling. But how could I? I knew perfectly well what his reaction would be to such a question regarding his physical well-being.

Reaching my village, I wrote a letter to Bhagavan in which I quoted the following verse:

'It is improper to make inquiries about the health and welfare of those whose sole delight is in the Self, since they are strangers to those mental states which distinguish between weal and woe.'

- Srimad Bhagavata: Skanda IV, Chapt. 22, Verse 14

In addition to this, I also included a short Sanskrit verse that I composed.

When I returned to the ashram, one of Bhagavan's attendants told me that on the day my letter arrived, Bhagavan removed it from the other letters and put it by his side. He later returned all the letters except mine. Subsequently, he asked the attendant to bring him the big notebook in which all the verses composed on Bhagavan were recorded. Then, in his own hand, he copied the Sanskrit verse I composed into the notebook. He not only copied the Telugu script, which I had written it in, but also transliterated it into the Devanagari script. Then, with a red ink pen, he artistically framed the verses using two close parallel lines, one thicker than the other. The finished product looked like a piece of art. When I heard all this from the attendant and saw what Bhagavan had written in the book, I was very moved by the solicitude and attention he extended to me.

Many years later I asked President T. N. Venkataraman if I could cut out from that big book my verse written by Bhagavan. He gave me permission and I now keep it in my album containing photos of Bhagavan. Below is a copy of what Bhagavan wrote in the notebook, followed by my English translation.

'I salute Ramana, who shines by the effulgence of the Self, who delights in non-action, and whose life purifies the world.'

In January of 1946, Bhagavan came across a verse in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* that seemed to have appealed to him immensely. He first found it in the *Tamil Bhagavatam* and then searched and found it in the original Sanskrit *Srimad Bhagavatam*. He then made his own Tamil rendering of it and, at my request, translated it into Telugu, my mother tongue. Because Bhagavan was giving this verse so much time and attention I naturally thought it must convey a special meaning, especially in regard to his own spiritual experience. The literal translation in English is:

'The body is impermanent (not real). Whether it is at rest or moves about, and whether by reason of prarabdha it clings to him or falls off from him, the Self-realized siddha is not aware of it, even as the

drunken man blinded by intoxication is unaware whether his cloth is on his body or not.'

Bhagavan showed me his Telugu translation and asked me to correct it. When I protested, saying, "How can I correct Bhagavan's writing?" he simply said that he must take advice from those who are proficient in whatever language he happens to use.

- (To be continued)

Dreams

By Sadhu Arunachala (Major Alan Chadwick)

'We are such stuff
As dreams are made of and our short life
Is rounded by a sleep.

Shakespeare really did know what he was talking about and it was not just poetic effervescence. Maharshi used to say exactly the same.

I suppose I questioned Bhagavan more often on this subject than any others, though some doubts always remained for me. He had always warned that as soon as one doubt is cleared another will spring up in its place, and there is no end to doubts.

"But Bhagavan," I would repeat, "dreams are disconnected, while the waking experience goes on from where it left off and is admitted by all to be more or less continuous."

"Do you say this in your dreams?" Bhagavan would ask. "They seemed perfectly consistent and real to you then. It is only now, in your waking state that you question the reality of the experience. This is not logical."

Bhagavan refused to see the least difference between the two states, and in this he agreed with all the great *Advaitic* Seers. Some have questioned if Sankara did not draw a line of difference between these two states, but Bhagavan has persistently denied it. "Sankara did it apparently only for the purpose of clearer exposition," the Maharshi would explain.

However I tried to twist my questions, the answer I received was always the same: "Put your doubts when in the dream state itself. You do not question the waking state when you are awake, you accept it. You accept it in the same way you accept your dreams. Go beyond both states and all three states including deep sleep. Study them from that point of view. You now study one limitation from the point of view of another limitation. Could anything be more absurd? Go beyond all limitation, then come here with your doubts."

But in spite of this, doubt still remained. I somehow felt at the time of dreaming there was something unreal in it, not always of course, but just glimpses now and then.

"Doesn't that ever happen to you in your waking state too?" Bhagavan queried. "Don't you sometimes feel that the world you live in and the thing that is happening is unreal?"

Still, in spite of all this, doubt persisted.

But one morning I went to Bhagavan and, much to his amusement, handed him a paper on which the following was written:

'Bhagavan remembers that I expressed some doubts about the resemblance between dreams and waking experience. Early in the morning most of these doubts were cleared by the following dream, which seemed particularly objective and real:

'I was arguing philosophy with someone and pointed out that all experience was only subjective, that there was nothing outside the mind. The other person demurred, pointing out how solid everything was and how real experience seemed, and it could not be just personal imagination.

'I replied, "No, it is nothing but a dream. Dream and waking experience are exactly the same."

''You say that now," he replied, "but you would never say a thing like that in your dream."

'And then I woke up.'

- From the Call Divine, March 1954

The Four Paths

Maharshi: An examination of the ephemeral nature of external phenomena leads to *vairagya*. Hence enquiry (*vichara*) is the first and foremost step to be taken. When *vichara* continues automatically, it results in a contempt for wealth, fame, ease, pleasure, etc. The 'I-thought' becomes clearer for inspection. The source of 'I' is the Heart - the final goal. If, however, the aspirant is not temperamentally suited to *Vichara Marga* (to the introspective analytical method), he must develop *bhakti* (devotion) to an ideal - may be God, Guru, humanity in general, ethical laws, or even the idea of beauty. When one of these takes possession of the individual, other attachments grow weaker, *i.e.*, dispassion (*vairagya*) develops. Attachment for the ideal simultaneously grows and finally holds the field. Thus *ekagrata* (concentration) grows simultaneously and imperceptibly - with or without visions and direct aids.

In the absence of enquiry and devotion, the natural sedative *pranayama* (breath regulation) may be tried. This is known as *Yoga Marga*. If life is imperilled the whole interest centres round the one point - the saving of life. If the breath is held the mind cannot afford to (and does not) jump at its pets (external objects). Thus there is rest for the mind so long as the breath is held. All attention being turned on breath or its regulation, other interests are lost. Again, passions are attended with irregular breathing, whereas calm and happiness are attended with slow and regular breathing. A paroxysm of joy is in fact as painful as one of pain, and both are accompanied by ruffled breaths. Real peace is happiness. Pleasures do not form happiness. The mind improves by practice and becomes finer just as the razor's edge is sharpened by stropping. The mind is then better able to tackle internal or external problems.

If an aspirant be unsuited temperamentally for the first two methods and circumstantially (on account of age) for the third method, he must try the *Karma Marga* (doing good deeds, for example, social service). His nobler instincts become more evident and he derives impersonal pleasure. His smaller self is less assertive and has a chance of expanding its good side.

The man becomes duly equipped for one of the three aforesaid paths. His intuition may also develop directly by this single method.

- Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi, No. 27

Celebration of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala

In honour of the 99th Anniversary of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's arrival at Sri Arunachala, devotees gathered at Sri Arunachala Ashrama at 72-63 Yellowstone Boulevard, Queens, New York City on Sunday, September 3rd.

Having learned of the celebration via the World-Wide Web computer network, a good number of new friends joined us, travelling from Massachusetts.

The program began with the devotees singing Sri Ramana Maharshi's composition '*Sri Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai*' (*The Marital Garland of Letters*). Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata then gave a moving message, inciting us to deepen and stabilize our practice of Self-Enquiry and Self-Surrender.

Bhajans were offered by several ladies, initiated and inspired by the transparent sweetness of devotional songs from our youngest devotee, Radha Ramaswami Devi - just seven years of age!

Puja was offered to Sri Bhagavan with flowers, led by Professor Chhaya Tiwari. All present chanted the *108 Names of Bhagavan*. Professor Chhaya, a dedicated Sanskrit scholar and devotee, also caused our humble sanctuary to resonate with her inspired chanting of Chapter eighteen of Ganapathi Muni's *Sri Ramana Gita*. The mood of the celebration was one of gratitude and rejoicing.

After the lights of *aarti* were offered, and after most of the devotees had left, following a sumptuous feast, Mrs. Kanthimathi Venkatraman arrived and poured out her heart in a Tamil song which she had especially composed for the occasion. Its English translation follows:

*As Azagu and Sundaram * you came to this world like a 'wonder', O Ramana!*
You stood as the pillar of light which has no beginning or ending, O Ramana!
I am being pulled on both sides by the forces of pleasure and pain, O Ramana!
Come and be present in my heart, O Ramana!
In spite of all the six senses that I have, I am feeling like a fool, O Ramana!
Comfort me and bestow knowledge of Atma, O Ramana!
In this tiny boat of worldly life I am being tossed, O Ramana!
Come to my rescue before I sink to the bottom, O Ramana!
Save me from the thieves' snarls, namely desire and anger, O Ramana!
Be known that I have no other saviour but you, O Ramana!
Having lost my direction and no one to guide me I am roaming here and there, O Ramana!
Come and ward off all the evil and save me, O Ramana!
Like a crop for want of water, I am dying. Give me life, O Ramana!
Come and appear before my searching eyes, O Ramana!
As camphor lighted, you merge into the jyothi of Arunachala, O Ramana!
You seat yourself firmly in the hearts of those suffering devotees who pray to you, O Ramana!

Mrs. Kanthimathi Venkatraman is 73 years old, and is the Mother of Girija Arakoni, who brought her to the Ashrama on that day.

In the Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama one hundred and fifty guests attended the day's celebration in Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram, travelling long distances from different Maritime Provinces and Northeastern U.S.A.

Mr. Yashwant Rai conducted the program, beginning it with *Ganesha Puja*. Raju Parekh recited *Shanti Mantrams* and Dennis Hartel gave a short welcoming talk in which he explained how Venkataramam, an apparently normal school boy, was transformed in a few moments of Self-Inquiry to a Sage, and how he travelled from Madurai and arrived at the Holy Arunachala Mountain on September 1, 1896.

Then many *bhajans* and *stotrams* were offered, as one after another came forward and sang. Dr. Subbarao Durvasula gave a short talk on the historical significance of Sri Ramana Maharshi's incarnation. He quoted Ganapathi Muni's prophetic Sanskrit verse:

'Obeisance to the line of preceptors with Dakshinamurti in the beginning, Sankara in the middle and Ramana in the end!'

The devotees then recited Sri Ramana Maharshi's composition, '*Upadesa Sarah*,' followed by the chanting of '*Arunachala Siva*.'

Aarti was performed, and outside on the spacious lawns surrounding the temple, meals were served to all the devotees.

Sri V. Ganesan Visits the Nova Scotia Ashrama

Sri V. Ganesan visited Arunachala Ashrama in Nova Scotia from October 5 to October 13. During his visit he gave daily talks on the life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. A few devotees travelled from long distances to meet him and hear about Bhagavan.

By recalling what he heard and learned from the intimate devotees of the Master, Sri Ganesan transported us to the days when the Sage of Arunachala walked on the holy soil of Tiruvannamalai.

Ganesan expressed his gratitude to the manager of Arunachala Ashrama and to Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata for allowing him to visit the ashrama and share with devotees the message of his Master, Sri Ramana.

Everyone present on this occasion was also elevated by the esteemed presence of Sri Swami Prakashmayananda (Jyothi Swami) of Sri Lanka.

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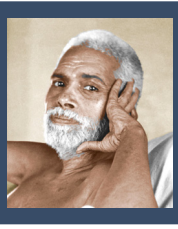

The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy Part VI

Ganapati Muni

After Ganapati Muni died, Bhagavan would always turn down requests to compose anything in Sanskrit. He never studied Sanskrit grammar and composed verses only through inspiration. He would say now that Nayana (Ganapati Muni) is gone, who could he turn to for assistance? He had complete faith in Nayana's knowledge of the language.

I never met Ganapati Muni, but I remember being with Kapali Sastri in Aurobindo Ashram when the news of his death arrived. I saw Sastri openly weep, lamenting the Muni's death. At that time Kapali Sastri had so much faith in Aurobindo and Mother, I heard him say, "If Nayana was here (at Aurobindo Ashram) he would not have died."

Nayana died in 1936 at Karagpur in West Bengal. A telegram relating this news was sent to Sri Ramanasramam, and then from there another telegram was sent to Aurobindo Ashram. Swami Viswanathan told me that when Bhagavan read the telegram, these few sad words fell from his lips: "Where will we find another like him?" Ganapati Muni was no ordinary *sadhaka*. He believed he was born on earth for a mission. He had great power and intelligence, and desired to rejuvenate India through *mantra japa*.

Bhagavan was once talking about him to me and said, "If Nayana had not come here (meaning to himself) and had his mind turned inwards to the Self, he would have certainly ended up in jail." Nayana had in his earlier years a predilection for political activity.

Aurobindo and the Mother recognized Ganapati Muni's extraordinary gifts. Kapali Sastri once took the Muni to Aurobindo Ashram and everyone there was eager that he should stay. He was given a royal welcome and offered a house and all the necessary conveniences for him and his family. Someone back at Sri Ramanasramam informed Bhagavan of how Nayana was being enticed to stay in Aurobindo Ashram. While this person was describing it all to Bhagavan, he expressed the opinion that Nayana, indeed, might very well settle down there. Bhagavan looked at the man in surprise and said, "Nayana? Settle down at Aurobindo Ashram? Impossible!"

Muruganar, like Ganapati Muni, was an inspired poet. It is said when one receives the gift of writing it is similar to taking a new birth. Muruganar was like that. His poetry is of a very high order. In his case, the gift became the master and he was the servant of it. The gift compelled him to write.

Learned Scholars

Many learned scholars and *sannyasins* would often visit Bhagavan and ask questions. Bhagavan's response to these visitors, and also to other visitors, was not always uniform. To some people he would give much

attention, either by talking to them or pouring out his grace through a silent look; others he would stoically ignore. All these variations were not governed by status, wealth, or fame.

One morning a famous swami of Ahmedabad arrived at the ashram. I understood he had many wealthy disciples and was himself attired in a costly silk, ochre-coloured cloth. He also had several pieces of luggage, which clearly indicated he was a man of some means. The swami came into the Guest House for Gentlemen and introduced himself to me. He wanted to know when he could see the Maharshi. I told him at 10 a.m. I would be going to the hall and he could accompany me and at that time I would introduce him to the Maharshi.

During that period, between 10 and 11 a.m. every morning in the Old Hall, Devaraja Mudaliar, Munagala Venkataramiah and I were going through Venkataramiah's English translation of a Tamil scripture. Bhagavan would open and hold the Tamil book in his hand and we would read the English translation for each verse. Then we would discuss it until we found it acceptable to Bhagavan.

The swami entered the hall with me at 10 a.m. and I introduced him to Bhagavan. He was fluent in Sanskrit and other languages, and also was well versed in all the scriptures. He inquired if he was allowed to ask a question. The consent was given and he asked Bhagavan if *Ishwara*, the personal God, actually existed. The Maharshi replied with one of his standard rejoinders: "We do not know about *Ishwara* or whether he exists or not. But what we do know is that we exist. Find out who that 'I' is that exists. That is all that is required."

The swami was not satisfied with this answer and continued to discuss the matter, quoting from various scriptures. Bhagavan then said, "If the scriptures say all this about it, why question me further?"

This also was not acceptable to the swami and he proceeded with more elucidation, at which point Bhagavan cut him off by turning to us and saying, "Come on. Let us begin our work." It is needless to say that the swami became quite annoyed and soon left the hall.

Later in the day I met him and he told me that my Maharshi doesn't seem to know very much. I simply replied, "Yes." And although this visitor was originally planning on staying for three days, he cut his visit short and left that very afternoon, without ever going back into the hall to see the Maharshi. Bhagavan later asked me what the swami said before leaving. When I told him, he simply smiled.

I remember when another similar incident occurred with a famous swami from Bombay, brought to the ashram by Mr. Bose. Although this swami too was well-known, had numerous disciples and was always given high honours wherever he went, in Bhagavan's presence he was just like everyone else: given no special seat, no special attention and made to sit on the floor with all the others.

When the swami had asked his first question, Bhagavan remained silent for a long time. He must have been wondering why there was no answer. Probably no one had ever, seemingly, ignored him like that before. The question was: "Which *Avatar* (incarnation) are you?" After sometime the *Mauni* (Srinivasa Rao) came into the hall and Bhagavan said to him, "He wants to know which Avatar I am. What can I say to him? Some people say I am this and some say I am that. I have nothing to say about it."

This was followed by a barrage of questions from the swami, who asked about Bhagavan's state of realization, about *samadhi*, the *bhakti* school, etc. Bhagavan answered him very patiently, point by point. The swami listened and whether or not he was satisfied is hard for me to say. Before leaving the hall, the swami touched Bhagavan's couch, joined his palms in salutation and took leave.

In *Day by Day with Bhagavan* more conversations with this swami have been recorded. Mr. Bose reported that before the swami boarded his departing train in town he told him, "I have truly gained something from this visit to the Maharshi." Bhagavan also commented after his departure, "It will work." Whenever he made this observation we understood it to mean that the conversation the person had with Bhagavan will sink in and ultimately have positive effects.

One day, this same Mr. Bose came to the ashram in deep despair. His only son, a bright boy of twenty, had just died. A private meeting with Bhagavan was arranged between 12 and 2 in the afternoon. At one point during the interview, in a desperate and somewhat challenging tone, Mr. Bose asked, "What is God?" For such a long-standing devotee to ask this question looked incongruous.

Bhagavan kept silent for a while and then gently replied: "Your question itself contains the answer: What is, (is) God."

One should note that this was not merely a clever and well-thought-out answer. That may be the case with ordinary men. A *Jnani's* utterances are free from the intermediary action of the mind, which colours and often distorts the truth. Also, Bhagavan's silence before answering the question was evidently meant to prepare the questioner to receive the full impact of the answer.

Another incident comes to my mind when yet one more learned swami visited Bhagavan. He questioned Bhagavan in Sanskrit and Bhagavan, once again, patiently answered in Malayalam, the swami's mother tongue. As the session continued it became clear that this swami's sole intention was to defeat Bhagavan in argument. Eventually Bhagavan said, "Will you be satisfied if I issue you a certificate stating you have defeated me in the argument?" But even that did not silence the swami's impertinence.

Jagadish Sastri, a Sanskrit pundit, was quietly listening to the proceedings. When he saw that the swami was incorrigible, he blurted out in Sanskrit, "*He dushta bahirgachha*," which means "O wicked man, get out!" I don't remember anyone ever making such an aggressive remark in the presence of Bhagavan. But it worked. The swami finally got the message and left the hall.

Bhagavan had no desire to argue or to prove anything to anyone. If people were not ready to accept his teaching, he would never try to force his views upon them. He left people free to believe whatever they wanted.

And his response to visitors was never influenced by status, wealth, or appearance. What was within the heart of the visitor reflected onto the clear mirror of Bhagavan's mind. His responses were automatic and directed to the needs of whomever he addressed. Those with genuine humility and childlike faith would attract his grace spontaneously. The garb of a *sannyasi*, of a householder, a man, child, or a woman, meant nothing before the pure, all-knowing gaze of Bhagavan.

Insincerity

When we were living with Bhagavan there was one thing we could never be: insincere. There was no way we could fool him on this account.

Once a group of influential devotees from Madras came up with a scheme to take Bhagavan away to Madras. In an attempt to execute this plan, a number of them arrived at the ashram and came into the hall. It wasn't long before they realised that Bhagavan would never consent to leave Ramanasramam, and eventually they left.

One old devotee was sitting in the corner of the hall quietly watching the whole drama unfold. He said nothing while the discussion was under way, though he was secretly in collusion with the group from Madras. After the group left, Bhagavan turned to one of his attendants and said, "Some people will sit quietly as if they have nothing to do with what is taking place before them. But on the contrary, they have everything to do with what is going on."

The old devotee questioned, "Bhagavan, are you testing me?"

Bhagavan simply remained silent. Any acts of insincerity were easily known to Bhagavan and he did not hesitate to point them out.

Foreigners and the English Language

I had seen many Western visitors come to the ashram after reading or hearing about the Maharshi. Out of all these foreigners, none had impressed me so much as Grant Duff. He was 70 years old, tall, lean, graceful in his movements, and when he spoke his words were clear and soft, originating from a deep sincerity.

On his first visit, I remember him asking if he could hear the Vedas recited. A chair for him was placed in the hall opposite Bhagavan's couch, while the priests chanted. At the conclusion of the parayana he looked at Bhagavan and said with deep feeling, "Magnificent!". Bhagavan also openly spoke of his virtues. Rarely had I heard Bhagavan speak about anyone like that.

Grant Duff studied Sanskrit for six months in Ootacamund. He loved the language and he loved Bhagavan. No one has written in English about Bhagavan as he has, as can be seen in the preface to *Ramana Gita*.

Duncan Greenless, whom I knew well, was another Englishman attracted to Bhagavan. He had an M. A. degree from Oxford University. Because of the many plans and projects he wanted to carry out in India, he was unable to stay with Bhagavan for any length of time. He was a Theosophist and had been commissioned by the Theosophical Society to write a fifteen volume History of Religion. Besides this, he had grandiose schemes to open many schools in India, but as fate had it, he was unable to accomplish any of his great designs before his death.

Bhagavan was familiar with, and had respect for, the classical English works. He had read many English books and would daily read an English newspaper. W. Y. Evans-Wentz had given Bhagavan copies of his published books, and of these books Bhagavan liked best Tibet's Great Yogi, Milarepa. He once requested me to read it.

Although he read and understood English quite well, he rarely spoke it. If people spoke English to him with clear diction and pronunciation he would not have much trouble understanding them. Once he said to me, "I couldn't understand a word Chadwick said." Which shows he did fail to understand English at times if not spoken clearly.

Bhagavan was once walking to Palakothu when the American engineer Guy Haig was standing directly in his path, apparently waiting to ask something. I was at the moment approaching from behind, but before I reached there, Haig had asked, "Can I help others after the attainment of Self-realization?"

To this Bhagavan replied in concise English, "After the realization of the Self there will be no others to help."

The State of a Jnani

Bhagavan once remarked, referring to himself, "In this state it is as difficult to think a thought as it is for those in bondage to be without thoughts." I also remember him telling us, "You ask me questions and I reply and talk to you. If I do not speak or do anything, I am automatically drawn within, and where I am I do not know."

This state is difficult for us to comprehend. Once during the winter months Bhagavan was sitting on his couch and, at one point, while picking up a shawl and wrapping it around himself, remarked, "They say I gained realization in twenty-eight minutes, or a half an hour. How can they say that? It took just a moment. But why even a moment? Where is the question of time at all?"

Then I asked Bhagavan if there was ever any change in his realization after his first experience in Madurai. He said, "No. If there is a change, it is not realization."

How he managed to remain in that unbroken state of Universal Awareness and still function in a limited, physical form remains a mystery. We cannot understand that state. And in spite of his exalted state, he interacted with us at our level. He took considerable interest in the operation of the ashram and the accommodation of visitors. This, no doubt, was a simple act of grace on his part, for what need did he have for all of this?

Once a princely family of India was visiting the ashram. It was commonly known that in spite of their high social position they were having financial difficulties. After they had visited for a few days and were preparing to leave, Bhagavan sent word to the office that no one should ask them to donate anything to the ashram.

On another occasion there was a French visitor named Jean Herbert, who had written several books on India, its holy men, and ashrams, etc. I saw him while he was on his second visit to the ashram. During this visit he requested the publication rights of all of the ashram literature, as he planned on using this material in his books. The ashram authorities were at first enthusiastic about books being published in the West on Bhagavan and his teachings. I told Bhagavan that Jean Herbert also requested the same permission from Aurobindo Ashram, but they decided not to give it. Perhaps they felt he would exploit Aurobindo's writings. When I had told Bhagavan this, he requested me to go to the office and explain it to them. I did, and the permission was withheld.

In this way, I observed Bhagavan taking special interest in the affairs of the ashram and, at times, personally directing them. It might not always have been so apparent as in the two cases above, but it was, no doubt, forthcoming.

Photographs

On December 2, 1947, Srinivasa Rao from Bangalore took photographs of Bhagavan sitting on the couch in the Old Hall. Two of them came out quite well and hand-coloured enlargements were sent to the ashram. I was shown the photos and someone from the office asked me if I would like to purchase one. This was the same photo that we now see on Bhagavan's couch in the Old Hall. In the picture he is smiling, resting his right hand on his knee, his left on his thigh, and two clocks and a lamp are on the table to his right. I purchased it and was about to send it to Madras to be framed when Mrs. Taleyarkhan said a far superior framing job could be done in Bombay and that I should send it there. I followed her advice, and when it came back everyone found it beautiful to look at. I brought it into the hall and handed it over to Bhagavan to examine. He held it in both hands, carefully inspected it and then returned it to me. In this way, I had this framed photograph sanctified by his touch.

About a year later, Gune, the Marati biographer of Bhagavan, brought from Bangalore the Welling photographers. They were a father and son team. Bhagavan was at that time sitting on the couch in the verandah outside the hall. In the early morning, just after breakfast, I remember seeing the son moving back and forth in front of Bhagavan, trying to get the right framing, focus and lighting to begin shooting. The photographs that were taken on that day turned out to be the most endearing and universally appealing images of Bhagavan, and one of the bust shots is now the most recognised and liked picture of Bhagavan. Another one wherein he is sitting with his legs crossed, with his walking stick and *kamandalu* resting by his side, is the most popular full-bodied pose of Bhagavan. There are two other remarkable scenes taken that day, showing Bhagavan reclining on the couch in a very delightful and majestic manner. The one thing remarkable about the hundreds of photographs we have of Bhagavan, is that in none of them do we see him with his eyes closed.

Before Bhagavan's Mahanirvana I purchased two large coloured photos of Bhagavan taken by the Welling photographers. I asked one of Bhagavan's attendants to take them to Bhagavan and show them to him. I thought even if he casts his eyes on them they will be sanctified. These two photos, and the one I bought earlier, which was taken by Srinavasa Rao, are now in the village adorning the walls of my ancestral home.

- (To be continued)

Balaram Reddy's Last Hour

In our July/August 1995 issue, we reported the sudden passing of Sri Balaram Reddy. An attendant who was with him in his final hour gave the following report:

"Balaram Reddy was in Bangalore recovering from what seemed to be a minor illness. The doctor had told him that his condition had improved and he would be all right. The day after he was told this, and one hour before his passing, he pointed to a corner in the room and said to me, "Do you see Bhagavan there? He is calling me."

I replied, "I don't see anything, and why would he be calling you now when the doctor has just said you are quite all right and healthy."

"No!" said Balaram, "He is right there (pointing) and he is calling me."

One hour later, unexpectedly, Balaram expired.

Annamalai Swami

Annamalai Swami, a lifelong devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi, was absorbed in his Master on November 9, 1995. He was 89 years old. The Swami's remarkable story was edited by David Godman and published in 1994 by the Sri Annamalai Swami Ashram Trust.

Annamalai Swami came to the Maharshi in 1928 and, at the Sage's behest, undertook the supervision in the construction of the Goshala (cow shed), Dining Hall, Dispensary and various other projects. In the mid-1940s, Bhagavan instructed him to leave the ashram and engage in intense *sadhana*. He would then occasionally meet the Maharshi on his walks, but never again in the fifty years that followed did he re-enter Sri Ramanasramam, preferring to live a quiet, austere life in Palakottu. His small ashram borders the western boundary of Sri Ramanasramam and he was well known to many devotees and visitors to Tiruvannamalai.

In the passage below, excerpted from Living By the Words Of Bhagavan, Annamalai Swami relates the incidents preceding his departure from Sri Ramanasramam.

My days as an ashram worker were coming to a close, although I didn't realise it at the time. In retrospect I can remember only one small incident which indicated that Bhagavan knew that my time in the ashram was coming to an end.

I was doing some digging with a crowbar when Bhagavan came and asked me, "Did you decide to do this work yourself or did Chinnaswami ask you to do it?"

I told him that Chinnaswami had asked me to do it. Bhagavan was not very pleased.

"So, he has given you work. So, he has given you work. Why is he giving you work like this?"

A little later Yogi Ramiah remarked to Bhagavan, "Annamalai Swami is working very hard. His body has become very weak. You should give him some rest."

Bhagavan agreed with him. "Yes, we have to give him some rest. We have to give freedom to him."

A few days later I went to Bhagavan's bathroom to help him with his morning bath. Madhava Swami and I gave him the usual oil bath and massage.

When the bath was over Madhava Swami asked a question: "Bhagavan, the people who take *ganja lehiyam* [an *ayurvedic* preparation whose principal ingredient is cannabis] experience some kind of *ananda* (bliss). What is the nature of this *ananda?* Is it the same *ananda* that the scriptures speak of?"

"Eating this ganja is a very bad habit," replied Bhagavan. Then, laughing loudly, he came over to me, hugged me and called out, "Ananda! Ananda! This is how these ganja-taking people behave!"

It was not a brief hug. Madhava Swami told me later that he held me tightly for about two minutes. After the first few seconds I completely lost awareness of my body and the world. Initially, there was a feeling of happiness and bliss, but this soon gave way to a state in which there were no feelings and no experiences. I did not lose consciousness, I just ceased to be aware of anything that was going on around me. I remained in this state for about fifteen minutes. When I recovered my usual world-consciousness I was standing alone in the bathroom. Madhava Swami and Bhagavan had long since departed for breakfast. I had not seen them open the door and leave, nor had I heard the breakfast bell.

This experience completely changed my life. As soon as I recovered normal consciousness I knew that my working life at Sri Ramanasramam had come to an end. I knew that henceforth I would be living outside the ashram and spending most of my time in meditation. There was a rule that only those who worked for the ashram could live there full-time. Those who wanted to spend their time in meditation had to live somewhere else. I thus knew that I would have to leave the ashram and fend for myself, but the thought of losing my regular meals and my room never troubled me.

I made a belated appearance in the dining room to eat my last breakfast. As soon as I had finished eating I went up onto the hill to look for Bhagavan. I found him sitting on a big rock.

"I have decided to leave the ashram," I said. "I want to go to Palakottu to live alone and meditate."

"Ah! Very good! Very good! Very good!" exclaimed Bhagavan.

The decision clearly had his approval. How could it be otherwise since it was Bhagavan himself who gave me the experience which precipitated the decision?

After getting Bhagavan's permission I packed my possessions and locked my room. I also locked all the other places that were in my charge.

I took the bunch of keys to Chinnaswami and told him, "I have decided to go and live in Palakottu. Please take these keys and keep them."

Chinnaswami was, quite naturally, very surprised. "Why are you leaving?" he asked. "You have constructed all these buildings. You have done so much here. How can you go after doing all this work? Where will you sleep? How will you eat? You will have many troubles because you have no way of supporting yourself. Don't go, stay here."

I told him that I would not change my mind. I also tried to give him the keys but he refused to accept them. I didn't want another argument with him so I just handed over the keys to Subramaniam, who was also in the office, and left.

It was an abrupt change in my life. Within a few hours of having the experience I was walking to Palakottu, knowing full well that I had left all of my old working life behind me.

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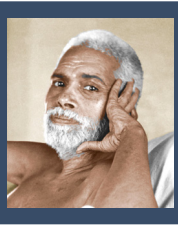

The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy Part VII

Collecting Funds

Sometime during the late 1940's a group of devotees felt there was a need to acquire land and construct a separate building to accommodate lady devotees. The *Sarvadhikari* decided that a piece of land just west of the ashram could be purchased and a building constructed on it. To accomplish this project he had bought a train ticket for Bombay where he was planning to go and meet devotees who might be willing to help finance it. Of course, he didn't want to undertake this journey or pursue his plans without Bhagavan's approval. He knew if he got Bhagavan's consent to the idea, there would be little trouble collecting the necessary funds.

Anticipating a reproach from Bhagavan, he enlisted my assistance, along with that of Devaraja Mudaliar, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer and a couple of others. The evening meal was over and Bhagavan had returned to his couch, which was then outside in what was at that time called the Jubilee Hall. Together, as a group, we approached him and stood by his side. Bhagavan straight away took in the situation, turned his head away from us and gazed into space. The *Sarvadhikari* was standing at a distance, near the well, and I have no doubt that Bhagavan saw him standing there; I also have no doubt that he knew that we had been sent by him. What were we to do now? We waited. Eventually, Bhagavan took pity on us, turned our way and asked, "What is it?" With some hesitation we explained as best we could the present need and what his brother, Chinnaswami, was proposing to do about it.

Then Bhagavan, looking straight at us, said, "We are supposed to be *sadhus* depending on God. Have we no shame? Must we stretch out our hands and ask for money like common beggars?" He then went on expressing disgust for the whole scheme. The *Sarvadhikari* had no recourse but to cancel his trip.

From this it would seem that Bhagavan was definitely opposed to collecting money for any cause. But from my experience it is not so, as is demonstrated from the following example.

Early in 1949, before the *Kumbhabhishekam* of the Mother's Temple was celebrated, Chinnaswami became worried that the funds required to celebrate it were insufficient. Toppayya Mudaliar had been invited to the ashram by Chinnaswami to help direct the consecration ceremonies. He was a large man of childlike nature, always bubbling with enthusiasm. I believe he spent most of his time travelling around, visiting various mahatmas and serving them to the best of his ability.

When Chinnaswami expressed his doubts about having adequate funds for the consecration ceremonies, Toppayya Mudaliar told him that one of his close relatives, a lady in the Tanjore District, would assist the ashram in its present need. He said that we need only to approach her, and to do that we have to take the aid of a lady devotee from here. The customs of this relative's family didn't permit a man to meet her for this purpose.

Knowing that I was a friend of Mrs. Taleyarkhan, Chinnaswami requested me to go to her and discuss

Mudaliar's proposal and secure her consent to travel to Tanjore with Mudaliar to collect the funds. When I met Mrs. Taleyarkhan she readily agreed. Then Chinnaswami decided that I also should accompany them to Tanjore. But now we had to face Bhagavan, inform him of our plan and obtain his permission. Naturally, we had some trepidation in approaching Bhagavan with this plan to collect funds.

It is well-known that during a period in Bhagavan's youth he begged for food. It is probably less known that he would never beg, or permit his followers to beg, for any special variety of food. They would only take food that was freely given and would never request any special item, let alone think of asking for money; Bhagavan never even touched it.

Knowing this, T. Mudaliar, Mrs. Taleyarkhan and I went and sat before Bhagavan. He was reclining on the couch outside on the verandah. We began explaining the whole situation to him, adding how T. Mudaliar remembered his relative, whom he believed would be happy to help the ashram if only she was informed of the need. Bhagavan listened, and then began to inquire about our travel arrangements, the length of our absence, etc. From this line of talk we could infer he had no objections to the plan. This was Bhagavan's way. We decided to proceed with the trip. D. S. Sastri offered to drive us to Villupuram, where we could catch the train to Tanjore. T. Mudaliar expected that his relative would help with a one thousand rupee donation, but to his surprise the kind lady offered three thousand. Upon our return, Bhagavan was keenly interested to hear all the details concerning our travels and if the trip was a success.

In this particular case it is apparent that, though Bhagavan generally opposed any funds being solicited for the ashram, he did not object in all cases.

Krishnaprem visits the Ashram

After my visit with Krishnaprem in 1938, I had corresponded with him a few times. In each of his letters he promised that he would soon be coming to see the Maharshi. But he never came and I began to think that he would miss his chance to have *darshan* of Bhagavan. This all changed on a December morning in 1948.

I was sitting with my eyes closed next to Bhagavan, outside on the verandah. When I opened my eyes, who did I see sitting before me but Krishnaprem. I said to him, "You have finally come. Why didn't you write and let me know you were coming?"

He said, "After writing to you so many times and promising to come, but didn't, I was embarrassed to write you again."

His three day visit to the ashram caused considerable excitement among some devotees. Krishnaprem was a tall man, with a keen intellect, sincere heart and mature devotion. He was then famous and respected throughout India. After lunch I proposed to take him to Skandasramam. As I knew Krishnaprem would like to have Swami Viswanathan come along with us, I asked Viswanathan to accompany us. Also, the versatile writer, poet and musician, Harindranath Chattopadyaya was requested to join us. When we were leaving, Bhagavan called me to him and said that I should report to him about the visit to Skandasramam when we returned. It was unusual for Bhagavan to make such special requests, and that is probably the reason why I remember it. We walked up to Skandasramam, stayed there for about two hours reciting hymns, singing *bhajans*, etc., and then returned.

In the evening, Krishnaprem was asked to sing some *bhajans* before Bhagavan. He requested the use of a harmonium. One was found and brought to the verandah where Bhagavan was resting on the couch. About seventy-five

devotees gathered outside to hear him sing. He began singing his songs with deep, genuine devotion, even pronouncing the words of the song with an Indian accent. Naturally, all were impressed and moved by his renditions. After Krishnaprem had finished, Harinath Chattopadyaya was eager to display his singing talent and harmonium playing. No one really asked him to do so, but that did not stop him. He began playing and singing, exhibiting copious skills, but all his talent fell flat in comparison to the natural talent that sprung from the devotion of Krishnaprem. Bhagavan later commented. "Here is one Westerner who embodies the intensity and devotion of a true Indian *Bhakta*."

During this visit, Krishnaprem handed over his small *Gopala Krishna* idol to Bhagavan. Bhagavan tenderly turned it this way and that, looking at it intently, and then returned it to Krishnaprem. In other places it has already been recorded about Krishnaprem's vision and inner experiences while sitting before Bhagavan in the Old Hall.

From Sri Ramanasramam he travelled to Sri Aurobindo's Ashram. After staying there a few days we planned that he and I would rendezvous at the Villupuram train station, from where we would depart together and travel south, visiting several famous temples and holy places. My train from Tiruvannamalai was scheduled to leave at 1 p.m. So, immediately after lunch I approached Bhagavan to take leave of him. He had just then finished his meal and was massaging his rheumatic knee joints—in his old age he had to do this prior to walking. I prostrated before him and informed him of my departure. He already knew all the details relating to this trip, and he also knew I was planning on visiting Kanyakumari. He said to me, "These people (meaning the management) have written to an advocate-devotee of Nagerkoil to send us the three different-coloured sands that are available at Kanyakumari. These are needed for the *Kumbhabhishekam* of the Matrubhuteswara Temple. So far, he has not sent them." Though Bhagavan did not say specifically that I should bring those sands, I naturally understood what was on his mind. In fact, he often employed this manner of speaking, asking us indirectly, when he wanted something done. Before leaving he also asked me to write and send him details about the pilgrimage.

When I arrived in Kanyakumari I discovered that the government had enforced a law prohibiting the removal of any sand from the beaches of Kanyakumari. Uranium, the mineral used for making atomic bombs, had been found in some of the sand. Nevertheless, I thought I should take my chances and stealthily proceeded to gather the three different sands. I filled three bags with the sands and concealed them in my bedroll. At the train station I hired a man to carry my bedroll and luggage and moved on towards the station gate. Standing at the gate, I saw the ticket collector and two policemen. The ticket collector was checking tickets and the policemen were checking baggage for illegal sand. I asked my man to stop and we both stood there momentarily as I contemplated the situation. Pondering over my next move, I mentally prayed to Bhagavan, "You wanted me to bring this sand. Now look at this—police! What am I to do?" As soon as I had prayed thus, the policemen, for some unknown reason, turned and looked in a certain direction and walked away from the gate. I immediately told my man, "Let's go," and we passed through the gate and boarded the train.

When I returned to the ashram and brought the bags of sands to Bhagavan, he called everyone around to come and look. Later, the sands expected from the advocate arrived by post, but the bags had broken en route and the three varieties of sands mixed, making them useless. When Bhagavan heard that he remarked, "If Balaram Reddy had not brought the sands, how could we have got a fresh consignment on time for the consecration ceremony?" Krishnaprem finally returned to North India after his tour of the South. Later I was told that for some time, wherever he went, he enthusiastically talked to others about Bhagavan.

Bhagavan and His family

Bhagavan took immense interest in the construction of the temple built over his mother's grave. Some may think that the construction of this temple was conceived and executed solely by his brother. We, who were

there at the time, cannot help but have a different opinion. Whenever the temple architect was unable to decide on some matter relating to the temple construction, the *Sarvadhikari* would send him to Bhagavan. Bhagavan would keenly listen to all the related details, discuss the matter and then advise him accordingly. He took interest in every step of the construction.

Sages like Bhagavan are of a different order than the regular *sadhus* and swamis we often see. He could have close family members living with him without being affected in the least. Take the instance of Bhagavan's mother. She once came and visited him on the hill in 1914, and during that visit she fell ill. When her condition turned critical, Bhagavan composed four stanzas supplicating Arunachala to save her life.

Rama also looked after the welfare of all his subjects, as well as the welfare of his near relatives. A Rama, or a Bhagavan, can do this without falling into the snares of Maya. They are above Maya, but they still serve mankind and their families.

Bhagavan wished to save his mother from future births and give her liberation. Her faith in him was firm. She believed that only her son, the Maharshi, could save her, and in her old age refused to leave him even for a single day. And he did sit by her and guide her to illumination during the final hours of her life. But see how natural everything was. Bhagavan's mother came, his brother came and his sister would often visit. On occasions he even looked after his brother's son, T. N. Venkataraman, when he was just a small boy. He would attend to the boy's needs, just like any other uncle would. But did he think he was an uncle, a son, or a brother? No. He knew he was the Self alone. That is the essential point.

Buddha once found himself in similar circumstances. His mother had died when he was young, so his mother's younger sister raised him. She also married his father, making her his stepmother. After Buddha's enlightenment his stepmother and his wife wanted to join his order or *Sangha*. Buddha at first refused to have a woman in the *Sangha*. His trusted disciple Ananda quietly moved near him and said, "How can you refuse the request of the very person who lovingly cared for you and raised you?" Buddha then softened his stand and accepted her, as well as some other members of his family.

There is no doubt that Bhagavan had a special affection for his mother, and he also showed a particular interest in the affairs of his brother's family. He never said that he was a renunciate and detached himself from his family members. He had affection for his relatives in the same way he had affection for others, whether a child, a man, a monkey, or a cow. His actions were spontaneous and natural, and by watching him we learned how we should live in the world. His example was the greatest teaching, and his divine presence far out weighed a lifetime of strenuous *sadhana*. Just to think of him, or sit in his presence, used to raise us to higher levels of beatitude.

- (To be continued)

Obituaries

In Remembrance of John Flynn

Born on March 7, 1914, John Flynn lived through a period of world change unprecedented in the history of mankind. And in this fast-paced society of the 20th Century he rode a wave of fortune and fame that sometimes lifted him upwards and sometimes threw him tumbling down.

From Hollywood contracts in the 1940's and 1950's, to television and radio work up until the mid-1990's, John's artistic performing talents were always in demand. We, his friends during the last thirteen years of his

life, will remember him most for his moving narration of the life of Sri Ramana Maharshi, heard in the *Sage of Arunachala* video.

After the death of a dear friend in 1980, John turned his attention to a sincere search for the meaning and purpose of life. In 1982, still seeking a firm spiritual footing, he walked into Arunachala Ashrama in Nova Scotia, holding in his hand the Christian classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

Upon seeing photos of the Maharshi and reading briefly about his life and teachings, John not only quickly grasped the practical implications of the enquiry "Who am I?" but also understood and accepted the continued guiding presence of Sri Maharshi, who he turned to with full faith and devotion.

John's mother was born in Nova Scotia and from his childhood he would make trips to this Maritime Province of Canada every year. After discovering Arunachala Ashrama in Nova Scotia, he increased his visits and proportionately reduced his work load.

During the last twenty years of his life, John worked mostly as a narrator, providing the voice on television for documentaries produced by the Discovering Channel, the National Geographic Society, the National Parks Service and other production companies. He was a lover of language and of learning in general and, although not formally educated, John was more learned in more subjects than anyone we ever knew. In his mid-seventies we saw him study relentlessly to learn Spanish, and then after learning it, volunteering to teach English to Spanish-speaking migrant workers from South America living in the Washington, D. C. area.

John was uniquely endowed with a soft and kind heart that embraced and assisted whomever he found in need. His last television job as a narrator, broadcast in December of 1994, was the Discovery Channel's special on the history of Santa Claus. He so naturally embodied this saintly personality that the television producers insisted on John doing the job, though he had turned it down because of his declining health.

John visited Sri Ramanasramam in December of 1989. We were then planning to produce a documentary on the Maharshi's life. John, of course, wanted to narrate it. He told me that although he was not too enthused about making the trip to India, he knew that he had to visit Arunachala once; not twice, but just once.

One day in Sri Ramanasramam, when I was walking on a little-travelled path to the Maharshi's tomb (the path running east and west, couched between the Palitirtham Tank and flower garden), I saw John standing still on that path, looking quite besides himself. Coming near I noticed tears streaming down from his eyes. I asked, "Are you all right, John?" He replied, "Yes, for perhaps the first time I am really all right. And now I know why I had to come here."

During the last eight years of John's life he suffered from recurring bouts of cancer. After every surgery or treatment he would bounce back to his old self, or nearly his old self. Few knew of his illness or what he was going through. John was optimistic throughout, turning with greater intensity to the Maharshi's teachings.

On January 1, 1996, residing in the home of his son Michael in Frederick, Maryland, John left his body. We will always remember him as a sincere friend and father-like figure, a kind man who wished happiness for all in his quest for spiritual fulfilment.

We express our sincere sympathy to his children, with whom we also share this great loss.

- Dennis Hartel

Georgina Halmagyi

Georgina emigrated to Brazil from Hungary in 1957. There she met Tibor Halmagyi, who was also a Hungarian national living in Brazil. It was from Tibor, whom she later married, that Georgina first heard of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

In 1966, they moved to the United States, settling in East Haven, Connecticut. Being subscribers to the Mountain Path magazine from its inception, they were aware of the Arunachala Ashrama in New York City. Not long after arriving in the USA they contacted the ashram and, though they moved to California in 1968, kept up a warm, friendly relationship with the devotees of Arunachala Ashrama in New York and Nova Scotia all these years.

Georgina would send special packages of food to the New York and Nova Scotia ashrams every year at Christmas time. Occasionally, she would write to us, and her letters were always a clear expression of her deep devotion and faith in Sri Bhagavan and his teachings. She was a steady devotee of the Master whose life of devotion and faith was an inspiration to us all. Everyone in the Ashrama will miss her kind and gracious presence, a presence that was not physically near, but always felt with warm, affectionate singleness of devotion to the Sage of Arunachala, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

At the age of 73, Georgina was quietly absorbed in her Master on March 18, 1995.

Lex Hixon

In 1974, a year before the construction of the Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram in Nova Scotia, Lex Hixon and his son made a flying visit to this relatively-new outpost dedicated to the Sage of Arunachala. Lex had recently completed his Master's thesis on the teachings and philosophy of Sri Ramana Maharshi, and he was happy to see a centre established in the Sage's name. The following year, Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram was built in Nova Scotia and Lex Hixon came forward as the major contributor. It would not be out of place to briefly relate a dream one of the Nova Scotia ashram residents had about Lex at this time.

In 1974 a trust was formed in Halifax, Nova Scotia by a friend who had taken the initiative to have the temple built. His efforts to raise the initial $15,000 necessary to begin the project met with very little success. This would not have been a problem except for the fact that the ashram was instructed to go ahead with the construction and refurbishing of the school house bought and moved to the ashram site. (It was later discovered that this school, which is now the temple, was built in 1879, the very year of the Maharshi's birth). Many supplies were ordered, work was well on its way and debts mounted up to nearly $15,000 when we heard the news that very little money would be coming in through our Halifax friend's efforts. We were in a dilemma as to how to pay the debt, and if the amount was not paid, according to stipulations in the trust agreement, the ashram would have to surrender land and property. It was at this juncture of events when an ashram resident had the following dream of Lex Hixon.

Going into the temple, then under construction, the dreamer saw a group of rowdy visitors carousing inside the building. He was in a fix as how to remove them and restore order. Going back out and standing near the entrance he sees Lex walking straight into the temple, grabbing one ruffian after another and tossing them out the door until the hall is cleared. After this job was done, Lex left without saying a word, while the dreamer looked on in amazement. It was just three days after this dream that a large check, equal to the amount required, was received from a generous benefactor who, in this instance, was no other than Lex Hixon.

In New York City, from 1971 to 1984, Lex Hixon hosted a weekly radio program "In the Spirit," in which he interviewed representatives from all the world's religions, among them the Dalai Lama and Mother Theresa. He earned a Ph.D. in comparative religion from Columbia University in 1976. Thereafter he lectured, wrote books, gave seminars and dedicated himself to teaching and imbibing a greater understanding of the world's religious traditions.

On November 1, 1996, at the age of 53, Lex quietly passed away at his home in Riverdale, New York.

Jayanti Celebrations in New York

On Saturday, January 6, 1996 the observance of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Jayanti* took place at Arunachala Ashrama on Yellowstone Boulevard, in Queens, New York.

The celebration, as is our tradition, began with the *Marital Garland of Letters*, sung in unison. Following Ganesha Stuti, Dennis Hartel and Evelyn Saphier offered a few words of welcome to the several friends, both old and new, who filled the modest meditation hall to overflowing. Next, Margo Martin read the wonderful story of Sri Bhagavan's birth, as told by Arthur Osborne in *Ramana Maharshi, The Path of Self Knowledge.*

Geeta Bhatt and Chhaya Tewari (sisters) offered worship, reciting the *108 Names of Bhagavan Ramana*, composed by Viswanatha Swami, while the children in attendance, led by Henaz Bhatt, placed offerings of flowers.

Once again, Radha Ramaswami, our youngest singer 'just 7 years' inspired the congregational singing with her transparent sincerity and devotion.

Especially inspiring was the talk of Virat Bhatt, who told of an unusual incident that occurred during his recent visit to Sri Ramanasramam. His sincere narration brought the sacred Arunachala Hill and its environs alive before our mind's eye.

Swami Prakashmayananda of Sri Lanka blessed this occasion with his gracious presence. He spoke movingly of his association with Sri Bhagavan during the 1940's Then the Swami's bhajans overflowed spontaneously from his heart and swept all along in the powerful current of his devotional fervour.

Aarati was led by Geeta and Savithri Ramaswami. The many dishes, prepared by virtually all the ladies present, were then served to the delight of all.

We were happy to have been joined by Aruna and Ramkumar, daughter and son-in-law of President V. S. Ramanan of Sri Ramanasramam, and their two children.

How grateful we are to Sri Bhagavan for this occasion to recall his impeccable life of simplicity, renunciation and his sublime spiritual instruction of Self Inquiry: "Who am I?" May the occasion of the celebration of his birth inspire within us a fresh renewal of the spirit of devotion and practice, is the prayer we offer at his lotus feet on this day.

- Evelyn K. Saphier

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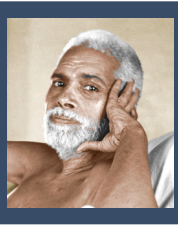

The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy Part VIII

Bhagavan our Guru

Once I was in my village pursuing my *sadhana* when I became very troubled by thoughts relating to the opposite sex. I wrote a letter to Bhagavan through Major Chadwick. Chadwick gave the letter to Bhagavan to read. Bhagavan read it without comment. But at the very time this trouble was brought to Bhagavan's attention by Chadwick, these troubling thoughts left me. Little incidents like this demonstrate the potency of having a guru of Bhagavan's stature. He was always there for us to turn to.

If we wanted to question Bhagavan on any matter we usually had to keep the question with us until we felt that Bhagavan was ready to hear it and reply. Sometimes his look would be so distant he seemed unapproachable, or he would be so intently occupied we could not think of disturbing him. Most of us were simply in awe of him and found it difficult to start up some conversation, or ask a question.

But what questions were we to ask? Did we not have faith in him, and wasn't that what mattered most? And what instructions were we to ask? We all knew his teachings. We all knew what we had to do. Those who had come to him and had taken to his path had already gone through the elementary spiritual practices. Undergraduate or post-graduate students may ask questions of their professor. But those who are working on their Ph.D. degrees are quietly occupied with their research and, on rare occasions, meet and consult their advisors. The serious aspirants that came to Bhagavan were like Ph.D. candidates.

Once I asked Bhagavan why, for no apparent reason, one sometimes feels composed and cheerful, sometimes restless and unusually active, and sometimes lazy and languid.

Bhagavan replied: "In man the three *gunas* of nature (*prakriti*) are in constant movement. When *sattva* comes to the fore, one is quiet and cheerful; when *rajas* predominates, one is restless; when *tamas* is uppermost, one is languid and cheerless."

"How to get over their influence?" I asked.

"By becoming a *gunatita* (transcending the *gunas*)," he replied.

"How to become a *gunatita*?"

"By realizing the Self," Bhagavan concluded.

The Maharshi was available to all. The management may have put limits on length of stays in the ashram, but anyone could live outside the ashram and daily come and visit the Maharshi. The women devotees did that. Since no women were allowed in the ashram at night, they all had to leave after the evening meals.

One day about 7 p.m., when it had already turned dark, an indiscreet incident between a man and woman occurred. When Bhagavan came to know of it, he said that the woman devotees should be fed their evening meal by 6:30 p.m. and then sent home. In the case of moral propriety Bhagavan intervened, but he would never judge or condemn people for their moral lapses. He understood human frailty and was determined to teach us how to transcend it, not to dwell on it.

In Bhagavan's Hall

In Bhagavan's hall, the devotees would be occupied with one of three things: some would be sitting in silent meditation with eyes closed; some would be quietly gazing on Bhagavan's holy form; others would be engaged in discussion, which usually consisted of questions put to Bhagavan. Any other activities required permission from the office.

Once T. M. P. Mahadevan had just returned from a trip to the West. He delivered lectures wherever he went and a number of those lectures were about Bhagavan and his teachings. A few of the resident devotees wanted to hear an example of how he lectured on Bhagavan. He offered to give one right then and there. But before he could do this, permission had to be taken from the office. Without undue delay it was given. T. M. P. Mahadevan then gave a lecture. Except for this lecture I don't ever remember anyone giving a lecture in the hall, although there were those whose very questions were the equivalent of a lecture. Usually, such visitors wanted to show off their knowledge.

Also, I don't remember many songs or *bhajans* being sung in the hall, except for the daily *parayanas*. Devotees did occasionally sing, no doubt, but permission was also required. Personally, I preferred to sit quietly before Bhagavan. In this way I felt I was reaping greater benefit than any *puja* or *sankirtan*.

There was one Daivarata, a devotee of Bhagavan who had been living in the north for some years and who had just returned to the ashram for a visit after a long absence. Among other things, he was known for his enthusiastic *kirtan* and dancing. He used to do it in earlier years before the Maharshi and while doing *pradakshina* of Arunachala. Some of the devotees expressed a desire to see him perform. It was arranged in the dining hall. Bhagavan sat where he usually did at mealtime and we all sat in rows. Daivarata began singing and dancing up and down the rows with great enthusiasm. He also sang Ganapati Muni's "Chatvarimsat" in his own melody, dancing with the tune.

Once the private secretary to the Governor of Pondicherry arrived at the ashram with a few of his associates. He came into the hall with a large sheet of paper filled with a long list of questions written in an elaborate, complex style of French. He handed the paper over to Bhagavan, walked over to the window opposite Bhagavan's couch and sat on the window sill. Bhagavan looked at the questions and noticing they were written in French called me to him and asked me to translate them. I found the French difficult to translate and I was struggling with it, word by word, while translating it to Bhagavan.

Bhagavan, realising my difficulty, said, "That's not necessary. Just tell me what the gist of this question paper is." I scanned through the whole list of questions and then told Bhagavan that it says that he really doesn't want oral answers to all of these questions, but rather the answer in the form of an experience.

Bhagavan paused a moment. He then slowly turned his face in the direction of the questioner and rested his eyes on him. When about thirty seconds passed like this, I noticed the man's body began to tremble. Soon he was shaking all over. Then he blurted out, "Oh no, Bhagavan, not now! Please Bhagavan, not now!"

I was standing a little to the side of Bhagavan watching this extraordinary scene and wondering what a being this Bhagavan is. He is a storehouse of power, but yet so kind, gentle and compassionate. And in spite of all this grandeur, he always seems so human and natural, even laughing and joking with us on occasions.

The attendants used to spread various sheets over Bhagavan's couch, changing them frequently. Occasionally they would place a tiger's skin on the couch and Bhagavan would sit on that too, just like it was any other sheet. Once I was sitting near the end of Bhagavan's couch facing him. That day a tiger's skin had been spread on the sofa and the head of the tiger was hanging over the armrest and, seemingly, staring straight at me.

Chadwick was also sitting in the hall at the west end. He would usually follow a punctual schedule and at exactly 7 p.m. he rose to leave. On his way out he walked up behind me and whispered in my ear, "Do you see? There is Chinnaswami, the ashram tiger, staring straight at you." We both chuckled at the joke. When Chadwick went out, Bhagavan asked me what Chadwick had said to me. When I repeated it, Bhagavan enjoyed the humour and we both laughed.

Gandhians and Service

Now and then, before India gained independence, followers of Mahatma Gandhi's Swaraj movement would visit the ashram. Most of these visitors were not what we would call spiritual aspirants, but rather social reformers. They would question Bhagavan about their work and ambitions. Sometimes Bhagavan would answer and other times he would simply remain quiet.

On one occasion, a prominent leader for the advancement of the lower classes came on a visit. She asked Bhagavan a number of questions concerning her work and ideals. Bhagavan simply listened and remained silent. The lady left. Shortly after her visit, an article written by this lady was found in a Madras newspaper. She wrote that she had discussed all her plans with Bhagavan and he agreed with them. When Bhagavan saw this, he commented, "What can I do? Even if I am silent, such statements are printed in the newspapers."

Rajendra Prasad was an intimate disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. But, unlike many others in the freedom struggle, he had genuine spiritual leanings. I was in the ashram in August of 1938 when he visited, together with Jamnalal Bajaj and others. I don't think we can say that Gandhi sent him to visit the Maharshi. Probably Rajendra Prasad had a desire to meet Bhagavan and benefit from his company and, Gandhi, being broad-minded, gave him permission to go.

Those who actually followed Gandhi's ideals could be called karma yogis. Adi Shankaracharya writes that karma yoga is useful for purifying the mind. But the purified mind has to be harnessed to some technique of spiritual practice. Only then will the *sadhana* be effective. Bhagavan has said that only a true jnani can be a true karma yogi. It is not that doing good works and giving to others is wrong. But only a *Jnani* knows that there are no others; there is only the Self. Who is to give to whom?

Bhagavan's whole life was simply an offering to the world. Everything he did was for others only. The scriptures say that a *Jnani* has no will of his own and whatever he does is prompted by *Ishwara*, or God. Bhagavan knew that social service could temporarily relieve suffering to some extent. He also knew that the

same person who was helped, would some day come to grief again, not only later in this life but in life after life. To remove all suffering, to completely extinguish the cause of all suffering, the Maharshi was born. He wanted to liberate us from the mistaken belief that we are this frail body, mind and ego. To do this he gave the method of Self-Enquiry, showed us how to practice it and effectively aided seekers by his powerful presence and grace. But even with all that he taught us, there were many who came to him, stayed for some time and then went astray. Such was the case with the pious attendant of Bhagavan, Madhava.

He worked in the ashram for about ten years, mostly serving Bhagavan as a personal attendant. At one point he seemed to have become restless, or perhaps he felt that he required rest somewhere away from the ashram. At this juncture, he came to me one day and asked if I could help him with the travel fare to Yogi Ramiah's ashram in Andhra Pradesh.

Up to this point Madhava was considered a model devotee. Everyone praised his virtues of steadiness, devotion and service to Bhagavan. So I was a little surprised when he told me he desired to leave the ashram. I asked him what Bhagavan and Chinnaswami said about his plans. He told me that they both approved of them. Later I discovered it was not so. Bhagavan had recommended that he simply cease working for some time, take his meals in the ashram and rest, free from all responsibilities. Apparently he did not heed Bhagavan's advice and as a result had to suffer.

Madhava left the ashram as planned, but returned after a short time. His job as one of Bhagavan's attendants had already been given to someone else. Consequently, he had nothing to do when he returned and I would often see him sitting in Bhagavan's hall. His restlessness persisted and it wasn't long before he left the ashram again. When he returned a second time he was wearing ochre robes, which means he must have been initiated into sannyas by some swami during his travels. Yet he was still unsettled and he went away again. Then, all of a sudden, we heard he had died in Kumbhakonam under strange circumstances.

It is not altogether uncommon for aspirants to deviate from the prescribed path after coming to Bhagavan. It is only those who persist to the end with their spiritual practice, devotion and faith that succeed. Of course, Bhagavan's helping hand is always there for those sincere *sadhakas* who strive and reach out for it.

Once the *Sarvadhikari* asked me to set my alarm so I could wake up at 2 a.m. It was discovered that Bhagavan was rising at this time every night and walking to the latrine near the *goshala*. The attendants were sleeping right through this and, of course, Bhagavan probably took special care not to disturb their sleep when he rose. When the *Sarvadhikari* discovered what was happening he became concerned that if Bhagavan should fall, or some other mishap should occur, there would be no one to help him.

So at 2. a.m. I awoke and walked over and stood near Bhagavan, who was then reclining on the couch outside on the verandah. When Bhagavan saw me standing there he quietly slipped off the couch and walked to the latrine with the aid of a flashlight. I followed. No words passed between us. There is no doubt that Bhagavan understood why I was there and who requested me to come at this hour of night, yet everything transpired in silence.

On such occasions, when silence prevailed, we would assume that Bhagavan approved or was pleased. When he was displeased, we could easily know, for he did not hesitate to correct us. In this way, we were always on our guard and alert to his will.

One day I received a letter from my family informing me that they were travelling to Thirupati. They

requested me to leave the ashram and meet them there. When Bhagavan was returning from his walk and was near the well, I mentioned the details of this letter to him. He made no reply. Now, how could I just leave? Normally he would indicate his approval of the plan by asking questions or commenting, and in some manner make it clear to me that it was all right to go ahead. In this instance he said nothing and just kept walking.

The very next day I received another letter from my family informing me that the trip was cancelled. How can we explain this? Is it a *siddhi*, a miracle, or what? Everything happened naturally in Bhagavan's presence, and he was always so unassuming.

- (*To be continued*)

A Visit To Russia

by

Geeta Bhatt

On March 12, I flew out of New York for a one week visit to St. Petersburg, Russia. My friend, Kamala Motihar, invited me to join her on this trip, which was a welcome respite from my demanding work in New York City.

Before leaving I was given the name, address and telephone numbers of Albert Timashev, a young devotee living in St. Petersburg. He is on the mailing list for this newsletter and corresponds by email to Arunachala Ashrama. I carried some pictures of Bhagavan with me, thinking that I would give them to him when and if we met. Dennis, an editor of this newsletter, had already emailed him about my visit.

My first attempt to talk to him on the phone resulted in utter frustration for both of us. His spoken English was, at best, limited, and my knowledge of the town of St. Petersburg was nonexistent. Because of the language problem we could not decide how to meet. I told him I would call back when I found someone who could speak to him in Russian. At the end of two days of hectic sightseeing, I asked my Russian guide to call Albert and arrange a meeting.

After a ten minute rapid-fire Russian chat with him, she told me that he would meet me on Monday, the 18th of March in front of the Russian Art Museum, and that he would be wearing black jeans, a brown leather jacket and a brown cap.

St. Petersburg is said to have only thirty days of sunshine a year, but since the 13th of March we were greeted by bright, sunny skies every morning. Again, on Monday the 18th, we awakened to clear skies and bright sunshine, the same unusual weather pattern that was cheering the spirits of all, visitors and residents alike. At one o'clock, my Russian guide Ludmila and I waited outside of the Art Museum. Ludmila soon spotted Albert, a young bright-faced, alert looking man. Ludmila introduced us. Albert then went to bring his other friends, who had already arrived and were waiting nearby. Albert knew written English, but had little, or no experience, speaking it. Nevertheless, he stumbled on the best he could, as his four friends - three women and one man - looked on and smiled. I showed them the pictures of Bhagavan I had and gave them some candy I had brought.

Of the four others, Constantine was the one who introduced Bhagavan to these friends and to the other members of their centre, called the Centre for Spiritual Development. Olga was somewhat older and seemed

to be the leader of the group; Julia said she was a vegetarian for the last twelve years; and Svetlana, another vegetarian, appeared to be very much like a sincere devotee.

Talking again through my Russian guide, it was decided that Olga would meet me at five o'clock after her work and take me to the Centre for Spiritual Development. At 5 p.m. Olga came and took me by taxi to another part of town. In Russian she tried to tell me something about their Centre and the evening they had planned for me. Knowing no Russian, all I could do was nod and smile. Ironically, the only understandable sounds came from the tape deck in the taxi that played the latest American pop music.

We reached the Centre at 5:30 p.m., which was housed in a two-story building in the interior part of town. The side streets were packed with frozen, slippery snow, making the walk to the Centre treacherous, and the low voltage of the street lamps seemed to accentuate the harshness of Russian winters.

The Centre occupied a fairly large room and was furnished much like a classroom with rows of desks and a piano at one end. I was led into the tiny office and seated at a table arrayed with fresh fruits, bread, *baklava*, cookies and candies. I was offered peach liquor and then *chai* (tea).

The Russian hospitality appeared to dictate that I eat while the five of them gather around me asking questions about Bhagavan and spiritual practice. After a little while of this solo eating performance I offered the food to each one of them. They laughed, relaxed, started to eat along with me as we broke the cultural barrier.

At 6 p.m., I was ushered into the larger room that was by then filled with about forty people, all eagerly waiting to talk to me. Albert informed me that they all followed one of four masters and knew about Bhagavan. Those gathered seemed very eager and earnest. The questions were many, ranging from the reasons for Bhagavan's physical illness, comparing Bhagavan and Sri Aurobindo, the stillness at Sri Ramanasramam, to simple methods of spiritual *sadhana*. Also, they all wanted to learn how to chant 'Om' and Arunachala Siva.

Albert and another young woman did the best they could to translate their questions and my answers. A long discussion followed among them, as I became increasingly more doubtful as to how my answers were being translated. At some point I suggested we meditate together. I recited OM, followed by the recitation of "Arunachala Pancharatnam," a period of silence and then the chanting of Arunachala Siva.

A most profound and deep silence followed this short meditation session. The energy in that room was so powerful and profound that we all became quieter and more centred. I almost felt Bhagavan gave them all an experience of the stillness of Sri Ramanasramam that they had so eagerly asked about.

We ended the general session at 7 p.m., though the core group of five continued to meet with me for another hour and half. Constantine, a young man of easy laughter and a deep spiritual quest, said he chanced to buy Oleg Mogilever's Russian translation of Arthur Osborne's Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge and that got the others interested in the Maharshi.

The few hours I spent with these sincere Russians left me deeply touched. The cultural tour of St. Petersburg, with all its opulent art, palaces and culture, paled before this simple evening with these five fellow *sadhakas*. In that small meeting house, on the night of March 18th, 1996 Bhagavan touched us all in a very special way. This was an experience that will stay fresh in my heart for ever.

The 100th Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala

On August 29, 1896 a young boy of sixteen stealthily left his home in Madurai and travelled to the holy Arunachala Mountain. The boy was later acclaimed as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, an illumined personality courted by Maharajas, religious scholars, the pious poor and sincere aspirants from the world over. But on that momentous day one hundred years ago when he left his home, swept away by a Divine Current that even absorbed his individuality, he was a solitary pilgrim lost to the world of sense and irresistibly drawn to his Father, Arunachala. On September 1, 1896 when the young Sage first arrived at Tiruvannamalai, Lord Arunachala vouchsafed to mankind a living example of the supreme state of Self-Abidance. And along with this paradigm of purity and peace we received the unique teachings of Self-Enquiry of 'Who am I?' and the grace necessary to achieve its end.

March 22, 1996 Letter To Sri V. S. Ramanan, President, Sri Ramanasramam

With Bhagavan's Grace we now would like to come to India in August, and with that same Grace we feel inspired to suggest a few plans for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of His advent at Arunachala. What we are about to propose is not simply a suggestion. It is an offer of responsibility that we, with the assistance of devotees and friends from here and there, would like to take in remembering and honouring that holy event that took place one hundred years ago.

To begin with, we wish to go to Madurai on August 28th, spend one night there and leave by train on Thursday, August 29th, following the same route Sri Bhagavan took to Arunachala. This entails detraining at Villupuram Station, boarding the train to Mambalapattu and then walking along the railway tracks to the Araiyaninallur Temple, taking the exact same route Bhagavan did as a young boy of sixteen one hundred years ago.

Bhagavan then spent two nights at Tirukoilur before reaching Arunachala on September 1st. The commemoration activities we are proposing will take place in Tirukoilor and the adjoining Kilur Village and culminate at the Arunachala Temple on Sunday morning, September 1st.

First of all, we would like to honour the Araiyaninallur Temple Tirukoilor, the Viratteswara Temple in Kilur, the house of Muthukrishna Bhagavathar where Bhagavan was fed and exchanged his earrings for rupees, and also the descendents of that pious family.

ARAIYANINALLUR TEMPLE: Bhagavan had the vision of light in this temple. This temple was also honoured by another young sage, Jnanasambandhar, one thousand years earlier, who had the same vision. We pious devotees would like to honour the Temple on this occasion with monetary gifts for its continued maintenance and with the performance of special *pujas* to mark the occasion. Bhagavan was not allowed to spend the night in this holy Temple. We would like to arrange for the Temple to be open night and day for pilgrims and devotees from August 30 to September 1. Also, pilgrims should be allowed to sleep somewhere on the premises during the night.

VIRATTESWARA TEMPLE: Here we will also arrange special *pujas* and offer a gift for the Temple's maintenance.

MUTHUKRISHNA BHAGAVATHAR'S HOUSE: We would like to have the house whitewashed and, by compensating its owner, use the house on August 31st. From inside this house we will have large quantities of food prepared and throughout the day give *bhiksha* to pilgrims and the indigent, thus repeating the kindness extended to Bhagavan from this home exactly one hundred years ago.

We also wish to honour the descendants of the Muthukrishna Bhagavathar's family with gifts.

TRAIN TO TIRUVANNAMALAI: We propose to take the train to Tiruvannamalai on Sunday morning, September 1st and then walk to the Arunachala Temple, reciting Bhagavan's "Aksharamanamalai." All those who had spent the previous two nights in Tirukoilur will join, as also those who had already come to Tiruvannamalai for the festivities. The latter should travel to Tirukoilur by bus in the early morning and board the same train for the 20 mile journey to Arunachala. We may require to charter buses and arrange for more cars to be added to the train for this event. I am not sure of the current train schedules either. But with Bhagavan's grace, I am sure these plans will greatly enhance the celebrations you have already scheduled, and they will certainly inspire us to follow the royal path to peace and bliss, lived and taught by Bhagavan, the Master of our hearts and minds.

April 4th faxed reply to the above letter

Pranams. Have just returned to Ashram after staying in Anandashram, Kanhangad for five days and have gone through your letter about reliving Bhagavan's journey to Arunachala from Madurai. Wonderful! We will plan as suggested in your letter. Will revert to you on this in about 15 days.

Thanks for Arunachala Ashram's contribution for the Centenary Souvenir.

My deep regards to Sri Bhagawata. With warm affectionate regards,

Yours in Sri Ramana,
Sundaram

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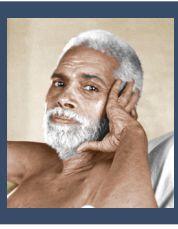


The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy Part IX

It was in February of 1949 that a small growth was noticed just below the elbow on Bhagavan's left arm. When it was first noticed it looked similar to the size, colour and shape of a black gram (pigeon pea).

At that time Bhagavan was sleeping outside on the couch which was placed north of the Old Hall and up near the fence that runs north and south, enclosing the flower garden. His couch was facing east and he would recline on it facing south. When devotees gathered around him during the day, the women would sit south of him, between the garden fence and the Old Hall and the men would sit east of him. During the nights, the white peacock was sleeping close to him in a cage.

Bhagavan's attendants told me that at night Bhagavan would sometimes get up, pass through the garden fence near his couch and relieve himself somewhere in the garden. While moving about in the dark, the attendants speculated, he must have bumped his left elbow on the fence, thus causing this growth to appear.

The Maharshi was vigilantly watched and attended to twenty-four hours a day. Therefore, any irregularity in his health was closely scrutinised by his cadre of devoted attendants. But how and why the tumour began where it did cannot be established with any certainty.

When it was first noticed by the attendants, Dr. Shankar Rao, a retired district surgeon who was then serving as the ashram doctor, was summoned to examine it. Dr. Srinivasa Rao, another devotee living near the ashram, was also called. After consultation these two doctors decided that surgical removal of the small growth should be performed. Without much fanfare, and without the use of an anaesthetic, the growth was removed. Perhaps everyone thought that this minor nuisance was now eliminated. The doctors did not realise then that they were tampering with a fatal type of cancer called sarcoma.

In March of 1949, the wound from the surgery seemed to be healing satisfactorily when another growth, a little higher up the arm, appeared. Dr. Raghavachari, an eminent surgeon from Madras, came to the ashram with all his instruments and removed the new growth on March 27. A local anaesthetic was used. About a month after this surgery, when the doctors realised that the tumour was sarcoma cancer, radium treatments began. Also, in May, herbs prescribed by an *Ayurvedic* physician were applied to the wound. During all these treatments Bhagavan's health was slowly deteriorating.

After the first surgery in February, I returned to my village. When the second surgery was performed and the tumour reappeared, Swami Viswanathan wrote me a letter, informing me of the situation and suggested that I should come back to the ashram immediately. I wasn't carrying on any previous correspondence with Swami Viswanathan and was a little surprised to receive his letter requesting me to return. I somehow felt Bhagavan's hand in his request and returned to the ashram without delay.

Bhagavan had then moved into the New Hall, which is connected to the Mother's Temple. What is now called

the Nirvana Room had been built near the New Hall for Bhagavan to rest between *darshan* periods. A bathroom was also built onto the Nirvana Room, alleviating the strain he experienced by walking all the way to the latrine near the *goshala*. After his final surgery in December of 1949, the Nirvana Room became his full-time residence.

As time passed, Bhagavan was becoming increasingly weaker. Sometimes after getting up from the couch he would shake violently and everyone feared he would fall. At such alarming times, Bhagavan would make a light comment, such as, "Oh! Look at me. I am dancing." In this manner, he would soothe the anguish of his devotees. Never would he take his illness or weakness seriously, even though most of us did.

Also, we could never ask him about his health. If we did he would shout at us, saying, "What of that?" Consequently, we had no choice but to sit, silently looking on. At times it would happen, that some devotee seeing Bhagavan's extreme weakness, would approach him in tears, sincerely grieving over his condition. On such occasions the Maharshi would tenderly console the devotee and dismiss his illness as irrelevant.

Once the doctors were about to cut some tissues from the tumour so that testing could be done on them. When they were about to inject a local anaesthetic to dull the pain, Bhagavan refused it and told the doctors to simply cut and take what they wanted. The doctors protested, explaining to Bhagavan that the pain would be severe without the use of the injection. But Bhagavan again refused and told them just to do it. They cut into the tumour and Bhagavan winced in pain. The doctors said, Bhagavan, we told you it would be painful.

Bhagavan replied, "Yes, the body experienced pain. But am I the body?"

When the Maharshi first arrived in Tiruvannamalai he was nearly always indrawn, lost to the outer world. He was unaware of whether he had eaten, slept, or even moved about. At that time, he could have dropped his body in the same manner without being aware of it. But his destiny, or God's will, dictated otherwise. And because of it we had before us a living example of how one can live always in the state of Self-absorption while still functioning in the world. Bhagavan lived for fifty-four years in full awareness of his pristine, immortal Self. Only by seeing this with our own eyes could we understand that such a state, or ideal, existed and was attainable. From time to time, God, in his mercy, ushers into the world messengers to guide and awaken mankind to the ultimate goal of life.

One day, in July of 1949, I walked into the New Hall and saw Dr. Guruswamy Mudaliar quietly sitting near Bhagavan's stone couch. Though he was at that time retired, he was still the most famous doctor in South India. He was renowned not only for his professional excellence, but also as a man of piety, charity, devotion and integrity. In Madras there is now a road named after him, and also a life-size statue of him can be seen at the Madras General Hospital.

I knew him from the time when I was a student living in a hostel next to his residence. Whenever I, or any other student was ill, we would go to him. I remember that as soon as we began explaining our symptoms, he would immediately interrupt us and say, "Stop!" Then he would write the correct prescription for the cure. He would never directly ask for payment either. A box was placed near the door, away from his view, and patients would put in it sums of money. Some patients put nothing. He never knew who put what.

Although he was then so distinguished, nobody seemed to have recognised him sitting in the hall. I approached Bhagavan and informed him of the famous doctor's presence. Bhagavan then asked me to go and inform Dr. Shankar Rao, the ashram doctor. I did, and the two doctors and myself met together in the dispensary, where Dr. Shankar Rao gave Dr. Guruswamy Mudaliar a summary of Bhagavan's condition and treatment thus far.

Dr. Guruswamy Mudaliar said that it was a mistake to have cut the tumour in the first place. "Cutting with the knife drives the cancer inside," he said, "but now that the damage has been done there is no other solution than to try surgery again."

On August 7, 1949, a third surgery was performed in the dispensary. I have heard it said that these surgeries were done without the use of anaesthetics, but this is not true. The standard anaesthetics of the day were used on Bhagavan.

There was a large team of physicians attending to Bhagavan's needs during this surgery and throughout his illness. When so many specialists came to certain conclusions about his illness and took up procedures, surgical or otherwise, to cure him, Bhagavan normally went along with the treatment. But when the tumour appeared again after the third surgery, and the doctors concluded that only by amputating the entire arm would there be any hope of a cure, Bhagavan flatly rejected the option.

On the evening of December 19th, I was one among a group of devotees standing north of the Nirvana Room waiting to hear news about Bhagavan's condition. The fourth and final operation had been executed on that day, once again in the dispensary.

Doraiswamy Iyer, who had been influential in bringing together prominent physicians for the two major surgeries on Bhagavan, came to where we were standing and informed us about his condition. "Whether or not the surgery was successful, can be determined only after three months," he said. Bhagavan remained in the dispensary for eighteen days recovering from the operation. Then around midnight, he shifted to the Nirvana Room.

One day when he was still convalescing in the dispensary, Chadwick and I were standing outside nearby when one of Bhagavan's attendants accosted us and inquired if we wanted to come in and see Bhagavan. This was not the usual procedure of having a personal audience with Bhagavan while he was ill; nevertheless, we jumped at the opportunity. Moving quickly into Bhagavan's room, we stood at his bedside and simply rested our eyes on him. No words passed between us, but I can never forget those cool, compassionate eyes that opened and bathed us in peace and love.

This small event may seem insignificant to the onlooker. Yet, by that one look, soaked with immeasurable peace and grace, we felt complete security and the confidence that his blessings would always be with us. Even now, more than forty years after he left his body, I feel that this same grace is flowing, enveloping me, guiding me. How can it be described in words?

When Bhagavan was in the last stages of his illness he insisted on giving *darshan* twice a day. A reclining chair was placed in the small passage in front of the Nirvana Room. He would repose there facing west towards the verandah of the Mother's Temple, and the devotees would sit or stand on the verandah silently looking at him, or sit meditating with closed eyes. Those devotees who were permitted to have a bedside meeting with him would come around from east of the Nirvana Room and enter. At this time, because of the severity of his illness, the *Sarvadhikari* rarely gave permission for separate meetings with Bhagavan. And, during this difficult period, I also thought there was no need of troubling Bhagavan by requesting a personal meeting with him. After all, what did I have to ask of Bhagavan, or what need was there for him to speak to me?

In February of 1950, a new cancerous growth appeared. Many devotees began to lose all hope that his life would be spared. On the other hand, there were others that resolutely declared that Bhagavan would never die

from this disease, as if it was inadmissible that a sage like Bhagavan could succumb to a common mortal affliction.

One day I received a message from the office that I should accompany the doctors to Bhagavan's room when they go again to clean his wound and change his bandages. I do not know why I was asked to do this. Perhaps Bhagavan didn't see me at *darshan* time and inquired about me, or possibly for some other reason the *Sarvadhikari* felt I should go to Bhagavan in his room.

When I walked into the Nirvana Room Bhagavan simply rested his benevolent gaze on me and said nothing. Then he slowly stretched out his left arm and the doctors began their work. The bandage was drenched with blood; the wound was large and pitiful to look at; the pain must have been extreme. Bhagavan calmly turned his head to the side and the doctors went about their business. I was amazed to observe his total detachment. It seemed to me that he looked on this painful affair as if it was happening to a body other than his own. I can never forget that sight. Bhagavan always told us that he was not the body. During his last days, in the midst of tremendous suffering, he demonstrated it.

About this time, my sister visited the ashram with her husband and baby child, who was then just seven months old. I asked permission from the office to take them to meet Bhagavan in the Nirvana Room. Although very few visits were permitted, I was allowed to take my sister and her child to see Bhagavan. My sister's husband had to stay behind.

Bhagavan was then in a dreadfully weakened state. I stood before him near the foot of his couch and introduced my sister. Then my sister sat her baby down on the floor alongside Bhagavan's couch and prostrated near the foot of his couch. The baby began to cry. With evident difficulty, Bhagavan leaned his head over to his left and looked down on the crying child, making endearing sounds with his lips, just as a mother would. I was astonished at the tenderness and grace he radiated, in spite of his severely debilitated condition.

Bhagavan's tumour had grown to the size of a cauliflower, blood was oozing between the buds and his whole arm was blackened. A doctor friend, who was experienced in all aspects relating to this type of cancer, told me that the pain associated with it at this stage of Bhagavan's illness would be similar to the suffering experienced if a fully-loaded lorry ran over your arm.

On another occasion during this period, a government minister from Madras, Sitarama Reddy, arrived for a visit to the ashram. This was his first visit and, since he was known to me, I was asked by the management to personally take him to visit Bhagavan in the Nirvana Room.

When we walked into Bhagavan's presence I noticed a peculiar radiance, or a strange kind of soft splendour, pervading the room. I thought because of my devotion to Bhagavan I was seeing this. Rationalising it in this manner, I even tried to dismiss it.

As soon as we came out of the room the minister turned to me and asked, What was that brilliance, or radiance, pervading the Maharshi's room? When he said this, without any probing from me, I thought there must be something to it. Then, all of a sudden, I remembered Ganapati Muni's second verse from his Chatvarimsat:

Who is the Master and Guide of the whole group of learned scholars beginning with Ganapati, Who is the repository of all the highest virtues, Whose beatific effulgence is hidden by the sheath of the gross body, like the blazing sun hidden behind the clouds;

Now that his mortal sheath is breaking down, I thought, it seems that this beatific effulgence is being released, or is escaping, from his physical form.

On March 15, several allopathic doctors met in the cottage west of the dispensary. After discussing Bhagavan's condition, they concluded that he had only one more month to live. This prognosis was correct, for exactly one month later at 8:47 p.m., on the night of April 14th, 1950, Bhagavan left his body.

At this meeting the doctors also decided that Bhagavan should be allowed to eat whatever food he desired. Throughout the course of his treatments, each discipline of medicine he was under had certain dietary restrictions. Often Bhagavan was required to consume items he would not ordinarily eat, or prefer to eat. But in spite of the doctors' decision about his diet, Bhagavan was not allowed to eat the *iddlies* and chilly powder he requested during the last month of his life.

Out of all the doctors attending on Bhagavan, it was only the allopathic doctors that didn't boast they could cure Bhagavan. The doctors from other disciplines would confidently announce that Bhagavan could be cured. Of course, during the final stages of his illness, when all hope was lost, there was little boasting. All the different systems of medicine, all the best doctors and surgeons and all of the latest medical treatments and technologies failed. Throughout it all, Bhagavan remained what he always was: a spectator in this world drama, ever revelling in the Self.

During his last few days, news of his expected demise spread through newspapers and by word of mouth. Thousands were flocking to Ramanasramam to have their final and in many cases their first *darshan* of the sage. The ashram could hardly cope with the overwhelming crowd.

On April 14th, a bulletin was released to the news service from the office, stating that Bhagavan was no longer giving *darshan*. By broadcasting this information the management thought the pressing throng of devotees would disperse. When this news reached Bhagavan, he immediately ordered the *Sarvadhikari* to withdraw the bulletin. In no way would he discontinue giving *darshan*. Even on this last day, when Bhagavan was in the throes of death, he insisted on giving *darshan* as usual between the hours of 5 and 6 p.m. He demanded that the devotees should not be prevented from seeing him.

Dr. Lt. Col. P. V. Karmachandani, the district medical officer, was then present. Seeing Bhagavan's critical condition on April 14th, he went to Vellore to bring his wife. The Doctor told me: I had a great desire to offer orange juice to Bhagavan. As the fruit was not available here, we purchased a few at Vellore, which my wife, with great devotion, made into juice. This we took with us to the ashram. Sri Bhagavan was by then declining all liquid, as movement to and from the bathroom was so troublesome to him. Twice he declined the offer, but asked for water instead. I was feeling sorry for my wife's unfulfilled longing. So this time, with all the earnestness of my soul, I conveyed a mute prayer to the Maharshi to spare my wife from a heartbreaking disappointment. Bhagavan at once said, "Give me orange juice." And when I offered it he drank it.

It was nothing but total compassion on Bhagavan's part to have asked for the orange juice, simply to fulfil the desire of a devotee.

On the final evening, thousands were cramped into the ashram grounds around Bhagavan's room. A gloomy mood enveloped the area, as Bhagavan's end was anticipated at any moment. The fan being waved over Bhagavan's body by the attendant was visible through the door, and all eyes were fixed on it, knowing that when it ceased moving, Bhagavan's heart had ceased beating.

Mrs. Taleyarkhan, an influential devotee with the administration in those days, obtained permission to go into the Nirvana Room and have her last *darshan* of Bhagavan at 7 p.m. At this sad juncture, she approached me and asked me to join her. I quietly stood there thinking, and then replied, "No. You please go ahead. I cannot go." During this past year I had seen Bhagavan's body suffer enough. There was no need for me to see more. Shortly after, the fan stopped, the famed meteor slowly floated across the heavens and it was all over. The light that illumined the earth as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi had now merged with the Eternal Light, the Source of all creation.

- (To be concluded)

"One's true birthday is when he enters That which transcends birth and death - The Eternal Being"

According to this definition of 'birthday' given by Sri Ramana Maharshi, his one hundredth birthday anniversary will fall somewhere in the month of July, 1996. About six weeks after this event he was irresistibly drawn to the holy hill of the Beacon light, Sri Arunachala. With his advent at Arunachala began an incomparable fifty-four year long demonstration of Self-abidance. It also commenced the imparting of a unique teaching imbued with a tremendous grace that is still available to sincere seekers.

To commemorate this special one hundredth anniversary, a small dedicated group of devotees from the U. S. and Canada will be travelling to India in August, 1996. They will spend the night of August 27th in Tiruchuzhi, the Maharshi's birthplace. The following night they will stay in Madurai. Then on Thursday, August 29th they will leave by train for Villupuram and follow the same route taken by the Maharshi to Sri Arunachala, arriving on the morning of Sunday, September 1, 1996, exactly one hundred years after Sri Ramana Maharshi first walked directly into the inner sanctum of the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple.

On Sunday, September 1, programs celebrating this event will be conducted at Arunachala Ashrama in New York and Nova Scotia, Canada. We hope that you can join us on this historic occasion.

Maharshi Ramana and N. Balaram Reddy Garu

Sri Ramakrishna Madhavpeddi, the author of the following article, had a forty-seven yearlong association with Sri N. Balaram Reddy. Sri Reddy was his friend and mentor, while he served him in all legal matters as his personal attorney. Now visiting his son in Chandler, Arizona, Sri Ramakrishna Madhavpeddi has kindly consented to relate some of his early memories of the Maharshi and N. Balaram Reddy.

IN 1948, when I was 24 years-old, I first visited Sri Ramanasramam. At that time I was very much inclined toward Communism. I was also very much depressed, owing to the death of my closest relative who suddenly died at the age of twenty.

My father had already visited Sri Ramana twice. He had gone to him with a list of doubts and twice all his doubts were cleared, without even a single word spoken. He experienced complete peace in the Maharshi's presence. Because I was depressed my father was urging me to visit the Maharshi. I was working as an attorney in the High Court of Madras when I was finally persuaded to travel to Tiruvannamalai and visit the Sage.

It was about 9 a.m. during the last week of April in 1948 when I first reached the Ashram. I was asked by the

management to stay in the Guest House for Gents, which was east of the well and near the kitchen. I entered the long guest house and placed down my bedding. As fate would have it, the late Sri N. Balaram Reddy was occupying the space next to me.

In addition to my work in the courts, I also wrote articles for various journals on Telugu literature, dabbled in poetry and had some familiarity with Sanskrit. Sri Reddy garu and I immediately struck up a conversation and, finding me interested in literature, he discussed with me the Ramayana and the character of Rama. He then took me the kitchen and got me *iddlies* for breakfast, as everyone had already eaten.

After eating he took me to where Ramana was reclining on a sofa and asked me to sit with my eyes closed. Although there was absolute silence in the hall I could not sit with my eyes closed. I was restless and I felt as if the time was dragging. Slowing my mind began to reflect on all my miseries, one after another. Every day, for three days, I accompanied Sri Reddy garu to the hall, and every time I sat down my thoughts would take off at high speed and my misery increased. So, on the evening of the third day, I told Sri Reddy garu that I had come to the Maharshi for peace but I was only experiencing an increase of pain and misery. Sri Reddy garu asked me to stay on for one more day.

On the morning of the fourth day I was sitting in the hall with my eyes closed. At one point I happened to open my eyes and saw the Maharshi looking at me intently. Suddenly, all thoughts vanished from my mind and I experienced a delightful blank, or void. Then a resplendent light enveloped me fully. I was empty of thoughts but full of immense happiness. I was one with that immense peace and resplendent glory.

After some time I again became aware of my body. This experience made me believe in God for the first time. In spite of all my theories of Marxism, dialectic materialism and atheism I could not deny the truth of this wonderful experience. This condition continued for three days. I witnessed my body go through its daily activities but I remained fixed in that immense peace. The Maharshi's look pierced into me when I sat before him and even when I was not before him. The eyes of the Maharshi are the kindest and most powerful energy of the universe, and it brings me to ecstasy remembering those first days with him in his Ashram. I left the Ashram after six days, but even after leaving I would suddenly go into meditation. Such was the effect of the Sage's presence.

This visit to Sri Ramana bound me to the Maharshi and also to Sri Reddy garu, with whom I maintained a close, lifelong association.

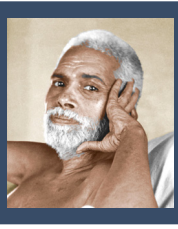
In October of 1949, I was married. My wife and I went to the Ashram on the 16th day after our marriage. Sri Reddy garu took us before the Maharshi and told him about us. The Maharshi blessed us.

Since then I have been visiting Sri Ramanasramam and meeting with Sri Reddy garu both in and outside of the Ashram. Whenever I met with Sri Reddy we would often sit and meditate together.

The *Maharshi* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil K. Sharma. Produced and distributed by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, 66-12 Clyde Street, Rego Park, New York 11374, USA. Tel: (718) 575 3215. E-mail: ashrama@aol.com. All editions of this newsletter can be found on the internet at - "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 1996 EDITED BY - DENNIS HARTEL & DR. ANIL K. SHARMA VOL. 6 - NO. 5



Arunachala Beckons All

Ocean of Nectar, Full of Grace, engulfing the universe in Thy Splendour!
O Arunachala, the Supreme Itself!
Be Thou the Sun and open the lotus of my heart in Bliss.

- Five Stanzas to Sri Arunachala

One hundred years ago, on September 1, 1896, a sixteen-year-old brahmin boy quietly walked straight into the inner sanctum of the great Arunachala Temple in Tiruvannamalai, South India. "Father, at thy call I have come," was his unspoken, heartfelt utterance. Since that day when Sri Ramana Maharshi made his appearance at the holy Arunachala Mountain, numerous seekers the world over have turned their gaze towards that ancient, holy hill of Light.

Now, forty-six years after the Maharshi cast off his mortal frame, it appears that even greater number of seekers from the West are being irresistibly attracted to him. His teachings are studied, disseminated and practised by citizens of all countries from all walks of life. In my twenty-five years of living and working in an ashram dedicated to the Sage of Arunachala I have observed this increase first hand.

It cannot be attributed to the efforts of any individual or groups propagating the Maharshi's teachings. Sri Ramana Maharshi is a unique powerhouse of peace. His powerful presence is his most striking feature, which even today draws us to him. During his lifetime he did not display occult powers, nor did he raise funds for any cause, lecture on Vedanta or go about making disciples. Rather it was his utter simplicity, transparent love and illumination that pierced even the most crusted hearts of unyielding sceptics. Here is a genuine, towering spiritual personality.

As this decade draws to an end and the panorama of spiritual teachers and teachings of the past century narrows, we find that the Sage of Arunachala is emerging as a dominant force. The spiritual power that he embodied during his lifetime is slowly being released after his death, and into the next century it will gain momentum, influencing the lives of countless seekers of Truth; and Arunachala will be the centre from where this current of spirituality will flow.

Throughout history there have always been a few rare souls whose destiny requires them to act as ships, ferrying myriad pilgrims to the other shore. Their influence does not abate with physical death. Their teachings are not buried in their tombs. The Maharshi still floats high on the water of our consciousness, and his power lies not so much in his spoken word recorded in books but in his grace conferred to sincere seekers. It is this grace that opens the Heart and pulls us into It. The wisdom gained by such grace is not knowledge born of thought, but rather wisdom born of intuition when thought ceases and the Self alone remains. Arunachala is the visible form of the Self and also represents the path to the Self as taught and lived by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

The glory of the Arunachala Hill has been sung in scriptures passed down to us from antiquity. The Maharshi gave this meaning of Arunachala:

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Aruna = red, bright like fire.

The fire is not ordinary fire which is only hot. This is *Jnanagni* (Fire of Wisdom) which is neither hot nor cool.

Achala = a hill

So it means Hill of Wisdom

- Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi No. 216

Arunachala is already one of the oldest and most sacred of all India's holy places. The Maharshi called it the 'Heart of the earth, the spiritual centre of the world.' Sri Shankara declared it to be Mount Meru. In the Skanda Purana we read, 'Of all, Arunachala is the most sacred. It is the heart of the world. Know it to be the secret and sacred Heart-centre of Siva.'

Down through the ages, saints and sages have adorned its caves. And it has been said that even now invisible *Siddhas* (Sages with supernatural powers) dwell in these caves. The Maharshi has confirmed their existence and some have seen them moving as lights upon the hill at night. This hill is considered to be the original *Siva Lingam* and the story of its origin is found in the *Arunachala Mahatmyam*.

The legend, briefly, is as follows: There was a contest between Brahma, the creator, and Vishnu, the sustainer of the universe, regarding the superiority of the one over the other. Everything in creation went wrong and turned chaotic on account of the feud between them. Siva, deciding to put an end to it and restore order, appeared as an infinite column of light, thundering forth: "Whoever finds the top or bottom of this column is the greater!"

Stunned at this, Brahma and Vishnu agreed to take up the challenge. Brahma took the form of a swan and flew up to find the top, whereas Vishnu became a boar and dug down into the earth to find the bottom. After aeons of futile search, Vishnu failed to reach the base of the column of light but 'beginning to see within himself the Supreme Light which dwells in the hearts of all, he became lost in meditation, oblivious to the physical body and even unaware of himself, the one who sought'. Vishnu returned and readily admitted his failure. Brahma, on the other hand, saw the flower of a mountain tree falling through the air and, thinking to win by deception, returned with it and declared he had plucked it from the summit. Then Brahma's ruse was exposed and, being totally disgraced, he confessed his fault.

In this legend Vishnu represents the ego or individuality and Brahma the mentality, while Siva is Atma, the Spirit.

Because the column of Light was so dazzling and impossible to look upon, both Brahma and Vishnu prayed to Siva to take a more benevolent and accessible form so that all beings could worship Him and realize the goal of life. Siva accordingly took the form of the Arunachala Hill.

Devotees of the Maharshi sometimes wondered why he would often refer to the Arunachala Mountain as God. Was he not an Advaitin, a non-dualist? This question was put to the Sage by a learned professor, Dr. Syed, and recorded in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi:*

273. *Dr. Syed asked:* I have been reading the 'Five Hymns.' I find that the hymns are addressed to Arunachala by you. You are an Advaitin. How do you then address God as a separate Being?

Maharshi: The devotee, God and the hymns are all the Self.

Dr. Syed: But you are addressing God. You are specifying this Arunachala Hill as God.

Maharshi: You can identify the Self with the body. Should not the devotee identify the Self with Arunachala?

Dr. Syed: If Arunachala be the Self why should it be specially picked out among so many other hills? God is everywhere. Why do you specify Him as Arunachala?

Maharshi: What has attracted you from Allahabad to this place? What has attracted all these people around?

Dr. Syed: Sri Bhagavan.

Maharshi: How was I attracted here? By Arunachala. The Power cannot be denied. Again Arunachala is within and not without. The Self is Arunachala.

To further convey the true significance of Arunachala, nothing is more revealing than these hymns Sri Ramana wrote praising the Holy Hill:

'Who is the seer? When I sought within I watched the disappearance of the seer and what survived it. No thought of "I saw" arose, so how could the thought "I did not see" arise? Who has the power to convey this in words when even Thou couldst do so in ancient days by silence only (appearing as Dakshinamurti)? Only to convey by silence Thy State Thou standest as a Hill shining from heaven to earth.'

- Eight Stanzas on Sri Arunachala

The ancient path of Self-enquiry taught by the Maharshi was previously relegated to hermits, far removed from worldly pursuits. What the Maharshi did was to make this path available to all, whether engaged with employment or rearing children, or living within the confines of a monastery. With a period of meditation each day and vigilant remembrance of the ideal throughout our activities, we can experience the true nature of Arunachala within and without. This is what the Maharshi taught and embodied as a living example. The study of his life is equal to the study of the scriptures, for in his every action the individual self was absent and the Supreme Self shined forth. This rare example in the 20th Century is an unfailing gauge to measure spirituality at its highest plateau, and we should make use of this standard to assess our life in all its varied aspects.

Recited daily before his tomb in Tiruvannamalai is this stanza composed by Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni:

Good luck accumulated to the Red Mount, Arunachala, for its having sheltered numerous sages in the past, has now grown incomparable because Lord Ramana Maharshi has chosen this hill among many other holy places, for his abode.

- Forty Verses in Praise of Sri Ramana

The Maharshi never admitted to having 'chosen' Arunachala as his place of residence, but had always expressed being "chosen by" Arunachala:

Bearing and tending me in the world in the shape of my father and mother, Thou didst abide in my mind, and before I fell into the deep sea called Jaganmaya (universal illusion) and was drowned, Thou didst draw me to Thee, Arunachala, Consciousness Itself, such is the wonder of Thy Grace!

- The Necklet of Nine Gems

We also may feel that we have a choice to choose Arunachala, to choose the path of practice of Self-enquiry,

to choose Sri Ramana Maharshi as our ideal, our goal, our Guru. And if we do this with our whole heart and mind, we will also come to know and experience *"Thou didst draw me to Thee, Arunachala, Consciousness Itself, such is the wonder of Thy Grace!"*.

(The preceding article was submitted by Dennis Hartel for the 100th Anniversary Souvenir, a book commemorating Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala. It is published by Sri Ramanasramam, India.)

Faith

Totally I believe
But then it turns its back on me -
My faith and love
All gone to waste.
That is how I feel.
But I should keep the faith,
For God carries me through
The times when faith turns away.
Keep the faith,
Keep the love
And don't lose hope.
Although all is destined
It doesn't hurt to hope,
It doesn't hurt to believe.
If you believe and hope and love
Slowly and gradually
You'll make it.
So trust faith enough to believe
And believe enough to love.

Henaz Bhatt- New Jersey, USA

The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy

After the Mahasamadhi

On April 16, the day after Bhagavan's body was buried, I gathered all my belongings and left on the noon train for Madras. At that time, I didn't know when, or if, I would be returning to the ashram. Many prominent devotees also began leaving Tiruvannamalai. Everybody was selling off their properties, the ashram's income dramatically fell and the Mauni, Srinivasa Rao, was scheming to seize control of the ashram; even before Bhagavan's demise he was scheming.

After one year, I again returned to the ashram to attend Bhagavan's *aradhana* celebration. The ashram was struggling to stay afloat financially. I remember Chinnaswami informing me that the ashram would be unable to serve me breakfast and I should go to town and eat.

By the mid 1950's T. N. Venkataraman began to gain considerable support, although he definitely had an uphill battle. And, as Bhagavan willed, the ashram has somehow been going along, prospering ever since. There are, no doubt, the occasional incidental problems in the operation of the ashram. Still, like before, I believe it is only Bhagavan who is getting everything done. His presence continues to be the controlling factor in the day to day operation of the ashram. And just look how the ashram has grown and how more and more seekers from all over the world are flocking here.

"Why Do You Doubt It?"

One time G. V. Subbaramayya questioned Bhagavan about his *Atma Vidya* song, which begins with "Self-knowledge is an easy thing, the easiest thing there is." Subbaramayya wondered why, if it is so easy, we don't realize it. This is something we all wondered about.

I then quoted to Bhagavan verse three in the seventh chapter of the Bhagavadgita, wherein Sri Krishna says, "Of thousands of men, some rare soul strives to realize Me; of those striving yogis, again, some rare one (devoting himself exclusively to me) knows Me in reality."

I thought if *Atma Vidya* (Self-knowledge) was so easy, as Bhagavan's song suggests, why did Krishna make this declaration in the Gita?

Bhagavan looked at us with compassion and, smiling confidently, said, "What is written in the song *Atma Vidya* is true. Why do you doubt it? It is as clear as a gooseberry in the palm of your hand."

When he spoke to us like this, with such certitude and conviction, we were filled with an unflinching faith and self-confidence in our ability to attain the ideal he taught us. Moreover, he sat before us as the living example of that ideal, a perfected soul, absorbed in the purity and peace of the Absolute Reality. What more did we need in life? How blessed we all felt.

This concludes the *Recollections N. Balaram Reddy*, recorded by Dennis Hartel during a 1993 visit to Sri Ramanasramam. The foregoing ten instalments and an additional Appendix (not published in the MAHARSHI) are being compiled into a book and published by Sri Ramanasramam, India. Sri N. Balaram Reddy was absorbed into his Master on May 11, 1995.

Quote

If one abuses another or injures him the remedy does not lie in retort or resistance. Simply keep quiet. This quiet will bring peace to the injured but make the offender restless until he is driven to admit his error to the injured party.

- Sri Ramana Maharshi

Devotee: How is the Guru found?

Bhagavan: God, Who is immanent, in His Grace takes pity on the loving devotee and manifests Himself according to the devotee's development. The devotee thinks that he is a man and expects a relationship as between two physical bodies. But the Guru, who is God or the Self incarnate, works from within, helps the man to see his mistakes and guides him in the right path until he realizes the Self within.

September 1st
1896

September 1st
1996

One Hundredth Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala

You are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's arrival at the Holy Sri Arunachala Hill.

The programme will start at 11.00 am. on Sunday, September 1st at both the Nova Scotia and New York Ashramas.

Bearing and tending me in the world in the shape of my father and mother, thou didst abide in my mind, and before I fell into the deep sea called Jaganmaya (universal illusion) and was drowned, Thou didst draw me unto thee, Arunachala, Conciousness itself, such is the wonder of Thy Grace!

- Sri Ramana Maharshi, The Necklet of Nine Gems, verse 9.

On Saturday, August 31st

A satsang will be conducted at the Nova Scotia temple. Participants will exchange views and experiences relating to the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi and other spiritual topics. Accommodation will be provided. For reservations please call (902) 665-2090 or (902) 665-2293 (Darlene Karamanos). For details about the programme call Dr. Lakshminarayana at (506) 388-1723.

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* Please note that the New York Ashrama has moved to a new address, which is only a five minute walk from its previous location.

A Tribute to Shep

For the last ten years, visitors to the Nova Scotia Ashrama were invariably impressed and enchanted by the Ashrama dog, suitably named Shep - A medium-sized German Shepherd. His previous owner was intent on destroying him, but a kind neighbour came to his rescue and brought Shep to the Ashrama in 1986. This gave the eager soul 10 more years to live, which he steadfastly utilised by attending all the *parayanas, pujas* and meditations in Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram, the Ashrama temple. Shep exhibited intelligence in all matters and many visitors were amazed seeing him rise just prior to the end of *Veda Parayana* and stretch out his front legs and paws in the direction of Bhagavan's shrine. He would do this at the conclusion of the *Sri Chakra Puja* as well.

Shep breathed his last and was merged in his Master on August 1st 1996. His *samadhi* was dug behind the temple and the burial took place amidst prayers and *pujas*.

Shep will always be remembered and missed by friends and residents of the Ashrama.

Questions and Comments

I wonder if you have any comments about an issue that's been troubling me, namely a need for a guru. Since I am an 'unrealized' person, my understanding is necessarily limited. I do appreciate that the true guru is within - it can't be otherwise. However, I am not at all clear about the need for an aspirant to spend time in the presence of a genuine sage. Obviously it's of considerable benefit. Here I think of the various individuals who have written about being transported into samadhi in the Master's presence; it seems that for most of them the experience would not have occurred but for the Master's grace, and that repeated 'doses' over a lengthy period of time were required before those states could be stabilized. That being the case, and fully-awakened individuals being exceedingly rare, the odds don't seem very good for us average seekers. Nevertheless, the Master himself, I gather, often counselled people, particularly those that could only spend a brief period with him, that physical distance was no barrier, that grace was always available. Based on your own experience and what you've seen of the early devotees, what do you think?

- Barbara Bondar, Taiwan

Your question regarding the necessity of a living Guru and seeking his immediate presence has been put to us many times. It is a natural question since, as you mention, we read of all those who were spiritually awakened sitting before the Maharshi. It must be remembered that even those who came under the immediate influence of the Master had to dedicate their lives totally to the spiritual ideal and put forth tremendous effort and sacrifice before resting in the supreme state of Self-abidance.

When once questioned as how to find one's Guru, the Maharshi answered: 'By intense meditation.' He also said that when your devotion to God has matured you, God comes in the shape of a Guru and from the outside pushes your mind inside, while being inside as Self, he draws you there from within.

We often feel that if left to ourselves we are unable to make satisfactory progress in our sadhana, so we seek someone to help us. But if we have firm faith in what Sri Bhagavan says about Guru, we need not seek him outwardly. However, that does not necessarily mean we will not have a bodily Guru, or at least a spiritually advanced friend to guide us to the Ultimate Goal. In other words, we need not feel that our progress has been stalled because we have not found a Sage to guide us and grant us His grace.

If we make the spiritual ideal the sole goal of our life, if all our actions and thoughts are directed toward that one end, surely the Guru will reveal himself to us. God or Guru comes to us; we do not go to Him. We earn His presence by our effort. The presence of the true Guru is the presence of the Self. We simply have to seek the Self with true sincerity and leave the rest to the Higher Power.

Did Christ die on the Cross? Did Sri Ramana Maharshi perish on April 14, 1950? No. The Guru is always present, the sun is always shining. We must simply turn to It.

There may not be another physical Guru of the Maharshi's stature available to us at present, but 'HE' is available to us at present. That is all we need to know. The rest depends on our sincere effort.

- Editor

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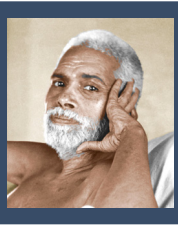

Arunachala Yatra

The following is a report of the pilgrimage that Eric Ford, James Hartel, Arthur Coucouvitis, Meena Shah, Janet Rubinson, V. K. Balachandar and Dennis Hartel of the USA and Dr. Anil Sharma, Vijaya Sharma and Dr. Wally Shishkov of Canada had the good fortune to participate in. Although the plans for the pilgrimage came from Arunachala Ashrama here in the West, they were wholeheartedly taken up and implemented by devotees in India.

At 7:30 p.m., on Thursday, August 29, 1996 seventy-four Pilgrims boarded the Pandyan Express in Madurai for a three day journey which culminated at the inner sanctum of the Arunachala Temple in Tiruvannamalai.

All these pilgrims, earnest devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi, were observing the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the Sage's advent at Arunachala, and all these devotees were highly inspired to travel the same route the youthful Sage took when, one hundred years ago, Sri Arunachala physically dragged the boy unto Himself, crowned him *Siddha Purusha* and enthroned him on His sacred slopes, to reign as King of the Yogis.

The pilgrims, ages 13 through 80, gathered in Madurai, travelling from all corners of India, the U.S.A. and Canada. The members of the *Ramana Kendram* in Madurai spent months meticulously working out every detail of the *yatra*, travelled every foot of the distance, anticipated every need of the devotees and prepared for all possible contingencies. With the devoted assistance of Mr. A. S. Krishnamurty of the Southern Railway, all the amenities, assistance and loving service we would have wanted to be extended to the lone Venkataraman one hundred years ago were lavishly showered on us during this pilgrimage. The preparations made by the Madurai devotees, and other devotees from places along the way, were a transparent reflection of their unparalleled devotion to their Master.

The description that follows will undoubtedly fail to recount this holy *yatra* as it was, in succeeding waves of devotion, experienced in the hearts and minds of each and every pilgrim. Every one of the devotees whose *punya karma* carried them to Madurai to participate in this pilgrimage will certainly have their own story to tell, which, in all likelihood, will not correspond to the actual events of the *yatra*, but rather to their own personal experience of Bhagavan and how He walked with him or her, or how He absorbed him or her in divine remembrance. This summary can only outline some of the memorable events and scheduled programs.

On the morning prior to our departure from Madurai, most all the pilgrims that had already arrived were taken to Tiruchuzhi by van. For some it was their first visit to the Maharshi's birthplace. *Puja* was offered at the Bhuminatha Temple and in the Sundaram Mandiram. Gifts were presented to the priest who resides in the Mandiram and there were recitations of Sri Maharshi's works in the small room of his birth.

Returning to Madurai and performing *puja* at the shrine in Ramana Mandiram, devotees began making their way to the railway station, which was less than a mile away. Throughout the *yatra* the pilgrim's luggage, when not needed, was carried in a van that followed them all the way to Tiruvannamalai. A nominal fee was paid to the organisers in advance and this amount covered all the expenses of the journey. Even some who were unable to pay the fee were welcomed to join.

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The train left Madurai at 7:30 p.m. and was scheduled to reach Villupuram Junction at 3 a.m. Most of the devotees were accommodated in the last car of the train, which was especially reserved for the pilgrims. Soon after boarding we were served meal boxes, containing iddlies, chutney and bananas. Later, about the time when Venkataraman bought two wood apples to appease his hunger, slices of wood apples were distributed. In groups, the devotees spent most the night singing and remembering the holy event they were now reliving.

By 3:30 a.m. the train reached Villupuram Junction, but unlike the boy, Venkataraman, we did not have to detrain. Our car, which was the last car of the train, was detached and immediately attached to the Tirupati Express. Though we reached this railway station about the same time as the Maharshi did, we departed much earlier, at 4:30 a.m. Within half-an-hour we were getting down at the Mambalapattu Station. When the train pulled away we saw through the dark a huge 1000-gallon water car that was left by an earlier train for our morning bath. Tea and biscuits were served and in the early morning light, led by a large, colourful banner, the pilgrims marched through the local village resounding the morning air with "Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva." Children woke and mothers and fathers left their dwellings to watch the joyous parade of devotees marching down the street. They were singing the *Marital Garland of Letters*, composed by the Maharshi for his devotees. By the end of the *yatra*, this hymn was sung so incessantly for three days that there could have been no pilgrim that did not consign it to memory.

For the next eight kilometres we walked on a road that was often parallel and very near to the railway tracks. It is believed that the Maharshi walked along the tracks, fearing he may lose his way by taking an unknown road. In these early hours there was little traffic on this black-topped road, and while the chanting and singing of Bhagavan's hymns continued, the boy-sage's presence was so tangibly felt that devotees were often seen glancing at the railway tracks, believing that the Boy's form may actually appear before their eyes.

By 9 a.m. we reached the village of Mugaiyur. Here, on the roof of a Brahmin's house, *iddlies, puris, sambar* and coffee were served. An overcast sky sheltered us from the warm-morning sun and, like the welcomed breakfast, a pleasant breeze refreshed all the pilgrims.

Having briefly rested at the Mugaiyur Railway Station, we continued for another nine kilometres, walking on the service paths alongside the railway tracks. The pilgrims slowly spanned out over a kilometre, as some walked faster and others slower. A ridge of clouds covered us and extended for about one mile to our right. It was remarkable that, in spite of the brisk breeze blowing, the clouds remained fixed in place till about noon, when the devotees began arriving at the Tirukkovilur Station.

Devotees met the pilgrims at the station with fresh, cool water and provided comfortable seats for them to rest. The van taxied the pilgrims to Kilur, about one mile distance, where a hall that had a number of adjoining rooms was rented for our accommodation. This place was just opposite the Mutthukrishna Bhagavathar's house and adjacent to the Varateswara Temple. Nearby, a second hall was rented where our meals were cooked and served. Dozens of straw mats were laid out on the floor in the various rooms and pilgrims rested after taking their meals.

Following the afternoon tea, the devotees were carried by van to the Araiyaninallur Temple. It was now evening. Earlier in the day elaborate flower garlands were brought from Sri Ramanasramam to adorn the sacred images of this ancient temple. *Puja* was performed in the shrines and the pilgrims gathered outside and sat facing the dim outline of the holy Arunachala Hill. Directly in front of them was a small monument dedicated to Saint Tirugnanasambandhar. A stone-carved relief of the famous Sage's two feet topped off this

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monument. If you align your eyes at the level of these feet and look directly through the narrow space that separates them you will see the Arunachala Hill. It was designed in this manner to direct the sight to Arunachala. There is no marker on the monument indicating what it is, so the devotees proposed to have a stone engraving attached to it reading: "From this temple two 16 year old Seers had *Arunachala Jyoti Darshan*—Tirugnanasambandhar over one thousand years ago and Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi one hundred years ago, on 30-8-1896." The preparations for installing this inscription have begun.

As the sun set, the pilgrims sang *Akshara Mana Malai* and then made their way across the mostly-dry Pennar River bed at about the same time of day the Maharshi did one hundred years ago. Arriving back at Kilur the devotees had their meals and retired for the night.

On Saturday morning, August 31, all the devotees gathered in the house of the Mutthukrishna Bhagavathar. There has been little change in its structure since Venkataraman visited and was loving served a meal by the Mother of the house and pawned his earrings for cash. A week earlier, with the owner's permission, the front portion of the house was newly painted, a small *pandal* in front of the veranda was erected and other minor improvements were done at the expense of Sri Ramanasramam. Also, the Ashram installed a beautiful framed, glass-enclosed, coloured photo of Sri Bhagavan to remain as a permanent fixture in the central room of the house. *Arati* was performed in front of the photo while the devotees sang *Akshara Mana Malai*. All the pilgrims came out to the front of the house and a two-by-five foot, professionally-painted sign was ceremoniously unveiled. The sign had a well-painted bust of Bhagavan and text describing the Sage's connection with the residence.

Since it was the pilgrims intention to honour with gifts the descendants of the Bhagavathar's family and a descendant of the temple drummer who gave his portion of food to the hungry Venkataraman, exhaustive inquiries were made on earlier visits by the Madurai devotees and representatives of Sri Ramanasramam. It was discovered that the Bhagavathar and his wife had no children and his sister's descendants presently owned and rented out the house. The earrings that Venkataraman pawned to the Bhagavathar were never located. It is believed by his family that the Bhagavathar actually took the earrings to a local pawn shop, got the four rupees and a redemption slip and gave it over to the boy.

A descendant of the drummer was present and thrilled the pilgrims with his *nadaswaram* renditions at the Varateswara Temple, where the schedule of programs now continued.

The devotees squeezed into the inner sanctum and sat before Lord Varateswara. "Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva" resounded uninterruptedly for a long period while devotees meditated on Arunachala-Ramana in their hearts. Drums reverberated from the ancient stone walls of the temple, *nadaswaram* was played and all felt sanctified and elevated. Magnificent flower arrangements bedecked the image, *arati* was performed and *prasadam* distributed. The pilgrims then moved to the Mother's shrine. *Sri Lalita Sahasranam Stotram* was recited by the devotees and *puja* was performed. The whole temple united with the pilgrim's devotion and ascended in unison enveloping the atmosphere in a vibrant Divine Presence. That day's worship in the Varateswara Temple was a grand, spontaneous outpouring of devotion from the pilgrims and local participants alike.

In the Mantap before the Mother's shrine felicitations and gifts were offered to all the *archakas* (priest) of the temple, temple servants, temple officers, the Mutthukrishna Bhagavathar's relative, who with deep devotion joined the pilgrims that day, the nadaswaram player who was the drummer's descendant, a young drummer boy with a bright, clear face that charmed us with his resemblance to the young Venkataraman, and to other organisers, local and distant, of the *yatra*. With great joy and satisfaction Sri S. Guruswamy, the President of

the Ramana Kendra in Madurai, officiated the event. Also, financing for connecting a permanent water supply to both the Varateswara and Araiyaninallur Temples was offered to the temples' executive officer.

Immediately following the felicitations a poor feeding took place in front of the temple. The pilgrims then went for their afternoon meal at about 2 p.m.

After rest and tea the pilgrims gathered in the stone *mantap* in front of the Varateswara Temple. A few distinguished devotees were scheduled to speak and modest loudspeakers were set up. This meeting evolved into a warm, informal, family-like gathering where anyone who wished to share a few thoughts about Bhagavan and the pilgrimage was given time. The sentiments expressed were replete with extreme cordiality, deep devotion and veneration to the Master. Devotees wept and laughed while listening to the heartfelt experiences of their fellow pilgrims, who by now had all been united as one inseparable "Arunachala *Yatra* Family."

The Maharshi spent the last night before arriving at Arunachala in the Tirukkovilur Railway Station and, naturally, the pilgrims felt they should spend the night at the same place. However, rain had started falling even while the evening program was going on under the stone *mantap* in Kilur and the sheltered space available at the train station was limited. Organisers first consideration was the woman pilgrims. It was thought that they should be taken by van to Sri Ramanasramam for the night. But the woman devotees refused to go, although they did agree to stay in the rented hall while all the men went and stayed under the shelter at the train station. *Bhajans* and chanting were going on late into the night when at midnight Sri Guruswami arrived with the van filled with lady devotees. He said, "What could I do? The ladies were weeping and wanted to come here." They were somehow accommodated in the single, small, mosquito-infested waiting room, though they neither minded nor complained. We could hear them singing, chanting and talking about Bhagavan all through the night. Some of the devotees chose not to sleep at all that night and remained awake, remembering their Lord in so many ways. There was no tiredness or exhaustion, as Bhagavan's grace was experienced to a high degree.

During the night we could overhear some of the conversations of devotees: "I don't think I ever contemplated Bhagavan and remembered Him day in and day out as we have done on this *yatra*." And another, with genuine sincerity, was heard to say, "Oh, I wish this *yatra* would never end."

This was the sentiments of many of the pilgrims as the train pulled into the Tiruvannamalai Station at 6:30 a.m. on Sunday, September 1, 1996. "Arunachala Siva! Arunachala Siva!" resounded in a chorus from the pilgrims arriving by train and this was echoed back by a large group of devotees gathered to receive them. The President of Sri Ramanasramam, Sri V. S. Ramanan, his father Swami Ramanananda Saraswati and others warmly embraced the pilgrims, as sincere devotion welled up and rained down from the eyes of the devotees. Ramana-Arunachala had reached His destination.

Amidst the chanting and emotion, Swami Ramanananda unveiled the engraved stone slab installed in the station, describing the Sage's arrival one hundred years ago. The pilgrims, joined by many local devotees, gathered in a procession following the banner and marched to the Arunachala Temple, chanting "Arunachala Siva!" Entering the temple we all offered ourselves to the Lord of Ramana, Sri Arunachaleswara, then proceeded onwards to Sri Ramanasramam.

The pilgrims reached the Samadhi Hall at about 9 a.m., just after the completion of the *Mahabhishekam puja*. Wall to wall the hall was tightly packed with devotees, but the pilgrims, following behind the banner, somehow entered and merged into the crowd, like a river merging into the ocean.

Later in the afternoon, following a short talk describing the *yatra* to the large gathering of assembled devotees, all the pilgrims were invited on to the stage and individually introduced themselves to the audience. Sri S. Guruswami presented a special commemorative gift to Mr. A. S. Krishnamurty of the Southern Railway. In addition to assisting the *yatra* organisers in every possible way, he was responsible for having commemorative stone engravings, describing the Maharshi's journey, installed at all the railway stations where the young Sage alighted while in route to Arunachala. Sri V. S. Ramanan was formally honoured for his assistance and guidance in connection with the *yatra*. Sri V. S. Ramanan presented a commemorative coin and ribbon to Sri N. Somasundaram of the Madurai Ramana Kendra in recognition of his untiring service to devotees. Concluding, Sri Somasundaram was requested to lead the pilgrims in the chanting of "Arunachala Siva," just as he had led them all throughout the pilgrimage.

What had transpired in a span of sixty hours will remain an unforgettable memory, kindling the flame of devotion and dedication in the hearts of all those blessed devotees who followed in spirit and word the sacred path to the holy hill of the beacon light, as lived and taught by the Sage of Arunachala, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Abhyasa

Practice

Devotee: Can this path of enquiry be followed by all aspirants?

Maharshi: This is suitable only for ripe souls. The rest should follow different methods according to the state of their minds.

Devotee: What are the other methods?

Maharshi: They are *stuti, japa, dhyana, yoga, jnana,* etc.

Stuti is singing the praises of the Lord with a feeling of great devotion.

Japa is uttering the names of the gods or sacred *mantras* like 'Om' either mentally or verbally.

Dhyana. When one is in *dhyana* the mind does not contact the objects of the senses, and when it is in contact with the objects it is not in *dhyana*. Therefore those who are in this state can observe the vagaries of the mind then and there and, by stopping the mind from thinking other thoughts, fix it in *dhyana*. Perfection in *dhyana* is the state of abiding in the Self.

Yoga. The source of breath is the same as that of the mind, therefore the subsidence of either leads to that of the other. The practice of stilling the mind through breath control is called yoga.

Fixing the mind on psychic centres such as the *sahasrara* (*lit.* the thousand petalled lotus) yogis can remain any length of time without awareness of their bodies. As long as this state continues they appear to be immersed in some kind of joy. But when the mind emerges (becomes active again) it resumes its worldly thoughts. It is therefore necessary to train it with the help of practice like *dhyana* whenever it becomes externalised. It will then attain a state in which there is neither subsidence nor emergence.

Jnana is stilling the mind and realizing the Self through the constant practice of *dhyana* or enquiry (*vichara*). The extinction of the mind is the state in which there is cessation of all efforts. Those who are established in the spontaneous effortless state have realized their true nature, the Self. The term 'silence' (*mouna*) and inaction refer to this state alone.

All practices are followed only with the object of concentrating the mind. As all these mental activities like remembering, forgetting, desiring, hating, attraction, discarding, etc., are modifications of the mind, they cannot be one's true nature. Therefore to know the truth of one's being and to be it, is known as release from bondage and the destruction of the knot (*granthi nasam*). Until this state of tranquillity of mind is firmly attained the practice of unswerving abidance in the Self and keeping the mind unsoiled by various thoughts is essential for an aspirant.

Those who follow the path of enquiry realize that the mind which remains at the end of the enquiry is *Brahman*. Those who practise meditation realize that the mind which remains at the end of the meditation is the object of their meditation. As the result is the same in either case it is the duty of aspirants to practise continuously either of the these methods till the goal is reached.

- from Self-Enquiry

Advent at Arunachala celebrations in New York and Nova Scotia

Evelyn K. Saphier from New York and Mr. Yashwant Rai from Nova Scotia submitted the following reports.

New York City

As the celebration of Sri Ramana Maharshi's one hundredth advent at Arunachala commenced, his God-intoxicated, melodious poetic hymn to Sri Arunachala *The Marital Garland of Letters*, resounded the new spacious, sun-filled sanctuary of Arunachala Ashrama on Clyde Street, in Forest Hills, New York City.

The young children of our Ashrama's extended "family" worshipped at Sri Bhagavan's shrine, offering flowers before his radiant image while the gentle, devoted voice of Swami Viswanathan (recorded in 1979) was heard singing his own Sanskrit composition of *108 names of Sri Ramana*.

An inspired reading of the story of Sri Bhagavan's monumental pilgrimage from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai evoked before our minds' eyes the scenes and events which our fellow devotees, participants in the *Centennial Yatra* led by Dennis Hartel in India, would be fervently reliving at this time.

Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, whose unswerving dedication to the establishment of an "Indian-style Ashrama" in New York City has been the cornerstone of our humble community, spoke words from the heart, reminding us of the directness, simplicity and accessibility of Sri Bhagavan's path of Self-enquiry.

During the celebration it seemed that Sri Bhagavan was pouring his grace into the devotees' hearts, which overflowed, resounding the sanctuary with *bhajans*, poetry and inspired talks. The ecstatic songs of Swami Prakashmayananda, in particular, surcharged the atmosphere with intense devotional fervour. Together, devotees

chanted *Upadesha Sara, Sri Arunachala Panchakam* and *Arunachala Siva,* concluding with *Na karmana...* and *arati* at the shrine.

In the glow and warmth of Sri Bhagavan's grace, *prasadam* was shared among the devotees. There were numerous delicacies which had been prepared by virtually all the ladies present.

How blessed we are to have been in the company of fellow devotees on this most auspicious of days in which our beloved Master Sri Ramana Maharshi so magnanimously poured out his unreserved grace on all.

The words of poet Muruganar, sung in years past, stand true as ever today:

> *Dear devotees, avid for grace,*
> *Our master is an ocean—take and hold your fill.*
> *Approach him freely, with minds and hands wide open.*
> *Drink, drink to your heart's content!*

Nova Scotia

On September 1, 1896, when Sri Ramana Maharshi was only 16 years old, he arrived at the holy Arunachala Hill. Exactly one hundred years after that momentous day this event was celebrated across the world with great devotion. In India a large number of devotees, drawn from all over the world, celebrated the event by travelling the same 350-mile route on foot and by train, just as the teenage Ramana Maharshi did 100 years ago. We take immense pride in saying that the idea of celebrating the event in India by walking and travelling by train originated in the Arunachala Ramana Mandiram, Bridgetown, Nova Scotia. About ten devotees from Canada and the U.S.A. participated in this historic march and most of the expenses required to conduct this pilgrimage were covered by the Arunachala Ashrama in Bridgetown.

At the Bridgetown Ashrama the event was celebrated with great fervour and devotion. Never before have we seen the Temple Hall so jam-packed with devotees from various parts of Canada, U.S.A. and England. For nearly two full hours the mountains behind the Ashram reverberated with the recitation of "Arunachala Shiva! Arunachala Shiva!"

Darlene Karamanos welcomed the devotees and gave a brief history of Arunachala Ashrama in Bridgetown, Nova Scotia.

Mr. Yashwant Rai, with the help of maps, charts and video explained the route that Sri Bhagavan followed a hundred years ago, the same route that Dennis Hartel and his party had just followed in their journey of pilgrimage.

Earlier in the day Dr. Lakshminarayan from Moncton, New Brunswick performed *Sri Ganesh Puja*, and *Sri Chakra Puja*. His presence was a source of inspiration for all devotees, though everybody felt the absence of Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil Sharma.

A large number of devotees had brought sweets and other food items as offerings and placed them at the altar. The *prasad* was served after *arati*.

Our grateful thanks to all the families, particularly to Mrs. Lakshmi Raju, Mrs. Aruna Pandey and Mrs. Janak and Raj Sharma for supervising the *prasad* arrangements.

Sri Bhagavan gave the world a simple and easy method for spiritual *sadhana*. Go to the source, ask the question "Who Am I?", find your own identity within the cavity of your own heart.

Mr. Sridhar, a Hindu from Goa, asked: What is Kousalam (skill) in Yogah karmasu kousalam (Yoga is skill in action)? How is that gained?

Maharshi: do actions without caring for the result. Do not think that you are the doer. Dedicate the work to God. That is the skill and also the way to gain it.

In the course of an informal conversation Sri Bhagavan pointed out that Self-Realisation is possible only for the fit. The vasanas must be eliminated before jnana dawns. One must be like Janaka for jnana to dawn. One must be ready to sacrifice everything for the Truth. Complete reunuciation is the index of fitness.

- Sri Ramana Maharshi

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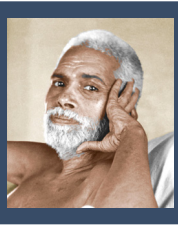

My Boyhood Friend and Classmate

by

Yogi Ranganathan

My father who was an Inspector of Police, was transferred to Tiruchuzhi in 1885. Bhagavan's father Sundaram Iyer was then practising there as a vakil. The two became close and intimate friends. I was a classmate of Bhagavan and my elder brother that of Bhagavan's elder brother in the local school. Our two families moved on the friendliest terms, almost as close relations. About the middle of 1888 my father was transferred to another place and we left Tiruchuzhi.

Bhagavan and his brother went to Dindigul for education and from there came to Madurai to continue their education. By that time we had also come to Madurai for our education. Bhagavan was first studying in the Mission School, and I in the Native College. But both the institutions were adjacent to each other. If my school closed earlier I would wait for Bhagavan; and if his school closed earlier he would wait for me. I and my brother, Bhagavan and His brother and a few other boys would go to the Vaigai river, play on the sands and return home. I was just one year older than Bhagavan. Bhagavan left Madurai in August 1896.

After that, I visited Bhagavan for the first time only after a long interval, along with my wife, mother and daughter. I asked whether he recognised me. He replied as if speaking from the back of his throat "Rangan", (In those days Bhagavan spoke rarely and he had almost lost speech through disuse) and turning to Palaniswami pointed out my mother to him and asked him, "Do you recognise this lady?" He replied, "Yes. She came when Bhagavan was at Pavala Kunru." I spoke to Bhagavan for some time and then while taking leave of him said, "You have attained a great stage." He replied "Distance lends enchantment to the view." By this he meant, as I later learned from many of his teachings directly and indirectly to me, that a householder's life was as good as that of an ascetic, and could equally lead one to *Jnana*.

On my next visit, when I was still ten or fifteen steps from Skandasramam, Bhagavan who was then cleaning his teeth near the parapet wall, observed my coming and told his mother, "Mother, Rangan is coming." She said, "Let him come. Let him come." When I went and got up after prostrating before Bhagavan He said, "It is a rare privilege to get the *darshan* of saints. It is good to go and visit them frequently. They will weave the cloth and give it to you." From this I gathered that if one had Bhagavan's Grace one could gain *Jnana* even without any effort on one's own part.

During my next visit, when Bhagavan, his mother and I alone were present, I told Bhagavan's mother, "I have also a right to a share in all that Bhagavan has gained." Mother asked Bhagavan, "Did you hear what Rangan said?" Bhagavan laughed and said, "Is he not also one of us? He has also a share."

Another time, I came to Bhagavan on my way to Madras where I wanted to try for a job. When I got up after prostrating, Bhagavan asked me, "Males can go anywhere and eke out a livelihood, but what arrangements have you made for your wife and children?" I replied, "I have provided for them." I stayed for a few days with Bhagavan and then went away to Madras. A few days later my elder brother visited Bhagavan and

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Bhagavan made kind enquiries of him whether my wife and children were getting on well, without any hardship. My brother told him, "He left some money when he started for Madras. All that has been exhausted now and they are suffering great hardship," and went away to Madurai.

When, after making some efforts for a job at Madras, I returned to Bhagavan he said, "You told me you had provided for your wife and children. Your elder brother told me they are undergoing hardship." I did not reply, for Bhagavan knows all and is also all powerful. I again went to Madras, and finding my efforts for a job there were in vain, returned to Bhagavan and stayed with him for some time. During that time, one night, when I was sleeping outside on a double cot that was lying there, Bhagavan suddenly came and sat near my feet. Seeing this I got up. Bhagavan asked me, "What is the matter with you? Are you restless and not getting sleep because of your family troubles? Would it be enough for you if you get rupees 10,000?" I kept silent. Once when Bhagavan and I were going round the hill he said, "There are herbs on this hill which could transmute base metals into gold." Then also I kept silent. Bhagavan used often to joke with me and laugh asking "Oh! Are you suffering very much?" He then told me, "When a man sleeps he dreams he is being beaten and that he is suffering terribly. All that would be quite real at that time. But when he wakes up he knows it was only a dream. Similarly when *Jnana* dawns, all the miseries of this world would appear to be merely a dream." In a few days, I returned to Madurai and through a friend got a manager's job in a motor company. Later, I was also appointed as an agent for the sale of buses in Ramnad and Madurai by another company, with a commission of 5 percent on all sales effected by me.

From this and in other ways I got rupees 10,000; and I spent them on the marriages of two of my daughters and for clearing off debts. I never used to mention my family troubles to Bhagavan, nor ask Him for anything. He was himself looking after me and my family, so why should I make any requests for this or that in particular? I left everything to him. I used to tell Bhagavan frequently, "I have entrusted my body, possessions, soul, all to Bhagavan. The entire burden of my family is hereafter yours. I am hereafter only your servant, doing only your behest. I am a puppet moved by your strings." Bhagavan used to laugh and say "Oh, Oh." It never occurred to me to ask him for any wealth.

Once, at Skandasramam, when Bhagavan was standing, I felt his legs from his knees downwards, running my hands over them and remarked to him, "When in the old days we frolicked, romped and played together, I used to feel as if I was pricked with thorns whenever your legs came in contact with my body, your skin then having been so rough and scaly. But now I find they are very soft, like velvet." Bhagavan replied, "My body has completely changed. This is not the old body."

One day Bhagavan told me, "Let us go to Pandava Tirtham and swim in it. Can you swim now?" I replied I had not forgotten swimming and would go with him. The next morning at 3 a.m. we both went accordingly, swam there, and played in the water as of old and returned before people could come there for their daily bath. Bhagavan told me, "Let us go like this from tomorrow. But we must go early and return before people come there for their baths." I said "Yes." We swam like this for a few days.

One day, before dawn, when I was restless in my bed, rolling from one side to another, Bhagavan came to me and asked, "Are you not getting sleep? What are you worried about?" I told him, "I am thinking of taking up *Sanyasa*. If I do it here my people would discover it. So, I want to go away to a distant place like Varanasi and become a *Sanyasi* there." He at once went and brought *Bhakta Vijayam*, read out from it the portion dealing with Vithoba's determination to remain a *Sanyasi* in a forest and the advice of his son Jnana Dev, that the same mind goes with a man whether he stays at home or retires into a forest, and told me I could attain *Jnana* continuing to be a householder. Thereupon I asked Bhagavan, "Why did you become a *Sanyasi*?" He replied,

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"That was my destiny," and added, "Though it is irksome to remain a householder, it is easy to attain *Jnana* that way."

Once at Skandasramam, after Bhagavan and I had a bath and he was drying his body with a towel, I noticed that down from his knee to his ankle the skin had peeled off and blood was oozing. I asked him what the matter was with his leg. He said he did not know. I asked, "Is it not from your legs that blood is oozing? You seem to know nothing about it!" He replied very casually, "When I was sitting down, the fire from the charcoal brazier in which incense powder was being burnt might have burnt my skin and caused this sore." I at once sent for some ointment and applied it to his legs. From this I learned how, completely detached from his body, Bhagavan lived only in the Self

One day, Bhagavan and I went round the Hill by the forest footpath close to the foot of the hill. After I had gone a little distance on that path full of thorns and sharp stones, I ran a thorn into my foot. When I lagged behind Bhagavan observed me, came to me, removed the thorn, and said, "Now there, come on." Then I proceeded with him. After a few yards, he ran a thorn into his foot. Noticing this, I ran up to him, lifted up his foot and saw marks of several thorns there. Then I examined his other foot and found several marks there too. Thereupon he said, "Are you going to remove the new thorn or the old thorns?" So saying, with the greatest indifference, he pressed his foot on the ground and drew it forward, and the thorn broke. He then proceeded on the hill round, asking me to accompany him. I was convinced that he was living completely detached from the body. I further imagined that both these incidents were designed by Bhagavan to impress upon me that Bhagavan was not his body.

On another occasion Bhagavan said to me, "You think you are undergoing great troubles. Hear some of mine: I was once climbing the hill up a precipitous track and when I caught hold of a rock above, the rock slipped down, and I fell on my back. The rock that slipped down and other rocks which it brought down fell over me. I managed to remove the rocks that were covering me, and to come out. Then I found my left thumb was missing from its place and was hanging near the little finger. I forcibly brought it back to its place and fixed it there." At that stage in the narration Bhagavan's mother came out with the remark "Don't ask for that horrid story. He came with blood all over the body. It was too heart-rending a spectacle." I cannot understand who came and removed the rock, treated his wounds and fixed up the thumb. Who was the Doctor?

One day Bhagavan's mother told me in his presence that once when he was standing she saw various kinds of snakes all over his body, round his neck, chest, waist and legs and got terribly frightened; and that after a while the snakes went back to their places. I believe that was one of the visions vouchsafed by Bhagavan to his mother to wean her from the belief that Bhagavan was her son and to impress on her that he was God Himself.

Once at Skandasramam when Bhagavan, his mother and I alone were present, mother said as follows: "About ten days ago, at about this time (*i.e.*, 10 a.m) as I was looking at Bhagavan, his body disappeared gradually into a *Lingam* like the one in Tiruchuzhi temple. The *Lingam* was lustrous. First, I could not believe my eyes. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. It was the same sight still. I became frightened that he was leaving us. But again gradually his body appeared in place of the *Lingam*." On hearing this I looked at Bhagavan. He smiled at me. From this I gathered he was confirming mother's account. When I returned home I mentioned this to the members of my family. My eldest son was writing an account, as he termed it, of Bhagavan's marriage with his bride *Jnana*, and he included the above incident in it. Later when that work was being read out before Bhagavan by my son, when the portion relating to this incident was read,

Bhagavan asked my son, "Who told you this?" And my son replied, "My father." Thereupon Bhagavan said, "Oh! That fellow came and told you all, is it?" Some of the *bhaktas* who were listening to this asked what exactly was the incident referred to. Bhagavan passed it over, saying it was nothing. I gathered from the above vision of Bhagavan's mother that Bhagavan was God himself and that the vision was vouchsafed to mother to impress on her that she was no longer to think of him as her son, but as God Supreme.

One day, when Bhagavan and I were climbing the hill, I told him that because I have had the good fortune to have Bhagavan's *darshan*, all my *Sanchita and Agami Karma* has been burnt away like a bale of cotton by a spark of fire, and that only my *Prarabdha Karma* was left. He replied, "Even *Prarabdha* will remain only so long as the mind remains. If the mind is destroyed, to whom is *Prarabdha*? Think over that deeply." From that I understood that once the mind is killed and *Jnana* is attained, there is no such thing as *Prarabdha*.

Once a *Bhakta* having done some *apachara, i.e.* something improper or irreverent towards Bhagavan, he came and asked me what he might do for expiating his offence. I advised him to do *Pradakshina* round Bhagavan three times. He came round Bhagavan three times accordingly, prostrated before him, and said, "Bhagavan should not keep in mind the *apachara* I have committed. Bhagavan replied, "Where have I mind? It is only if there is a mind I can keep anything there." It is clear from this Bhagavan has attained *Mano Nasa* (extinction of the mind).

When Bhagavan was in Skandasramam, a gentleman from Malabar, greatly learned and expert in *yoga sastra*, came and lectured for four hours on yoga. After he had finished, Bhagavan said, "Now, you have finished, I hope, all that you had to say. The end of all your yoga is seeing lights and hearing sounds. The mind will be in *laya, i.e.*, there will be suspension of mental activity, whilst the sound or light is there. When they disappear, the mind will again emerge. The real thing is to achieve *Mano Nasa* or extinction of the mind. That is what is called *Jnana*. The other man thereupon said, "What you say is the truth," and took leave of Bhagavan.

- The Call Divine, January 1, 1955

A Pilgrimage in India

For months I was feeling that there must be something that I could do; I just couldn't let the 100th anniversary of Bhagavan's arrival at Arunachala pass without attempting to acknowledge it in some way. In the spring, Dennis Hartel had e-mailed to us his inspired idea to take the journey that Bhagavan took as a boy of 16 from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai, but at the time the idea of my travelling to India seemed quite far-fetched. However, then and there the seed was planted, and in spite of the resistance that the mind threw up, all obstacles fell away. On August 15th I found myself on a plane headed for India in the company of a sincere and committed group of American devotees.

Stepping out of the car at Sri Ramanasramam I felt His Presence; on the roof of the office a peacock stood utterly still and inside my mind the words formed "This is Siva's abode". I took off my sandals and walked up the steps, aware in my heart that every pebble, every grain of sand that I walked on and everything that I saw was Siva and Siva alone. The sacred hill, rising majestically above the trees, drew my mind with greater and greater intensity; then and there I decided to give myself over to it; the feeling of devotion and the desire to be totally absorbed by it was irresistible.

The days spent in the lap of Arunachala gave me an increasing awareness of the beauty and sweetness of the people whose traditions and culture are the fertile soil in which the Sage Ramana chose to take birth and to grow. On one of my first nights there I had the privilege of doing *giripradakshina* with a group of Indian devotees. Getting to know them a little gave me a chance to acquire some feeling for the depth of their *sadhana*. I was also deeply moved by hearing the Tamil *parayanas* that are sung six evenings a week before Bhagavan's Samadhi Shrine. It seems no mere coincidence that it was to these people the Maharshi had come; that this field of *Shakti* has rising from it Siva Maheshwara in the form of the Hill.

As the day of Bhagavan's advent at Arunachala centenary celebration drew nearer more people began arriving at the ashram, including some devotees from Canada affiliated with the Nova Scotia ashram. Soon we were all preparing to depart for Madurai. On the evening of August 27th we boarded the second class sleeper car of the train that would travel all night and into the next morning before reaching its destination. Prior to leaving I was unaware that we would be staying at the Ramana Mandiram in Madurai, which is the very house in which the boy Venkataraman had the experience that established him permanently in the Self. Another revelation was that the house is in such close proximity to the southern *gopuram* of the Meenakshi temple (emblazoned with Dakshinamurti Guru).

Visiting the Meenakshi Temple was the first of many such opportunities during the trip to receive the *darshan* of the residing deities. The next morning we went to the Maharshi's birthplace and to the Bhuminatha Temple where resides the Siva Nataraja image that was carried through the town on the eve of Sri Bhagavan's birth. Also on our tour we visited the Araiyaninallur Temple where both the Maharshi and, one thousand years before, Jnanasambandhar, had their first glimpse of Arunachala. At the Kilur Varateswara Temple *abhishekams* were offered to the *lingam* amidst the exquisite sounds of the temple drums and nadaswaram. At these temples, which were in remote areas and not crowded with pilgrims as are the more popular shrines, I experienced the true legacy of *Sanatana Dharma*; being in touch with That which is beyond time, beyond creation.

The 17 kilometre walk undertaken on the morning of August 30th at about 5 a.m., left us all quite willing to bed down that night on straw mats without the least concern as to whether sleep would be possible. The next day in Kilur, at the house where a hundred years ago a kindly mother gave a hungry young pilgrim the *prasad* that was being prepared for Sri Krishna's Jayanti, a *puja* was performed and a plaque unveiled, describing the house's historical significance. We were also invited to hear speakers that evening at the temple and to honour the planners of the *yatra*. As the pilgrimage progressed, the devotees seemed to share the growing feeling of being one family in Bhagavan.

The final leg of the journey, a short train ride, was made all the more memorable by the high spirits of those who had spent the previous night in the train station, as Bhagavan did, undaunted by rain or considerations of comfort. With the doors of the train flung open and chanting the *Marital Garland*, our eyes feasted on the sight of Arunachala drawing closer and closer. A rainbow appeared in the sky as if to herald the great day, and on September 1, 1996, a hundred years after Venkataraman left his mother Meenakshi's arms to journey to Father Arunachala Siva, the gates of the Arunachaleshwara Temple were again opened wide. With Siva and Sakti in full embrace in our hearts, we were home.

Janet Rubinson
Coral Springs,
Florida

A Poem to Rumi

You keep surprising me.
Yet of course it's no surprise.
This day begins like any other for the bees—
Off to work by 7:00 a.m.
There's pollen to gather, and it's
Important to be there early to
Pry open the portulaca blossoms.

I'm not like the bees.
I yawn all day at my job
Waiting to leave—
Huge, wracking yawns.
Need a Coke just to make it through the lifelong day awake.
Finally, I make it home to my bed,
Read some of your poems, and drop blessedly to sleep.
But the body, as you say, is carrying the soul's burden

And the tormenting itch manifests again.
After only an hour's sleep, you wake me suddenly
And I sit up in bed
And for a moment
God is in my room
Looking through my eyes.

Barbara Cherington - Belmont, Massachusetts

Forthcoming Festivals

Sri Bhagavan's 117th Jayanti—Thursday, December 26, 1996
Pongal—Tuesday, January 14, 1997
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana—Thursday, January 23, 1997
Maha Sivaratri—Friday, March 7, 1997
Sri Vidya Havan—Friday, March 21, 1997

Once when meditating in the presence of Bhagavan, the mind persisited in wandering. I couldn't control it. So I gave up meditation and opened my eyes. Bhagavan at once sat up and said, "Oh! You abandoned it thinking it is the *swabhava* (habit) of the mind to wander. Whatever we practise becomes the *swabhava*. If control is practised persistently that will become the *swabhava*."

- From the January, 1971 Mountain Path: "How Bhagavan Came To Me," by Sadhu Trivenigiri Swami.

Questions and Answers

Visitor: Mental activity during meditation does not seem to converge at a point, as it should, on the object of meditation and it does not stay there but gets diverted into numerous thought channels. Why is it so? How can the mind be made to overcome this tendency towards diffused thinking and attain its primal state of freedom from thought?

Maharshi: It is the mind's attachment to objects constituting the not-self that makes the mind wander about during meditation. Therefore, the mind should be withdrawn from the not self, and an effort should be made to fix it in Self-enquiry. All extraneous thought is effectively eliminated when you attune the entire mind to the one question, "who is it that is making the enquiry?"

Visitor: In spite of having come to the definite conclusion as a result of one's investigation that "I" has no essential relation with the not-self, *i.e.*, with the body, senses and the objects perceived by the senses, the mind persists in going after these very same things which constitute the not-self. What is it due to and how can it be remedied?

Maharshi: It is due to lack of *abhyasa* and *vairagya*. When Self-enquiry has become steady through practice, and the spirit of renunciation firm through conviction, your mind will be fee from the tendency of thinking about the not-self.

Visitor: How can I gain steadiness in practice?

Maharshi: Only through more practice.

- The Call Divine, January 1, 1957

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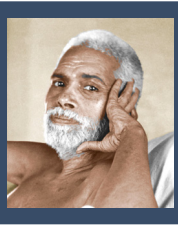


By an Eye Witness

By Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami

The 47th anniversary of the Maharshi's Mahasamadhi will be observed on Tuesday, April 14th. Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami, the author of the following article, was the individual who took the vast majority of the photographs we have of the Sage. Below he describes the Maharshi's last days and how it influenced the direction of his life.

I had the rare privilege of being allowed to stay with the Maharshi during the last days. Knowing full well that his end was near, I was inquisitive to watch and see if he would leave any message for us. Would he not speak words of solace? Would he not leave behind some directions for us? It was sad indeed to look at the suffering of the body. But the mystery was his attitude to it. He described all the pain and suffering as though the body belonged to someone else. The question arose whether he was suffering or not. How could he describe the pain and suffering so accurately and locate it in the body and yet remain unaffected by it? "There is a severe intolerable headache," he said as he was going into a slow uraemia and his kidneys were failing. The Maharshi never described the symptoms in a subjective manner.

On the evening of the last day, the Maharshi asked to be propped up in a sitting posture. He tried to assume a semi-*padmansana* posture. His breathing was getting laboured and heavy. The attending doctor put the oxygen to his nose. Those around stood sad, with baited breath. The Maharshi brushed aside the oxygen tube. There was a chorus of "Arunachala Siva" from outside the room. The gathering stood dumbfounded. Would death dare to touch him? No, it is impossible. A miracle would happen.

The atmosphere was tense with emotion, fear and expectation. There was some weeping. Very gently the Maharshi seemed to gasp a little and the body became still. Synchronized with the Maharshi's last breath, a meteor was seen to trail across the sky. We could scarcely realise what had happened. He had left us once and for all. No more the beatific smile to greet us. No more the graceful form to adorn the Ashram. The Maharshi had deserted us! Were we now to turn our backs on the Ashram and go home disappointed?

This gave me a severe jolt. I was shocked. Had I missed the opportunity of a lifetime to imbibe the teaching of the Enlightened One? I had done nothing in the direction of spiritual *sadhana*. Had I wasted all my time taking photographs while I should have engaged myself in trying to understand and practice his teachings in his very presence? "No," I said to myself, "this cannot be true. I was sure that I had obtained some grace from the Maharshi." He was somehow still here; only we have to learn to feel his presence. We would never be forsaken for he had himself assured us that he was not going away.

Then I turned to studying his teachings. I began to see light in them. Some of the sentences touched me and made me feel that I was in his presence, listening to him. I took heart. The more I read, the more intimate the Maharshi became to me. His teaching pulsated with life; I began to understand it and it mixed with my being and became my own.

- Ramana Pictorial Souvenir, 1967

Living in His Presence

The author of the following article is an American devotee living in Europe. She has been visiting Sri Ramanasramam regularly for the last fourteen years and attended last year's celebrations marking the Centenary anniversary of the Maharshi's arrival at Arunachala. She requested to be referred to as MT only.

I was very happy to be among the devotees who gathered at Sri Ramanasramam for the Centenary Celebration of Sri Bhagavan's arrival at Arunachala. I did not take an active role in the celebrations nor did I participate in the *yatra* from Madurai to Arunachala, although I was invited to join. Somehow, I felt that I should not move from Arunachala, and there was no rational explanation.

In the days prior to the celebration, I got into a routine of going around the hill *(giri pradakshina)*, sitting in the Samadhi Hall, the Old Hall, or visiting the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple in the town. I watched as the Ashram workers built the *pandal* where the function would be held, and the other temporary structures to feed the 4,000 visitors that were expected on that day. Sometimes I helped in the kitchen cutting vegetables and splitting the banana leaves on which the food is served.

A temporary thatched extension to the dining room was erected, and groups of Indian men and women sat in circles cutting vegetables with a traditional cutting utensil that had a sharp, upright blade mounted on a wooden base. There were literally mountains of vegetables to be cut for the *sambar* and curry. The volunteers played cassettes of Sanskrit *stotras* which helped to turn the work into meditation. A meditative atmosphere prevailed even as we chatted gaily. And of course, I always kept in mind that Sri Bhagavan himself used to go into the kitchen and take an active role in preparing food for his devotees.

On this particular visit to the Ashram I was more socially inclined as the circumstances did not favour having much privacy. I enjoyed meeting with fellow devotees, learning about their joys and pains and sharing some of mine. Sri Bhagavan continuously enfolds us in the aura of his presence. We only have to dive deep in the heart. What is going on externally is not the essential. There is a quiet current of peace that prevails, and we can hold fast to it.

Early mornings are particularly special at the Ashram. Some mornings I would set out for *giri pradakshina*, but most often I would go before dawn to the Samadhi Hall, sit in the back and become absorbed in Sri Bhagavan's presence. The whole place is charged with that presence as devotees start to slowly walk around the *samadhi* in perfect silence or sit down in various places in the hall. As the Centenary Celebrations approached, the number of devotees increased significantly. The magnet of Sri Bhagavan's grace continues to draw us to him as honey draws bees to the flower.

There is something very special in this transition period between darkness and daylight *(sandhi)*, as if all the tendencies of the mind *(samskaras)* are drawn into the Self and the whole creation lies suspended for a moment in this latent state. At the centre is Sri Bhagavan's *samadhi* emanating grace. When the *pujari* begins to chant Sri Ganapati Muni's "Chatvarimsat," forty verses in homage to Sri Ramana, it seems as if all the creation is offered to the lotus feet of Bhagavan, allowing the "I-I" to shine forth even in the midst of activity. The milk offering is made after a short *puja*, and devotees take the light, apply *kumkum* and *vibhuti* and then file silently around the *samadhi*. Just before going out the door towards the dinning room, as the bell rings for breakfast, another *pujari* pours a spoonful of milk into our open hands - the day begins.

Whether I am in the Samadhi Hall, on the *pradakshina* road or in the Sri Arunachala Temple in these early morning hours, this feeling of a new beginning dedicated to Sri Bhagavan is the same. There is a great feeling of oneness.

Just before the Centenary Celebration began the iron grille was removed from in front of Sri Bhagavan's *samadhi*. There was much banging and clanging for several days, but the result was well worth it. The *samadhi* is now fully open to delight our eyes with only a stone railing around it and a beautiful copper gate in front to mark off the limits.

The program started on Monday the 26th of August with the chanting of *Yajur Veda* in the morning and afternoon. The music program was a wonderful opportunity for us to listen to Sri Bhagavan's compositions in both Sanskrit and Tamil, some of which like "Upadesa Saram" we have the good fortune to hear during the Sanskrit and Tamil *parayana* carried out daily at the Ashram. This was a special occasion and the devotional fervour was at a peak. We were also able to listen to the "Sri Ramana Suprabatham" written by a visiting swami and sung by the devotees, the *Ribhu Gita, Sri Ramana Gita, Sat Darsanam* and others.

The chanting and music taking place one week before the Centenary day roused great feelings of devotion. I was particularly moved by the Indian lady devotees who sang Sri Muruganar's beautiful *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* in the New Hall outside the Mother's temple. I was lucky to have someone translate parts of it very discretely at my side. The spiritual emotions culminated in the Thevaram songs sung by the *Oduvars* from the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple accompanied by a violin and a drum. How to express the feelings? I was transfixed as these singers brought the ancient Tamil devotional hymns alive and stirred us in the depths of our being. I looked at the faces of some of the old devotees sitting there in rapture and felt chills running through me.

The ceremony at the *pandal* opened with the lighting of the *Kuthuvilakku* by Swami Ramanananda, formerly Sri Venkataraman who has served Sri Bhagavan and the Ashram tirelessly for most of his life. When his son, Sri V. S. Ramanan (Sundaram), gave the inaugural address, his voice shook with emotion, mirroring the feelings that we all shared. I listened to some of the program and alternately went into the kitchen to help. I felt very much at home.

Sunday was the 1st of September and there was to be a *Mahabhishekam* at the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple at 3:30 a.m. to commemorate the arrival of Sri Bhagavan one hundred years ago. At 6:00 a.m. the *'yatra'* devotees would be greeted at the railway station by Sri Ramanananda and Sri Sundaram. I set off for the temple at 2:30 a.m. by myself. I had wanted to do *giri pradakshina* first, but I felt that I should go directly to the temple. When I got there just before 3:30 a.m. the temple gates were shut. A few devotees were sitting outside the temple, and we all waited as more devotees started to arrive. Some had carried out *giri pradakshina* first. We started to sing Arunachala Siva and the outer gates were opened. We were stopped again by the inner gate being closed. As we stood outside, a brief shower fell on us and I could not help but think of Sri Bhagavan's being bathed in the same way, when as a boy he arrived at his Father's abode. The gates opened and the devotees flooded into the courtyard in front of the inner sanctum *(garbha griha)*, the shrine of Sri Arunachaleswara.

We could see the shape of Arunachala rising above the *gopurams* of the temple. With great reverence and awe, I entered the *garba griha* along with the other devotees. Although I had entered this area of the temple many times and attended many *pujas* over the past fourteen years, I felt this particular time was unique. I thought of the young Brahmin boy from Madurai who had come to join his father one hundred years ago. Sri Bhagavan came to the abode of his father by himself. Today there was a huge crowd, but somehow I felt as if we were all reliving this moment as one being united in our devotion to Sri Bhagavan and Arunachala.

Great heat emanates from the *Arunachaleswara Linga*. With the crowd it was even more intense like undergoing extreme *tapas*. The priests performed the *Mahabhishekam* ceremony where the *Arunachaleswara Lingam* is

washed and dressed. The priests apply various items to the *Lingam*, like saffron, honey, milk, curd, *vibhuti*, sandal paste etc. Large vessels of water are carried in and the priests pour the water over the *Lingam*. A curtain is then drawn, as the priests continue to dress and garland the *Lingam* and adorn him with special ornaments. Food is also offered behind the curtain. All the while the priests are chanting mantras in Sanskrit. When the curtain was drawn revealing Sri Arunachaleswara in his full glory, we were filled with great awe and devotion. The priest waved the lamps as the temple bell tolled. I cannot describe the intense joy I felt during those precise moments - however, those moments are eternal and their significance can be relived over and over again by turning within.

After the ceremony in the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple was completed, the flow of devotees moved to the shrine of Apeethakuchambika (Unnamulaiyamman), the consort of Arunachaleswara. The coolness of the Mother's shrine refreshed us. Again the priests performed *Mahabhishekam*, garlanded and dressed Mother behind the curtain, drew the curtain revealing her glory and waved the lights.

As I came out of the Mother's shrine, I saw the devotees who had just returned from the *yatra* in the inner courtyard of the temple. I don't remember clearly what happened, just that I was completely transported and I saw my feelings reflected on the faces of the returning pilgrims. Then I knew that we were all like streams flowing into the same ocean of Sri Bhagavan's grace as we joined together in this sacred spot.

I joined the pilgrims as they walked back to the Ashram singing Arunachala Siva. It was moving to see some of the older devotees who had undertaken the *yatra* without the slightest strain. The pilgrims were greeted warmly as they entered the Ashram gates. The Centenary program was starting and I stayed for part of it. However, I felt some force pulling me back to the Arunachaleswara Temple. I returned in a rickshaw.

I spent the rest of that day in the temple, sometimes in the shrine of Arunachaleswara and sometimes in the shrine of Apeethakuchambika. Each *puja* drew me further inward and there are no words to describe the immense joy. In the evening I joined some devotees taking food outside the Mother's shrine. I contemplated the ever-present Arunachala Mountain and thanked him from the depths of my heart.

It was fairly late when I got back to the Ashram. There had been a concert by a popular Tamil musician, but most everyone was gone by then. The kitchen, however, was still open and Sundaram was making sure that some remaining devotees had their food. I was happy to take some drinking water, as I was quite thirsty. I then retired to my room very, very happy *(santosham)*.

Grace and Guidance

Through the potent Grace of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, the path of Self-enquiry was brought within the competence of men and women of this age, was indeed fashioned into a new path that can be followed anonymously in the conditions of the modern world, with no forms or ritual, nothing to distinguish a person outwardly from the world wherein he moves. This creation of a new path to suit the needs of the age has made Arunachala the spiritual centre of the world. More than ever, now that he has shed his physical body and is one with Arunachala, the Grace and guidance that emanates from him to those who turn to him and seek his aid is centred at Arunachala. It is the holy place and many are drawn there, both those who were disciples of the Maharshi in his lifetime and those who have come later.

- Arthur Osborne

Questions and Comments

Fitness for Self-enquiry

I was reading through one of the letters where a devotee asks the question, "Is this path Self-enquiry suited for everybody," to which Bhagavan Ramana replies that it is "...only for ripe souls. The rest should follow different methods according to the state of their minds."

My question is, how do I know whether I am ready to take up this path or not? Somehow, the Maharshi's answer is a little discouraging for me. Please explain what all this means.

- Ramakrishna, New Jersey

The path of Self-enquiry includes all other paths. Whatever practice you take up, Self-enquiry will be its necessary end. So you need not worry whether you are fit for the path of Self-enquiry. One should do those spiritual practices that seem most natural and gives peace, always keeping in mind that Self-enquiry is the essence of that practice and the supreme path we all must tread. With sincere prayer, openness of heart and guilelessness one can never go wrong. Bhagavan watches over us and guides us. That is certain.

- Editors

The Heart Centre

When I enquire 'Who am I?' I feel an intense sensation in the heart centre on the right side of the chest. It is a similar sensation like one has when overwhelmed with emotion. When this sensation becomes even more intense, it brings tears into the eyes. Every time I ask 'Who am I?' it draws me to this centre. Is it right to hold on to that sensation? I ask because I have read somewhere that though concentration on the heart centre is a spiritual exercise, it is not the same as enquiry—I don't want to do anything wrong.

- K. S., Germany

Bhagavan says that concentration on the source of the 'I- thought' is the enquiry. It will of itself take us to the Heart centre. Heart is the Self. If we experience a 'sensation' of any kind in relation to the Heart centre, we must immediately ask who it is that experiences this sensation. We must hold on to the 'I-thought' alone until the conscious individuality has dissolved into the Heart or Self.

Bhagavan certainly guides those sincere devotees, like you, who turn to him. He will hold our hand and take us to the goal if we only turn to him and practice his teachings with devotion and dedication.

- Editors

Obstacles and Aids

Aids are meant for eradicating thoughts; these thoughts are the re-manifestations of predispositions remaining in seed form. They give rise to diversity from which all troubles arise. These aids are hearing the truth from the Master *(sravana)*, reflection *(manana)* and one-pointedness *(nididhyasana)*.

The effects of *sravana* may be immediate and the disciple realises the truth all at once. This can happen only for the well-advanced disciple.

Otherwise, the disciple feels that he is unable to realise the truth, even after repeatedly hearing it. What is it due to? Impurities in his mind: ignorance, doubt and wrong identity are the obstacles to be removed.

(a) to remove ignorance completely, he has to hear the truth repeatedly, until his knowledge of the subject matter becomes perfect.
(b) to remove doubts, he must reflect on what he has heard; ultimately his knowledge will be free from doubts of any kind.
(c) to remove the wrong identity of the Self with the non-self (such as the body, the senses, the mind or the intellect) his mind must become one-pointed.

All these things accomplished, the obstacles are at an end and *samadhi* results, that is, Peace reigns.

Some say that one should never cease to engage in hearing, reflection and one-pointedness. These are not fulfilled by reading books, but only by the continued practice of keeping the mind withdrawn.

The aspirant may be *kritopasaka* or *akritopasaka*. The former is fit to realize the Self, even with the slightest stimulus: only some little doubt stands in his way. It is easily removed if he hears the truth once from the Master. Immediately he gains the *samadhi* state. It is presumed that he had already completed *sravana*, reflection, etc. in previous births; they are no more necessary for him.

For the other, all these aids are necessary; for him doubts crop up even after repeated hearing. Therefore he must not give up aids until he gains the *samadhi* state.

Sravana removes the illusion of the Self being one with the body, etc. Reflection makes it clear that Knowledge is Self. One-pointedness reveals the Self as being Infinite and Blissful.

- Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, No. 249

The 117th Jayanti Celebration

The Celebration of Sri Ramana Maharshi's 117th birth anniversary took place for the first time in the new home of Arunachala Ashrama at 66-l2 Clyde Street in Rego Park, Queens, New York City, on Sunday, January 5, 1997 At 11:00 a.m. the spacious and serene, sunlit sanctuary was filled to overflowing with devotees. The chanting of Sri Bhagavan's "Marital Garland of Letters" charged the atmosphere with devotional fervour. Following the recitation of "Ganesha Stuti," the children devotees offered worship with flowers to Sri Bhagavan while the "108 Names of Bhagavan" were chanted with reverence at the shrine.

Dennis Hartel extended a warm welcome to all, many of whom had travelled long hours and distances to be present. On this occasion, Dennis paid special tribute to the one-pointed dedication and vision of Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata, without whom this joyous occasion in Arunachala Ashrama would not have taken place. Invited to speak, Bhagawata, in brief, emphasised the directness and accessibility of Sri Bhagavan's path of Self-Enquiry and Surrender. Following Margo Martin's traditional reading of the story of Sri Bhagavan's birth, Swami Prakashmayananda from Sri Lanka began the song offerings with his most fervent *bhajans*. One and all participated, from the youngest to the eldest. Raju Parekh offered an original poem composed especially for the occasion. *Aarati* was led by Geeta Bhatt. As usual, *prasadam* was shared amidst the warmth and glow of Sri Bhagavan's grace. Devotees returned to the sanctuary and continued to offer devotional songs and hymns of praise well into the evening.

Installation of Statue

In 1949, Vaidyanathan Statpathi, the famous architect of the Mother's Temple at Sri Ramanasramam, employed his immense skill and devotion to carve a life-size stone statue of Sri Maharshi. Bhagavan sat with the sculptor for many days as he worked on it. This sculpture now adorns the New Hall in Sri Ramanasramam. In November of 1989, James Hartel visited Sri Ramanasramam for the express purpose of producing a replica of this statue and documenting the life of the Sage on video. The video documentary he edited, *The Sage of Arunachala*, was released two years later and now, after seven years, the statue was completed and installed in the shrine of Arunachala Ashrama in New York. While in India, Jim made thirty-three fibreglass moulds from the original statue, brought them back to the USA in a suitcase and slowly, with sincere dedication, began reconstructing the replica.

This lifelike image of the Master in the Ashrama shrine exudes the fragrance of serenity and the power of peace that he so profoundly embodies.

Only Mother

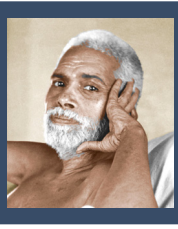
Mother in the sea and she whose eyes
See, and ask a question,
and always waiting,
You create and shape undulating certainties,
inhale,
And draw to your center my parts,
dispersed among distant inlets;
I lose my senses, swimming too far into the deep,
And through separation from you,
I grow parched.
In the spray of yours splashes,
my mother, I'm driftwood
Hardly a vessel with oars, which,
carries a soul,
All salty tears, and bitter,
when I forget you.

- Raju Parekh

The *Maharshi* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil K. Sharma. Produced and distributed by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, 66-12 Clyde Street, Rego Park, New York 11374, USA. Tel: (718) 575 3215. E-mail: ashrama@aol.com. All editions of this newsletter can be found on the internet at - "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

MAY / JUNE 1997 EDITED BY - DENNIS HARTEL & DR. ANIL K. SHARMA VOL. 7 - NO. 3



The Attendant Rangaswamy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The moment I heard him say this my mind froze. He then asked me to read a verse from *Upadesa Saram*.

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

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

"I am not finding time," I said.

"What are you doing now?" he asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Is Everything Ordained?

By Devaraja Mudaliar

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

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

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

Bhagavan explained: "The only freedom man has is to strive for and acquire the *jnana* which will enable him not to identify himself with the body. The body will go through the actions rendered inevitable by *prarabdha*

(destiny based on the balance sheet of past lives) and a man is free either to identify himself with the body and be attached to the fruits of its actions, or to be detached from it and be a mere witness of its activities."

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

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

- First appeared in the Call Divine, December 1, 1959

Sri Ramana's 47th Mahanirvana

Observed in Arunachala Ashrama in New York City

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Evelyn K. Saphier

Sri V. S. Ramanan's Talk

At Arunachala Ashrama on April 13, 1997

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

Ladies and gentlemen, I feel proud to call myself the grandson of Swami Niranjanananda because he was one of the greatest devotees of our Master. I distinctly recollect what he once told a relative who prostrated before him. This relative, according to custom, was taking her child to Lord Venkateswara in Tirupati to have the baby's hair cut for the first time. The Swami advised her that "When Lord Venkateswara is right HERE, why go to Tirupati at all!." Such was his unshakeable faith in Bhagavan, his Guru.

To me, also, Bhagavan is not just the grandfather, but the Guru. If He is my grandfather, He is the grandfather for all of us here. To Bhagavatji, of course, He is the father!

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

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

I also remember Bhagavan grinding chutney for the breakfast in the long verandah east of the Ashram kitchen, and His offering a small quantity of it with His own hand to me to taste! I can't claim I was aware of His exalted state in those early years of my youth, but I was certainly aware that He was always natural, and most

of the first-time visitors also felt that they somehow had always known Him. As Major Chadwick observed, "He was like a mirror which seemed to reflect back your own feelings." If you responded quite naturally to the all-embracing love of His presence, he treated you as one of His own.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya!

Letters and Comments

Finding a Guru

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

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

- Phil Safier, USA

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

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

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

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

- Editor

Dream

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

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

- A Young Devotee from Europe

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

For a devotee it is real, and these divine dreams are often more potent experiences than waking state experiences. You are fortunate that Bhagavan has blessed you. Have no doubts. Many other sincere souls

have had similar experiences of Sri Bhagavan. He is our teacher and Guru and He will provide us with everything we need to realize Him as the Self. If we have faith in this, we need nothing else.

- Editor

Bhakti or Jnana

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

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

- Same Young Devotee from Europe

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

- Editor

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

- Sri Ramana Maharshi

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

- Narayanaopanishad

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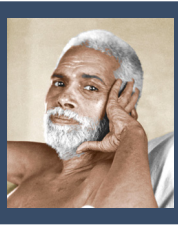

The Meaning of Sri Ramanasramam

By

Geeta Bhatt

Geeta Bhatt, a devotee from New York City, interweaves the story of many pilgrims with her own, revealing the true meaning of Sri Ramanasramam and how the Maharshi continues to guide and bless seekers from the world over.

This past February I stayed at Sri Ramanasramam for a total of ten days. Not a significant time in the larger scheme of things, but significant in the sense of what happens there, or more importantly, afterwards.

My past visits to the abode of the Maharshi were filled with memorable events. Every minute of the stay was filled with observable occurrences, but this time, why wasn't I feeling anything? In fact, I was acutely aware, on the physical level, of all the noise, the crowds and the routine of life at the ashramam. I sat in the Old Hall, observed the *pujas* to Bhagavan's shrine, listened to the Vedas, to the Tamil *parayana*, walked around in the Matrubhuteswara Temple and did the *giripradakshina* on Mahasivaratri night. But I couldn't understand why all these activities lacked the emotional intensity that I had always experienced and now expected!

I walked around the ashramam with an inner ease and calm, but that I attributed to the familiarity of the surroundings and to the knowledge that I was accepted as an integral part of the larger Ramana family. Outwardly it appeared as if the number of visitors to the ashramam had increased tenfold since the last time I was there. There were bus loads of school children on field trips, villagers on pilgrimage, western tourists on 'check out all the ashrams' route, Hindu pilgrims, the curious and those filled with wanderlust. Why did it feel to me that there were more of these than the sincere seekers? And then it happened ....

After dinner when I was walking towards the main gate there was a total blackout. All the lights went out. Not wanting to walk in the dark, I sat down in the little room used for leaving foot wear. A young lady was sitting there, and a little later an older woman joined us. We began to talk, and as the conversation progressed the real purpose of my visit started to take shape. The young woman said she was from England and of Portuguese descent. This was her second visit to India and now she had found what she was looking for - BHAGAVAN. She said, "I am probably the first Portuguese to come here. I haven't heard of any other Portuguese ever coming to Bhagavan." I told her that for the last few months I was searching for the copy of the book *In Days of Great Peace*, by Mouni Sadhu (M. Sudouski), a Polish devotee and a *sadhaka*, who had written this most amazing book of his *sadhana* under Bhagavan's watchful gaze. This book had made a profound impression on me. On my second visit to Sri Ramanasramam I read his account and was deeply moved and touched by his writing. In fact there is only one copy of his book in the library and that for "reference only". The young woman, whose name I never got, was overwhelmed by this information and said, "It's strange that I should meet you."

The older German woman, whose name is Ilse, then started to tell us that she visited the Master in the mid 1940's and had been coming to the Ashramam since then. Being of Jewish descent, she had fled Nazi Germany and was teaching in India. After hearing of Bhagavan she travelled by train to Tiruvannamalai and then took a bullock cart to the Ashramam. She said, "I was wearing a frock, and was dirty from the long

journey. I felt that I should wash and change into more appropriate attire before going to see the sage. I was standing at the door of the Old Hall (that is the southern door that is now closed and leads into the Samadhi Hall) when someone urged me to go to him right away. I walked in and stood in front of the sofa, when He made the gentlest of gestures, inviting me to sit down. That is when everything disappeared. There was no sofa, no hall, no Maharshi, no me. The thought came 'There is no floor. Where can I sit?' I don't know how long I stood there, but eventually I did sit down."

In all my later conversations with Ilse, she talked about the all-pervading peace in the Ashramam of those days; she talked about the beauty and Grace of those eyes. She kept trying to describe to me Bhagavan's complexion, which she thought was most unusual: "He was light skinned, lighter than some Europeans when they have lived in the East for a long time." She fumbled for the right words, looked at my hands, her own hands and kept saying, "It was lighter than mine, it wasn't like yours, it was light. It was like... was like..." and then words failed her. Was it golden, was it a translucent quality that she was looking for? Hearing her speak I kept wondering how one describes Divine Manifestation in human terms? Yes, the form was human, but was it human? Didn't Bhagavan himself once say to a boyhood friend, "Yes, this is not the same body" when it was observed that Venkatramana's skin was rough when they were young and now it had an unusual softness to it.

I don't know what she had witnessed, but this devotee left me feeling like I saw Bhagavan in the flesh. By sharing her memory of those moments, she transported me to His physical presence. Thank you, Ilse, for giving me a glimpse of that moment, that PRESENCE!

The electricity was restored, and we parted company. The next day I saw Ilse again, but the young Portuguese devotee had moved on.

On another evening while in the Dining Hall, the person next to me asked "Do you speak English?" Leonor Cunha, as I got to know her name later, had just got off the bus. This was her first visit to Southern India and to Sri Ramanasramam. During the next few days, we sat in front of the bookstore, walked in and around the ashramam, and she shared her feelings and doubts with me. Leonor's spiritual quest had brought her to North India once before, and she was familiar with Sai Baba and some other sages, but nothing satisfied her yearning. Only a few days back she had read the Portuguese translation of Arthur Osborne's book and then boarded a flight for Madras, leaving behind her husband and children. From the airport she took a cab to the city bus stop and boarded a bus that dropped her at the ashramam gate. She said, "This feels like home." The need to meet and seek out other living gurus was quickly leaving her. In fact, a visit to another teacher in town, at the insistence of some other visitor, left her feeling uncomfortable. She wanted to know if it was right to decline to go to other places and teachers when asked to by fellow pilgrims. Her face betrayed the intense emotion she was feeling, and I felt privileged to witness the outpouring of Bhagavan's Grace on this *sadhaka* for whom all desires to be some place else were dropping away. He had chosen her; she had arrived.

A young Filipino-American from the U. S. West Coast also shared his story with me. He said he migrated to the West Coast as a teenager from the Philippines with his parents. He related the painful years he experienced in high school where he was teased for being different. He was drawn towards the martial arts, and the New Age movement. Visiting a bookstore he saw Bhagavan's face on a book cover. He said, "I went home, but couldn't get that face out of my memory. It haunted me and I even started to see His face in my sleep! I had to go back to the bookstore and buy that book. Once I read it, there was no turning back. I had to come HOME, I had to come to HIM." Saying this he turned towards the Samadhi Hall. There were tears in his eyes. I thanked him for sharing his story with me. He looked at me for a long time, and said, "I knew you would understand," and we parted.
A lady of Irish descent who lives in London comes to the ashramam every winter for three months. She loves

everything about India. One morning after completing the inner *pradakshina*, we were sitting and taking breakfast in town when she started to tell me how she came to Bhagavan.

"I am not the sentimental type," she said, "but I have been drawn to matters spiritual for a long time. In London some friends introduced me to Hinduism, and after some months of *bhajans* and *pujas*, I had had enough. Then I came on a sightseeing tour of South India. We visited every temple and palace. By the time we reached Tiruvannamalai I had seen it all, heard it all. I was up to here (indicating over her head) with it, and was no longer interested. That evening we were to visit Sri Ramanasramam. I came reluctantly, because one more lecture on Advaita, one more *puja* and I was ready to throw up.

"We walked into the Samadhi Hall, and the life-size picture of Bhagavan was in front of me. I saw nothing but those eyes... that face. I knew that was the face of GOD. That is it, this is my story."

A bright smiling face, a face full of life and love, is how I will always remember her.

There were many more that I spoke to, or observed. There was the young girl from Australia, the woman from Texas, the couple from Bangalore and the young woman from Japan that I got to know. All seekers, all drawn to the abode of the Sage of Arunachala, all on their own inner journeys, guided by the Maharshi. All individuals, but still part of the larger crowd of humanity that daily visits the ashramam. Only on reflection it is becoming clearer to me what the real purpose is of the crowd and activities at Sri Ramanasramam. At times we see only the throngs and the crowd, we hear the traffic, the peacocks and monkeys, and miss the Silence and Grace that guides the sincere seekers. Even during Bhagavan's time the guidance and grace worked unnoticed and unhindered by the outer activities of daily living. Today, it seems the crowds are there to hide the individual, mass pujas are a cover for the individual surrender. The magic of the Maharshi goes on unobserved by the casual visitor. For those not yet devoured by Arunachala, Sri Ramanasramam is just another overcrowded holy place, once an abode of a Sage and nothing more. But for those who sing

Abandoning the outer world, with mind and breath controlled, to meditate on Thee within, the Yogi sees Thy Light, O Arunachala! and finds his delight in Thee.

there are no crowds, no noise, no distraction, JUST THE PEACE AND PRESENCE.

Because you give precedence to worldly things, God appears to have receded to the background. If you give up all else and seek Him alone, He alone will remain as the I, the Self. "*Sadhana* and Grace," Maharshi's Gospel

The Greening of Arunachala

Visitors to Sri Ramanasramam are definitely seeing a change. The once barren slopes of the holy Arunachala Hill are now pushing up trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses from its dry, rocky surface. Will the ecology of this sacred hill ever return to the days when it sheltered numerous birds, mammals, provided medicinal herbs to the infirm, cool shelter to the weary and edible plants the hungry? If the Annamalai Reforestation Society (ARS) succeeds in their determined drive to balance this ecology with the growing population of Tiruvannamalai it most certainly will.

Responding to a desperate situation facing the holy Arunachala Hill, the Annamalai Reforestation Society was established 1988. It is well known that Sri Ramana Maharshi loved this mountain and looked upon it as God

Itself. He was most happy when roaming upon Its slopes. Aware of this, many prominent devotees have taken active interest in establishing the ARS and working to achieve its goals. The aims of this voluntary, non-profit organisation are to work towards the reforestation and conservation of Arunachala and to encourage local, national and international participation in the regeneration and protection of animal, bird and plant life in surrounding areas through awareness campaigns, educational activities and employment opportunities.

If we are to mention a few of the society's accomplishments during the last ten years we must first describe how acres of waste land within the Arunachaleshwara Temple are now a lush beautiful garden of flowering plants, fruit trees and scared trees of medicinal and herbal values. The tens of thousands of tree saplings growing there are used to reforest the hill, the *giripradakshina* road and the temple lands around the hill. The nursery also maintains adequate stock to offer saplings to local schools, individuals and other organisations.

Eight acres of land near Tiruvannamalai, which was previously a barren stretch full of boulders and rocks, was acquired by ARS in 1992. The has become the model permacultural farm in India, and harnesses non-conventional energy resources, like bio-gas and solar heat for power generation.

ARS also runs classes for children in nearby villages to create awareness and also to teach eco-friendly lifestyle choices.

The work is impressive on many levels. All repeat visitors to Arunachala are aware of the return of vegetation on the hill, which is the direct result of the untiring efforts of ARS. The Society employs many women. The workers are trained, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and dedicated to their cause.

Recent pilgrims to Arunachala cannot but notice the shady path to Skandasramam and the new abundant growth of trees and flowers on the Hill.

During the last five years major funding for this work came from the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau. This funding runs out in mid 1998. The current interest from the corpus fund meets 35% of the expenses and income from the farm and nursery covers 30%. To continue the work at the present level, with no expansion, the project urgently needs to increase its corpus fund.

Individuals who want more information, wish to become members, or desire to send donations can write to:

Annamalai Reforestation Society, 60-B/1 R.O.A. Colony, Sri Ramanasramam P.O., Tiruvannamalai 606603 Tamil Nadu, INDIA

A Dream Comes True

The following abridged article was written by Evelyn Kaselow Saphier in 1972. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the founding of Arunachala Ashrama in Nova Scotia, Canada.

In the heart of New York City's Lower East Side on Sixth Street near First Avenue there is a small rented storefront meditation center known as Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. Over the years many seekers have come to this Ashrama, joined the regular practice of prayer and meditation, and then moved on to different pursuits. But Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat has continued his spiritual practice in Arunachala Ashrama with or without companions all these years, knowing that disappointments come only to make us strong and fit for the future.

The history of this Center is the life-story of Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, the man who sits faithfully on the Ashrama floor chanting and singing devotional hymns every night, as he has done since December 7, 1966. He was the man inspired and inebriated with his dream of building a residential ashrama in the open-air surroundings "where people from Wall Street can sit on the grass." Also, he dreamed of building a temple on Fifth Avenue in New York City in honour of the great sage of modern India, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

In the fall of 1970, a young couple from New Jersey, Joan and Matthew Greenblatt, each only 19 years old, walked in through the New York Ashrama door and fell into the nightly spiritual practice with devotional fervour. Until then, the couple had no idea of the future awaiting them. Nor until then did they feel an inner awakening which filled their lives and turned their minds inward to the source of joy, which was to be the mainstay in their new life. Drawn by the practice of nightly recitation, chanting and sitting in silence, as well as the warm and simple devotional nature of their new friend, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, Joan and Matthew would come again and again until their normal life and the life of service to the Ashrama merged.

In the autumn of 1971, an offer came for the gift of a small farm in Nova Scotia Canada. Without a second's thought, the Greenblatts became the instrument of Divine Grace in Bhagawat's life. Within twelve hours, the young couple was driving north in pursuit of land for a residential ashrama. They drove straight to the intending-donor's home near Halifax, Nova Scotia, only to discover that his enthusiasm had meanwhile waned.

Encouraged by the friendliness of all they met, they went from door to door asking the residents if they knew about any farm for sale. Each evening they would return from their search to the home of a kind, elderly couple, the Taylors of Clarence (Nova Scotia). As the search continued, the feeling began to grow on the young couple that the farm house where they returned in the evenings for warm food and conversation would be their own home! The Taylors had been planning to sell their farm and return to town.

This is how Joan and Matthew, with hardly any money, made a token down payment on the farm of 130 acres at the foot of the northern mountain range in the peaceful Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia.

Soon after, the work of fund-raising was undertaken. The Greenblatts begged and borrowed from every person they knew and also those they did not know, but it was only shortly before their return to Nova Scotia that their efforts bore fruit. After they arrived in Nova Scotia the work began with exuberance for converting the farm into a residential Ashrama for all devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. From the end of April, 1972, the young couple and a friend and fellow devotee, Dennis J. Hartel of Tonawanda, New York State, started working full time to make the farm a home for all aspirants and children of the Universal Spirit who came to its door.

The country Ashram is dedicated to the simple life of hard work, the practice of Sri Ramana Maharshi's teaching of Self-Enquiry of "WHO AM I?" and total surrender to the Divine Presence. Every evening at seven and morning before dawn, Sanskrit hymns and chants resound with the sweetness that comes directly from the Heart. This is followed by silence, then by the reading of teachings. The doors of the Ashrama' both in New York City and Nova Scotia, are always open to all.

We offer our infinite gratitude for the blessings showered upon our bodies and minds in this lifetime. All praises be to Life Universal in the form of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, who by Divine Grace has brought the dream of a man from the backwoods of India, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, to fruition.

Remembering

Yogamaya Bharati Singh

We are very sad to report the passing of Yogamaya Bharati Singh in the early hours of Thursday, May 8. She was the devoted wife of Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, the founder of our Ashrama.

Born in the village of Rusulpur, Bihar in 1922, and following the practice of those times, Yogamayaji was married at a young age. In 1947, her husband travelled to the USA for graduate studies and later took a post with the India Embassy in Washington, D. C. Yogamayaji was unable to join her husband until 1952. It was here that she gave birth to her first son Bhaskar (a second son, Prabhakar, died as an infant in India in 1962). She was residing with her son in Forest Hills, New York City when she died.

Yogamayaji assisted her husband in the founding of Arunachala Ashrama and serving visitors and devotees. Though living in the West for over forty years she was totally untouched by the extravagances of the American culture, always remaining a simple and pure villager, performing the traditional practices passed down to her through an ancient and rich culture.

In her last days she demonstrated more vigour and strength than in previous years. Her sudden demise surprised all, except, perhaps, Yogamayaji herself. The night of her passing she told her daughter-in-law (Hena) that she would shortly leave for the other world. No one actually believed her, but as the night progressed into early morning her physical strength drastically waned. She asked her daughter-in-law to forgive her for any trouble she may have caused. She lay on her bed, raised her joined palms upward and over her head, repeated Bhagavan's name and was absorbed in Him. At that moment she lifted into the padmasana posture, as is the custom in her village.

Yogamayaji's simple and noble life, and her act of leaving this life, will always be remembered by her friends and the devotees of Arunachala Ashrama.

Devotion and Meditation

A devotee referred to the contents of the 6th verse of "Upadesa Saram" (chittajam japa dhyanam uttaman etc.). Fully translated, this verse reads: "The repetition aloud of His name is better than praise. Better still is its faint murmur. But the best is repetition within the mind-and that is meditation, above referred to."

Bhagavan explained: "At the initial stage to develop bhakti (devotion), mantras should be repeated aloud and only by such constant practice control of mind can be acquired. It will be felt difficult to control the mind and do meditation at the initial stage. Hence utterance of mantras aloud can be successfully accomplished at the beginning stage. For a novice silent concentration cannot be achieved easily unless he has past merits (purva-punya) to his credit.

"Sri Tukaram and other great saints used to tie salangai (small bells) around their legs and hands and do bhajana, dancing and jumping with ecstasy throughout the night. But during day time they would remain in samadhi. Likewise without allowing sleep to overcome and devour our time the mind should be concentrated on Ishvara (God).

"In the later stage vichara (Self-enquiry) becomes very easy and itself includes all, i.e., sravana, manana and nidhidhyasana-hearing, reflection and uninterrupted contemplation."

- From the diary of N. N. Rajan, 18-32-43, recorded in the Mountain Path, Vol. 8 No. 1, 1971

Letters and Comments

The kindest and most powerful energy of the universe

Thank you for your very kind and most generous response to my letter. I'm very grateful for the photos and am searching now for suitable frames for them. Just glancing at the Maharshi's picture brings a measure of peace. As Sri Ramakrishna Madhavpeddi wrote, his eyes "are the kindest and most powerful energy of the universe." I can really feel the kindness. At the same time, I become immediately aware of my shortcomings, and so it's a little difficult to look!

Thank you for the newsletters and the booklet, Who Am I?. Simply reading the teachings is a practice, isn't it?

Thank you also for your invitation to attend the celebration of the ashrama's twenty-fifth anniversary and the Maharshi's 101st anniversary (of his Advent at Arunachala). Jean-Rene and I regret that we cannot make it to the ashrama at that time, but hope to visit one day.

I had always pronounced the word "A-RUN-a-CHA-la." How much more beautiful is its true pronunciation!

We've lent our video [The Sage of Arunachala] to the Yasodhara Ashram, which is across the lake from us. The residents and students there follow the teachings of Swami Sivananda Radha, who died in the fall of 1995. At the behest of Swami Radha, the permanent residents take an Aikido class with us once a week. That may seem like a hodgepodge of traditions, but the different teachings don't contradict one another.

Thank you again, for your great kindness. If you are ever in this area, please come stay with us.

- Meg Seaker, British Columbia, Canada

The Power of Prayer

I became very ill and one evening was in such pain that I could not find the least respite and could not go to sleep. I dragged myself from my futon to the phone and telephoned to my doctor, but he had not yet returned to Tokyo from his trip to Europe, and I had none of the necessary medicines. I returned to bed and finally in acute pain burst into tears of exhaustion and despair. Then I recalled your issue of The Mountain Path on the power of prayer [April 1966-Editor]. I seldom pray because there is little that I want apart from what I am striving for all the time. But I decided to pray to Bhagavan. I pulled myself together and threw myself with all my heart upon his mercy and asked for help. Immediately, without any time lapse, an extraordinary thing happened. All my energies, my thoughts, my emotions were suddenly sucked into my heart. It was like a sort of spiritual vacuum cleaner! They seemed to be sucked into what I thought of as a vanishing point in the heart. Although it all happened in a flash, I have grown accustomed through introspection to observe things of an inner nature, and I was aware that what I have called a 'vanishing point' was something like the entrance to the Great Void, to a realm of objectless infinity of tremendous power, speed and purpose, and of infinite good will. In words all this sounds so miserably incomplete. Anyway, when I seemed to be poised on the brink of

this Void, suddenly into my conscious mind popped, like a menu card, a clear list of things which I myself could do in the house that minute to alleviate my extremity.

I crawled out of bed again and after about an hour of following this advice was able to fall asleep. The next morning my doctor had returned to Tokyo and was able to send me all I needed.

Mrs. Edna Ylse, Tokyo

From the Mountain Path

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THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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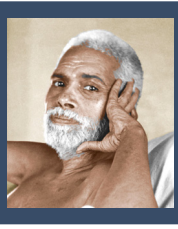

From the Early Days

The following article was first published in the September 1931 monthly magazine called PEACE, the journal of Swami Omkar's Shanti Ashram in Andhra Pradesh. It was later reprinted in the April, 1966 issue of the Mountain Path. It describes Paul Brunton's first visit to Sri Ramanasramam and one of the dialogues he had with the Maharshi. In this article, his former name "Hurst" was used. He later adopted Paul Brunton as his pen name which he ultimately made his permanent name. It is interesting to note what an event a visit from a foreign journalist to the Ashram was in those far off days - something to be written about in the newspapers.

It was half past four in the afternoon and the disciples were sitting before the Maharshi in the hall and were talking about a notification that had appeared in the dailies [newspapers] to the effect that a Mr. Hurst and a Buddhist Bhikshu were intending to visit the Ashram. The clock struck five and there entered the hall a man in European costume, bearing a plate of sweets and followed by a Buddhist monk. The visitors offered the sweets to the Maharshi and then, after making obeisance in the Eastern way, they both squatted on the floor before him. These were the visitors of whom the disciples had been talking. The man in English clothes was R. Raphael Hurst [Paul Brunton], a London journalist who was then on a visit to India. He was keenly interested in the spiritual teaching of the East and thought that by an intelligent study and appreciation of it the cause of co-operation between East and West might be greatly promoted. He came to Sri Ramanasramam after visiting many other ashrams. The Bhikshu who came with him was also an Englishman by birth. He was formerly a military officer but was known as Swami Prajnananda. He was the founder of the English Ashram in Rangoon. Both visitors sat spellbound before Maharshi and there was pin-drop silence. The silence was broken by the person who had brought the visitors, asking them if they would like to ask any questions.

They were, however, not in a mood to do so, and thus an hour and a half passed. Mr. Hurst then stated the purpose of his visit. In a voice of intense earnestness he said that he had come to India for spiritual enlightenment. "Not only myself," he added, "but many others also in the West are longing for the Light from the East."

The Maharshi sat completely indrawn and paid no attention. One of those who were sitting there asked them if they had come to the East for a study of comparative religions. "No," the Bhikshu replied, "we could get that better in Europe. We want to find Truth; we want the Light. Can we know Truth? Is it possible to get Enlightenment?" The Maharshi still remained silent and indrawn, and as the visitors wanted to take a walk, the conversation ended and all dispersed.

Early next morning the visitors entered the hall and put some questions to the Maharshi with great earnestness. The conversation reproduced below is from rough notes taken while it was going on.

Bhikshu: We have travelled far and wide in search of Enlightenment. How can we get it?

Maharshi: Through deep enquiry and confident meditation.

Hurst: Many people do meditate in the West but show no signs of progress.

Maharshi: How do you know that they don't make progress? Spiritual progress is not easily discernible.

Hurst: A few years ago I got some glimpses of the Bliss but in the years that followed I lost it again. Then last year I again got it. Why is that?

Maharshi: You lost it because your meditation had not become natural (sahaja). When you become habitually inturned the enjoyment of spiritual beatitude becomes a normal experience.

Hurst: Might it be due to the lack of a Guru?

Maharshi: Yes, but the Guru is within; that Guru who is within is identical with your Self.

Hurst: What is the way to God-realization?

Maharshi: Vichara, asking yourself the 'Who am I?' enquiry into the nature of your Self.

Bhikshu: The world is in a state of degeneration. It is getting constantly worse, spiritually, morally, intellectually and in every way. Will a spiritual teacher come to save it from chaos?

Maharshi: Inevitably, when goodness declines and wrong prevails He comes to reinstate goodness. The world is neither too good nor too bad; it is a mixture of the two. Unmixed happiness and unmixed sorrow are not found in the world. The world always needs God and God always comes.

Bhikshu: Will He be born in the East or the West?

The Maharshi laughed at the question but did not answer it.

Hurst: Does the Maharshi know whether an *Avatar* already exists in the physical body?

Maharshi: He might.

Hurst: What is the best way to attain Godhood?

Maharshi: Self-enquiry leads to Self-realization.

Hurst: Is a Guru necessary for spiritual progress?

Maharshi: Yes.

Hurst: Is it possible for the Guru to help the disciple forward on the path?

Maharshi: Yes.

Hurst: What are the conditions for discipleship?

Maharshi: Intense desire for Self-realization, earnestness and purity of mind.

Hurst: Is it necessary to surrender one's life to the Guru?

Maharshi: Yes. One should surrender everything to the Dispeller of Darkness. One should surrender the ego that binds one to this world. Giving up body-consciousness is the true surrender.

Hurst: Does a Guru want to take control of the disciple's worldly affairs also?

Maharshi: Yes, everything.

Hurst: Can he give the disciple the spiritual spark that he needs?

Maharshi: He can give him all that he needs. This can be seen from experience.

Hurst: Is it necessary to be in physical contact with the Guru, and if so, for how long?

Maharshi: It depends on the maturity of the disciple. Gunpowder catches fire in an instant, while it takes time to ignite coal.

Hurst: Is it possible to develop along the path of the Spirit while leading a life of work?

Maharshi: There is no conflict between work and wisdom. On the contrary, selfless work paves the way to Self-knowledge.

Hurst: If a person is engaged in work it will leave him little time for meditation.

Maharshi: It is only spiritual novices who need to set aside a special time for meditation. A more advanced person always enjoys the Beatitude whether he is engaged in work or not. While his hands are in society he can keep his head cool in solitude.

Bhikshu: Have you heard of Meher Baba?

Maharshi: Yes.

Bhikshu: He says that he will become an *Avatar* in a few years.

Maharshi: Everyone is an *Avatar* of God. "The kingdom of heaven is within you." Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Krishna, all are in you. One who knows the Truth sees everyone else as a manifestation of God.

Bhikshu: Will the Maharshi make a statement about Meher Baba?

Maharshi: What statement? That (the existence of an outer *Avatar*) is a question which seekers of Truth need not consider.

Bhikshu: Will the world be rejuvenated?

Maharshi: There is One who governs the world and it is His business to look after it. He who has created the world knows how to guide it also.

Bhikshu: Does the world progress now?

Maharshi: If we progress the world progresses. As you are, so is the world. Without understanding the Self what is the use of understanding the world? Without Self-knowledge, knowledge of the world is of no use. Dive inward and find the treasure hidden there. Open your heart and see the world through the eyes of the true Self. Tear aside the veils and see the divine majesty of your own Self.

Brazilian Devotees Commemorate A Silver Jubilee

For more than two decades we have had the good fortune of occasionally meeting, but more often, hearing from members of A Luz no Caminho-Associacao Espiritualista, a Centre dedicated to Sri Ramana Maharshi in Rio de Janiero, Brazil. The president of this Centre, Nelson Lara dos Reis, will invariably visit our New York Ashrama whenever he travels to the U.S. on business. He called us from Brazil on the day of their 25th Anniversary celebration and also visited the Ashrama in New York on July 21. On that day he personally delivered the following letter:

Dearest Brothers:

The year of 1997 is a very important milestone for Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Brazilian devotees. A Luz no Caminho-Associacao Espiritualista completes twenty-five years of existence.

Daura Silva Franc, after years of work and dedication to the Arunachala Group in Brazil, finally succeeded in founding an Ashram in Rio de Janeiro on May 3rd, 1972. She fulfilled her mission with forty-nine friends who signed the Articles of Association of A Luz no Caminho-Associacao Espiritualista.

Since that day, our "House," as we gently call the Ashram, has been proclaiming Maharshi's teachings. The Advaita doctrine, through Self-enquiry (*Atma Vichara*) as an instrument for realization, is the focus of our prayers and meetings. In addition to the Ashram, our Centre also maintains a house to serve the aged, named "Case de Ramana" (Ramana House for the Old People). At present, seven elderly ladies reside there.

The preparations for the Silver Jubilee Commemoration of the Ashram led us to the recollection and memories of the July 1982 issue of the Mountain Path magazine. In this issue, the Ramana devotees of the world were informed of the existence of the Ramana Centre in Rio de Janeiro. This is the reason why we are once more writing to you in Arunachala Ashrama. We would be glad if through your newsletter we could share with devotees the happiness of this milestone in the history of A Luz no Caminho-Associacao Espiritualista.

We pray to Ramana that His Grace may remain with us and that we may be blessed to commemorate many more 25-year anniversaries.

As our Master praised Lord Arunachala, we devotees in Brazil, fixing our gaze on his graceful eyes, repeat His verses:

Whoever can find You? The eye of the eye is Thou, that without eyes can see me, Oh Arunachala! From my home Thou have taken me and soon, penetrating into my Heart, Thou have brought me within Yourself. So great is Thy Grace, Oh Arunachala!"

Sincerely,
Nelson Lara dos Reis
President

The Journey of My Heart

By Evelyn Kaselow Saphier

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam

On arriving at Sri Ramanasramam on December 5, 1982, I was given room number 16 in the guest compound across from the Ashram. Beside me was the room of Ramaswami Pillai, who had come to Bhagavan in the 1920's Throughout my first night at the Ashram I often heard Ramaswami burst into songs of devotional fervour.

December 6, 1982: Ramaswami Pillai was leaving his room after yet another outburst of song. I accosted him saying, "Swamiji, I enjoy your *bhajan* any hour of the day or night! 1 a.m. or 1 p.m.!" He laughed and gave a humble *pranam*, moving his head from side to side. He began to walk away. I asked him to wait and brought him the portrait of Sri Bhagavan done by my friend back in New York, Madeline Lorio. To me Madeline's drawing was especially beautiful, capturing the feeling of Bhagavan's overflowing love. From the way the Swami scrutinised it, I could tell he had some trouble seeing. "What is this...," he asked, "a drawing of a person?" I explained it was a picture done by a devotee in New York City but, also hard of hearing, he had trouble following me. He seemed to think it needed some work and said, "It's all right. If a person thinks of even a stone as God, he realizes Him - from Form to the Formless. But stick to the Formless - the forms will change, go away." The Swami's words went straight to my heart. Did he know that during this visit to Sri Ramanasramam I was feeling the absence of Viswanatha Swami and other friends so keenly? He handed back the picture and I placed it on my head. Yet I wondered about this man who, with sight and hearing limited, spoke so appropriately to my need.

December 9, 1982: Following *pradakshina*, on my way to lunch, I dropped into Ramaswami's small room. I had been moved out of room 16 and put in the German Cottage at the end of the guest compound. "I miss hearing you sing," I told him.

"Can you hear me where you are?" he asked.

"No, but before I could hear every word!"

Then he said, "I don't sing always. Inspiration must come. One may do *stotra* daily. Also, if you ask me to sing I can, but it will not be so sweet." He explained he had been feeling weak.

Ramaswami asked me whether I had received some initiation, and practice some mantra. "Yes, from Sri Bhagavan, in a dream."

"Oh, did He tell you to keep it a secret?" he asked with interest. "Was it to take His Name, or (that of) Arunachala...?"

"No, it was to practice Self-enquiry."

"And, can you do it?'

"Not very well."

"No matter. You must persevere...."

Taking note of my photo of Sri Bhagavan, Ramaswami remarked, "I see you keep this with you. In *samadhi* the eyes may be closed and there is no thought. However, *samadhi* is also experienced with eyes open. Sri Bhagavan was always in *samadhi*. One may look into his open eyes and experience, with eyes open, the same state. In that state, all the senses are alert; yet are not travelling outward. The mind is calm and one is aware. One may engage in some activity in that state. A child may be about to fall and you could catch the child. Still, with a calm mind, activity is no hindrance."

About *pradakshina* he said, "Now, because of problems with my legs, I must take a rickshaw, but to walk is better. The moment I think of it I go, sometimes in the middle of the night!"

December 9, 1982, afternoon: Kunju Swami and I sat for a talk on the porch of a new guest house on the west side of the Ashram. He asked me what practice I do and I described our routine in the New York City Ashram and my present employment. He then said, 'Keep your mind calm at the feet of Bhagavan. Take no thought about the Ashram (*i.e.* Arunachala Ashrama) and have no concern for its growth. If Sri Bhagavan wills, it will grow. You need not worry about it. The body is itself an ashram - for that ashram only a small hut is necessary." So saying, he took my leave.

- (To be continued)

Letters and Comments

Questions on Practice

I have been aware of the teaching of Ramana Maharshi for about ten years. About three years ago I visited Sri Ramanasramam for two weeks....

Could you please help me by responding to the following questions:

1. Have you pursued meditation in this fashion and been able to experience this in a practical manner?

2. Can you offer any insights or "tips" (so to speak) that might be helpful to approach the meditation in the proper way?

3. Do you find that there are any common difficulties or misunderstandings that seekers come up against when trying to follow this line of meditation?

4. How can I tell whether I am doing the enquiry properly?

5. In sum, what is your advice for the seeker trying to sincerely understand, apply and experience Bhagavan's meditation of Self-enquiry?

6. In the past I was associated with a teacher whom I later came to know was of questionable character. How can I safely determine which of the teachers are authentic and which are not?

I would appreciate whatever remarks you may have on these six points.

- A Devotee from California

Whenever I have visited India since the early 1970's I always made it a point to spend time with those who moved close to Bhagavan and remained His lifelong devotees. I would humbly approach them and imbibe whatever I could grasp from their life and guidance. Invariably, I would always discover that the deeper the spiritual experience these fortunate souls had, the more they would turn my attention to the ever-present Presence of Sri Bhagavan. They would always say, "He is here now just as before. Turn to Him with sincere devotion and humility and He will guide you, bless you, extend His grace to you." And after all these years, I still find this most simple instruction to be the greatest of all. Many understand the Maharshi's teachings, many may be practising them or teach them, but there are not many with a sincere and firm faith in His Presence and guidance.

I preceded the answers to your questions with the above paragraph because I realise that these answers cannot satisfy you to the extent you desire. That fullness will only come by God's Grace and your experience of It. To experience this, faith is required: faith in the Maharshi's words, faith in His omnipresence and faith that you can realise the fullness of His teachings and His Presence.

Bhagavan's teachings are most practicable. They are like the air we breathe. It is available to the newborn babe all the way up to a mature adult. Likewise, we can experience the practicability of His teachings at any stage of spiritual development. Teachings or "tips" are often given to meet the particular need of the individual aspirant. No two are alike and there is no teaching that will apply in all respects to all people. There are general guidelines, though. These help prevent the aspirant from deviating from the path.

I have seen some common misunderstandings in the practice of the Maharshi's teachings. Firstly, I notice that many seekers are taken up with the "Who Am I?" practice and do it enthusiastically for sometime. Not finding themselves in the Supreme State, they drop it and go on to some other type of meditation practice, or stop meditating altogether. Aspirants often do not realise that only a very few are fit to jump straight to the roof from the ground (to the highest experience from the mundane). One usually has to take to additional methods to still the mind, purify it and scorch the ego. On occasions Bhagavan explained this to aspirants. The aids the Maharshi talked about were devotional practices, pranayama, service, hearing, reflecting, etc.

If one is unable to still the mind by questing "Who Am I?" the practice should not be abandoned. It should be supplemented with other spiritual exercises which curb the outward going, or selfish tendencies of the mind. When, through the steady and consistent practice of sadhana, the mind becomes fit, it will automatically sink into the Heart. There should be no doubt about this. By the depth of peace experienced you can tell whether you are doing the practice correctly. But in general, it is difficult to judge our own progress. Bhagavan has said this on many occasions.

Dispassion and practice-these are the means for attaining the goal. Be ready to sacrifice everything for the ideal, but in doing so you should in no way make others suffer. Seek the company of like-minded aspirants. Serve all, and look on yourself as a simple servant of God's creation who has no other aim but to abide in Him.

In response to your question about teachers whose outer actions do not necessarily reflect their teachings, all I can say is to study intently the life of Sri Bhagavan. He is our yardstick. There was no discrepancy in what He taught and how He lived. He wanted nothing from anyone. He served all with His gracious glance. He loved all and experienced all as His Self. He is our ideal. Choose your company from those who most emulate these genuine qualities. Bhagavan always protects those who look up to Him. He seems to have protected you so far and kept you on the path to freedom and joy. Trust him. He is our Guru and guide.

- Editor

Intellect and Faith

Thank your for the brochures. I hope it will not be amiss for me to ask you about the practice itself. While I feel at home intellectually with the Maharshi's teaching, I have the greatest difficulty with the assertion stated often in different ways, that "the Self cannot be objectified." On the one hand, I can see that an objectively perceived Self is a contradiction in terms, requiring a second self to perceive the first. But on the other hand, how else can anything be known? What distinguishes an "unknowable" Self from any other inferred thing such as a "magnetic field' or mathematical abstraction? Or from an imaginary Creator?

If this were mere intellectual curiosity, I wouldn't bother you with it. However, it disrupts, in any case, my feeble attempts at "Enquiry." Five minutes after sitting silently it occurs to me that I can't "Get" anything from the practice, otherwise I'd be separated from the thing I "Get." Yet if its not possible to discover an objective self, I'm simply left with this ordinary discursive mode of seeing things. I am really trapped.

I'm not seeking your opinion as to how to go about resolving the dilemma in theory. What I am asking is whether you could say something from your own experience that could point the way to resolving the difficulty in practice.

What does "pure subject" mean, if anything? Is it awakening to a hitherto unknown sense? Or is it just an abstraction we invent to nicely round out our "theory of the Self?" Perhaps at bottom, I am grasping for some evidence - even if only hearsay evidence from you - that there really is a "Self", and it's not a fiction. Putting away speculation, are you able to confirm it by your direct experience?

If this is too personal, I won't hold you to an answer.

- Regards, A Seeker from Ontario, Canada

I can tell you that there really is a Self and it is no fiction. All conscious beings know this. But all conscious beings do not wish to understand the essential nature of the Self.

The term "Pure Subject" means nothing to me. We can never "Get" anything by meditation. We can only realize what we are and have always been.

Understanding or experience comes only by practice. If there is no faith that the spiritual practice we are doing will be effective, we should stop doing it. If we still feel unfulfilled and cannot proceed, we must pray to God. If we have no faith in the existence of God and no faith in the effectiveness of spiritual practice then we can simply turn away from this line of thinking and enjoy life in whatever way we believe will make us happy.

Eventually, all will be humbled and made to realise the futility of the intellectual approach. The Maharshi has said, "The door to realization is always open, but the entrance is low and one must bend his head very low before entering."

It is much better to realise the limitations of the intellect and humbly feel, "Lord, I know nothing. Please save me," than to pursue an answer to the many doubts that enter the mind. After all, it is the mind and its thoughts alone that veil the ever-present experience of Truth.

- Editor

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THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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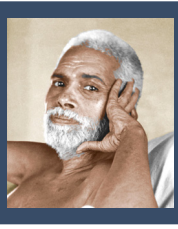

M. G. Shanmugam

An Early Devotee of the Master

M. G. Shanmugam, one of the early devotees of Sri Bhagavan, was so modest that he always refused to be drawn into the limelight. His Tamil biography of Bhagavan concluded with the early days at the present Ashram, that is, with the 1930's It is a pity he did not complete it, because Bhagavan had mentioned to others that he liked it. Fortunately M. G. Shanmugam left a few notes in Tamil on Bhagavan, his teachings and his own observations on spiritual sadhana. The following excerpts have been culled from these notes.

During my twenty-four years of personal association with Bhagavan I have noted that He seldom preached elaborately. He would give hints which keen seekers had to absorb carefully and follow faithfully in their *sadhana*. By close observation of Him and His actions and from His occasional words and terse expressions, one could definitely learn and properly follow His teachings.

He once said categorically, "For practising *Atma vichara* every day is auspicious and every moment is good - no discipline is prescribed at all. Any time, anywhere it can be done, even without others noticing that you are doing it. All other *sadhanas* require external objects and a congenial environment, but for *Atma vichara* nothing external to oneself is required. Turning the mind within is all that is necessary. While one is engaged in *Atma vichara* one can with ease attend to other activities also. Besides, *Atma vichara* being a purely internal movement, one does not also distract others who are around; whereas, in *sadhanas* like *puja*, others do notice you. One-pointed perseverance alone is essential in Self-enquiry and that is done purely inwardly, all the time. Your attention on the Self within alone is essential." Some of Bhagavan's personal instructions to me:

(i) If you observe the breathing one-pointedly, such attention will lead you spontaneously into *kumbhaka* (retention) - this is *jnana pranayama*.

(ii) The more you humble yourself, the better it is for you, in all ways.

(iii) By withdrawing the mind within, you can live anywhere and under any circumstances.

(iv) You should look upon the world only as a dream.

(v) Do not allow your mind to be distracted by objective things and by thoughts. Except attending to your allotted duty-work in life, the rest of your time should be spent in *Atma-nishta* (Self-abidance); do not waste even a second in inattention, lethargy.

(vi) Do not cause even the slightest hindrance or disturbance to others. Also, do all your work yourself.

(vii) Both likes and dislikes should be equally discarded and eschewed.

(viii) With attention focused on the first person and on the Heart within, one should relentlessly practice 'Who

am I? When this is done one-pointedly, one's breathing will subside of itself. During such controlled practice, the mind might suddenly spring up; so you have to vigilantly pursue the *vichara*, Who am I?

To remain silent without thoughts is the Whole;

To remain without thoughts is *Nishta*;

To remain without thoughts is *Jnana*;

To remain without thoughts is *Moksha*;

To remain without thoughts is *Sahaja*.

Therefore, the state without any trace of thoughts is the Final State of Fullness, indeed!

From M. G. Shanmugam's personal diary (in Tamil) the following interesting anecdotes are gathered:

When we were living at Darapuram and I was seven years old, I was initiated into *Linga puja*. Such traditional upbringing gradually involved me in the study of the Sastras, doing *japa, bhajan, saguna* and *nirguna dhyana* and regular *puja* three times a day. During this period I also had three gurus. I came to the conviction that the highest human attainment was the state of *Jivanmukti*. I was then at Tiruchengode (1921-1925) studying in college. When I was 18 years old, I fervently prayed that I should meet a *Jivanmukta* and receive his blessings.

My prayers were soon answered! My father, a police officer, was transferred to Tiruvannamalai. I came to know of Bhagavan Ramana living there. I gave up my studies and rushed to Arunachala. At Katpadi, while travelling in the train towards Tiruvannamalai, I had a remarkable vision of Bhagavan. Thus my Sadguru came to me and absorbed me even before l could have His physical *darshan*!

When I arrived at the Ashram, Bhagavan gave me a warm welcome with a benign smile. As He was seeing me for the first time, His two spontaneous utterances surprised me. Like an affectionate mother, He asked me, "When did you come?" and "How is your right hand?" My right hand was badly fractured when I was 14 years old and though it healed up the hand remained bent and short. I used to cover it up with full sleeves and even my friends did not know of this serious deformity. How did Bhagavan know about it? And what affectionate concern He showed! After Bhagavan inquired about it, my sense of inferiority because of the defect totally disappeared. More than all this, He asked me to be seated in front of Him. Gazing at Him I sat down and I do not know what happened to me then. When I got up two hours had elapsed. This was an experience I had never had before and I have always cherished it as the first and foremost *prasad* and blessing received from my Sadguru. That day I understood the purport of the statement, "The Sadguru ever gives unasked!" That moment I knew I had been accepted into His Fold. This strong bond He allowed me to enjoy until His *Mahasamadhi*, and even after.

Daily I would go to him by two in the afternoon and return home only at 8 p.m. My father, who was a staunch devotee, was instrumental in constructing, in a remarkably short time, the Old Hall where Bhagavan was to stay for more than twenty years. Bhagavan would quote from *Ribhu Gita, Kaivalya Navaneetam, Jnana Vasishta* and other Advaitic texts and explain to me their greatness. All the while I was aware I was in the blissful presence of a *Brahmajnani*, so highly extolled in all our scriptures.

He was a *sarvajna* (all-knower). I got many proofs of it, though I never demanded them. Daily pocket-money of three *annas* was given to me by my father. I bought for that amount *sambrani* (incense) which was burnt in the presence of Bhagavan. One day I did not get the three *annas*, so I could not buy the *sambrani*. I Therefore

refrained from going to Bhagavan that day. The next day when I went, Bhagavan graciously remarked: "Yesterday you did not come because you could not get *sambrani*. Veneration in the heart is enough."

"My father was suddenly transferred to Vellore. None of us, particularly myself, wanted to leave Tiruvannamalai since *darshan* of Bhagavan would then be denied. We ventilated our grievance to Bhagavan. He gave me a benign smile. A few days after, strangely, the transfer order was cancelled!

Apart from the greatness of Bhagavan's Presence and the tremendous power of His silence, I noticed the strange way the doubts in one's mind got answered through someone else present in the Hall. The doubt you had, somebody in the Hall would express to Bhagavan and Bhagavan would not only give the answer but look at you with a smile, as if to say, 'Has your doubt been cleared?'

Bhagavan would be seated like a rock with eyes open for hours together and silence would pervade the Hall. Everyone's heart would be filled with peace and stillness. This silence was His real teaching!

- From Moments Remembered, Chapter 14

Several paths are taught in the Vedas to suit the different grades of qualified aspirants. Yet, since release is simply the destruction of mind, all efforts have control of the mind as their aim. Although the modes of meditation may appear to be different from one another, in the end all of them become one. There is no need to doubt this. One may adopt that path which suits the maturity of one's mind.

-Self-enquiry

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The Journey of My Heart

By
Evelyn Kaselow Saphier

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam

December 14, 1982: This evening Ganesan took Paul and me to meet Sri Balarama Reddiar. He spoke of the beauty of a mother's selfless love. He told us, "For spiritual life, infinite patience is needed - not just for one lifetime but for many lifetimes.... The sense of time should disappear."

December 16, 1982: This morning I departed for *pradakshina* at 5:15 a.m., well before dawn. However, I soon discovered hundreds of people had the same idea, for it is the first day of the new Tamil month. I felt as one with the stream of women dressed in their most festive saris and men in their fresh *dhotis*. Many women appeared to walk the entire eight miles with a child in their arms! In the dark before dawn, the temples and *lingams* were lit up with images bedecked with flowers, turmeric, etc. The faces of the villagers, filled with faith as they gazed upon the images, impressed themselves on my heart. Dawn broke on the dirt road to Adi Annamalai. In the tiny rural hamlet fresh *rangoullis* (white-powder designs) were at each door, and at the centre the women had placed bouquets of fresh, bright yellow flowers, resembling daffodils. Naturally, the recitation of Mother's Names (*Sri Lalita Sahasranam*) formed the background from which I viewed all these charming sights. The cup of tea I stopped to have at Adi Annamalai tasted like the sweetest nectar. During this *pradakshina* I went round almost all the *Siva Lingams*.

Returning, I found Ramaswami Pillai sitting outside in the sun. I took him some homeopathic pills for his congestion which he accepted like a meek child, and sat with him for awhile. He inquired about my parents' occupations and the size of our family; whether I lived in a house or apartment; whether I was married. When I told him I was single, he said, "It is all right. When a person is unmarried he remains fresh. After marriage reality takes over, imagination is absent. Then, the partner becomes a possession, a part of one's self. Also, there may be fear of losing the person - though not in Hinduism, especially among Brahmins. Yet, tastes change. When a person is a child he may want a tricycle, then a bicycle. Later, that will have no meaning and he'll want a motorcycle. So it is with the mind."

Ramaswami went on to speak of the beauty of selfless love which springs from a pure and one-pointed mind: "In its pure state the Self is indivisible, it cannot be split. You see, Sri Bhagavan's teachings is completely separate from religion. In religion there is still ego - 'I am a Hindu'. For Westerners, they need not become Hindus. Within their own religion, in the context of their own society, they may practice it. In reality, Sri Bhagavan's teachings is not religious - it is more scientific than religious. Religion is not required to turn the mind back on itself."

He also spoke about attachment, especially the strong attachment of a child to its mother. As a boy, Ramaswami's strong attachment to his mother prevented him from dying and taking another birth: When he had become very sick the thought of his mother helped him survive. "Even great saints may ultimately have to serve their parents," he commented.

He spoke at length on the uniqueness of Sri Bhagavan's teachings and about how, once a person is established in the Self, sacrifice is no longer painful but becomes a great pleasure. Then he said, "I think I'm exhausted - not physically tired - but my supply has run out." He joined his palms and as I saluted him he gently chanted, "Om, Om, Om." I took his leave.

⇦

December 18. 1982: In Ganeshan's room at 5:00 a.m. I had found Kunju Swami sitting on a folding chair. With a broad smile he motioned me to take the chair beside him. Ganeshan finished his ablutions and we three took off, going round behind the shrine for the path leading out to Palakothu. Walking beside Kunju Swami I began to feel light-hearted as a child. His very presence uplifted us.

We followed a path quite near to the base of the mountain, obviously familiar to Kunju Swami as one taken with Bhagavan. The tall trees gave way to low lying bushes and thorns and a panoramic view of Sri Arunachala in its majesty opened up before us. We talked while walking.

Kunju Swami expressed concern that I had not worn sandals.

"I need all the merit that I can get!"

"Then you are a true *dacoit*!" he replied.

Ganeshan explained that Kunju Swami uses the term "*dacoit*" especially with reference to devotees of Arunachala Ashrama who, coming for short periods of time, plunder all of the wealth of Sri Bhagavan and Sri Arunachala, and then take it home with them.

I said that I was thinking of extending my stay, although I had my work to return to in New York.

Kunju Swami said in an ecstatic mood, that during Sri Bhagavan's time some with exceptional devotion, living away from Tiruvannamalai, would begin to find excuses to extend their stay. In such cases, Bhagavan would send Kunju Swami with the devotee to the station to make sure he got on the train.

"Sri Bhagavan was particular that women going on *pradakshina* should be accompanied," Kunju Swami said. But rather than say, "Don't go alone," he would ask, "Who is accompanying you?" After the woman had left he would ask, "Who went with her?"

We passed the spot where only the foundation of S. S. Cohen's home in Palakothu remains, and Kunju Swami described how Cohen would cook some rice and vegetables in the early morning and then go to Bhagavan. Half he would take at noon and the other half at dinner. In the afternoon Bhagavan would walk about Palakothu and inquire about everyone's welfare like a father. All would be delighted at his solicitude and personal care for them.

One day Bhagavan asked Cohen what he had eaten. "Oh, nothing much, Bhagavan, a little rice and vegetable," he replied like a poor man. "Rice and vegetable! How fortunate!" was Bhagavan's rejoinder. "When we were on the hill we had only rice, sometimes even without salt, and now you are eating like a king!" In this way Bhagavan would encourage and console them.

During his walks to Palakothu, Bhagavan would sit on Cohen's stone verandah. Cohen began to feel bad that Bhagavan had to sit on the hard stone. One day he put out a chair and Bhagavan never returned. So considerate to all, he never wished to cause inconvenience or to receive special attention. Cohen lamented this as his life's greatest mistake.

- (To be continued)

August 31st Celebration in New York City

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's anniversary of his 101st Advent at Arunachala Day and the 25th Anniversary of the founding of Sri Arunachala Ashrama in Nova Scotia, Canada, was celebrated with joy and gratitude in a warm and intimate gathering of devotees at Sri Arunachala Ashrama on Clyde St. in Rego Park, New York City on Sunday, August 31st at 11 a.m.

The gathering began with the ecstatic strains of Sri Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai. Lord Ganesha was invoked with Sanskrit slokas. Next, the Ashrama children offered flowers at the statue and photo of Bhagavan as his 108 Names were intoned in English and Sanskrit. Bhaskar Singh extended a warm welcome to all present and paid touching tribute to the vision and daily sacrifice of his father, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat. P. E. Narasimhan read out the inspirational talk of Dennis Hartel which covered the history of the Nova Scotia Ashrama and affirmed his faith that the teaching and life of Sri Bhagavan would, indeed, become known to increasing numbers of devotees. Virat Bhatt reviewed the story of Sri Bhagavan's journey to Sri Arunachala. Indira Narasimhan offered inspiring classical bhajans. The celebration closed with the chanting of "Na Karmana..." and traditional arati. According to custom, a sumptuous feast was served to all present.

What an unspeakable blessing it has been for many of us, day by day, to imbibe the grace of Sri Bhagavan's personal guidance and his sublime and potent silence which stills the mind and makes all things possible. Looking back, the twenty-five years which have passed seem a mere moment! And what a blessing it has been during the times that we could not travel to India to be able to immerse ourselves in the silence, the teaching and the sense of Sri Bhagavan's all-pervading presence in the serene atmosphere of the Nova Scotia Ashrama. Dear Bhagavan, grant us the grace to continue in Thy remembrance until the vision of this world vanishes-this is our humble prayer!

- Evelyn K. Saphier

25th Anniversary of Arunachala Ashrama

Nova Scotia, Canada

On Sunday, August 31, Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center in Nova Scotia, Canada observed its 25th anniversary.

The temple, Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram, was full to capacity as devotees travelled from the U. S. and different parts of Canada to assist in the preparations and join the activities scheduled for that day. Vegetables from the Ashrama garden were harvested and many lady devotees tirelessly prepared dishes to serve guests. Even to mention the names of all the selfless workers would not adequately recognize the rare virtues of kindness, generosity, devotion, cheerfulness and humility demonstrated on that day. Bhagavan alone can, and will, vouchsafe to them their well-deserved rewards.

Srimati Susila Ramanan, the wife of the president of Sri Ramanasramam, kindly accepted our invitation, flew from Detroit and participated in the function. With her versatile voice she engaged the rapt attention of all the devotees by singing the Tamil songs of Saranagati Ramaswami. His song "Saranagati" has long since become a classic among the devotees of Sri Maharshi.

Bhajans, talks and pujas were followed by prasad (a full meal) served to all the guests and devotees. A special

photo of the Master was printed to mark this occasion and it was distributed free to all the devotees that day. Altogether, 1,000 of these prints were sent complimentary to devotees around the world.

The following talk given by Dennis Hartel. He has been a member of the Nova Scotia Ashrama since its inception twenty-five years ago.

"Today we are observing the 25th Anniversary of Arunachala Ashrama in Nova Scotia, and to understand this Ashrama in a larger context I would like to describe to you something of its origin, its ideals and ultimate purpose in today's society.

"Although Arunachala Ashrama is dedicated to Sri Ramana Maharshi who shed his body in 1950, its actual origin precedes his birth and extends far into antiquity. This Ashrama represents the ideals and thoughts expressed in the words and actions of numerous saints, mystics, sages and great spiritual personalities who lived on every continent of this earth down through the ages. It has been our constant endeavour to stir up these same pure aspirations in our own hearts, to actually live them and experience their fulfilment. "And to my mind, in this 20th Century, there has been no greater manifestation of all these qualities than in the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. That is, no doubt, the reason I have dedicated my life to His Ashrama here in the West.

"Following the events leading to the founding of this Ashrama, we travel back in time to 1941, and shift our attention from the rolling hills and quiet pastures of the Annapolis Valley to the distant hill station of Darjeeling in the Himalayan Mountains.

"It was here that Bhagawat Prasad Singh, while working as a teacher and principal of the Himachala Hindi Bhavan School, first glimpsed a photograph of Sri Ramana Maharshi and read about his life and teachings. Right then he knew that the Maharshi was his Guru and wished to fly off for Tiruvannamalai to sit at his feet. But circumstances dictated otherwise. Nevertheless, Bhagawat had always believed that that person would be his Guru with whom he never had to voice a single question, and whose very presence and grace could be experienced from wherever he lived. He discovered these qualities manifested in Sri Ramana Maharshi. Even now, fifty-six years later, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, as he later became known, never tires of expressing the peace and bliss that inundates his heart by the simple remembrance of the Sage of Arunachala. Due to his advanced age - he is now 85 - and weakness he is sorry that he is unable to travel up here to participate in today's program.

"In 1947, just after the independence of India, Bhagawat travelled to America for graduate studies. He studied and worked in the U. S. for about ten years, returned to India for 18 months, and when visiting Sri Ramanasramam in 1960, was encouraged by Arthur Osborne to hold meetings in Sri Ramana's name when he returned to America. From these meetings that began in New York City in 1961, Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center was founded.

"By the late 1960's, Bhagawat was inspired to open an Ashrama where serious sadhakas could practice the teachings of the Maharshi in a quiet, country setting. Out of that inspiration this Ashrama was founded in 1972. Of course, there is a lengthy story as to how we came all the way up here from New York (for that story see the MAHARSHI, Vol. 7, No. 4). But now I would like to move on to what I foresee for the future of this Ashrama.

"To begin with, it is important to understand what exactly is Sri Ramana Maharshi's place in a historical sense, or his actual place in the spiritual heritage of mankind.

"Genuineness, or a thing of true and lasting value, must not only withstand the test of time, it also must enable individuals from every generation to irrevocably prove its inherent worth. It has only been about 50 years since the Maharshi shed his mortal frame. Obviously, we do not see millions lining up to view his tomb. We do not read about his life and teachings in the newspapers here, or see his image broadcast across the multimedia of our day. Does that mean that his contribution to mankind has been forgotten?

"No, it hasn't. The truth is that the mainstream of the present-day society may never know anything of Sri Ramana Maharshi. They also may never stop to question "What is death?" "Does life have an ultimate meaning and purpose?" "What is the greatest good and what is the greatest happiness?" and "Who am I?" The vast majority of people will never investigate these matters deeply. But for those who sincerely do, the life and teachings of the Sage of Arunachala will shine forth like the effulgent rising sun after the long dark night of sadness and confusion.

"In dedicating the last 25 years of my life to serving those seeking to know more about the life and teachings of the Maharshi, I clearly see that almost fifty years after His passing, Sri Ramana's influence is steadily growing throughout the world. Centres dedicated to him have sprung up in India and in many other countries on every continent. I daily receive mail, telephone calls and e-mail from inquirers from all corners of the globe. As more and more aspirants come to experience the efficacy of his teachings and the power of his grace, I have no doubt that a hundred years from now vast numbers of spiritual aspirants from all countries and all religions will come to know, love and respect the unique qualities found in the silent Sage of Arunachala.

"The Maharshi left for us a very direct path to experience the ultimate spiritual Truth. He did not start a new religion but emphasised the essential truth in all religions. He never desired that seekers should change their religion or give up whatever spiritual practice they may be doing. He simply wanted all of us to look deeply within ourselves and discover the essence of our being. From his experience he knew that if once this is found unalloyed happiness, universal vision and all goodness would follow.

"Similarly, we here at Arunachala Ashrama desire that everyone only look deeper into themselves to understand the simple unity underlying each one of us. It is this message of unity and the experience of our Eternal Essence, the Divine Self, that has for 25 years sustained and nourished Sri Ramana Maharshi's Ashrama here in Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, Canada.

"When the Sage was born in 1879—and by coincidence, it is the same year this temple building was built - his mother was attended to by a blind midwife. It was said that just at the moment of delivery this blind lady saw a dazzling light flash before her. No one else saw it. How could it be seen by others, it was not a physical light?

"Similarly, the Maharshi's light today is not physical. It is an inner light. It is the light of Pure Awareness that illumines our consciousness when we still the restless mind and allow it to sink effortlessly into the Heart. There, in the peace and joy of Pure Awareness, all differences cease to exist, all religions become one, all existence unite in the simple but Supreme joy of Self-awareness. To live in this state is real life. To ignore its quiet, consistent tapping at our door of awareness is death. This is the Maharshi's message to us. And as I have lived all these years in His Ashrama as his simple-minded servant, with my sincere warmth and affection, I am passing it on to you. Thank you."

1997 Visitors to Arunachala Ashrama in Nova Scotia

During the last 25 years many guests have come, especially during the summer months, and spent two days to two months living in the Ashrama and participating in its activities. Below is a list of visitors for 1997. It does not include visitors who visited only for a day. Also, a good number of the guests listed below visited more than once.

Ron & Linda Whitaker, Halifax, N.S.
Mrs. Dorothy Hartel, Tonawanda, NY
Sri V. S. Ramanan, President, Sri Ramanasramam, India
Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, Founder of Arunachala Ashrama, NYC
Geeta Bhatt, NYC
Dr. Eric Ford, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Chris Meagher, NYC
Sushila & Yashwant Rai, Halifax, N.S.
Joe Beninati, Quebec
Dr. S. Raman, Madras, India
Arnold Frogel, NYC
Galina Heifetz, NYC
Tara Dean, Hawaii
Jim & Fran Hartel, Franklin, NY
Dr. Prakash, Mamtha, Tara & Athman Adiseshan, Ann Arbor, MI
Don & Cynthia, Rumford, ME
Michael Fahey, Truro, N.S.
Mohan Fernando, Halifax, N. S.
Arthur Coucouvitis, Manchester, NH
Duart McClean, Quebec
Lyse Lebeau, Quebec
Devraj Shyampur, Toronto
Bhaskar, Hena, Saraswati, Parvati, Ram & Lakshmi Singh, NYC
Eileen & Mac Wells, Long Island, NY
Kelly Harrison, Halifax, N. S.
Fabin MacDonald, Antigonish, N. S.
John & Bonnie Osher, Moreland Hill, OH
Prof. Kate Brooks, United Arab Emirates
Paul & Evelyn Saphier, NYC
Dr. T., Imayam & Mekalai Kumanan, Sackville, N. S.
Rathai, Rathika & Rathisha Thillamathan, London, England

Ashok, Eva, Maya & Ganesha Thirumurthi, Waterloo, Ontario
Dr. Dan & Latha Thirumurthi, Halifax, N. S.
Virat, Srimati Indira, Henaz & Chancy Bhatt, Parlin, NJ
Harvey & Kit Schneider, NYC
Dave, Janet & Areille Rubinson, Coral Springs, FL
Muriel Leibowitz, Cooper City, FL
Mr. B. K. & Lakshmi Raju, Halifax, N. S.
Mohan, Savithri & Radha Ramaswami, NYC
Mr. & Mrs. M. S. Sethi & Toni Sethi, NYC
Dr. T. R. Krishnan, St. John's, Newfoundland
Dr. J. S. S. Lakshminarayana, Moncton, New Brunswick
Ruth Kelly, Truro, N. S.
Dr. Wally Shishkov, Guelf, Ontario
Srimati Susila Ramanan, Sri Ramanasramam, India
Dr. Sathya Prasad Mangalaramanan, Brampton, Ontario
Swarna & Indra Weerasingh & children, Halifax, N. S.

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THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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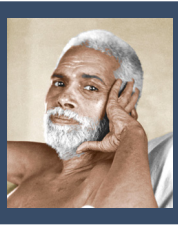

How I Came to the Maharshi

By Dr. Lt. Col. P. V. Karamchandani

Normally, as soon as I place my head on the pillow I fall asleep. One night in February 1949 at Vellore, for no conscious reason, I could not sleep and kept tossing in bed. That was something very unusual. At 1 a.m. a telephone call came from Tiruvannamalai, a town fifty-five miles away, asking me to reach there by 8 a.m., as Bhagavan Ramana was very ill. Having received the call, I fell sound asleep.

I was the District Medical Officer of North Arcot then, and Tiruvannamalai was within my jurisdiction. I reached Tiruvannamalai without any emotion. My only thought was that I was on a professional mission of attending on a patient. The sainthood of Bhagavan Ramana had no significance for me.

I examined Bhagavan Ramana. He had cancer of the main nerve, high up in the arm. I gave my prescription and returned to Vellore the same day.

I had conducted my examination of Bhagavan Ramana in a strictly professional manner. I carried no spiritual feelings for him, nor did he speak a word with me. But he had directed a momentary gaze of grace at me which kept stirring me deeply. Involuntarily, I felt a new vista of spiritual consciousness open out before me.

That wondrous gaze of Bhagavan seemed to envelop me with an aura of bliss. The spiritual pull from him felt so irresistible that after a few days I myself arranged a visit to Tiruvannamalai just for the sake of having his *darshan*. I took my wife with me.

We visited Bhagavan with a sense of curiosity and an indefinable sense of expectation. We made our obeisance and sat by his feet. We did not speak a word, nor did he speak. No speech seemed necessary. So surcharged with spirituality was he that his spirituality wafted out to us, completely enveloping us. Serenity seeped into us. Our minds attained a state of blissful, ecstatic meditation.

The tumour that Bhagavan was bearing must have given him the most excruciating, nerve-wracking pain. Such writhing pain would make the toughest man wince and moan. But Bhagavan's face was serene, smiling and radiant.

All of a sudden a disciple accidentally touched only the fringe of the thin bandage that was covering Bhagavan's tumour. Bhagavan gave an involuntary start. The disciple felt bewildered and mumbled, "Bhagavan, did I hurt you? It was only the fringe of the bandage that my hand touched." Bhagavan smiled his benign smile and softly said, "You do not know the enormous weight, as of a mountain, that this fringe bears!"

That chance exclamation of Bhagavan indicated the severity of his pain. But his godly face did not bear the slightest sign of his agony. It reflected only joy and peace. He seemed to have switched off his mind from the body to the divine.

The next occasion when I was summoned to Bhagavan's presence was when he had developed anuria. I now

went to his Ashram not with the all-important feeling of a District Medical Officer going to visit his patient. I went in the spirit of a humble devotee going to serve a saint of colossal spiritual magnitude. My ministrations as a doctor were to be coupled with the devotion of a disciple. When I reached the Ashram I was told that for the past twenty-four hours Bhagavan had not taken any food, not even a drop of water; that the disciples' implorations in this behalf had failed; and that, in consequence, the entire community was feeling most anxious. I was entreated to persuade Bhagavan to eat something.

On examining Bhagavan I found that it was imperative that he should take some fluid. But what if he refused my request too? Ordering him in my capacity as a doctor seemed to be out of the question. I felt like asking him as a boon to accept my prayer. I prayed inwardly and held a glass of buttermilk before him.

He gazed at me for a second, took the buttermilk in shaking hands, and drank it. My joy knew no bounds. There were relief and jubilation all around. I was thanked profusely, but I felt infinitely grateful for Bhagavan's overwhelming grace. He had heard my silent prayer and granted my boon. Wonderful was the spiritual exhilaration I experienced in Bhagavan's holy presence.

The next time I was called to him was at midnight. When I entered his room, four disciples were there. Bhagavan was saying something to them in Tamil.

They told me that he was asking them to leave the room but that they wanted to stay as, according to them, he was in a delirium. I persuaded them to go.

Three of them went away. The fourth one stayed on. Bhagavan turned to him and whispered, "You are not going away because you feel that you love me more than the others!" The disciple now knew that Bhagavan was not delirious. He bowed and went.

I was left alone with Bhagavan. As usual, he did not speak with me. I was also silent. But the vibrations that emanated from him were celestial. His body must have been in terrific, mortal pain, but his heavenly spirituality was unaffected by it. A rapturous thrill electrified my entire being.

I administered to his body; but I was hardly conscious that I was a District Medical Officer. I was conscious only of an intense desire to worship this illumined soul. I had learned that Bhagavan did not allow devotees to touch his feet. But I felt a deep urge within me not only to touch his blessed feet but to press them lovingly. I took courage in both my hands and pressed them.

The wonder of wonders! Bhagavan let me do so! His grace was abounding. I considered myself in the seventh heaven. I glorify those few minutes of my life.

The next time I was summoned to him was about three hours after midnight. Pain must have been torturing his body. Still, he was sound asleep. Holy silence filled the room. It was the ambrosial hour of the dawn. I did not wish to disturb him. I sat quietly by his feet. Suddenly, he opened his eyes. His gracious gaze fell on me. He softly muttered, "D. M. O.!" The peculiar tone in which he mentioned me indicated that I had been in his sacred thoughts and that he was expecting me. I felt myself blessed. I silently worshipped him. My whole being seemed to vibrate with ecstasy.

At that time I had been feeling restless about a promotion to the rank of Major General (Surgeon General) which was legitimately due to me as the seniormost I. M. S. Officer in the Province of Madras. However I

tried to banish the idea of that coveted promotion from my mind, it loomed large before my mind's eye and marred my equanimity.

Then I said to myself, "Why am I fretting unnecessarily? The next time I visit Bhagavan, I shall request him to grant me this promotion!"

When I visited the Ashram again I went before Bhagavan with my mind resolutely set on requesting him for that boon. But a marvel happened. As soon as I saw Bhagavan my mind melted, the resolution evaporated, and I felt filled with a strange contentment. A request did formulate itself within me, but it was an entirely different request. I inwardly prayed, "Bhagavan, free me from my craving for this promotion. I don't want anything mundane. Instead, grant me my soul's evolution." My prayer seemed to be instantly granted. Effulgent joy flooded the very depths of my being. I reverently bowed before Bhagavan and he gazed at me benevolently.

My last visit to Bhagavan was on the day he attained Nirvana. I have described it in my book, Saintly Galaxy: how, on visiting him, I found that his body would not last beyond that day; how I silently prayed that he might retain his body till I brought my wife from Vellore as she had always been anxious to witness a great saint's last moments of life; how she brought orange juice for him; how he would not accept any drink at all; how, once again inwardly, I implored him to drink the orange juice to save my wife from deep disappointment; how he accepted my unspoken prayer and asked for orange juice to the transcendental delight of my wife and myself; and how, shortly afterwards, in utter tranquillity, he passed on. That was a scene of great sombre beauty.

During my two months' contact with Bhagavan, I did not speak a single word with him. But what wonderful grace he poured into me through his benign, benevolent gaze! A peerless spiritual experience indeed!

- From The Mountain Path, January 1966

The Journey of My Heart

By Evelyn Kaselow Saphier

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam

December 18, 1982: Kunju Swami recounted how he was given the mission to accompany the Princess Prabhavati to Kerala following her marriage. She spent a month in the home of friends; Kunju Swami lived in a mutt. At the end of the planned time period the princess wished to extend her stay. Kunju Swami decided to go on *yatra* to various holy places in Kerala. When news of Kunju Swami's intent reached Bhagavan, Bhagavan expressed annoyance that Kunju Swami had neglected to do the job for which he had been sent, *i.e.*, to look after the princess.

Immediately on hearing this, Kunju Swami moved into the house where the princess was staying and stayed as long as she wished. "Thus, Bhagavan was always kind and considerate to women," Kunju Swami remarked, "but we (men) received his reprimands!"

Kunju Swami said the person who goes round Arunachala barefoot is indeed blessed according to Hindu mythology. When the person goes to heaven, the bruises on his feet will be worshipped by all the deities of heaven! Moreover, when they bend over to touch the bruises with their heads, their crowns will bloody the pilgrim's feet even more! The pilgrim will then be doubly blessed! "Therefore, you're not selfless for wishing

to walk on Arunachala barefoot. On the contrary, you're selfish!" Kunju Swami concluded laughingly. So saying we took our seat on a flat rock, one of the few places before Gautama Ashram where Bhagavan would customarily stop when going by the inner path.

Far from the road or any visible habitation, Kunju Swami remarked that on the hill Bhagavan would tell them, "This is our kingdom; that (i.e., the town) is their kingdom." On the hill the devotees could sing, dance and act with complete freedom. In Bhagavan's presence, day and night they enjoyed an extraordinary feeling of intoxication. He alone had to bring them back to the world from time to time. Once a devotee asked Kunju Swami, jokingly, "What would you do if Lord Siva appeared before you right now as a column of light and offered you heaven?" Kunju Swami replied without hesitation, "I would refuse it. The happiness of heaven could in no way equal the happiness of being in Bhagavan's proximity here on earth!"

He further said that on the day of Sri Bhagavan's Mahanirvana the devotees' minds were filled with grief, yet within a day they discovered that, when speaking of Bhagavan, they would feel the same infectious joy that they felt in his physical presence! Bhagavan, though no longer in the body, continues for them as before!

Being with Kunju Swami on the hill and talking of Bhagavan, I felt I too am Bhagavan's direct disciple, enjoying the same happiness his presence imparted to his most intimate companions! Ganesan then commented that coming out on the hill and talking of Bhagavan, he finds that for him the Ashram and all its related concerns disappear; moreover, the worries related to the body disappear. I said this was my experience too, for I had not even taken note of the fever I'd developed in the afternoon.

Among his devotees, Sri Bhagavan established the rule while going round the hill, that once they reached *Essanya Mutt* they must be quiet. Bhagavan was so particular never to create trouble or disturbance to anyone that he would have the devotees split up and take different routes back through the town. He himself would walk with a towel over his head to avoid notice. All would regroup behind the temple of the town. Bhagavan would make sure they were all there, and they would return up the hill together, to their "Kingdom".

Bhagavan did not have a rigid ethical code. Kunju Swami was very young when he first came to Bhagavan. At times Kunju Swami and a friend, for fun, would see how many times they could run from Skandashram to Virupaksha Cave and back. Chinnaswami would object: "This boy is so irresponsible! It is his duty to bring us food from the town-what if he falls and breaks a leg!" Bhagavan would tenderly say, "It is not he who is doing it... It's his age that is doing it!" In speaking of a misdeed, the strongest word Bhagavan would use was "mischief".

Kunju Swami described Bhagavan's state of mind as all-knowing, yet without an element of personal will; that is, he did not "read" minds nor would he give any indication or display of this ability. It was simply his natural state.

The thoughts and past deeds of all were immediately apparent to him. About this facet Bhagavan once commented, "It is true I know the innermost thoughts of you all, but if I brought them all to light would any of you stay here?" Kunju Swami narrated this with a laugh.

Bhagavan's complete and total disregard for *siddhis* set him apart from virtually all other saints, Kunju Swami noted. It seems on one occasion Bhagavan said he had experienced his body dissolving into the five elements, yet called it back. "There has never been a saint so unique as Bhagavan, who remained so human, so simple and so ordinary to all appearances," Kunju Swami exclaimed in ecstasy, "and I don't think there could ever be another one like him again!"

Since our talk continued after sunset we returned to the Ashram by the road and Ganesan filled me in on a few details about our venerable friend. As a boy Kunju Swami was found to be very intelligent, possessing a prodigious memory.

At one time he wished to take up a study of Vedantic texts and told Bhagavan, "Not for myself, but for the sake of others!" He had the gift of eloquence and could easily quote from any number of scriptures. Bhagavan, however, forbade him pursue this study. In subsequent years when Bhagavan saw Kunju Swami talking to devotees he would now and then chide him by asking, "Are you doing it for yourself or for others?!" Thus, Kunju Swami came to understand that it was he himself who was helped when he spoke with others of Bhagavan's teaching and life. Therefore, I must thank you for helping me remember Bhagavan, Ganesan concluded!

- (To be continued)

A Tribute from The Dalai Lama

The heritage of India is enriched with numberless saints and yogis. Ramana Maharshi represents that tradition and his spiritual greatness is guiding millions of people. Such masters light the path and bring solace to suffering humanity.

The Dalai Lama, Swarg Ashram, Upper Dharmsala, Kangra/Punjab
November 5, 1965

- from The Mountain Path

Scientist Turned Vedantin

Benefit of a Darshan of Sri Bhagavan

An anonymous author, a scientist, sent the following article to Sri Ramanasramam on April 14, 1946. It was written in Tamil and only recently retrieved from the Ashram's archives and published in the 1996 Tamil souvenir commemorating the 100th anniversary of Sri Bhagavan's Advent at Arunachala. Prakash Adiseshan of Ann Arbor, Michigan has translated it to English, condensed it and sent it to us for publication.

A youngster was pursuing study in the scientific discipline in college. He would attend lectures in science given by eminent scientists such as Sir C. V. Raman. He was convinced that a career in scientific research would provide fulfilment in his life. On the eve of graduation with a Bachelor of Science degree, he wanted to visit a few places before returning to his hometown. He happened to think of Tiruvannamalai, a town where his father used to frequently visit Sri Ramanasramam. Having never seen a Sage in person, an urge to visit the Sage's Ashram arose in him. After arriving in Tiruvannamalai and entering the Ashram, he obtained the Maharshi's darshan. This Sage he saw did not appear like the one he had seen in the movies. The Sage was wearing koupinam and appeared to be an ordinary person. The youngster bowed down before the Sage and sat in the hall in front of him. Maharshi was seated and remained silent. There were many people present in the hall, but the hall was quiet.

Some time passed in this manner. After a while, the youngster was unable to continue sitting in a quiet manner. He did not know what to speak to the Maharshi. Fortunately, there were a few books near Maharshi. He

picked up one of them and began to read. It was an English translation of *Ulladu Narpadu* with explanations.

In that book, concepts such as "Being is One," "The world is unreal," were enunciated. But the youngster could not understand them. At that time, his knowledge was confined to science. He could not help feeling confused in the following line of thoughts: "Why should God create me? Where was I? Where will I be? Why should I remain here? Is all that I see false? I do know the presence of objects using my five senses. Don't I see the Maharshi sitting in front of me?" He could not read the book any more. He fell into a contemplative mood. Just at that time, the Maharshi addressed the youngster thus: "What is the doubt?" The youngster raised his head and said, "There is a human figure on the sofa. There is one on the floor. Upon looking with my eyes, I perceive these two very clearly. But you say that in Reality there is only One. How can that be true?" Maharshi smiled and kept quiet for a little while. After the passing of a few minutes, he replied to the youngster's question and said, "You must be used to performing experiments in your laboratory. Let us say that you are examining an object. The amount of detail you see depends on the quality of the instrument you use to examine the object; the more detail your instrument shows, the more you know about the object. Even in the presence of such a fine instrument, if your eyesight is poor you will know very little about the object. If your eyesight is good and if the brain is not normal, the object's true nature is not known to you. Similarly, if your brain is fine but if your mind does not pay attention to what you are observing, the less you will know about the object. In summary, the amount you know about an object is dependent on an entity called mind. What is mind? It is thoughts. All the thoughts spring up from a single thought. This single thought forms the source of all the other thoughts comprising the mind. This thought is the I-am-this-body thought. Without such a thought, the other thoughts that identify various external objects and cause the body to be identified separately from the external objects cannot occur. In deep sleep, devoid of I-am-the-body thought, this alienation of external objects does not happen; further, there are no other thoughts in that state. Upon waking up, the first thought to occur is the I-am-this-body thought. There are two components in this thought. One component is body and the other component is I. The body is of transient nature; it is subject to change and it depends on external factors for its existence, such as food. But the nature of 'I' is opposite from that of the body. What exists in truth should be existing always. The body does not exist all the time, so that is not the truth. The 'I' exists in all states including waking, dream sleep and deep sleep. Hence 'I' is the truth; body is untrue.

Both of these combined cannot exist as one entity that is true. How will night and day, light and darkness coexist? When there is light, there is no darkness; when there is darkness, there is no light. Similarly, there is no entity that has as its basis the coexistence of 'I' and body. So the I-am-the-body thought has no basis in truth. If we examine the world with this untrue thought as the basis, how could we learn the Truth?".

At that moment, he felt that the foundation of his knowledge being shaken up and his conviction in scientific pursuit providing the ultimate fulfilment suddenly disappeared. Further, the Maharshi said that one can realize the truth about the world after knowing the Truth about oneself. He spoke about Self-Enquiry as the means to knowing Oneself.

The *upadesa* the youngster received changed his mental attitude and, subsequently, his daily activities. The youngster pursued life in the same environment he had before. But he looked for life's fulfilment in the spiritual path, blessed by the Maharshi. He took up graduate studies and further undertook a career in teaching. However, he had no desire to achieve fame any more. He felt that the Grace of Maharshi allowed him to lead a harmonious life.

The Light that shines as Maharshi is the source of all and in all beings and is *Iswara* Himself. Let us pray in our hearts to the Maharshi and live joyously.

Letters and Comments

Suffering

My wife and I are suffering a lot. She with her physical problem and the depression that comes with it, and me, I don't know. She said the other day, "I feel like selling everything and taking off!" I do not enjoy anything: work, home, quiet activities-nothing. Everything is a chore. Is our lifestyle in question, or is this a phase of progress. I am following all the teachings of Bhagavan. I do *japa* and pray for faith, like the pilgrim, almost constantly. I find it all so confusing, like I am banging my head against the wall.

There is no peace and quiet in meditation and we have trouble fitting it in twice a day. Only on the weekends do I listen to tapes. I don't think I have the right daily program to help settle me down.

- A Devotee from Canada

Another word for 'Life' is 'problems.' But God is kind, because another word for 'problems' is 'lessons'. He gives us all things only for our spiritual growth. If we look upon them as 'problems' they become problems and we suffer. If we look upon them as 'lessons' they become stepping stones to higher spiritual realization. We have the choice. As long as we do not believe God is kind and is doing everything to further our spiritual progress, we will suffer. As long as we cherish desires for happiness outside of God, we will suffer. As long as we have desires, we will suffer. Either we have faith in God's guiding grace in all aspects of our life or we believe that some things are good for us and others bad. The latter path leads to an endless succession of troubles and rebirth; the former to joy, peace and immortality.

- Editor

I have been planning to write to you for some time now but only recently discovered your e-mail address. I can't begin to tell you how much attending the New York Ashram's 47th anniversary of Bhagavan's Mahasamadhi in April meant to me. Thank you so much for your kindness and hospitality. We had fully expected and hoped to be able to be at the Nova Scotia celebration at the end of August and get to see you again as well. Unfortunately, it was not to be this year.

It has been a very difficult time for me since we were at the NY Ashram in mid-April. Two weeks after our visit I discovered I had cancer. After various tests and a trial of antibiotics I was scheduled for surgery at the end of May. However, the surgery had to be postponed when I came down with a severe cold two days before the scheduled surgery. The surgery was finally accomplished on June 18th. I came through the surgery pretty well and went home the same night. I had to close my office for three weeks for the recovery. The biopsy showed that it was indeed cancer, a cancer fairly rare in my age group (I'm 46). The most common age for this type of cancer is 15 - 35 years old and less than 1% of men get it.

After the surgery I was advised to undergo three and a half weeks of radiation therapy which raises the cure rate from 80% to virtually 100%.

So I underwent the radiation therapy and finished on August 8th. Because the radiation is done over the abdominal and pelvic area I got quite sick (nausea and diarrhoea). It has taken me quite a long time to recover from the side effects of the radiation and I am only now beginning to feel like I am on the mend.

What really helped me get through all of this is my depth faith in Maharshi. I must have read every book I

have of his at least three times during this period. My meditation practice increased considerably as well. So, I think there is definitely a silver lining to this cloud.

Early on, before the surgery and a certain diagnosis, I had a dream/vision in which Bhagavan came to me briefly and holding his hand over the cancer-infected area said "This is my gift to you." I felt elated and interpreted it to mean that the tumour would be cured and all would be well. After the surgery and diagnosis I came to the conclusion that my original interpretation was incorrect and in fact the tumour itself was the gift. This experience has placed me even more firmly on the path-in truth, an invaluable gift. I do hope to be able to visit again in the not too distant future. I wanted to let you know that I really value my one visit and it came at just the proper time in my life as well. Also, the Nova Scotia Anniversary photo of Maharshi included with the last newsletter was a wonderful surprise!

- Devotee from New York

Thank you for writing. So many seekers write, visit or call here, and so few follow up with any personal contact, I honestly forgot who you were by name and only recalled your April visit when you mentioned it in the body of your e-mail.

Nothing could be more true than what Bhagavan said to you in your vision. Anything which awakens us to the fragility and impermanence of the human body is certainly a gift from God, and it seems this cannot be done better than by physical suffering. I am sure that most aspirants, including myself, found that they experienced the deepest insight into truth when they were the closest to death.

I was very glad to read that your strength is returning. I am sure that now, after this profound experience, you will utilise that strength with greater intensity for the realization of the ever-present Self, which Sri Bhagavan is for us.

- Editor

Effective Practical Method

Some three years ago, I began to realise the futility of the life I was leading, and the things my peers and friends were so excitedly looking forward to. I felt confused and sometimes aggrieved, realising there was no meaning in all these things they were hankering after, but there was nothing I could do. Life kept rolling on, exams came from time to time. I was gradually losing my balance, torn between two worlds-one of Truth of an absolute sense, and another of fear, desire, pain, anguish and meaninglessness.

Then I heard of Ramana Maharshi.

Within a few weeks I devoured every book of His I could lay my hands on. I realised that this was no ordinary mortal being but verily the Supreme, and almost every saying of His brought tears to my eyes when I experienced the full force of its meaning.

I decided then and there to spend the rest of my life in the way recommended by Him. I have been only very marginally successful.

I am from Madras which is just a couple of hundred kilometres from Ramanasramam, and so I used to go there whenever it was possible. I did experience the peace and bliss so highly talked about when I was there and I never wanted to come back, but I had to.

Whenever I returned to my normal life, the frustrations and feeling of futility came rushing right back, and so here I am in the U. S. A. doing my Bachelor's degree with no sense of direction or purpose at all.

What I'd like to request of you is to help me by letting me know if there is a PRACTICAL way of getting rid of this turmoil of the mind such that I can practice Self-enquiry unhindered. At the moment I feel like I'm trying to control a hundred mad elephants with my bare hands.

Therefore, I implore you to let me know if there is an EFFECTIVE, PRACTICAL way by which I can still continue to do my everyday activities, which will help me gain calmness and detachment and, ultimately, take me to the Self.

Please reply as soon as possible. Thanking you for your kind attention.

- A Devotee from Connecticut

Since you are blessed with the desire for a higher life, some struggle or turmoil is inevitable. It is your sincere aspirations conflicting with past samskaras, or latent tendencies, that causes this friction. One should not become frustrated because of it, but pursue the ideal with perseverance and constancy. No one has ever succeeded without a struggle.

Bhagavan always teaches us the practical method to abide in Him and go on with our daily activities. If we are able to do the former, the later will go on automatically and we will always rest in peace in spite of activities.

We must somehow, by any of the methods, train the mind to turn inwards and abide in the Self. At first we may be frustrated at our attempts, but that is no reason to give it up. As we mature by prayer and practice everything falls into its proper place and we discover that the peace and joy that we have been seeking so long is really always present. It is what we are, our very nature.

Activity is not the obstruction to peace; it is the belief that we are the bodies that is the obstruction. To remove this obstruction we must, by repeated practice, turn the mind inward and let it dissolve into its Source.

Then work will not bind us or hinder our happiness.

To do selfless service, or work without desire, is an aid. You are a student. It is your duty to study to the best of your ability. Do it. Then leave the results to God. The results do not affect the real 'You' in any case. You are always free. Do not give way to thoughts of turmoil. The turmoil can be only in the mind, and you are not the mind. Let the mind be in turmoil, but who are you? Know that and rest in your own Self which is unalloyed peace, free of turmoil.

All this is known and experienced by practice and prayer. It comes to us gradually as we mature. If you persist you will soon come to know what kind of thief the mind is and then you will no longer be deceived.

- Editor

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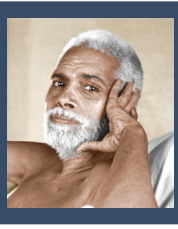

Early Days with Sri Bhagavan

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 Siva 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 1 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 meagre 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 flavour 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 more than we could dispose of on the spot. We even used to make tea and coffee when the ingredients were available.

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 Pallai was absorbed in his Master. He had lived in Sri Ramanasramam longer than any other - 72 years.

The Journey of My Heart

By
Evelyn Kaselow Saphier

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam

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 beside the rickshaw could talk (Ramaswami and Paul rode in the rickshaw), but since the driver had trouble pedalling 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 Ganesha 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 practising 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 publicise 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 Lalitasahasra-nam' 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 practised always ... continuously. By practising *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."

- (To be continued)

The Self is not attained through discourses, nor through intellectuality, nor through much learning.
It is gained only by him who longs for It with his whole heart. To such a one the Self reveals Its own nature.

- Mundakoponishad

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 Nirainthavai.

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 behaviour 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 Allen Chadwick*** *(Sadhu Arunachala), a resident of Sri Ramanasramam from 1935, clearly saw otherwise. In the following article published in the May 1953* ***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 night 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, waiting till the last breath should be breathed, and the one they all loved so much should once for 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

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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 stagnation is over. The *Veda Patasala* school 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.

The *Maharshi* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil K. Sharma. Produced and distributed by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, 66-12 Clyde Street, Rego Park, New York 11374, USA. Tel: (718) 575 3215. E-mail: ashrama@aol.com. All editions of this newsletter can be found on the internet at - "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

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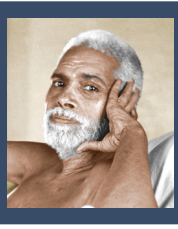

Concentrate on the Original Purpose

By Kunju Swami

After spending about twelve years in personal attendance on Bhagavan, I began to feel an urge to devote myself entirely to *sadhana*, spending my time all alone. However, I could not easily reconcile myself to the idea of giving up my personal service to Bhagavan. I had been debating the matter for some days when the answer came in a strange way. As I entered the hall one day I heard Bhagavan explaining to others who were there that real service to him did not mean attending to his physical needs but following the essence of his teaching: that is concentrating on realizing the Self. Needless to say, that automatically cleared my doubts.

I therefore gave up my Ashram duties, but I then found it hard to decide how in fact I should spend the entire day in search of Realization. I referred the matter to Bhagavan and he advised me to make Self-enquiry my final aim, but to practice Self-enquiry, meditation, *japa* and recitation of scripture turn by turn, changing over from one to another as and when I found the one I was doing irksome or difficult. In course of time, he said, the *sadhana* would become stabilised in Self-enquiry or pure Consciousness or Realization.

From my personal experience, as well as from that of others within my knowledge, I can say that before recommending any path to an aspirant Bhagavan would first find out from him what aspect, or form, or path he was naturally drawn to and then recommend him to follow it. He would sometimes endorse the traditional stages of *sadhana*, advancing from worship (*puja*) to incantation (*japa*), then to meditation (*dhyana*), and finally to Self-enquiry (*vichara*). However, he also used to say that continuous and rigorous practice of any one of these methods was adequate in itself to lead to Realization. Thus, for instance, when one adopts the method of worship, say of the *Shakti*, one should, by constant practice and concentration, be able to see the *Shakti* everywhere and always and in everything and thus give up identification with the ego. Similarly with *japa*. By constant and continuous repetition of a mantra one gets merged in it and loses all sense of separate individuality. In *dhyana* again, in constant meditation, with *bhavana* or deep feeling, one attains the state of Bhavanatheeta, which is only another name for pure Consciousness. Thus, any method, if taken earnestly and practised unremittingly, will result in elimination of the "I" and lead to the goal of Realization.

Once some awkward problems concerning Ashram management cropped up. Without being directly concerned, I was worried about them, as I felt that failure to solve them satisfactorily would impair the good name of the Ashram. One day two or three devotees went to Bhagavan and put the problems before him. I happened to enter the hall while they were talking about them, and he immediately turned to me and asked me why I had come in at this time and why I was interesting myself in such matters. I did not grasp the meaning of his question, so Bhagavan explained that a person should occupy himself only with that purpose with which he had originally come to the Ashram and asked me what my original purpose had been. I replied: "To receive Bhagavan's Grace." So he said: "Then occupy yourself with that only."

He further continued by asking me whether I had any interest in matters concerning the Ashram management when I first came here. On my replying that I had not, he added: "Then concentrate on the original purpose of your coming here."

- From the Mountain Path, July 1966

The Journey of My Heart

By Evelyn Kaselow Saphier

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam

January 4. 1983: Once again Ramaswami Pillai and I enjoyed an open-hearted talk while children, one after another, came to his door to receive few pennies from his hands.

The children called him "Tatha" or grandfather, and he said, "The first time I was called 'tatha' I was not shocked, but surprised! I looked in the mirror and saw I had no teeth and white hair. Since coming to Bhagavan I have no feeling of ageing. I am the same. And on the contrary, as one meditates the mental process is reversed. Mentally, one becomes younger and stronger. [This no doubt was borne out in his case, as he lived a hundred years! - editor]

January 5, 1983: Paul and I began our Evening Recitation at 6 p.m., and while reciting "Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam," Kunju Swami and Ganesan walked into the room. The chanting flowed of its own accord, and I felt merged in the light of Arunachala Siva!

After a period of silence, Kunju Swami proceeded to immerse us with his gracious and consoling words, all aimed at encouraging us. He complemented us on our recitation and said it should be taped.

"Though we moved closely with Bhagavan," he continued, "and he always acted normal, just as one of us, Bhagavan invariably had a far-off look. I believe that look was for such as you who live at a distance. You are special recipients of His Grace. Those who live near take it for granted; those far-off remain thinking of Bhagavan. We (he and Ganesan) are the frogs; you are the bees!" He said this in reference to verse 10 of "Sri Arunachala Patikam:"

Lord of my life! I have always been at Thy Feet like a frog which clings to the stem of the lotus. Make me instead a honey bee which from the blossom of the heart sucks the sweet honey of pure Consciousness. Then shall I have deliverance.

"Bhagavan not only taught us *vichara marga*," Kunju Swami resumed, "He taught us how to live. He taught us not to drink until the end of the meal; to have fruit last of all; not to mix cold water with a drink or with hot water, but to let it to cool naturally. We observed all his actions and learned all these things. In so many ways, Bhagavan taught us how one can live happily anywhere in the world.

"Also, Bhagavan stressed that all devotees should know how to cook simple food, and he emphasised the importance of limiting the quantity of intake. 'Even too much *sattvic* food becomes *tamasic*,' Bhagavan would say. He wanted devotees to be self-reliant and not depend upon others for their basic needs. In Palakothu, all the *sadhus* cooked for themselves and Bhagavan would take a personal interest in their diets. But our purpose should not be to think of food, but to think and talk of Bhagavan."

"Bhagavan himself was a great cook! Not only was he highly skilled in preparing food, he also was a spiritual cook of souls, He baked our egos and served them to Arunachala! His "Song of the Poppadum" gives us some understanding in this matter.

I expressed my desire to cook a meal for Swamiji and he declined the offer so graciously that I almost didn't

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mind his not accepting it. He said that by watching me serve he could tell I was a good cook, and the very thought of my offer gave him the same satisfaction as eating whatever I would have prepared for him.

- (To be continued)

The Grace that brooks no barriers

The author of this article, Sri C. R. Rajamani, presented the following talk at the April 25th Aradhana program at Arunachala Ashrama in New York City. He and his wife are visiting their son, Dr. C. R. Ramakrishna, of Stony Brook, NY.

I have been a devotee of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharishi for over 55 years. I was in my early twenties when I first had His *darshan*. The event is still fresh in my memory not because I was at that age so mature, which I was not, but because of a very remarkable incident I saw on that occasion.

I went to the Ashram in the early forties when the Second World War was at its peak and our own independence movement was also at its maximum intensity. I am not certain about the date or the month of my visit; it may have been December or January. I remember the season was quite cool. The summit of the Holy Arunachala was shrouded in dense mist and clouds. The morning air was crisp and pleasant.

It was in the original small hall, that is remembered by the early devotees with justifiable fondness, that I first saw Sri Bhagavan seated on a raised platform. A cast-iron charcoal brazier was radiating a comfortable warmth, and a pleasing aroma of the incense thrown into it at regular intervals was pervading the entire hall. About thirty people, comprised of men, women and a few young boys were seated on the floor facing Sri Bhagavan. None spoke or even whispered between themselves. What struck me was, no one showed even an inclination to talk. Some were meditating with closed eyes. The silence was definitely not an imposed one.

Sri Bhagavan, his body luminous like burnished gold, was sparsely clad in his usual *kaupinam* and a small towel across his chest. He appeared to be occasionally dozing off and had to steady his head often. He frequently stretched his palms over the fire and massaged his long fingers. In spite of his apparent dozing, his eyes did not look drowsy. On the contrary, they were extraordinarily bright and alert. He was not looking at anybody in particular, nor were his eyes roaming about the hall in idle curiosity. Although my first impression was not a very uplifting one, I felt I was in the presence of an extremely affable person with a lot of natural grace, at perfect ease and without any pretension whatsoever. I was, however, aware of an effortless peace in the hall.

I saw a white-skinned boy, a foreigner, of about ten years sitting a couple of feet to my left. Next to him was a white man, presumably his father. Further to my left, beyond the central aisle, was a white woman, whom I thought was the boy's mother. I then saw Sri Bhagavan's eyes alight on the boy for a brief minute. I thought it was just a casual look. The boy was all the time looking at Sri Bhagavan with a sort of fixation, as if on the verge of asking a question. But, no! He broke into tears. A cascade of tears came gushing out of his eyes. They were not tears of pain, for his face was radiant with joy. In temples, I have seen adults shedding tears in ecstasy, and had myself experienced that type of joyous outpouring on hearing a beautiful hymn or a moving melody, but I had never seen a ten-year-old boy from a far-off land exhibiting this type of beautiful expression in an extremely quiet and serene atmosphere. I could see that Sri Bhagavan's glance, though only resting on him for a brief moment, had opened in the boy's heart a veritable reservoir of pure joy.

I did not feel a remorse for my lack of receptivity that I ought to have felt. But I felt most fortunate to see a boy not even half my age showing such an alert sensitivity. The flat feeling I had experienced earlier was washed away by the joyous tears of another; I really felt blessed in an indirect way. Direct or indirect, blessing is blessing. Whenever I recall this incident, it creates a feeling of being very near to something truly Divine. Of course, I have had my own share of Sri Bhagavan's grace in my later years. I have also had some ever-fresh visions which I dare not devalue as creations of a fevered imagination for they have strengthened my faith in Sri Bhagavan. Some of them occurred decades after Sri Bhagavan's Mahanirvana. They have been firm confirmations of his continued Presence and reassurances of his immortal words, "They say I am going! Where can I go? I am always here!"

Now, returning to that first day at the Ashram, I learned that the boy had come along with his parents, both of them Theosophists. The Theosophical Society's world convention is usually held at their international headquarters at Adyar, Madras in December-January. Some of the people from foreign countries choose to visit Sri Ramanasramam at that time. The boy's parents arranged a trip to Tiruvannamalai, but he stoutly refused to go with them, as he was not in tune with conditions in India which can never be adequate when compared with the posh amenities of his native Australia. However, he changed his mind at the last moment and did make the trip. Within an hour of his face-to-face meeting with Sri Bhagavan, his mental barriers were reduced to nothingness. He shed tears for quite some time and later said to his mother, "I am so happy. I don't want to leave his presence. I want to be always with him!" His mother was most upset. She pleaded with Sri Bhagavan, "Swami, please release my son! He is our only child. We will be miserable without him." Sri Bhagavan smiled at her and said, "Release him? I am not keeping him tied up. He is a mature soul. A mere spark has ignited his spiritual fire." So, that casual look was a spark of tremendous power. Turning to the boy, He said, "Go with your parents. I will always be with you." He spoke in Tamil throughout, but the boy understood him fully. He bowed to Sri Bhagavan and reluctantly left with his parents, immensely rich with the newly-found spiritual treasure.

Quintessence of Wisdom Reprinted

The Quintessence of Wisdom:

Published by Sri Ramanasramam. pp. 50

Quintessence of Wisdom was first published in 1955 and has been out of print for many years. It is essentially an English translation of Sri Bhagavan's Tamil version of *Upadesa Saram*.

The translator, Sri M. Anantanarayanan, the former Chief justice of the Madras High Court, has created a rather loose translation, a 'transcreation' as he calls it. As an example, verse seven is usually translated as the following: "Better than spells of meditation/ Is one continuous current/ Steady as a stream/ Or downward flow of oil" (from the Sanskrit). Compare this to: "As the unbroken stream of fragrant oil/ As the river flows ceaselessly into the breast of the sea/ Not fugitive thought/ Not fitful preoccupation/ This is the excellence of meditation." The author is aware of the possible pitfalls of this non-literal approach, but notes that there are other literal translations available. In any case, English speakers will find this translation very fluid and inspiring.

The one or two paragraph commentaries on each verse are often insightful and are written in the author's own words with many original turns of phrase. Again taking verse seven as an example, we have, "Meditation is rarely understood. In its native, characteristic form, it is not thought, nor any kind of thought process. It is the

silence and peace of the mind-stuff, in which the Real is effortlessly mirrored." The author's deep understanding and devotion to Sri Bhagavan comes through clearly in his commentary. Some readers will also find the introduction interesting. It is of a philosophical bent, invoking everyone from Kant to T. S. Eliot to William Blake. This is apparently not an effort of the author to make an impression, but rather a function of who he takes his audience to be-the scholar familiar with Western works. In fact his unclouded understanding of the essential point and his deep reverence for Sri Maharshi are apparent. The patient reader will find the introduction worthwhile, and even the impatient reader would do well to read section three, a summary of Sri Bhagavan's life written in very original prose.

- Reviewed by Dr. Eric Ford, Amsterdam

Sri Ramana Maharshi's 48th Aradhana

On Saturday, April 25, 1998 Sri Ramana Maharshi's 48th Mahanirvana was observed at the New York Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center.

The Ashrama shrine was completely full with devotees who all sang enthusiastically Bhagavan's "Akshara Mana Malai," "Arunachala Pancharatnam" and "Upadesha Saram." Also, the devotees were led in the singing of spirited bhajans sung in resounding unison and with full-hearted devotion.

Two of the devotees present had on several occasions visited Sri Ramanasramam in the 1940s. Sri C. R. Rajamani of Madras graciously described his first visit to Sri Ramanasramam. He had written out his talk which we have included in this issue of the MAHARSHI (see page 2). Also, Sri Comal Subramanian, a devotee of Janaki Mata from his youth, described how this revered saint from Tanjur requested him to go to the Maharshi. He then very warmly described some of the incidents he had observed during his several visits there. He was especially graphic in describing the Maharshi relationship with animals and all the wonderful scenes he witnessed.

Phil Marden, a resident of Brooklyn, NY, returned from Sri Ramanasramam a few days earlier. He brought with him a gift from Sri V. S. Ramanan, President of Sri Ramanasramam, which he was requested to present to Arunachala Ashrama on this day. It was the new Sri Ramana Maharshi postal stamp and the "First Day Cover" released by the Department of Post in India on April 14.

The day's program concluded with *arati* and the serving of *prasad* (meals) to all the devotees, many of whom lingered on to begin another round of hymns and songs in praise of Ramana Arunachala.

"Arunachala, Thou dost root out the ego of those who meditate on Thee in the Heart, O Arunachala!"

In the Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama

A few of Bhagavan's dedicated devotees gathered in Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram on Friday, April 24. Sri Chakra Puja was performed, followed by hymns and readings suffused with devotion and dedication to our Master, Sri Arunachala Ramana.

IN DAYS OF GREAT PEACE

by

Mouni Sadhu

THE book under the above title was first published in 1953 and tells the story of a Westerner (Mouni Sadhu) who came to Sri Ramana Maharshi in 1949, just months before the Maharshi's Mahanirvana. In spite of the Sage's failing health, the author was enabled to absorb the teachings so intensely that he was quickly taken into the experience of oneness. He graphically, without technical language, delineates his step by step entrance into spiritual awareness while residing in the holy atmosphere of Sri Ramana Maharshi and Arunachala.

Unfortunately, the book has long been out of print. Melvin Powers of California obtained the publishing rights from George Allen & Unwin, Ltd. decades ago, but has only printed it once and will not print it again unless he is convinced that there will be some sales. If our readership, especially bookstores and distributors, would contact him by telephone, or even better, by letter, and express their interest in its reprinting, Mr. Powers said he would respond favourably. We ask that you please write to him so this inspired book may once again be available to devotees and seekers.

Melvin Press,
12015 Sherman Road,
N. Hollywood,
CA 91605
Tel: 818-765-8579

Obituaries

Savithri Devi Krishnan

We are sad to hear the news of the passing of Savithri Devi Krishnan of Bangalore on April 11, 1998. She was 85 years old She spent eleven years in Nova Scotia, Canada, mostly in the 1970's, and was a frequent guest and resident of Arunachala Ashrama in Bridgetown.

As a young girl Savithri once sang at the Madras Theosophical Society for Rabindranath Tagore, who was immediately inspired to ask her to return with him to his then small Bengal school known as Santiniketan. A tall imposing figure, with long white hair and beard, Tagore appeared at first a forbidding personality to her and she refused the honour. In a canny way he managed to persuade her otherwise and her new life under the affectionate guidance of this poet-saint transformed her forever. Her musical talents blossomed and inspiration and devotion to God became the indelible foundation of her life.

Savithri Krishnan later sang many of Tagore songs, some of which were especially composed for her, to large audiences and in recording studios. In recognition of her inspired gift, Tagore once wrote in her autograph book, "If my songs find a dwelling in your voice, I wonder who becomes the donor, you or I."

In Nova Scotia, she worked at the Halifax Free School, a special walk-in facility for wayward adolescents. There she would teach crafts, sing songs, but most of all, offer these wayward children the genuine love of a mother's heart. To her students, and the growing East Indian community in Nova Scotia who adored her, she

was addressed only as Mataji (Mother). Our fond and affectionate memories of her will live on, as well as the inspiration and insights she brought into our lives.

Mr. Edwin Connell

From the first day of our arrival at the Nova Scotia Ashrama twenty-six years ago, Mr. Connell, the immediate neighbour east of the Ashrama, took us under his wing, taught us the country ways and demonstrated a warmth and wholehearted friendship hard to come by in today's society.

He took a keen interest in watching over the Ashrama when no one was there, maintaining the Ashrama lawns, inspecting the buildings and plowing our garden with his horses. Every year, up to the last year of his life, he would bring to the Ashrama buckets of home-grown corn and cucumbers to be served to our guests at the annual Advent at Arunachala program at the end of the summer.

Although he liked to maintain a rough outer surface, his heart was soft like butter and his insight into life was as clear as spring water. He derived the greatest joys from the simplest gifts of nature and lived an uncomplicated and contented life. By his life and words we have learned many lessons, and our lives will be much less full by his physical absence.

Letters and Comments

Faith

I sometimes have faith in the existence of God or an Ultimate Reality and sometimes I feel I have no faith at all. This inconsistency in my attitude seems to undermine my aspiration and spiritual practices. Many times I feel I am in a quagmire with no way out....

- A Devotee from Australia

For most aspirants faith in the existence of God will not be firm or continuous until the actual experience of His presence is felt. Then it is no longer a faith, but an actual perception of Truth that had earlier eluded the seeker. Until this perception of Truth is experienced, faith in Its existence is necessary. We must take as truth what the illumined sages like Ramana Maharshi or Sri Ramakrishna have told us. They wish only that we also be illumined and free from sorrow and doubt. We must believe them, follow their teachings and live by their example. That is the path open to us, and it is open to us only by God's grace.

- Editor

Work and Spiritual Life

I was wondering if you could give me some advice. I am in a dilemma with my work situation and have been for some time. I am a tradesman in the metal industry and have worked in it on and off for many years. I desperately want to get out of the industry but for the life of me do not know what I want to do. An opportunity may be opening up for me with B. P., which is not in this trade. The conditions are great and so is the pay. The only problem is I find that the company is not spiritually based. In fact all of the companies I have worked for are like this. I have been wandering around for years trying to find out what I want to do and have come to dead ends.

I pray to Bhagavan about it. I feel a sense of homecoming now, a desire to reside in the Self. Every time I try to fill the void inside me with anything but God I only find misery. What I am trying to say is I feel torn between whether I should continue to work in the world and serve God, or commit my life to spiritual training in a more traditional sense (i.e., join an ashrama or equivalent) and serve God.

- Same Devotee from Australia

We have found that the most important factor in spiritual life is spiritual practice, the practice of prayer, meditation, Self-enquiry and Self-surrender. Anything may happen to us outwardly, but when an intense spiritual practice is maintained, we remain strong within and are not affected. The storms may rage on the surface of the ocean but we lie deep below, on the floor of existence, undisturbed, at peace and free. So, ultimately, it matters little if you take this new job or not. What really matters is that you dive deep within yourself and realize your true nature. That is what Bhagavan tells us again and again.

If you make this your ideal in life, Bhagavan will guide you in every way, he will place you in the best situation needed for your spiritual progress. That has been our experience and I am sure it will be yours too.

- Editor

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THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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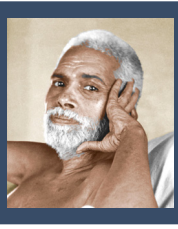

Sinners and a Muslim's Prayer

By
Voruganti Krishnayya

Bhagavan was most tender with people who thought themselves for some reason or other to be miserable sinners and who went to him torn by repentance.

During summer evenings we used to sit in the open space near the well. We would collect in the dining hall for dinner and come back to the well. Suddenly, one day, a visitor started weeping bitterly, "I am a horrible sinner. For a long time I have been coming to your feet, but there is no change in me. Can I become pure at last? How long am I to wait? When I am here near you I am good for a time, but when I leave this place I become a beast again. You cannot imagine how bad I can be-hardly a human being. Am I to remain a sinner forever?"

Bhagavan answered: "Why do you come to me? What have I to do with you? What is there between us that you should come here and weep and cry in front of me?"

The man started moaning and crying even more, as if his heart were breaking. "All my hopes of salvation are gone. You were my last refuge and you say you have nothing to do with me! To whom shall I turn now? What am I to do? To whom am I to go?"

Bhagavan watched him for some time and said, "Am I your guru that I should be responsible for your salvation? Have I ever said that I am your master?"

"If you are not my master, then who is? And who are you, if not my master? You are my guru, you are my guardian angel, you will pity me and release me from my sins!" He started sobbing and crying again.

We all sat silent, overcome with pity. Only Bhagavan looked alert and matter-of-fact.

Bh: "If I am your guru, what are my fees? Surely you should pay me for my services."

D: "But you won't take anything," cried the visitor. "What can I give you?"

Bh: "Did I ever say that I don't take anything? And did you ever ask me what you can give me?"

D: "If you would take, then ask me. There is nothing I would not give you."

Bh: "All right. Now I am asking. Give me. What will you give me?"

D: "Take anything, all is yours."

Bh: "Then give me all the good you have done in this world."

D: "What good could I have done? I have not a single virtue to my credit"

Bh: "You have promised to give. Now give. Don't talk of your credit. Just give away all the good you have done in your past."

D: "Yes, I shall give. But how does one give? Tell me how the giving is done and I shall give."

Bh: "Say like this: 'All the good I have done in the past I am giving away entirely to my guru. Henceforth I have no merit from it nor have I any concern with it.' Say it with your whole heart."

D: "All right, Swami, I am giving away to you all the good I have done so far, if I have done any, and all its good effects. I am giving it to you gladly, for you are my master and you are asking me to give it all away to you."

Bh: "But this is not enough," said Bhagavan sternly.

D: "I gave you all I have and all you asked me to give. I have nothing more to give."

Bh: "No, you have. Give me all your sins."

D: The man looked wildly at Bhagavan, terror stricken. "You do not know, Swami, what you are asking for. If you knew, you would not ask me. If you take over my sins, your body will rot and burn. You do not know me, you do not know my sins. Please do not ask me for my sins." And he wept bitterly.

Bh: "I shall look after myself, don't you worry about me," said Bhagavan. "All I want from you is your sins."

For a long time the bargain would not go through. The man refused to part with his sins. But Bhagavan was adamant.

Bh: "Either give me your sins along with your merits, or keep both and don't think of me as your master."

In the end the visitor's scruples broke down and he declared: "Whatever sins I have done, they are no longer mine. All of them and their results, too, belong to Ramana."

Bhagavan seemed to be satisfied. "From now on there is no good nor bad in you. You are just pure. Go and do nothing, neither good nor bad. Remain yourself, remain what you are."

A great peace fell over the man and over us all. No one knows what happened to the fortunate visitor; he was never seen in the Ashram again. He might have been in no further need of coming.

Another time, a visitor started wailing before Bhagavan that he was being quite crushed under the enormity of his sins.

Bhagavan asked: "When you sleep, are you a sinner?"

D: "No, I am just asleep."

Bh: "If you are not a sinner, then you must be good."

D: "No, I am neither good nor bad when I am asleep. I know nothing about myself."

Bh: "And what do you know about yourself now? You say you are a sinner. You say so because you think so. Were you pleased with yourself, you would call yourself a good man and stop telling me about your being a sinner. What do you know about good and evil except what is in your mind? When you see that the mind invents everything, all will vanish. The good will vanish, the evil will vanish, and you will remain as you are."

Once a visitor said: "I have been coming to you, Swami, many times, hoping that something will happen and I shall be changed. So far I do not see any change in me. I am as I was, a weakling of a man, an inveterate sinner." And he started weeping piteously.

"On this road there are no milestones," replied Bhagavan. "How can you know in which direction you are going? Why don't you do what the first-class railway passenger does? He tells the guard his destination, locks the doors and goes to sleep. The rest is done by the guard. If you could trust your guru as much as you trust the railway guard, it would be quite enough to make you reach your destination. Your business is to shut the door and windows and sleep. The guard will wake you up at your destination."

Dr. Syed was a Muslim scholar and a great devotee of Bhagavan. His wife too became a devotee without losing her faith in the ways and conventions of the Muslim religion. She would not appear before other men. Stealthily she would come to the Ashram, hide herself in one of the rooms and implore her husband to ask Bhagavan to come to see her. It was a most unusual request, but such was Bhagavan's grace and compassion that even this was granted. Mrs. Syed would at first keep silent, rather than talk to Bhagavan through her veil; then later she would talk to him without a veil. But it took a long time for her to venture into the Hall without a veil and sit there like everybody else.

Dr. Syed and his wife used to stay in a rented house outside the Ashram and cook their own food. One day she felt a very strong desire to invite Bhagavan to their house for food. She nagged her husband, but he did not have the courage to request something so unusual. Meeting his wife outside the Hall was unusual enough, and twice he had asked Bhagavan to consent to it; that Bhagavan should go to their house for food seemed unthinkable. But the intrepid lady went on pressing her husband until he became more afraid of her than of the enormity of her request and hinted her wish to Bhagavan, who smiled and kept quiet. She would not give up. She was certain that Bhagavan would grant her wish if the matter were put before him in the proper spirit and form. At last, while Bhagavan was going up the hill, Dr. Syed and his wife stood before him and told him her desire. Bhagavan just laughed and went up the hill.

When they returned home in the evening, there was quite a row in their house, she accusing him that he had not asked Bhagavan in the proper way. At last he had enough of it all and said to her: "How am I responsible? The truth of the matter is that your devotion is deficient. That is the reason why Bhagavan refused." These words of his must have touched her deeply and she sat in meditation throughout the night. She wanted by sheer intensity of prayer to bring Bhagavan to dinner. During the early hours of the morning she must have dozed. Bhagavan appeared to her in a dream or vision and told her: "Why are you so obstinate? How can I leave the Ashram and come to your house for food? I must dine along with others, or they won't eat. Besides, as you know, people are coming from distant places, facing a lot of trouble to see me and to have food with me. How can I leave all these guests and come to your place? Feed three devotees of mine and it will be the same as feeding me. I shall be fully satisfied." In her vision she saw the three devotees whom she had to invite. One was Dr. Melkote, the second Swami Prabuddhananda and the third was myself.

She told of her vision to Dr. Syed, who invited all the three for food in his house, telling us that we could

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not possibly refuse. We were astonished and asked him the reason. Dr. Syed told us the whole story. We were all Brahmins and, although we were delighted to represent Bhagavan at the feast, we were afraid of what the Ashram Brahmins would say. For a Brahmin to eat in a Muslim's house is a serious breach of convention.

Dr. Melkote was in the guest room near the flower garden. I went to him and asked him, "What are you thinking about?"

"I am thinking of the dinner at Syed's place."

"Are you going?"

"I wonder. They are Muslims."

''If we go, we are bound to get into a lot of trouble."

"Yes, they may turn us out of the Ashram."

"Then are you going?"

"I am going," said Dr. Melkote. "I am taking it as Bhagavan's direct order. Otherwise, how could Mrs. Syed pick us? How could she know our names and faces so as to show us to her husband?"

"Prabuddhananda can go, for he is a *sannyasi* and can eat anywhere. Besides, he is not afraid of the Ashram authorities, for he cooks his own food. But we are taking serious risks," I said.

"Well," said Dr. Melkote, "we are going, and Bhagavan will attend to the risks."

In spite of these brave words Dr. Melkote was perplexed. We were to dine in a Muslim's house. Even if the food were vegetarian, what about the kitchen and vessels? What do Muslims know about the Brahmin rules and habits concerning cleanliness? How would we explain our going to a Muslim house for food? Why should we trust the vision of some Muslim lady? Could we really say that we were merely obeying Bhagavan's orders? Who would believe us? Surely not the Ashram Brahmins! And what an assortment we three made! One was a Kanarese householder, the other an Andhra bachelor, the third a Bengali *sannyasi*!

The next day when the bell for dinner was rung, we three went before Bhagavan and bowed. Bhagavan did not ask us the reason, he merely looked at us. Instead of going to the dining hall with others we marched out of the Ashram, passing before Chinnaswami who-O wonder!-did not ask us why we were going out without taking food.

Mrs. Syed got up early in the morning, swept the kitchen and washed the vessels carefully herself. She would not allow the servant girl to enter the kitchen. She had been scolded repeatedly by her relatives and the Muslim Moulvis for her devotion to a Hindu saint. She told them that while she used to say her prayers she would see the Prophet standing by her side. Since she met Bhagavan, the Prophet had disappeared and Bhagavan was coming to watch her pray. So great was her devotion!

After getting everything quite clean, she lovingly prepared dish after dish, and when we arrived, we found the food excellent. After the meal she offered us betel with her own hands.

When we were returning to the Ashram, Dr. Melkote had tears in his eyes. He said: "I come from Hyderabad and I know well the Muslim ways and customs. A Muslim lady will give betel leaves with her own hands to nobody except her husband or a fakir (a saint). In her eyes we were fakirs, the forms Bhagavan took to go to her place."

When we returned to the Ashram we were astonished that nobody enquired why we had not been present in the dining hall, where we had gone or what we did in a Muslim's house. How wonderfully does Bhagavan protect those who obey him!

- From Ramana Smrti Souvenir

The Journey of My Heart

By
Evelyn Kaselow Saphier

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam

January 8, 1983 - Our trip to Madras: The pleasant taxi ride which Paul, Ganesan and I were enjoying on the way to Madras became a nightmare when at Chingleput our driver took a drink or some narcotic. However, good fortune was the final result of our misfortune for we were forced by circumstance to spend the night in the home of the President's [Sri T. N. Venkataraman's] daughter, Lakshmi.

Lakshmi's sublime devotion to Sri Bhagavan made a sweet and very deep impression on me. She was elated and enraptured to be visited by Bhagavan's devotees. The devotion with which she one-pointedly served all and the way she later kept me up during the night to talk of Bhagavan deeply inspired me. Her dedicated and devoted presence uplifted us all immensely.

I entered Lakshmi's kitchen and saw on her shrine the two cutting knives I had brought to India. "I brought these for you," I said.

Looking at me with her deep, dark eyes she replied, "Your presence is the greatest gift for us." Extremely fatigued, I looked away and she caught my eyes again, "Do you understand?" she said most tenderly, pressing my arm with her hand.

Lakshmi served dinner in the traditional manner: she remained standing and waited on all, refusing to eat herself. She seemed to know the want of each. Her food was delicious and mild. It had the mark of being prepared by a devotee, for it was so light and pleasing.

At night Lakshmi and I stayed up to share some of our experiences before falling asleep. She seemed never to tire of offering little services! She placed water by my side just in case I became thirsty in the middle of the night; she offered to rub my temples with oil, thinking I must have had a headache after our going about Madras during the day in the heat. In fact, while I thought I was drifting off to sleep I heard her voice: "Oh, how I feel like staying up with you to talk! Please, tell me something about yourself, your Ashram and Bhagavan!" I opened my eyes and found her leaning close to me in the dark!

Lakshmi was nine years old when Bhagavan left the body and is the eldest sister of the family. "Bhagavan must have been like a father for you," I said.

"Bhagavan was everything to us," she exclaimed, her eyes shining in the dark, "even though we were playful children, he was our mother, father, brother, sister, grandfather-everything!"

"I must have been an Indian in my former birth," I mused, "because when I am here with devotees like you I feel so happy and light."

"Where is India and where is America?" she cried out, putting her face nearer to mine, "We are all only with Bhagavan, wherever we may be!"

That night Lakshmi confided openly about the hardship she and all her sisters experienced on leaving Sri Ramanasramam after their marriages. Maybe in the end they will all return there, I thought.

The next morning she insisted that I sit with her again in the kitchen as she prepared *dosais* for us. Though her cooking was so light and delightful she apologised for it and said, "I am not at all talented."

She served us with so much kindness and love that upon our leaving I saw her eyes rimmed in tears. In her I life I could see and feel a cool, gentle breeze of devotion issuing out from a heart filled with the holy presence of Bhagavan. Only by Bhagavan's grace can we meet such pure and humble souls.

On returning to Ramanasramam and meeting Ramaswami Pillai I told him of our visit to Lakshmi's home. "Lakshmi!" he exclaimed, "She is the ideal girl!" Then he went on to describe how Muruganar and other devotees would invariably come to Bhagavan's Samadhi when they heard that Lakshmi was singing.

- (To be continued)

Ashtavakra Teaches King Janaka

Ashtavakra is an interesting character in Indian mythology. His name - which means eight contortions - is derived from the fact that his body was twisted in eight places. Venerated as a scholar and teacher, he was the preceptor of King Janaka of Mithila, Sita's father.

Ashtavakra was the son of Kagola and Sujata. Once, while the future sage was still in his mother's womb, Kagola was sitting beside his wife and reciting the Vedas. To their great surprise, the child suddenly cried out, "Father, even though I am still in my mother's womb I have already learned the Vedas through your grace. But I regret that you often make mistakes in your recitation." Gravely insulted, Kagola cursed his yet-unborn son and he was born deformed.

Legend has it that king Janaka once demanded to be enlightened in the brief time he spent between putting his foot in the stirrup and mounting his horse. He had challenged the country's foremost savants to fulfil his demand or suffer punishment. No one could help him, and he grew disheartened. Then one day, there appeared in his court a strange individual with eight crooks in his body. Everyone present burst into laughter at the sight. Ashtavakra silenced them by declaring they were all cobblers: "You judge a man by the skin that covers him." King Janaka, however, extended him every honour.

Before satisfying Janaka's demand, Ashtavakra asked the monarch to offer up everything he possessed as his guru-dakshina or obligatory gift to the teacher. Once Janaka had declared that everything he possessed now belonged to Ashtavakra, the latter ascended the throne and asked the king to sit among the shoes that those

present had removed in respect. Janaka did as he was commanded, but felt insulted; his mind wandered through the apartments of his comfortable palaces. At this, Ashtavakra shouted, "Stop. You cannot think of your palaces or any of your former possessions. They no longer belong to you."

The king folded his hands in contrition; but before long, his mind wandered to his queens. "Stop," said Ashtavakra again. "You have given me all your queens." Dumb struck, the king complied, but he could not restrain himself from dwelling on his plight. At this, Ashtavakra once again said, "Stop, you have given yourself to me. You have no 'I' any longer."

Trapped, the king was grappling with his condition when Ashtavakra shouted yet again, "Stop. Your 'I' is mine. You cannot even think of yourself without my permission."

It was then that Janaka's mind became suddenly empty of all thought. A strange calm descended on him, something that he had sought all his life but which had eluded him. He had thus been brought to the threshold of an experience of truth, through the grace of Ashtavakra.

The Janaka-Ashtavakra Samhita is a treatise of wisdom comparing well with the Gita; it has even been called the "Ashtavakra Gita," and its teaching is simple and direct in its appeal. In answer to Janaka's question as to how freedom could be achieved, Ashtavakra observes that if one knows "the Self as pure consciousness, the unaffected witness of the phenomenal world, he will be free."

Note: The above was reprinted from the Times of India, "The Speaking Tree" by Vinod Dhawan. This version of Ashtavakra's instructions to Janaka differs somewhat from the way the Maharshi used to tell the story. The Maharshi said there where different versions. If any of our readers knows from what books the different versions of this story originate, we would greatly appreciate being informed about it.

"The story of Ashtavakra Gita is intended to teach that for getting Brahma Jnana all that is necessary is to surrender yourself completely to the Guru, to surrender your notion of 'I' and 'mine'. If these are surrendered, what remains is the Reality. Then, it becomes impossible to state what further time it would take to attain Brahma Jnana. It would be wrong to state that it takes as much time as a man would require to put his other foot into the second stirrup after having placed one foot in the first stirrup. The moment when ego is completely surrendered, the Self shines."

-Day by Day with Bhagavan

Sri Bhagavan's Replies to Questions

Submitted by Sri D. C. C. and found in the June 1953 edition of the Call Divine.

Koham

Japa of Koham is not correct. Put the question "Who Am I?" once and then concentrate on finding the source of the ego and preventing the occurrence of thoughts.

Pranayama

You should not attend to the breath if you are capable of concentrating on the Enquiry without it. Some may have to attend to the breath if unable to concentrate on the Enquiry alone. Some may practice *Kevala Kumbhaka* (retention of breath) during the Enquiry. Some may require the help of regular *pranayama* also to steady

the mind and control the thoughts. All these practices are to be given up when the mind becomes strong enough to pursue the Enquiry without aid. *Pranayama* is to be practise with the usual caution. It will gradually increase the power and duration of the *kumbhaka*. It will make the mind one-pointed. Take its help if unable to concentrate without it. *Pranayama* is like the reins to control the mind-horse, or like brakes to control the wheels of thought.

The true answer will come by itself

Suggestive replies to the Enquiry, such as *Sivoham*, etc. are not to he given to the mind during the meditation. The true answer will come by itself. Any answer the ego may give cannot be correct. These affirmations or auto-suggestions may be of help to those who follow other methods, but not in this method of Enquiry. If you go on asking, the reply will come. The method of Enquiry is *dhyana*, and the effortless state is *Jnana*.

Guru-mantra

"I" is also a Guru-mantra. The first name of God is "I" (*tasya aham nama -Brihidaranyaka Up.*) Even OM comes later. *Atma* or the real Self is always saying "I-I." There is no mantra without the person (the *aham*) who does the *japa*. The *japa* of "*Aham*" is always going on within. *Japa* leads to *dhyana* and *dhyana* leads to *Jnana*.

Japa is always going on. *Japa* and God are one and the same. See the philosophy of the Name as given by Saint Namdev.

You may practice *saguna* meditation or the method of Enquiry according to your inclinations. Only that method will appeal to a person which is most suitable for him.

You may continue all activities

Without losing hold of the knowledge of "Who you are," you may continue all activities as prompted by the Inner Controller. They will go on even without your efforts. What you are destined to do, you cannot avoid. They will come your way of their own accord.

You are already perfect

Don't entertain thoughts of imperfection, the lack of desirable qualities, etc. You are already perfect. Get rid of the idea of imperfection or the need for development. There is nothing to realize or annihilate. You are the Self. The ego does not exist. Pursue the Enquiry and see if there is anything to be realized or annihilated. See if there is any mind to be controlled. The effort is being made by the mind which, in reality, does not exist.

Real asana

Real *asana* is "being established" in the Self-Reality or the Source. Sit in your Self. Where can the Self go and sit? Everything sits in the Self. Find out the source of the "I" and sit there. Don't have the idea that the Self cannot be realized without the help of *asanas*, etc. They are not at all necessary. The chief thing is to enquire and reach the source of the ego. The details such as posture, etc. may distract the mind towards them or to the body.

The real book

You may read whichever book you like. Self (*Atma*) is the real book. You can look into it whenever you like. Nobody can take it away. It is always at hand to be read. Hold on to your Self and then you can read any book.

Doubts, fears and worries

Ask yourself, "To whom do these doubts, fears and worries occur?" and they will vanish. Cease to pay attention to them. Pay attention to the Self within. Fear, worry and doubt can only arise when there are two, or when anything else exists apart from or separate from, or outside you. If you turn the mind inward towards the Self, fears, etc. will disappear. If you try to remove a doubt or fear, another doubt or fear will arise. There will be no end to them. The best method to annihilate them is to ask "To whom do they occur?" and they will disappear. To destroy a tree by plucking its leaves one by one is impossible. By the time you pluck just a few, other leaves will grow. Remove the root of the tree. The ego and the whole tree with its leaves and branches will then be destroyed. Prevention is better than cure.

The ego and the Heart

The ego arises within the body. Hence, in the first instance, you may look within the body for its source. When you reach the source there will be no inside or outside because the source of the Self is all-pervading. After realization everything will be seen to be in the Self. The Heart is defined as the place from which the "I thought" arises. Heart means the Centre of consciousness. It cannot be identified with any part of the body.

Letters

Dear Sir,

Having heard excerpts from the latest issue of your inspiring newsletter read out yesterday at our weekly Satsang, I am induced to offer the enclosed account of a personal episode of another devotee of Bhagavan from my family for possible inclusion in the next issue of the newsletter.

Thanking you,

Yours at Bhagavan's Holy Feet,
Dr. T. Sankaran,
193 Ganganagar, 9 Cross
Bangalore 560 032
India

The following episode was recounted to me by an uncle of mine who was employed in Ananthapur, which was then in the Madras Presidency of the former British India.

It was the mango-fruit season and he left for Tiruvannamalai for darsan of Bhagavan Sri Ramana. He took with him a basket of mangoes for offering to Bhagavan and changed trains at the Madras Central Station and Villupuram Junction, arriving in Tiruvannamalai at a time when it just started raining heavily.

Since the train halted in Tiruvannamalai for only a short time, he alighted in haste with his baggage and rushed out of the ticket barrier to hire a bullock cart. Having succeeded, he proceeded to a hotel in the town and settled down for a bath when he suddenly discovered to his dismay that he had left the basket of mangoes on the railway platform. He, however, still found the same cart waiting for another fare. Daunted by fear of losing his basket he thought to himself: "Oh Bhagavan! What have you done to me? Is this how you care for your devotees?" He engaged the cart again, went to the railway station in the abated rain, reached the spot where he had alighted and found the basket untouched by anyone, with all the fruit cleaned by the shower.

He returned back to the hotel room, had a refreshing bath and reached the Ashram with his offering. When he got up after prostrating before Bhagavan the latter asked him with His graceful smile: "Oh! You still have trust in me?" My uncle was nonplussed by the humorous remark, but Bhagavan put him at ease by asking him to join the party going for lunch. Bhagavan also sat near him and when sliced mangoes were served on the leaf-plates he took an extra piece and offered it to my uncle with extreme love.

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THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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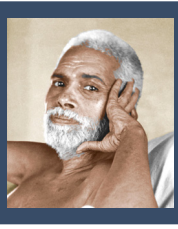

Eternal Bhagavan

At the instance of Sri Muruganar, Shantammal came to the Ashram from Ramnad in 1927. She worked in the kitchen and her devotion to Sri Bhagavan was total. Since she served all with love, everyone at the Ashram loved her, and wherever she stayed people surrounded her to listen to her expositions describing her life with Sri Bhagavan.

When my brother's brother-in-law was transferred from Ramnad to a neighbouring village, his wife could not go with him, so he sent for me to cook for him. I was then a widow 40 years old. One morning I sat in front of the fire and looked at the rice boiling and various thoughts came to my mind: "Shantamma, what is the matter with you? Why are you doing all this? You already lost your husband and your three sons. Your daughter you loved dearly and served her, along with her husband. You spent all your money on them. Then your daughter died and so did her child. Then you gave your love to your brother's daughter and her husband and all your money too, and now you are here cooking for your brother's wife's brother. Is it for this that you were born? Must you always entangle yourself with somebody or other? Who is this man to you? Why should you cook for him? What is the meaning of all this endless cooking? If you go on wasting your life like this, what will become of you in the end?"

It was as if a light had flooded my entire being. I went to my brother's son-in-law, told him that I was leaving on pilgrimage for Rameshwaram and got into the train.

During the journey in the train and at Rameshwaram one question was all the time in my mind: "Where can I find the one who will lead me to salvation, who will show me the way to God?"

At Rameshwaram I stayed with a lady who was reading scriptures to pilgrims in the temple and helped her in the household work. She advised me to read the book Kaivalyam. That book was available with one Nagaswami, whom I knew well. I found him and asked him to lend me the book.

"Why do you need Kaivalyam?" he asked.

"To know the path to liberation."

"Will books lead you to salvation?"

"What else can I do?"

"Do you really want to know the way?"

"Yes, I do."

"Have you no other desire than that?"

"None."

"Is that the truth, the very truth?" Thrice he asked.

"Yes, yes."

He carefully searched my face. "All right, come on the full-moon day."

On that day he taught me the Mahamantra and gave me instructions on how to use it. For months on end I was engrossed in my spiritual practices and forgot my very existence. When I became somewhat conscious of my surroundings, I would serve Nagaswami. But he died within a year and I returned to Ramnad. I was reading holy books, explaining them to other ladies and practising my mantra. Thus nine years passed and I was already fifty years old.

Muruganar, a native of Ramnad, gave up worldly life at an early age and was known to me to be a disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Once I saw Bhagavan's photo with him and felt a very strong urge to go and see him. I was very poor and it took me a year to collect the money needed.

In 1927, three other ladies and I went to Tiruvannamalai. By that time Bhagavan had come down from the hill and was living in a hut near his mother's *samadhi*. We rented a place in the town, had a bath and went to see him. He was seated on a cot in a grass-thatched shed. Muruganar was by his side. As soon as I saw him I knew he was God in human form. I bowed to him and said, "The dream of my life has come true. Today I am blessed. Grant that my mind does not trouble me any more."

Bhagavan turned to Muruganar and said: "Ask her to find out whether there is such a thing as mind. If there is, ask her to describe it."

I stood still, not knowing what to say. Muruganar explained to me, "Don't you see? You have been initiated in the search for the Self."

Although I was all mixed up, I remembered to honour Bhagavan by singing a poem from "Ramanastuthi Panchakam." It says: "Your spiritual splendour fills the universe with its perfume. Attracted by it numberless beings turn their face to you. I too grew restless and sought you eagerly. Where is He? Where is He? I enquired, and now I have come to you." Bhagavan asked me how I had come to know the song. Muruganar explained that he had given me a copy of the book.

We stayed for forty days. We would cook some food, sharing the expenses, and take it to the Ashram. Bhagavan would taste it and the rest was given to the devotees. In those days, Bhagavan's brother, Chinnaswami, was cooking for the Ashram. Some provisions were sent from the town by various devotees and the supply was very precarious. Often there were no curries or *sambar*, only plain rice and a piece of pickle. The *Kartikai* festival, for which Arunachala is famous, was going on. From three in the morning until twelve at night there were people coming and going. Bhagavan had to be protected by a bamboo fence.

I wanted to stay on until Bhagavan's birthday, but the other three ladies had to return, so I went to Bhagavan to take his leave. He asked me to wait a day longer, for the newly-printed *Upadesa Saram* was to be released. The next day he gave me a copy with his own hands. The thought of leaving him broke my heart and I wept bitterly. Very kindly he said, "No, don't cry. You are going to Ramnad, but you are not leaving Arunachala. Go and come soon."

I spent a year at Ramnad the way I did before. Bhagavan's birthday was nearing and I felt eager to go back. I had not even the money to buy a ticket, yet I resolved to start on Saturday, come what may. On Friday the

invitation arrived. Later I came to know that Bhagavan had mentioned my name to the dispatchers. Bhagavan's picture was on the invitation and I took it to the ladies in the Ramnad Palace. They gave me thirty rupees to attend the *Jayanti*. It was the experience of every devotee that if they were determined to visit him, all obstacles would somehow vanish.

This time Bhagavan was on a sofa in a newly- built hall. He was explaining something from *Ulladu Narpadu* to Dandapani Swami. When he saw me his first question was: "Have you a copy of this book? I asked them to post one to you." How my Lord remembers me by name and how loving is his personal attention to my needs! What have I, an ignorant woman, done to deserve such kindness? How can I afford to keep away from him?

I stayed at the Ashram as if it were my own home. At night I would sleep in some devotee's house, but from dawn to dusk I would help in the Ashram chores.

The birthday celebrations were over, the guests were leaving, and naturally I felt that I too would have to go. But how could I leave Bhagavan? One day I gathered courage and told Bhagavan about my deep urge to stay on: "As long as I am with you, Bhagavan, my mind is at peace. Away from you I am restless. What am I to do?"

He said, "Stay here until your mind gets settled. After that you can go anywhere and nothing will disturb you."

How could I remain? I was too poor to stay in the town. The Ashram was poor too. Often there was not enough food for all. How could I ask them to take me in? Why should they? Anyhow, I had decided not to return to Ramnad. I would not leave the feet of my Guru. If only by some miracle I could stay in the Ashram. And the miracle happened that very minute! When I was going towards the dining hall, I overheard Chinnaswami and Ramakrishnaswami talking to each other. Chinnaswami, then our cook, was not well and had to leave for Madras for treatment. "Would Shantamma kindly agree to stay and cook, if asked?" I heard him say. Kindly agree when I was dreaming of it! How merciful was Bhagavan! I was to stay for two months ... and stayed forever.

I was put in charge of the cooking and Bhagavan would come often to help. Could I dream of greater happiness? He would get everything ready and tell me what to cook and how. With him near me I was tireless. No amount of work was too much for me. I did not even feel I was working. I worked with God! I was silently wondering at my great good fortune of being allowed to live and work in such a Great Presence!

At that period of the Ashram's life, Bhagavan used to be unusually active, working both in the kitchen and outside. He would clean grain, shell nuts, grind seeds, stick together the leaf plates we ate from, and so on. We would join him in every task and listen to his stories, jokes, reminiscences and spiritual teachings. Occasionally he would scold us lovingly like a mother. All Vedanta I learned from him in easy and happy lessons. At every hour and place, at each task, the work was from him or for him and thus between us an unending link was forged. He was always in the centre. It was easy for us to keep our minds on him. It was impossible to do anything else, for we had to refer to him all the time. All initiative and responsibility were his. He would attend to everything. Whatever trouble cropped up during cooking or in daily life, we had only to mention it to him and he would set it right. Everything we did, every problem we faced, was made use of in teaching the art of total reliance on him.

As soon as Chinnaswami became the *Sarvadhikari* (general manager) of the Ashram, he was full of zest and declared that henceforth adequate meals were to be served in the Ashram, even if it meant buying and storing

foodstuffs. Bhagavan used to make fun of him: "Well, store up, go on storing. Have rice from Nellore, dhal from Virudupatti, all the best and the costliest." The Ashram was growing, the number of visitors increasing, and prepared food was needed at all hours, so the *Sarvadhikari* was allowed to have his way. (To be continued)

- from Ramana Smrti Souvenir

Ellam Ondre – 'All is One'

14-10-46

This morning I told Bhagavan, "Last night, as desired by Uma Devi, I took some of the Polish party around the Hill and on the way explained to them the tradition about the Hill and the various gods of our religion. They said, 'How many gods? How can there be so many gods?' Though I explained it to them they could not understand it all." Thereupon, Bhagavan suggested that they should peruse the book *All is One*, which had been translated into English, and asked me to find out if typed copies of the English translation were available to give them. I brought three copies from the Mauni. Bhagavan gave one to Uma Devi, one to the girls of the party and had the third in his hands.

- Day by Day with Bhagavan

On another occasion, when I asked Bhagavan to select some reading material for me, he gave me a short-list of six books: *Kaivalya Navanitam, Ribhu Gita, Ashtavakra Gita, Ellam Ondre, Swarupa Saram* and *Yoga Vasishtam*.

He laid particular stress on *Ellam Ondre*, telling me, "If you want *moksha* write, read and practise the instructions in *Ellam Ondre*."

- Living by the Words of Bhagavan

A Letter From Eurico M. S. Saraiva, Lisbon, Portugal

A french devotee who could not speak English and was living in Sri Ramanasramam during my last visit asked me to go with him to the Annamalai Ashram for a visit on some personal matter. While I was there translating for this devotee I notice Annamalai Swami's book, *Living by the Words of Bhagavan*, for sale. I immediately purchased it and while reading through it found the reference to *All is One*. I somehow became keen on knowing more about this book and asked in the Sri Ramanasramam Book Depot if an English translation of this Tamil book was available. Even though it was also noted to be recommended by Sri Bhagavan in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, no one could give me any information about it.

Four or five days before my departure something made me remember that probably in the Annamalai Ashram I could find out some information about the book. The Ashram manager told me it was only available in Tamil and that the last English translation had been printed privately some time around 1950. However, he had a photo copy of that translation and allowed me to copy it for myself.

Around the same time, a French devotee with whom I had earlier discussions about the book came to me and showed me the French translation. In spite of it being printed in Pondicherry, she had purchased it in Paris.

I am now sending it to you because I think that we should make an effort to publish it for the benefit of

devotees and Advaita students, even if it is in the form of a small inexpensive brochure. It appears that this 19th Century, anonymous composition was highly valued by Sri Maharshi and, for this reason alone, I am sure many will be interested in studying it.

Preface to Ellam Ondre

Men court happiness and shun misery. It is the same with other beings also. This holds good for the common run of mankind. But the higher order is bent upon right conduct, enduring patiently the good or evil that it may bring. Fellowship with these will be lasting, whereas fellowship with ordinary people will not be. Good will result to the world through fellowship with the higher order only.

The question then arises: "What is right?" The point is important, but the answer has not been found. Why? Because what is right is determined by circumstances. However comprehensive a work may be written on the subject, there will always be circumstances not envisaged by the author. Therefore it becomes necessary to realize that state which will enable us to assess the various conditions and determine what is right.

That state is one only. There are no states like it. Although it is single, it is extraordinary that the worldly wise consider it exceedingly rare. Nothing can be more extraordinary than this. That unique state is very clearly taught in the Upanishads. In this book I have put down the same truth according to my understanding. I have considered it my duty. I do not claim originality. The six chapters of this book are so closely interrelated that some point which may be expected in one chapter may be found in another. Again a few points which may not be clear on a superficial reading will become clear upon closer study. More may be gathered from major works or Sages. Universal Mother, Master true, save us!

- The Author

Chapter 1 - UNITY

1. All including the world seen by you and yourself, the seer of the world, is one only.

2. All that you consider as I, you, he, she and it, is one only.

3. What you consider to be sentient beings and what you consider to be insentient, such as earth, air, fire and water is all one.

4. The good which is derived by your considering all as one cannot be had by considering each as separate from the other. Therefore all is one.

5. The knowledge of the unity of all, is good for you and good for others as well. Therefore all is one.

6. He who sees "I am separate," "you are separate," "he is separate" and so on, acts one way to himself and another way to others. He cannot help doing so. The thought "I am separate, others are separate" is the seed from which grows the tree of differing actions in relation to different persons. How can there be any lapse from righteousness for a person who knows the unity of himself with others? As long as the germ of differentiation is there, the tree of differing actions will flourish, even unawares. Therefore give up differentiation. All is one only.

7. Ask: "If in the world all things appear different, how can I consider all as one? Is there any way of gaining

this knowledge?" The reply is: "In the same tree we see leaves, flowers, berries and branches, different from one another, yet they are all one because they are all included in the word 'tree'. Their root is the same; their sap is the same. Similarly, all things, all bodies, all organisms are from the same source and activated by a single life principle." Therefore all is one.

8. Oh good man! Is the statement that "All is one," good or evil? Think for yourself. Just as the person will always be righteous who regards himself like others and others like himself, how can any evil attach itself to him who knows himself to be others and the others to be himself? Tell me if there is any better way for obtaining good than the knowledge of unity? Certainly other methods cannot be as good as this one. How can anyone love others more than when knowing them to be himself, to know them in unity-love as unity, for they are truly one.

9. Who can share the mental peace and freshness of the knower of unity? He has no cares. The Good of all is his own good. A mother considers her children's well-being to be her own well-being. Still, her love is not perfect because she thinks she is separate and her children are separate. The love of a Sage, who has realized the unity of all, far excels even the love of a mother. There is no other means of gaining such love than the knowledge of unity. Therefore all is one.

10. Know that the world as a whole is your undecaying body and that you are the everlasting life of the whole world. Tell me if there is any harm in doing so? Who fears to go the harmless way? Be courageous. The Vedas teach this very truth. There is nothing but yourself. All good will be yours. Yea, you become the good itself. All that others gain from you will be good only. Who will work evil to his own body and soul? A remedy is applied if there is an abscess in the body. Even if the remedy is painful, it is meant to do good only. Such will be some of your actions; they will also be for the good of the world. For that reason, you will not be involved in differentiation. I put it briefly: The knower of unity will act as one should. In fact, the knowledge of unity makes him act. He cannot err. In the world, he is God made visible. All is one.

Chapter II - YOU

1. Who are you? Are you this body? If so, why are you not aware of a serpent crawling on it when you are in deep sleep? So then can you be this body? No, certainly not. You must be other than this body.

2. Sometimes in sleep you dream. There you identify yourself with someone. Can you be that one? You cannot be. Otherwise, what becomes of that individual on your waking? You are not he. Furthermore, you are ashamed of having identified yourself with him. Clearly, you are not that particular person. You are the one that stands apart from him.

3. Recall the state of dreamless slumber. What is your state then? Can that be your true nature? Surely you will not subscribe to this belief. Why? Because you are not so foolish as to identify yourself with the massive darkness which obstructs you from knowing the state you are in. Discerned by the intellect from the things around, how can you admit yourself to be the same as ignorance or blank? Or, how can it truly be your real nature? It cannot be. You are the knower who knows that this state remains one of dense darkness veiling your true nature. How can you be that which you have experienced and condemned? Therefore you are not the dark ignorance of deep sleep. You stand apart from this too.

4. When it is said that even this gross body is not you, can you be any other thing which is yet farther away from you? In the same way that you are not this gross body, you are not anything farther from the body, nor the dream person, nor the ignorance of deep sleep. You are distinct from these three states and this world.

5. These three states can be reduced to two conditions only-namely, the one of the subject and object, and the other is the unawareness of the subject itself. The former includes the waking and dream states, whereas the latter represents deep slumber. All your experiences are comprised in these two conditions only. Both of them are foreign to you. Your true nature remains distinct from them.

6. If you ask what that is, it is called *turiya*, which means the fourth state. Why is this name used? This name is proper because it seems to say the three states of your experience-waking, dream and deep sleep-are foreign to you and your true state is the fourth, which is different from these three. Should the three states, waking, dream and deep sleep, be taken to form one long dream, the fourth state represents the waking from this dream. Thus it is more withdrawn than deep sleep, also more wakeful than the waking state.

Therefore your true state is that fourth one which is distinguished from the waking, dream and deep sleep states. You are that only. What is this fourth state? It is knowledge which does not particularise anything. It is not unaware of itself. That is to say, the fourth state is Pure Knowledge which is not conscious of any object, but not unconscious itself. Only he who has realized it even for a trice, has realized the Truth. You are that only.

8. What is there more for him who has gained the fourth state? Practically, it is not possible for anyone to remain forever in that state, that is, the state of no particular knowledge. He who has realized the fourth state later wakes up in this world, but for him this world is not as before. He sees that what he realized as the fourth state, shines forth as all this. He will not imagine this world as distinct from that Pure Knowledge. Thus what he saw within, he now sees without in a different form. In the place of the differentiation of old, he is now established in the state of non-differentiation everywhere. Now, he is all. There is nothing distinct from himself. His eyes closed or open, howsoever the things may change, his state remains unchanged. This is the state of Brahman. This is the natural eternal state. You are that ever-true state.

9. There is nothing beyond this state. The words, 'inward' and 'outward' have no meaning for him. All is one. His body, speech and mind cannot function selfishly. Their workings will be grace for the good of all. The fragmentary "I" is lost forever. His ego can never revive. Therefore he is said to be liberated here and now. He does not live because his body lives, nor does he die because his body dies. He is eternal. There is nothing other than he. You are He.

10. Who is God? He is grace. What is Grace? Awareness without the fragmentary ego. How can one know that there is such a state? Only if one realizes it. The Vedas laud such a one as having realized God and become one with Him. Therefore the greatest good that one can derive from the world and the greatest good which one can render unto it, is to realize this state. In fact, there are no states besides this. They appear in the state of ignorance. For him who knows, there is one state only. You are that.

- (To be continued)

Letters and Comments

Preordained

Everything is preordained. Everything is the Self, even all our little egos. What is seen and the one that sees are all the same. So, all the thoughts that come to our minds and the efforts that anyone makes are already preordained, isn't it?

Why, then, Ramana and many scriptures instruct so often that "effort is necessary"?

I mean, if every detail of the ego is preordained before the body comes into this world, so even the efforts that will be made are also preordained. Is that so? Or is there any space for freewill? Of course not, because everything is the Self. So, who takes the decision of making the effort, or who practices the *sadhana*?

The efforts we make in this life and the path we follow depend on the efforts and the respective karma made in previous lives. But, who made those efforts in those previous lives? The point is, are the efforts to be made in anyone's life already preordained? Should we worry about that? Or will all that happen automatically? The thought to make the effort comes to one's mind. Is then one free to choose to make it or not?

I am aware that if I could present these questions before Ramana the answer would be more or less, "Find out to whom the questions arise..." Yes, who asks the questions?

- Devotee from Europe.

If we experience, rather than just try to understand intellectually, the first paragraph of your question then all the other doubts will not come into play. But since the doubt has arisen, we have Bhagavan's replies to similar questions to turn to.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- from My Recollections, by Devaraja Mudaliar

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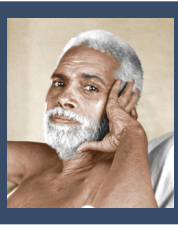

Eternal Bhagavan

By Shantammal - Part II

The next year I wanted to go to Ramnad for *Devi Puja*. When sitting in the Hall in meditation, I saw, instead of Bhagavan, a little girl of about two years old. She was full of charm and splendour, intensely alert and powerful, radiating a golden brilliance. Soon the vision vanished and I saw Bhagavan again. I understood that he was the goddess I wanted to worship in Ramnad. Where was the need of a pilgrimage to a goddess when I was daily serving him from whom all gods eternally were born.

One morning a European came on a horse carriage to the Ashram and went straight to Bhagavan. He wrote something on a piece of paper and showed it to Bhagavan. Bhagavan did not answer; instead he gazed at the stranger with unwinking eyes. The stranger was staring back at him. Then Bhagavan closed his eyes and the stranger also closed his. They stayed without moving. At mealtime the meals were served, but Bhagavan would not open his eyes. Madhavaswami, the attendant, got Bhagavan's water pot and stood ready to lead Bhagavan out of the Hall. Bhagavan would not stir. We felt afraid to go near, such was the intensity around him. His face was glowing with a strange light. The guests in the dining hall were waiting and the food before them was getting cold. Chinnaswami was talking loudly to attract Bhagavan's attention. Even vessels were banged about, but all in vain. As the clock was striking twelve, Bhagavan opened his eyes. They were glowing very brightly. Madhavaswami took up the water jug. The European got into the carriage and went away. It was the last we saw of him. We did not even get his name. Everybody was wonder struck at the great good fortune of the man to have received such immediate initiation from Bhagavan.

During those days I had a dream. A resplendent lady with a luminous face was seated by Bhagavan's side on the sofa and Bhagavan was adorning her with meticulous care. Another lady, as beautiful and full of light and splendour, was moving about the Ashram, doing all kinds of service. I asked Bhagavan how it was that he was giving so much attention to one and none to the other. Then I woke up. When I told my dream to Muruganar, he told me that it was true that an invisible being was always near Bhagavan. She was the Goddess of Salvation and Muruganar had composed several songs about her.

In the afternoon, Bhagavan, Muruganar, and I were sitting around a big brass plate, preparing sweets for the coming festival. I asked Muruganar to tell my dream to Bhagavan. When he started, Bhagavan said: "What are you, her attorney? Let her tell her dream herself." When I had finished, he added: "When I was on the hill, the lady who used to bring me food would serve a second plate by my side. When I asked whom it was for, she would answer, 'For the Mother.' She had a similar vision."

Once the Maharaja of Mysore visited the Ashram. He would not visit Bhagavan in the Hall and asked for a private interview. We were perplexed, for Bhagavan never allowed such a thing. Whatever had to be said was said in public, by letter, or in the mind. Finally, it was decided to bring the Maharaja in when Bhagavan was having his bath. The Maharaja entered the bathroom and we were all standing outside. Trays and trays of costly presents and all kinds of sweets and dainties were offered at Bhagavan's feet. For ten minutes the

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Maharaja just stood looking and then prostrated before Bhagavan. Tears flowing from his eyes actually made Bhagavan's feet wet. He sobbed for some time and went away.

A few days later the Maharani of Travancore also came to the Ashram. When Bhagavan was sitting alone in the dining hall after lunch, I asked him: "The Maharani was here. What did she do?"

"She asked many questions and went away."

"And the Maharaja of Mysore?"

"Oh, he is a ripe fruit," said Bhagavan, and with great felling he re-enacted the scene. We could almost see the Maharaja's eagerness, his humility and sadness. The Maharaja had told him: "They made me a Maharaja and bound me to a throne. For the sin of being born a king I lost the chance of sitting at your feet and serving in your glorious presence. I cannot stay here and I do not hope to come again. Only these few minutes are mine. I can only pray for your grace."

After some time the Ashram received a long letter from the Maharaja in his own handwriting. At the end he wanted to know where he could get the incense sticks used in the Ashram. They were Mysore incense sticks, but what could not be purchased was their fragrance when they were glowing in Bhagavan's presence.

A villager had a dream in which he was told to offer his next calf to Ramanasramam. He brought his cow and the calf to Bhagavan. The jungle around the Ashram was thick at that time and there were cheetahs. The Ashram people were perplexed and refused the offer, but the villager was taking his dream seriously and would not take the calf away. The mother cow had to remain with the calf to feed her. Finally, the cow and the calf were entrusted to a devotee in the town. The calf became the famous cow Lakshmi. She grew up and had three calves within a few years. She would come daily to the Ashram to have her meals, graze on the Ashram land, enter the Hall and sit contentedly near Bhagavan. In the evening, she would go back to the town as other women did.

Once Lakshmi came into the Hall. She was pregnant at that time. It was after lunch time when Bhagavan was reading the newspapers. Lakshmi came near and started licking the papers. Bhagavan looked up and said: "Wait a little, Lakshmi." But Lakshmi went on licking. Bhagavan laid his paper aside, put his hands behind Lakshmi's horns and his head against hers. Like this they stayed for quite a long time. I stood nearby looking at the wonderful scene. After some ten minutes or so, Bhagavan turned to me and said: "Do you know what Lakshmi is doing? She is in *samadhi*."

I looked at her and tears were flowing in streams down her broad cheeks. Her breathing had stopped and her eyes were fixed on Bhagavan. After some time Bhagavan changed his position and asked: "Lakshmi, how do you feel now?" Lakshmi moved backward, as if reluctant to turn her tail towards Bhagavan, walked round the Hall and went out.

On the fourth day Lakshmi gave birth to a calf. The man with whom Lakshmi used to stay brought her with her progeny and left them in the Ashram for good. Lakshmi, with her three calves, came into the Hall and lay down by the sofa. Bhagavan saw her and said: "All these days Lakshmi had to go in the evening to the town and she was always leaving in tears. Today she is delighted for she need not go away any more. She knows that her home is here now. We have to look after her. Look at her. With what self-assurance she has stretched herself out!"

One year I had to go to Ramnad and my train was in the evening. At noon I asked for Bhagavan's permission to leave. "Why do you ask so early?" enquired Bhagavan.

I said, "Lest I should forget to ask for it in the hurry of departure."

Bhagavan laughed and turning to Sri G. V. Subbaramaiah, remarked: "There is a *sloka* for it." He then recited a Sanskrit verse which runs: "O, my Lord, at the time of leaving this world I may not remember your name, so I am pleading with you now. Take charge of me at the time of my death."

In the end, I could not go that night. The next morning when I was serving the breakfast *iddlies*, Bhagavan said to Sri Subbaramaiah: "Look at her. She took my permission to go, but she did not ask for permission to stay."

In the early days of the Ashram, a pariah (a man of the lower caste) used to stand near the well and accompany Bhagavan whenever he would go up the hill. One day Bhagavan called him near and said: "Go on repeating 'Shiva, Shiva'." It was very unusual for an untouchable to receive this kind of initiation. He could never have secured it without Bhagavan's infinite grace. After that the man disappeared.

Once a *sannyasi* came and stayed in the Ashram for three weeks. On the last day he came near Bhagavan and said: "Swami, I am satisfied in every way with my stay in the Ashram. Now I pray, fill my heart." Bhagavan got up and held the *sannyasin's* hands. They stood thus for a long time. Then the *sannyasi* prostrated before Bhagavan and said: "Now I am blessed." With that he departed. Thus would Bhagavan give enlightenment with a word, a look, a touch or in deep silence.

In those days, before Bhagavan took his meals he would go around and see if all the animals, like dogs and birds, had been properly fed. Then he would go and see if the cattle were looked after well. Even *iddlies* had to be given to the cows and calves. Sometimes the Ashram *iddlies* were all eaten up by the cows and we had to send to the town for more, lest Bhagavan should reproach us for stingy cooking. Then he would see that the beggars at the Ashram gate were also fed. If there was no bean soup (*rassam*) ready for the beggars, to go with their rice, he would order *sambar* to be distributed.

During the *Kartikai* festival beggars from all over South India would collect at Tiruvannamalai in vast crowds and they would flock to the Ashram for an assured meal. Once they became so unruly that the attendants refused to serve them. The matter was discussed among the workers and it was decided to abandon the distribution of food to beggars. That night I had the following dream: Bhagavan's Hall was full of devotees. On the sofa appeared a small creature which gradually grew until it became a huge, bright-red horse. The horse went round the Hall, sniffing at each devotee in turn. I was afraid he would come near me, but the horse went to Bhagavan, licked him all over the body and disappeared. Bhagavan called me near and asked me not to be afraid. A divine perfume emanated from him. He said: "Don't think it is an ordinary horse. As soon as the flags are hoisted at Arunachaleshwara Temple for the *Kartikai* festival, gods come down to partake in the celebrations. They join the crowd and some mix with the beggars at the Ashram gate. So never stop feeding *sadhus* and beggars at festivals." I told the dream to Chinnaswami Swami, and that day he ordered seven measures of rice to be cooked for the beggars. - *(To be continued)*

- From Ramana Smrti Souvenir

1999 Desk Calendars of Sri Ramana Maharshi

The 1999 Desk Calendar depicts seven outstanding portrait photographs of Sri Ramana Maharshi which were taken by Mr. G. G. Welling of Bangalore in 1946.

It measures 9 1/4 inch square, showing two months on each page, with the current month displayed simultaneously on both the front and back of the calendar. This handsome calendar was professionally designed and offset printed in a limited edition on matte art card.

Verses from *Upadesa Saram* are quoted on each page.
Price: $9.00, Plus $2.00 Shipping

Ellam Ondre (All is One)

In our last issue we documented how Sri Bhagavan took particular interest in the study of this small Tamil book, Ellam Ondre. Below are the third and forth chapters of the six chapter text.

Chapter III - GOD

1. Who is God? God is He who has transcended all that is seen by us. If transcending this world, is there no relation between Him and this world? Not a particle here is unrelated to Him. Then what is meant by transcending the world? The world comprises us and the objects seen by us. In other words, the animate and inanimate together form the world. What shall we say of Him who created the beings and things? Of these two, we say the conscious beings to be superior. All that we can apprehend is that He belongs to the highest order of beings known to us. Our intellect cannot proceed further. Thus, our Creator is superior to us; He cannot be apprehended by our intellect; therefore His Name, Transcended Being, "Kadawul," means that He surpasses our intellect. Hence His Name is "Kadawul" - Transcended Being.

2. Can God then not be made known to us? Not quite so. In a way, He is known to us. This much of His Grace is enough for us. We have no need for all His Greatness. He has made known so much of His Greatness as will suffice to eradicate our misery. There is no reason for Him to reveal a jot more of His Power than is necessary to remedy our defects in the present state. Thus He is known according to our needs. Nay, He is in our grasp. However limitless, He is within reach of our knowledge to some extent.

3. What is it which brings Him within reach of our knowledge? That He is known as Being-Consciousness-Bliss.

Being denotes that which is imperishable, that which exists forever. Should He become non-existent at any time, who is His Destroyer? Who created Him? Since the perishable nature of all leads to the inference that they are lorded over by One who is imperishable, this immortal Overlord is God. His imperishable nature is Being (Sat).

Now, what is Consciousness (Chit)? By Consciousness we mean knowledge. This is absolute Knowledge, and not like our erring intellectual knowledge. Irregularity or mistake cannot stain its actions. It is Knowledge, pure and simple. Frequently He teaches us saying, "Your knowledge is irregular and erring." How orderly are even the insentient objects of His creation! It is known to many how an atheist was taught a good lesson when he

derided the scheme of things saying, "Why did He make the seed so small for the *banyan* tree which is so big?" That an insentient thing is found in good order and later becomes useful, implies a conscious agency at work. Can a simple, insentient thing do something which is possible for unfailing knowledge only? Or, can't it be done by our inadequate knowledge? No, it can never be. Therefore God is said to be Consciousness (Chit) also.

Now, what is Bliss? It is the state of being free from desire for anything. It is Peace which is ever full. Were He to desire anything, how could He be better than ourselves? How could we gain Bliss from Him? He Himself would require another being to fulfil His desires. But who would think Him to be so? The state of self-contentment is that of Bliss also. Therefore He is called Bliss (*Ananda*).

The three-Being, Consciousness and Bliss-are inseparable; otherwise, they would become naught individually. Hence, He is known as Being-Consciousness-Bliss (*Satchitananda*). Thus God remains not only transcendent but also falls within the reach of our knowledge as Being-Consciousness-Bliss.

4. He who has gained the fourth state and sees all as one, only he knows God truly as Being-Consciousness-Bliss. Words cannot express nor the ears hear how such a one is united with God; it is a matter of realization. But there are ways and means for such realization. They can be spoken of, learned and acted upon.

5. He who can be realized thus, is God. He has no name; we give Him a name. He has no form; we give Him a form. Where is the harm in doing so? What name is not His, or what form is not His? Where is the sound or form in which He is not? Therefore, in the absence of true knowledge of Him you can name Him as you please or imagine Him as of any form so to remember Him. Your hope for His Grace without any effort on your part is utterly fruitless. Should it be possible to have His Grace without any effort on your side, all would be alike; there would be no reason for any difference. He has shown us the ways and means. Make effort, reach the goal, be happy. Your idleness and selfishness make you expect His Grace without your effort. The rule for all is for you too. Do not relax your efforts. God can be realized by your effort only.

6. There is an effort which excels all others. This may, however, appear to be less effective than devotion to God with name and form. Nevertheless, this is the more efficient. It is simply the love which you extend to all beings, whether good or bad. In the absence of such love to all, your devotion to God amounts to a mere parody. Of what use are you to God? That you seek fulfilment of your desires from God without doing your duty towards the needy in the world must be attributed to your selfishness. In God's presence, there is no use for such. The workings that take place in His presence are all unselfish. Therefore, think that all the Centres are His and He is in all the Centres and thus be devoted to Him. God is truly bound by such high devotion.

7. As you go on ascribing names and forms to God and showing love to all because you have understood all names and forms to be His, your mind will gradually mature. Just as the taste improves with the ripening of a fruit, so also you will recognise the waxing of good and the waning of evil in you. As your mind matures, there will come a time when you should meet your Master. This is not to say that you go in search of him or he comes in search of you. At the right time the meeting will happen. All are moving in their own ways. Your fitness brings you together, makes you trust him, makes him teach you the right way, also makes you follow the his instructions. That is the straight way to reach God, which is to gain the fourth state. You will follow the way and reach your goal which is Being-Consciousness-Bliss, which is God.

8. The way shown by the Master is final, straight and making for unity. It is well-tried, natural, and free from pain. When you are following the way shown by the master, doubts will not arise; there will be no fear. Are not

fear and doubt the characteristics of the ways of darkness? How can they meet you in the way of Truth shown by the Master? In this manner, the way will itself speak to you and say that it is the right one. In that way, there will be nothing more for you to do but to meet your Master and learn from him. That way will be familiar to you, as the Master and God have made it so. Before you, he had treaded the way. He has shown you the way and you are following him. To how many will you show the same way? And how many more will follow the same way later? Obviously fear and doubt have no place in the way of truth. When once you have taken a step forward you will step back. The master's help is only for the first step forward. You need not do anything for your master in order to have the way shown to you. Know him to be the messenger of God sent down to disclose the way to the fit who have become ripe by their own efforts in either or both the directions mentioned earlier. It is God who sends this godly messenger just when you are ripe.

9. Practice with faith in the period of ignorance is called *Bhakti*; the same, with knowledge, is called *Jnana*. Of the two divisions of *Bhakti*, the one is devotion to God with name and form, and the other is karma which is love for all. Of the two divisions of *Jnana*, the practice of the true way shown by the Master is called yoga and the resulting state is called *Jnana*. It is natural for all to believe in something which is not seen and then to find it. Those who do not believe can never find. Therefore, the believers will gain something sometime or other and the unbelievers never gain anything. You can believe even for the simple reason that faith in God is not harmful. Thereby you can share the good effects. This world is meant only for creating faith in you. This is the purpose of creation. Have faith and you can reach God.

10. Though you may not believe all that is said of God, believe at least "There is God." This seed is very potent in its growth. It is so mighty as to negate all else and fill all by itself. It is so almighty that you will not see anything besides God, not even yourself. Truly, God is all.

Chapter IV - Peace

1. What is peace? Although the world persists when a man is in deep sleep, does he have any cares concerning it? His mind is tranquil and refreshed. Should his mind be in the same degree calm and refreshed even when he is face to face with the world and is active therein, then there is peace.

2. Can the mind remain so even when the world confronts us? It depends upon our estimate of the world. The mind is more excited when one's own property is plundered than when another's property is similarly plundered. Of one's own things, the loss of one thing causes greater concern than those of another. Why? Because our estimate of the things is the cause of the degree of the delight or anxiety concerning them. Therefore, should one learn to regard all equally, the mind will be extremely peaceful. Or should all things be considered as our own and highly prized, then too there is no cause for pain. Why? What will a man regret? The mind which knows that universal concern is beyond its capacity, must needs become tranquil. Also when one feels that one has no claim on anything or that everything is perishable, the mind will remain cool. Thus there will be lasting peace if one looks on all as of the same value. Peace is dependent upon one's intellectual appraisals.

3. I shall now illustrate this. A man wakes up from a dream. His mind is happy or troubled according to his opinion of the things seen in the dream. But on waking, his mind remains unaffected by all the happenings in the dream; it remains the same. Why? Because, only now his mind has learned to value all the matters of the dream equally. He is not sorry for the cessation of the dream. Why? He is convinced that the dream is not everlasting and must end on waking. In the same manner, should a man be convinced that he cannot but wake up sometime from the long dream of the world, his mind will be unchanging. It is the state of freshness. This is the state of Peace.

4. This is not to say that his relation with the world will cease. Now only peace and freshness of the mind are his. His actions cannot but vary according to circumstances. The only change in him after the mind has become peaceful is this: his mind has known the truth and become unattached; therefore, it rests in peace. His actions though changeful will always be impartial. But the actions of others are changing and cannot be impartial. Thus, the coolness of the mind produces enormous good not only to himself but also to the world at large. Peace shows the way to right conduct.

5. A man walks with a lighted lamp in his hand. Can there be any hostility between the light and the ups and downs on the way? There cannot be. But light and darkness cannot be together. The light chases away darkness, it discloses the ups and downs on the way and makes the man walk carefully, whether he moves up, down, or sideways. It removes the cause of vain complaints, such as, "That snag hurt my foot" or "This hollow made me slip." Similarly, after peace is gained, the state of peace makes the man neither hate nor antagonise the world. Rather it dispels the darkness which conceals from our view the true nature of the world and its snags. In the absence of the light of Peace which enables people to adjust themselves to varying circumstances, they condemn the world as full of misery, as they would complain of the snags on the road. Therefore a man who has gained the utmost peace after knowing the whole world as a complicated dream, should not be considered either unrelated to the world or unconcerned with its activities; he alone stands in effective concord with it; only he is competent to be a man of action. Thus Peace is that which regulates one's duties.

6. The concern of a man of Peace in the actions of the world lies in rectifying them. Should he feel fear before this world, what hope of reformation can there be, especially from those who esteem it and want to possess it? They are in the grip of selfishness, blind to impartiality. To guide the blind on the way or treat the blindness of the eye, one's eyesight must itself be good. Similarly, it is for him to reform the world who has already discerned his unchanging nature from the changeful nature of the world and become peaceful. These cannot help serving the world. Why? Can anyone be so hard hearted as not to lift up a child when it slips and falls? So also for the wise ones who can rightly appraise the troubles of the world and help the people. Because he has already withdrawn himself from the mind and body the sage feels no concern under the strain of service to the world, just as the life principle does not suffer even when loaded carts pass over the corpse it has left behind (by itself). He will not shrink from work or trouble. Only truly realized peace can bestow such courage and coolness.

7. To all appearances. Peace will look poor and quite weak. But in effect, it beats all. In tenacity and courage, it surpasses all. After all, success depends on these qualities. Even if Mount Meru should topple over, the incident will hardly produce a gentle smile in the man of peace, or it will leave him unmoved. This state is helpful both for worldly and spiritual matters. True happiness in the world is his, and that happiness comes out of release from bondage. Peace means doing good to any one in any manner.

8. The obstacles to peace are several. They are meant to prove the man. When they confront us we should be wide awake and keep the delicate flower of the mind distant from even their shadows. If the flower of the mind be crushed, it will lose its fragrance, freshness and colour; it will neither be useful to you, nor can it be presented to others, nor offered to God. Know that your mind is more delicate than even a blossom. By means of a peaceful mind, all your duties to yourself, to others and to God must be discharged. Let it release the same freshness throughout. All blessings for the mind are contained in Peace.

9. Unremittingly worship the God of your Self with the flower of your mind. Let the children of the mental modes watch this worship. Gradually they will learn to cast away their childish pranks and desire to delight like yourself. As they watch your Peace, they will themselves recoil from their vagaries. Continue the worship

patiently. Be not led away by the vagaries of the mind. On the contrary, they should become peaceful by your peace. All must get peace.

10. I shall finish in one word: The essence of all the Vedas is "Peace."

- (To be continued)

The Journey of My Heart

By Evelyn Kaselow Saphier

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam

January 11, 1983: In my room this afternoon, Ramaswami was once again spoke of the greatness of Self-Enquiry. "There, you have so many activities (meaning me as an individual). That is why you do not rigorously practice Self-Enquiry. But once your activities are less, the method will come to you very naturally. At that time you will be surprised at how natural and effective it is, and you will regret that you didn't take to it earlier." These words were unsettling to me. "How can I most effectively practice Sri Bhagavan's teaching?" I asked myself again and again. During meditation His Name quelled my thoughts and I felt at peace.

January 16, 1983: This morning the temple drummers awoke me at 4 a.m. and when I realised that the images of Sri Arunachaleswara and his consort were coming around the hill I quickly jumped into slacks and shawl and ran up to the road. The images wended their way through pitch blackness, illumined only by bright torches and accompanied by horn and drums. At the Ashram, offerings were made and, during the *arati* before the Ashram gate, I took a photo. This caught the eye of a man nearer to the offering plate than I. He motioned for the priest to come to me; he gave me the *vibhuti* which I received with reverence. I remembered how Bhagavan, on such an occasion, remarked, "The son is beholden to the Father," and I felt that somehow Sri Arunachaleswara, the Father, knowing my extreme need of His grace, singled me out among the hundred or so people at the roadside to receive the sacred ash.

Paul and I recorded the Vedic recitations of Kittu and Appuchi in Muruganar's (Paul's) room. After the taping was finished, we presented them with letters of appreciation and gifts. We read out our letters to them which described the inspiration we gain by listening to their recitation of the Vedas and the *Sri Chakra Puja* year after year, and how we derive from them the inspiration to carry on our lives in Sri Bhagavan's Name. Kittu spoke with such humility and sincerity: "Here we are very gratified and happy that you listen to and appreciate the Vedic recitations. There are so many here, so many sit quietly, yet we find no one who does the practice as all of you from Arunachala Ashrama do.

Kittu described how he and Appuchi were boys in the first *Veda Patasala* founded by Major Chadwick. They would recite before Bhagavan in the Old Hall in the mornings at 5 a.m. and again in the afternoon. During the day, Bhagavan would walk out toward the *goshala* and the *Veda Patasala* and inquire after their welfare. Thus they received his grace in a personal way. When Kittu saw we had presented him with a *dhoti* he reminisced how each year Major Chadwick would present all the boys in the school with fresh clothes.

Appuchi wished to hear us recite a few names of "Sri Lalitasahasranam." Paul and I happily obliged.

Kittu and Appuchi took our leave. As they slowly walked, side by side, across the yard in front of the Old Hall

I followed their path intently with my eyes and wished to always remember the image of these two humble, lifelong servants of Bhagavan .

Around 6 p.m. Kunju Swami and Natesan came to Muruganar's room to recite "Sri Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai." Kunju Swami then spoke movingly of Bhagavan and His relation with Sri Arunachala: "'Arunachala, Arunachala' repeated within Bhagavan's mind from his youth. He wrote, 'From the age of innocence it had shone within my mind that Arunachala was something of surpassing grandeur.' Sri Bhagavan's *Arunachala-sphurana* was the cause of his seeming absent mindedness at school. Sri Arunachala, within, was pulling his mind to the center. People say that Bhagavan had no teacher, but he himself has written, 'Making me free from faults and endowing me with virtues, accept me as Thy devotee, O Arunachala, that shinest as the Guru!' Normally, when a person receives a pencil or pen he will first write his own name. Bhagavan, however, would always write 'Arunachala' - Arunachala was his Name! Arunachala is none other than the Supreme Self. This he proclaims in "Navamanimalai" and again in "Sri Arunachala Pancharatna," verse 1: 'Although Siva is motionless He dances before the Mother (*Shakti*) who stands still in the Court of Chidambaram. But know that that *Shakti* is withdrawn into His unmoving Self and He stands in His grandeur as the towering Arunachala.' And in stanza 2, 'When one inquires into the meaning of Arunachala which is lustrous like red gold and bestows liberation, one finds that the word 'Aruna' means Sat, Chit and *Ananda* (existence, consciousness and bliss).'

- (To be continued)

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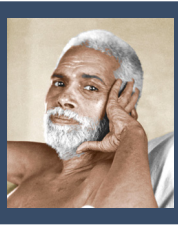

Eternal Bhagavan

By Shantammal - Part III

When I first came to Bhagavan, I saw a bright light, like the sun, and Bhagavan was in the midst of it. Later on I used to see a light between my eyebrows. Once I saw a big light come out from Bhagavan's head and fill the hall. In that light everything disappeared, including Bhagavan. Only the feeling of 'I' was floating in the luminous void.

When I related these experiences to Bhagavan, he said: "Yes, such visions do occur. To know how you look you must look into a mirror, but don't take that reflection to be yourself. What is perceived by our senses and mind is never the truth. All visions are mere mental creations, and if you believe in them, your progress ceases. Inquire to whom the visions occur, who is their witness. Free from all thoughts, stay in pure awareness. Out of that don't move."

When I cooked, Bhagavan would come to the kitchen to taste the food and see whether the seasoning was just right. Once he said: "The Maharajas employ special taste experts and pay them huge salaries. I wonder what will be my pay."

"I am a beggar, Bhagavan, and all a beggar can offer is her life," I said, and Bhagavan nodded lovingly.

One of the visitors was leaving the Ashram. He stood before Bhagavan with folded hands and prayed: "I am going far away. I do not know when I shall be coming back, and if at all I shall be allowed to see your holy face again in this life. I am so much less fortunate than those who have the benefit of your constant presence. How can you help me, a sinner in a distant corner of the world, unless you think of me? I implore you, give me a place in your mind."

Bhagavan replied: "A *Jnani* has no mind. How can one without a mind remember or even think? This man goes somewhere and I have to go there and look after him? Can I keep on remembering all these prayers? Well, I shall transmit your prayer to the Lord of the Universe. He will look after you. It is His business."

After the devotee departed, Bhagavan turned towards us and said: "People imagine that the devotees crowding around a *Jnani* get special *favours* from him. If a guru shows partiality, how can he be a *Jnani*? Is he so foolish as to be flattered by people's attendance on him and the service they do? Does distance matter? The guru is pleased with him only who gives himself up entirely, who abandons his ego forever. Such a man is taken care of wherever he may be. He need not pray. God looks after him unasked. The frog lives by the side of the fragrant lotus, but it is the bee who gets the honey."

One day, when I was still new in the kitchen, I served Bhagavan with a few more pieces of potato than the rest. Bhagavan noticed it and got very angry with me. He turned his face away and would not look at those who were serving food. I could not make out the cause of his anger and wondered who it was who had offended him. The women who worked in the kitchen would collect around him to take leave of him in the evening after the work was over. Usually he would exchange a few words with us, inquire who was accompanying

us, whether we had a lantern, and so on. That evening he gave me a sign to come near.

"What did you do tonight?"

"I don't know, Swami, have I done something wrong?

"You served me more curry than others."

"What does it matter? I did it with love and devotion."

"I felt ashamed to eat more than others. Have you come all this way to stuff me with food? You should always serve me less than others."

"But, Bhagavan, how can I treat you worse than others?"

"Is this the way to please me? Do you hope to earn grace through a potato curry?"

"Out of my love for you I committed a blunder. Forgive me, Bhagavan, I shall respect your wishes."

"The more you love my people, the more you love me," said Bhagavan, and the matter was closed. A good lesson was learned and never forgotten.

Two devotees of Swami Vilakshananda, a husband and wife, came to Bhagavan. They told Bhagavan that their guru had asked them to repeat Rama's name constantly and surrender the merit of it at the guru's feet. Bhagavan laughed, and said: "If the guru takes the benefit, what remains with the devotee? It is like keeping the capital, but abandoning the interest." Muruganar, who was present, said: "Their guru takes the name, which the interest, and leaves the mind, which is the capital. Bhagavan robs us of both the interest and the capital." As he talked tears were flowing in a stream from his eyes.

Two women came from Kumbakonam to meet Bhagavan. One of them was a guru and the other her disciple. They were leaving by train the same evening. In the afternoon the disciple brought her guru into the Hall and made an elaborate seat for her in front of Bhagavan. Every now and then the disciple would go up to Bhagavan's sofa and whisper. "In everything, she is just like you, Swami ... she is in the same state as yourself.... Please let us have your blessings.... Will you teach us briefly the path of salvation? What is attachment? How to be free from Maya?" She was going on like this for quite a long time. Bhagavan never replied. Evening was nearing. The disciple felt hurt. "Swami, please instruct us ... Swami, proceed with initiation quickly, it is getting late.... Be quick, Swami. You know we have to catch the train. Hurry!" The poor lady was getting desperate. "At least tell us something. They all speak of ignorance, what is ignorance?" Bhagavan turned to Muruganar and, in his mercy, said: "Ask her to inquire within. Who is ignorant?" Muruganar told them: "Now you go, your initiation is over." And they went away.

Bhagavan talked about it later: "Everything must be done in a hurry. Everybody has some train to catch. They visit Swami in a rush and want to carry away a parcel of liberation. They read something here and there and think they are quite learned." (Whenever there was a chance to snub our ego, Bhagavan would never miss it). He continued: "Before the people come here, everyone has the most sincere desire to work for his own liberation, but when they settle down, the ego goes to their heads and they forget why they came. They imagine they are doing me great service by feeding me and think altogether too much of themselves. The feeling of self-importance that they have when they serve their guru destroys their hope of enlightenment. Only humility can destroy the ego. The ego keeps you far away from God. The door to God is open, but the lintel is very low. To enter one has to bend. Are you doing me greater service than the man who for years was like my shadow? What was the good of it? The same man went to court against me and got me cross-examined! Even if a trace of ego is left in the mind it will rapidly increase and ruin you spiritually." - *(To be concluded)*

- from Ramana Smrti Souvenir

Ellam Ondre (All is One)

In our Sep/Oct 98 issue we documented how Sri Bhagavan took particular interest in the study of this small Tamil book, Ellam Ondre. Below is the fifth chapter of the six chapter text.

Chapter V - ACTION

1. All action is God's. His power has fixed each thing into its own individual function. By His agency the insentient objects and the sentient beings do their work. All actions are His.

2. All are doing their respective work. So what has God to do with it? We will first consider the sentient beings and, later on, the insentient objects. We are sentient beings. Let us first see whose actions are ours. We all desire a higher state and work for it. But our achievements are not uniform. Sometimes the goal is the same and so is the work, but why is there a difference in the results? Here God makes us understand that the action is His. Otherwise all must be alike. The difference in the conditions cannot be accounted for. Can there be anyone who does not wish to improve his position? Whatever their intention towards others, their intention towards themselves is surely honest. The conditions of people of the same intention are yet different. This is because all actions are of God.

3. All beings have the same intention; yet their efforts are of different degrees, so also their states. After saying this, the question arises: What is effort? Is it not simply a mental image? All these images have the same origin, namely, the common intention of all. Why then should the image of effort differ in each? Here too God makes us see that all actions are His.

4. If it is said that notwithstanding the same intention, the effort can vary according to individual capacity, the question arises: What is the source of this capacity? It is of the body and mind. The environment may also affect it. One must take account of all the factors before one makes an effort. However, these factors are not under one's control so that the effort may not be equal to the task. Therefore all actions are God's.

5. Again, if it is said that the body, the mind and the environment will gradually be made equal to the task, it implies a present incapacity. This is to admit that all actions are God's.

6. Now, is it for good or bad that people do not gain their objectives? It is certainly good. Why? Most of them are selfish. Judge for yourself if their success is for the good of the world or otherwise. You may ask: Should not the attempts of the unselfish be entirely successful? Though to all appearances they may look unselfish, yet they are not free from blemishes. These depend on the ego. If the imagined unselfishness has given rise to a sense of superiority over others, God frustrates their purpose and teaches them that "You are also like others and I govern you". On the other hand, free from selfishness and free from ego is the representative of God, within whom the cloud of ego that conceals God does not exist and from whom God is ever shining forth. To such a one of true purpose (*Sattva Sankalpa*) all his intentions come out true. God shines forth directly in him. There is no darkness in him. Only he knows the Divine purpose as it is. Through him God fulfils the purpose of His creation. All actions are God's.

7. If it is asked: Is there not a single person of true intent? And why should not the world have all blessings in full? The answer, which is a secret, is that the sages who are aware that all actions are God's, wish to make it known to others as well. There is no greater good than to know that all actions are God's and not our own. This knowledge contains all the blessings in itself. Therefore the intention of the sages is to clearly instruct

others in the knowledge of God and His actions. Even so, they do not say "Know God this very instant," but they teach the ways and means to knowledge and encourage us in right conduct-this much only. They do not say, "Be emancipated at once." Why? Because this is not possible for the common people. Nor do the sages say to God, "Liberate the people at once." Because the sages are free from the ego and think, "God knows what He should do and when to do it. What is there for me to say to Him?" Thus they wish only to do their work, without any interest in the fruits this work may produce. They have known that God alone dispenses the fruits of actions. Simply they watch the course of events in the world and do their work, never thinking of creating a world of their own. Why? To do so is a form of egoism. The creation is as it should be. Everything is in order. All actions are God's.

8. Knowing their actions are subservient to the Higher Power, how could they hope to achieve something dear to their hearts? No, they cannot. They will do their work simply as a duty. The scriptures say, "Do work, but do not think of its fruits." Just as anger unconsciously overpowers a man even though he is determined not to get angry, so also the sages of true intent (*Sattva Sankalpa*) may be shocked by the iniquities of the world and unwittingly think, "God, let that be made good!" If so, then it will certainly happen and good will prevail. This is the cause of some extraordinary events in the world. These extraordinary events are the results of a wish stealing into the mind of a sage. This is the law of nature. Who can change it? All actions are God's.

9. Whatever takes place, it is in the natural order of things. Also, it is right. Everything happens by His will alone. In truth, it is not wrong to think "He makes the thief steal." Why? Because at the time of punishment He also makes the thief suffer for the robbery. Thus, there should be no ill-will directed towards the thief. Such is the fruit of the knowledge that all actions are God's. Although there is no ill-will towards the thief, there is a dislike of theft. This is also the result of our knowledge that all actions are God's. How is this? Because the thief himself dislikes theft: Would he keep quiet if his own belongings were stolen by another? He would not. Who can be unaware that good is right and evil is wrong? Therefore the knowledge that all actions are God's will bring into the world an era of orderly conduct. Our knowledge does not extend further. We can repeat only what we know. We need not worry about what lies beyond our knowledge. This too is God's will.

10. One of the fruits of knowledge granted to us by God is the knowledge that all actions are God's. We are powerless to ask God, "Why do you act thus?" Because the fruits of our actions are not always according to our desire, all religions admit similar states of our powerlessness. In other words, because our powers are limited, we cannot but say that all actions are God's. The law which applies to us, applies to insentient objects also. Our law is no better than theirs. All is one. Even though some do not admit that all actions are God's, yet they admit their own incapacity. This itself is the act of God.

- (To be concluded)

The Journey of My Heart

By Evelyn Kaselow Saphier

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam

January 19, 1983: Today I met again with Ramaswami Pillai and we talked for two hours.

"Do you think it is important that we live with few possessions?" I asked him.

"You must not make an effort to live with or without possessions. You must live with the conditions that prevail. The mental state alone is important. However, you must not have or be a slave to any want. Really,

you only should have what is necessary for keeping body and soul together, and in good health. Also, you should not associate with all kinds of people."

Then he again spoke of the path of Self-Inquiry: "In the path of surrender, the ego can very easily remain. However, Bhagavan has said that real surrender can come only when we know, 'Who am I?'."

"You have convinced me that I must try to do Self-Inquiry in a serious way," I replied.

"I shall miss Paul and you," he said. "As a boy, I would beg our guests, 'Take me with you!' I would run down the road after them, crying, until I felt satisfied. During Bhagavan's time I would have to accompany devotees to the train. I especially loved those devotees."

This afternoon at 5 p.m.. Kunju Swami, Natesan and I climbed the hill. Rather than follow the path to Skandashram, we took the path to the left and sat together on a rock. Kunju Swami told me, as if a deep voice from within me spoke, "When a person follows the path of devotion, obstacles will arise." In his own life, the moment he saw Bhagavan's picture he had a great desire to come to Bhagavan. At that time, his teacher, a man with whom he was studying Kaivalya Navaneeta and other works, vehemently opposed his going to Bhagavan. He even threatened that some ill would befall him if he went to Bhagavan. In course of time, the teacher had to go away and Kunju Swami without his knowing, came to Bhagavan. Ultimately, the teacher also came, realised Sri Bhagavan's greatness and entrusted Kunju Swami lovingly to Bhagavan's care.

"If your *lakshya* (aim or goal) is Bhagavan alone, everything else will fall into place," Kunju Swami emphasised, "but there will be obstacles. If your *lakshya* is something small or trivial, it may be missed, but if your aim is the Mountain-which is so great-you cannot miss it. Be like the Mountain-calm, immovable!

"Now, a worldly example: we have Sri Ramanasramam. While all sorts of things may happen in the Ashram, it is not run by any individual. Sri Bhagavan's divine *shakti* alone runs the Ashram. Similarly, in any of Bhagavan's Ashrams, no single individual runs the Ashram. Regardless of whoever may leave, Sri Bhagavan will continue His work and the Ashram will also continue.

"In this context, your attitude toward all humanity should be one of brotherhood and of natural and spontaneous friendliness. You should not hate or harbour a single bad thought for anyone, nor should you allow a single thought about whether or not someone likes you. It is completely immaterial.

"Whoever comes or goes, an Ashram established in the Name of Sri Bhagavan and Sri Arunachala must grow! There is not the least doubt about it!

"I have admired Bhagawat," he continued, "I wondered what *tapasya* he must have done to attract such people as you. And to send you all here! (It is remarkable!) Yet, whatever happens you must remember your Lakshya of Sri Arunachala and be calm with your mind at the feet of Bhagavan."

January 20, 1983: Ramaswami shared with me a few details about his personal life. He came to Bhagavan at the age of 25. At the age of 31 or 32 he was living in a temple in a village when he became mad with ecstasy. He said, "It was evening about 6 o'clock when I had that first experience. I was surprised, not shocked. There was Consciousness-as though I was being told, 'This is what you sought.' It lasted only a few minutes at first. Later, the experience would return. 'What is the meaning of this coming and going of this experience,' I thought, 'I want it when I want it!' Then, I got it. I was in that state for three months. I was like a mad fellow

wearing a dirty loin cloth and I didn't bathe. I wouldn't enter into any houses. If I got some hunger I would beg for food.... 'Happy' is not the word to express that state; 'Ecstatic' is also inadequate. That experience is still there with me, like an undercurrent. Some devotees came and took to Bhagavan. At that time I got the confirmation that it is 'That'. I came with only one loincloth and ate in His presence. When I arrived he was sitting on the sofa, and it somehow appeared to me as if he was sitting there waiting for me."

"...if I am Bhagavan's devotee, to deal with me is more dangerous than to deal with Bhagavan! I may forgive, but Bhagavan will not....

"Your business is with the thinker-not with thoughts. Whenever your attention is given to thoughts, you must return it to the thinker."

Ramaswami turned his attention to my picture of Bhagavan and said, "You may become calm and peaceful by looking into Bhagavan's eyes. In the Hall we would sit and gaze on his eyes; he would not blink. It is something like a child sucking from the mother's breast. The child is not exactly awake-it is blissful. It ingests the milk without swallowing. The mother's love is so great; the milk flows in a current to the child. In this same manner, we receive the current (of grace) from Bhagavan's eyes. Bhagavan's grace is so great, you cannot escape it!"

January 20, 1983 - Afternoon: With bananas and puffed rice in hand I ran up to the Ashram for an ox cart *pradakshina* with Kunju Swami, Ganesan and Paul. Climbing aboard, the four of us sat cross legged: Ganesan first, then Kunju Swami, me, and Paul at the back. Side-by-side we bumped blissfully down the road.

Kunju Swami explained how it could be that many of Bhagavan's direct disciples, apparently out of their mind at the time of death, would be alert and clear in their recollection of Bhagavan. Moreover, they would reassure Ganesan that Bhagavan's grace was with them and they experienced the awareness of Him within.

The mere contact with Bhagavan was sufficient to awaken Divine Knowledge in a person. Kunju Swami said, "Knowledge of the world is a separate thing, which may be affected at the time of death. The inner awakening might not be apparent during one's life due to the person's *vasanas*. Particularly in one's last days many *vasanas* may have to come forth. The mind may become irrational, but it is the finite mind."

Kunju Swami reassured us, "Don't think that because you didn't see Bhagavan in the body that same inner awakening has not occurred to you. It is written, even to think of Arunachala assures one of liberation! But, for thinking of Arunachala, YOU do not get the credit!" He was speaking in a playful, exuberant vein. "No! Arunachala makes the person remember Him. Such is the power and greatness of Arunachala that even the most ignorant person, once having known of it, will have to think at least once a day of Arunachala."

Kunju Swami continued his encouraging overflow: "Once a person has come to Bhagavan, he cannot escape! In the "Marital Garland of Letters" Bhagavan wrote, 'I had but thought of you as Arun, and lo! I was caught in the net of your grace. Can the web of your grace ever fail, Oh Arunachala?' In Tamil, the emphasis here is on the fact that the net of Bhagavan's grace 'cannot' be escaped!"

"I am very happy and content to be caught in the net of His grace," I said. Kunju Swami laughed.

- (To be continued)

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THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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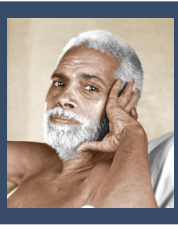

Eternal Bhagavan

By Shantammal - Part IV

In the kitchen, there were no proper jars for foodstuffs and everything was kept in tins and pots which would leak and spill and make the floor in the kitchen mucky and slippery. Once I scrubbed the kitchen floor very carefully and Bhagavan congratulated me on the neatness in the kitchen. I sighed: "What is the use, Swami. People will come and spill the oil and scatter the flour and it will return to how it was before. We must have proper jars and containers." Ten days later they called me to the Hall. Attendants were opening wooden boxes and there were six beautiful jars. "You wanted jars, now you have jars. Take them to the kitchen," said Bhagavan. On inquiry it was found that some station master had booked them to the Ashram for no ostensible reason.

Such mysterious coincidences happened almost daily, both at the Ashram and in the homes of the devotees. Unless one is himself a witness, one cannot easily believe it, and I found it difficult to convince others that it all happened in front of me, so to say. Such things happen even now. The other day I was taking a lady visitor to the Ashram. I did not feel well and wanted to go home and have some change from eating the Ashram rice, but I stayed for the lady's sake, though I did not eat. That day Subbalakshmi did not stay for food, went home, made some wheat cakes, packed them in a leaf, brought them to the Ashram and gave them to me to eat. She told me that she did not know why and for whom she was baking the cakes until I ate them up. To me it was clearly Bhagavan's care, but can I convince others?

Once I had no money and badly needed some. I prayed silently to Bhagavan: "Ramana, how can I get hold of a little money?" On the third day a money order came for me from one Dr. Srinivasa Rao, whom I did not know. It seems he had been reading Bhagavan's life and on reading the name of "Shantamma" decided that it would be nice to send her some money.

Once we had to fry a big quantity of snake gourd. This vegetable is full of water and the usual way is to squeeze the water out of it to shorten the frying time, but Bhagavan said it should be fried with the water in it. So we sat near the fire, stirring the vegetable in the big iron pan with our long spoons. Suddenly he let go of his spoon and stared, motionless. When I looked at him, my mind stood still. Everything disappeared from before my eyes. After some time he moved and I also moved.

"The curry is noiseless; it is time to add the spices," he said. It could refer to cooking vegetables; it could also refer to his poem, "Aksharamanamalai," in which he addresses Arunachala: "You drugged me with your charm and I woke up full of knowledge." When the curry of the mind is silent, then is the time to add the spice of wisdom.

One day there was talk in the Hall about one of Bhagavan's old devotees who had come under Sri Sai Baba's influence. Bhagavan said: "Once a man has surrendered his life here, he belongs here. Wherever he may go, he shall return. For him this is the door to liberation."

Once a devotee arranged for a big feast for all the inmates and guests of the Ashram. Bhagavan had a bad

cold, and whenever he had a cold he would not take milk or curds or coffee. The people in the kitchen prepared some sweet pancakes served with almond milk. We were all sad that Bhagavan would not touch them. Chinnaswami was, naturally, anxious that the feast should go without a hitch and assured us that Bhagavan would relent. Raja Iyer started serving pancakes to Bhagavan, who asked him: "Are they sweet?"

"No," said Raja Iyer.

"Then put some pepper water." I had the almond milk in hand so I poured it over the cake. Bhagavan flared up: "What I ask for is *rassam* and you serve me milk? Go and get some *rassam*." We had to serve him *rassam* with one more pancake. He mixed it all up-sweet pancakes, almond milk and pepper water and ate this wonderful mixture! After having finished all, he continued complaining: "I ask for one thing and get another. I ask for plain cakes and get sweet ones; I ask for pepper water and get almond milk. You expect the swami to eat as he is told. You seem to know what is best for your swami."

The next day Bhagavan refused to drink coffee. I gave up coffee too, as a penance, and a hard penance it was! A month passed like this. One day I burst out in tears before Bhagavan: "Swami, I did offend you, but there must be an end to punishment. Please have your coffee."

"No, do not think I gave up coffee to punish you. Why should I punish anybody? I gave up coffee because it does not agree with me. Ask the doctor, he will tell you. He advised me to avoid coffee." Then, turning to the audience, Bhagavan added: "It was the same on the hill. I did not take coffee, nobody would touch it and all would curse the swami for depriving them of coffee."

A few days later Janakiamma brought a huge pot of coffee and put it before Bhagavan. "What am I to do now? Coffee has come by itself; nobody asked Janaki to bring it. Now, if I do not drink it, nobody will touch it and Janaki will be sorry." He did taste some of Janaki's coffee and started taking it again soon after that.

You may ask what this storm in a pot of coffee has to do with liberation and realization. Those who have not lived through it cannot appreciate the deep spiritual effect of these anxieties and conflicts. Our 'I' would hurl itself against the rock of truth and the rock would not yield. The 'I' had to yield and in that yielding was the highest blessing. His anger would sometimes seem to shatter us to pieces, and blessed are they indeed who have seen in his wrath his utmost grace.

After serving for years in the kitchen, I became old, my heart got weak, and I could work no longer. I stopped going to the kitchen and I was wondering what to do next. I did not want to eat without working, nor had I any means to live on my own in Tiruvannamalai. So I wanted to go away to a near relative of mine, a doctor who had been inviting me to come and live with him. One night I dreamt that I was taking Bhagavan's leave and fell at his feet. He told me: "Why do you think of going? Who is there in this world to take care of you?" I disregarded the dream and left the Ashram. I reached the doctor's house on a Saturday afternoon. The doctor, who looked quite healthy, died suddenly on Sunday noon. I went to my own place at Ramnad. There too everything went wrong and I felt so miserable that my relatives bought me a ticket and put me on the train for Tiruvannamalai. I have no place in the world except at his feet, nor do I want any other.

To those who would taunt me by saying, "You were for so long with Bhagavan and still are subject to pain and sorrow," my answer would be: "Each time I was in trouble I experienced his grace. My greatest sorrows led me to the highest bliss. Bhagavan makes me and unmakes me; who am I, a simple old woman, to choose when all comes from him only?"

Ellam Ondre (All is One)

In our Sep/Oct 98 issue we documented how Sri Bhagavan took particular interest in the study of this small Tamil book, Ellam Ondre. Below is the sixth and final chapter of the text.

Chapter VI - EGO

1. Oh ego, all the evils of the world are from you. To crush you, the kings make laws and the wise give lessons. In spite of their efforts from time immemorial, alas! you are yet alive; you simply go into hiding and reappear again and again. Can there be no end to you? Yea, it is surely approaching. Another Ego has started to kill you. It is the Universal Ego called "I am Brahman".

2. Eh! ego, think not that your enemy is of your kind. You are perishable whereas He is not. You are conceited as "I" because you always differentiate as "I", "you" and "he," but your enemy is free from this conceit. How? He harmonises all differences, resolves all into Himself. Moreover, you feel enmity towards Him because he has arisen to kill you. But He has no ill-feelings towards you. How is this? Because you are not to be found in His presence. He regards you as a part of His limbs. Your loss in his proximity is the working of your own falsity; He would not think of killing you because you are of no consequence in His sight. Therefore, ego, you are His enemy, but He is not yours. More briefly put, you are your own enemy. Why? Owing to your greed you flaunted yourself before the Great One as you would elsewhere. Instantly, you were lost; therefore, the Universal Self obscures you by devouring you and then shines forth as All-light.

3. Eh! ego, the evils of your works have no limits. You are not content unless you are exalted above others and others are lowered before you. Endless are your desires, such as "By what title shall I gain honour?" "In what form shall I appear elegant?" "Do others bow to me? Do others obey me in silence?" "Do others say that no one excels me?". Alas! How short is your life! And yet to how much do you aspire! And how much evil you do! You have deluded yourself that there is happiness in such ideas and in differentiating yourself from all others. This is not to your good. Why not? Are not others also entitled to all these? What is your share in things which are common to millions and millions of others? Such being the case, do not desire in vain to rule over all. By your vain desire you bring about evil to yourself and to others. Listen to my friendly advice. Truly speaking, He whom you regard as your mortal enemy is your friend. He knows how to make you worthy of true greatness and blessings. Surrender to Him. This Universal Ego does not treat you as an enemy but is your greatest benefactor.

4. By no means can you discover what He will make of you unless you surrender yourself to Him. However much I may speak of it, you cannot understand. It is a matter of experience. Doubtless He will do nothing less than exalt you to His state. Therefore, be not perplexed about your future; directly surrender yourself. You can always turn away if joy does not overtake you from the very instant of surrender. Just as the drinking of milk starts with an agreeable taste and ends with the satisfaction of hunger, so also surrender starts with delight and ends with Perfect Bliss, which lies beyond even pleasure and pain. Therefore your goal, without doubt, is this Universal Ego (I-am-Brahman).

5. What will be your new name after surrender? There is no name besides yours. The Vedas laud you; the world praises you; the essence of religious teachings is yourself. Then what is your form? All forms are yours. There is no form which is not yours. What is installed in the temples of worship is you; what is described in the Vedas is you; festivities and celebrations are all for you. Now what can be your power? In your presence the

world is active; each is what it is, because of you. Briefly said, all things glorify you and bear witness to your being. They are duty bound to do so. You would not have even dreamt that this will be your state. Start at once, be not self-conceited. The Universal Ego awaits you.

6. Do you wish to wake up from your dream or continue in it? How long will the dream images last? Be not idle, shake off your sleep, wake up! You are witnessing your own mental images and imagining more and more. It is all in vain. Just find out who it is that sees the visions. Do not delude yourself that you are these that rise and sink in you. Wake up. The instant you wake up you will know that waking is better than this dream. Get up! The Universal Ego waits to rejoice at seeing you awake.

7. Fear not the cessation of the present ego dream. Once you are awake you will enjoy the same all the more. You will no longer be deluded and will observe it with cheerful detachment, unconfused. The folly of all appearances will be understood and you will have no burdens. In dream your mental imagery assumes shapes. On waking you know the dream as just a dream. Do not mistake dream for the waking state. Know the dream as dream. For doing so, you must reach the state of "I-am-Brahman" (Universal Ego) and wake from the illusion of the ego.

8. I have instructed you for your good and not in my own interest. If you believe me, you should act upon what I have taught you. On the other hand, if you see no good in what I have said, then turn away from this ideal. How can I help you if my advice and all the advice of the saints do not make any impression on you? No state is higher than this. Believe me, it is for your good that you realize this truth; and through you others may realize the same. Be free from self-conceit. Start at once. Realize that the Universal Ego is your own.

9 Oh ego, see how you are a slave to all and therefore suffer. How pitiable is your state! All are hostile to you! When you say "for me only," all others will also contend "for me only, for me only". When you say "I am great," they protest, "Why? We are also." All are hostile to you. Owing to the troubles caused by others, your mental images increase a million fold. Should you not rise above them and profit by surrendering to a Master? Then all your enemies will befriend you. If you say to others, "All these are yours," everyone becomes your friend. There is only One who can make you that magnanimous and that is "I-am-Brahman" (Universal Ego).

10. I shall say one word only and this is not owing to my egoism. It is simply my duty. I do not say this word just for your or my good alone. It is for the good of all. The truth is "I-am-Brahman" (Universal Ego).

The Journey of My Heart

By Evelyn Kaselow Saphier

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam

January 20, 1983 - The Ox Cart Pradakshina:

We began to recite the "Akshara Mana Malai" together, but right at the invocation Kunju Swami stopped and said, "Bhagavan has written, '*Extend to me your hand of grace....*' One with Arunachala, he addressed the Mountain as His equal! This is most rare. In virtually all devotional hymns, the invocation is a prayer to God for His grace. However, Bhagavan wrote, 'Extend to me your hand....' Bhagavan was a real American!"

When we came to the first verse Kunju Swami paused to exclaim, "'*Thou dost root out the ego of those who*

meditate on Thee in the Heart, Oh Arunachala' - all of Bhagavan's teaching is contained in the first verse!" Our singing continued as one voice in an ecstatic mood as the ox cart bumped down the dirt road toward Adi Annamalai. Sri Arunachala glowed in the light of dusk. The road was completely deserted and we were free to let our praise of Arunachala rise from the Heart.

Approaching the town we stopped singing and passed quietly through the village. "There is no hymn like "Akshara Mana Malai," Kunju Swami said, "Bhagavan has compared it to the Vedas. Generally, the Vedas are listened to for the vibration of the sound. "Akshara Mana Malai" is similar. In this hymn, we press our demands on Arunachala; we are on familiar terms with Arunachala! Bhagavan wrote the hymn as a woman to a man, Arunachala. See how clever he is! In the end he says, 'Although I have exposed You, You are My Lord! You must be gracious and accept me!'"

Outside of the town, our singing resumed. As our ox cart slowed atop Bhagavan's bridge we saw the large orange ball of the sun setting between the trees lining the road we had just travelled. With the horizon a bright pink and the crescent moon directly overhead in the cool, blue sky, it was a sight of divine beauty. Knowing this to be our last *pradakshina*, I drank in the scene with my eyes. Kunju Swami said, "In New York, you will not see the sunset." "I was just thinking the same thing," I said, "I was just thinking that I will have this be my sunset for the next five years."

We stopped and ate our fill of puffed rice, bananas, peanuts and candy and resumed our way. We also resumed our singing of the "Marital Garland of Letters". The mountain was now a dark silhouette against a golden and pink sky radiant with light. It deepened to pink, purple and then darkness as we jangled down the road in our ox cart concert.

"Kunju Swami does not like that you have said 'for the next five years,'" Ganesan relayed to me.

"What should I say then?" I asked.

"Kunju Swami says you will come back sooner, and when you come back you will be a Tamil pundit!"

As our ox cart came up the road facing Skandasramam, Kunju Swami reminisced, "Bhagavan used to come up this road. The houses at night would be lit up, the doors and windows open, and people would be quiet, just like this. 'This is like the *turiya* state,' Bhagavan would say, 'All the doors of the senses are wide open, and yet the mind is quiet.'"

When we arrived back at the Ashrama Kunju Swami remarked we had done tapasya, laughing, as he stretched his legs to climb out of the cart. For me, this was anything but tapasaya, or so I thought!

Over dinner in Paul's room Kunju Swami told us two stories about the competition between someone and the sage Vasistha. In each contest the humility of the sage Vasistha brought him victory. The first was a competition to feed 1,008 people 'beneath' one's own station. In the second the challenge was to see who could bring the sun nearer the earth by virtue of his *tapasya*. The former contestant recited the various places where he had done intense *tapasya* and described his penances. Then, on the strength of his *tapasya*, he called the sun to come nearer. The sun advanced one mile. The sage Vasishta pondered deeply. He thought, 'I am a *grihastha*, I've done no penance to speak of, but once coming through the woods I stopped a while to hear the Vedas recited and expounded. This, I will consider my penance.' So thinking, he called on the sun to come near. The sun came down to earth, causing everyone to scatter. The immaculately pure wife of the sage, Arunditi, was unaffected, however. She hid the sun under her sari, then sent it back to heaven.

The point of the story, Kunju Swami concluded, is that you never need feel you have done no penance, for you have gone round Arunachala, thinking and talking of Bhagavan! If anyone ever challenges you and asks what *tapasya* you have done, you can say you have done the greatest *tapasya*, *giri pradakshina*! There is no *tapasya* greater than this!

The 119th Jayanti of Sri Ramana Maharshi

On Sunday, January 3, 1999 Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center in New York City celebrated the 119th anniversary of the Maharshi's birth.

In spite of one of the severest downpours of rain in years, many devotees from the metropolitan New York City area, and others from neighbouring states, ventured out that day to join together and remember the Master.

The day's program consisted of the recitation of many of Bhagavan's works, such as "Upadesa Sarah," "Akshara Mana Malai," "Sri Arunachala Pancharatna," the singing of *bhajans* led by several participants, the reciting of "Arunachala Nivedanam," composed and sung by Babubai Parekh (see text on the next page), a brief talk by Virat Bhatt, and a slide show of photos from Sri Arunachala taken by Eurico Saraiva of Portugal.

Tasteful and elaborate food preparations were once again organised by Savithri Mohan, who was ably assisted by women and men devotees alike.

A few families spent the night at the Ashrama, and throughout the weekend all the devotees assembled exchanged genuine warmth and friendliness, like a large family reuniting in their ancestral home after the passing of many years.

We would like to thank all the friends and devotees who participated and helped to make the function inspiring and memorable.

Letters and Comments

I feel uncertain about how to practice Self-enquiry. I have tried a few times to ask myself who I really am. I have read the teachings, but I am not sure how to practice them. Could I hurt myself if I follow them wrongly? It is repeated often that *pranayama* is helpful; however, no instructions on how to practice *pranayama* have been given. Only that it is a means to an end, enquiry, and not an end in itself.

I have studied the teachings and endeavour to understand them in their original sense, without distorting them through simplification and wishful thinking (avoiding to read over the parts that I don't want to hear, but need to hear) - Sincerely,

- A seeker in the USA

You wrote that you feel uncertain about how to practice Self-enquiry. Although I believe that your sincerity and steady aspiration will ultimately result in your doubts being removed and the method being clarified, we can still offer a few simple suggestions which are only quotations from or paraphrasing of the Master's teachings.

First of all, we cannot deny our existence. This is the consciousness we call 'I'. To think deeply upon the origin of that 'I' consciousness, to search wherefrom it arises within us, its source, will not harm us. It can only result in peace and happiness.

If the mind cannot be stilled and applied to the investigation, Bhagavan does suggest several aids to help in mind control. Pranayama is an important aid and is recommended by the Maharshi to those who cannot readily control the mind. He has given explicit instructions on how to do pranayama. Below I quote from No. 54 in Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi:

Later on Sri Bhagavan said: "Control of breath may be internal or external."

The *antah pranayama* (the internal breath-regulation) is as follows:-
Naham chinta (I-am-not-the-body idea) is *rechaka* (exhalation).
Koham (who am I?) is *puraka* (inhalation).
Soham (I am He) is *kumbhaka* (retention of breath).

Doing thus, the breath becomes automatically controlled.

Bahih pranayama (external control) is for one not endowed with strength to control the mind. There is no way so sure as that; or a *sadhu's* company. The external practice must be resorted to by a wise man if he does not enjoy a *sadhu's* company. If in a *sadhu's* company the *sadhu* provides the needed strength, though unseen by others, *Pranayama* need not be exactly as described in *hatha* Yoga. If engaged in *japa*, *dhyana, bhakti*, etc., just a little control of breath will suffice to control the mind. The mind is the rider and the breath the horse. *Pranayama* is a check on the horse. By that check the rider is checked.

Pranayama may be done just a little. To watch the breath is one way of doing it. The mind abstracted from other activities is engaged in watching the breath. That controls the breath; and in its turn the mind is controlled.

If unable to do so, *rechaka* and *puraka* need not be practised. Breath may be retained a short while in *japa, dhyana*, etc. Then, too, good results will follow.

To conclude, one must persist in the practice, in whatever manner that practice is understood to be. The Maharshi is the Guru. For those who persevere and yearn to realize the true purpose and meaning in life, He is still present and extends His help.

-Editor

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THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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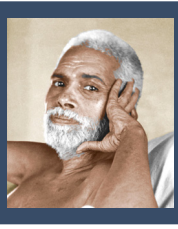

Sadguru is within

By Arthur Osborne

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 forms, invisibly, 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 SILENCE. It is also the highest spiritual instruction.... 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.

It must be remembered that verbal explanations are not the real teaching; they are preliminary explanations which are easy to understand but whose understanding does not in itself enlighten the heart. The real work is the awakening of Self-awareness in the heart, and this is made possible by the powerful yet subtle action of the silent Grace of the Guru.

- 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, Peter Fell, Arnold Frogel, Arthur Coucouvitis 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 there for 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

Dennis explained that while in India, with this view in mind, they had video-taped the retired president of Sri Ramanasramam, 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 4 for the text of the interview).

In 1989, James Hartel had video-taped interviews with the following lifelong devotees of Sri Maharshi: Sri T. N. Venkataraman, Sri N. Balaram Reddy, Sri Annamalai Swami, Sri Ramaswami Pallai, Sri Kunju Swami, Sri Krishna Swami, Sri N. N. Rajan, Prof. K. Swaminathan, Prof. N. R. Krishnamoorthy Iyer, Sri K. Natesan, Sampurnamma, 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 physically with us.

After mentioning the interview-video proposal to the Ashram president, Sri V. S. Ramanan, he and other devotees became enthused about continuing to video-tape 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 digitised and copied onto CD's for storage. Because of this it was easy to view on the Ashram computer (they have four!) the old photographs from the Ashram 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 see 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 1989 taping. Due to the great wealth of new material video-taped this year we may have to produce a series of 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 Bhagavan's 50th Maha Nirvana day.

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 turn 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.

Ganapati Muni Library

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 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 performs this service with the unshakeable conviction that future generations will come to value the prolific and inspired verses 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 literary bent 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 going out of his way to bring these invaluable documents into our hands "for the sake of posterity", 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 outpouring of gratitude to the Divine Mother for securing him such an illustrious Guru, Sri Ramana. The last 300 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, Seer's Song, and also to read out some of the verses.

After reading through Maha Yoga many times, George discovered that all the precepts of the 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, ate 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 raise himself. 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 paralysed 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 expressed the desire to bring him to his home to live with his family. He was brought 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 on January 31. He is not in any particular pain, maintains a healthy appetite, a well-known 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 firmly 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

It has been fifty years since the Maha Nirvana of Bhagavan 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 Bhagavan. Not long after I was born, my mother passed away, and when I was three years old, my father took *sannyas* and joined Sri Bhagavan and their mother, Alagamma, at Skandasramam.

I was then lovingly raised by Bhagavan'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 descendant in my family's line.

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

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

With Sri Bhagavan'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 Bhagavan in 1953, I succeeded him as the Ashram manager and President.

In all humility, I can say that Bhagavan 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 Bhagavan. I continued serving in the Ashram until 1994, at which time I resigned, handed over the presidentship 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 Bhagavan 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 *Patala Lingam* Shrine in the Arunachaleswara

Temple was performed on April 21st. 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

By Evelyn Kaselow Saphier

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam

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, he feels strongly. 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 sit very close to him, as close as possible, for meditation. Others though, without being particular, might sit some place in the back of the Hall. Bhagavan ever had a far-off look in his eyes. Now and then he would look on 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 samatwam. 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. We may be destined 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 Bhagavan's hymns, Kunju Swami's mood was melted. He was intensely indrawn, 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 Bhagavan's Shrine for the milk offering, I stopped at Ramaswami Pillai's room. I prostrated before him and took the dust of his feet.

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

I went into Mother's Temple. Appuchi (the priest) was sweeping the outer room of the shrine and Kittu [another priest, now deceased] was standing nearby. I climbed the steps to salute Appuchi. "Please remember us when you do Sri Chakra Puja," I requested.

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

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

"Please! You must take up Self-enquiry wholeheartedly! Whatever else you may have to do in life, 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 taxi Paul 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. It was so hard to wrench ourselves away! All were there—Lucy Ma, Natesan, Kittu, Appuchi, T. R. S. and the office staff; Ganesan stood on the steps with palms joined. How hard it was to leave the love and affection of our friends, and the Mountain Itself! Paul and I felt immersed in the glow of Bhagavan's grace. Neither 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. Driving out of Tiruvannamalai, we sat looking back as the mountain receded from our view. Only near Gingee did it escape our sight. Yet the warmth of Bhagavan'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.

Letters and Comments

Letters From Belgrade

The following two E-mails were received in early April. About this time 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: ramana@EUnet.yu - To: ashrama@aol.com

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 aeroplanes; 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 'frozen' scene of the Archival Films video, never shinier or brighter, breathes and possesses me as my only support.

Total surrender to Him. The fear that had paralysed 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 fulfilment 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

To: ashrama@aol.com - A few words from Nebojsa:

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 OK, that your life is filled with grace and that all of you feel that peace for which we strive.

My illusions slowly disappear. I now see how many of them there are. And yet, how strange it is that under His 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 Bhagavan, where all this is an illusory letter on the paper of the Self.

Thank you for everything,

- With Love, See you, Nebojsa,

You be in your hearts,
Never let worry seize your hearts,
Be happy, be good,
Let love make you understood,
With no feeling that disturbs.
May we all be blessed and free
When He makes us see.

Worship is only self-enquiry

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 forbid the mind to dwell 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 abides as the Self, constant surrender of the mind by absorption in the Self is said to comprise all forms of worship. Mind controlled, all else is controlled. The mind is itself the life-current; the ignorant say that in form it looks like a coiled serpent. The six subtle centres (chakras) are merely mental pictures and are meant for beginners in yoga. We project ourselves into the idols 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 continually 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 so 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"

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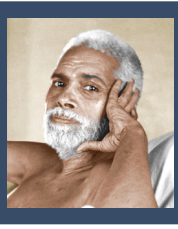

The Way of the Spirit

By M. A. Piggott

The author of this article was the first western woman to visit the Maharshi in the year 1932.

I had visited India before, but it was my first trip off the beaten track. Staying with friends or in the luxurious hotels of Bombay and Calcutta, provided with modern conveniences, can give little indication of the conditions to be met with when leaving highways. But this was an adventure in a cause, and nothing else mattered.

For some years it had been my wish to meet one of the real holy men of India, but so far it was a vain one. I had, it is true, spoken with a few saintly men and also some fakirs of the mediumistic type, who were no doubt sincere enough in their way. But they were not what I was seeking. Then I was told of Sri Ramana Maharshi. And even from the little I heard, I knew I would travel anywhere and put up with any inconvenience in order to reach him.

The friend who gave me the welcome news of his existence offered to take me to him, and so we arrived at Tiruvannamalai late one afternoon. We put up at that none-too-clean accommodation, the 'dak' bungalow or travellers' rest-house, which is all that is offered to the wayfarer who strays from the cities. No bedding is provided and there is seldom much furniture. But we left my servant to wrestle with such details and made our way to the bazaar and then up to the Ashram in a cart, drawn by a pony. The end of our drive found us somewhat battered but full of expectation.

Several of the people living in the Ashram, mostly devotees, came out to greet us. Amongst them was the younger brother of the Maharshi. He was dressed in the ochre robe denoting a *sannyasin* - one who has renounced the world. The others were not strictly monks in the western sense of the word, nor is an ashram a monastery. It is a place where people wishing to study or follow a spiritual life may live. Often there are no orders or binding rules, and anyone can come and go as he pleases. Even women, though not allowed to sleep on the premises, are welcomed.

Most of the people spoke English and greeted me in a most friendly manner. This was encouraging, for I was nervous, having been told that I was the first European woman so far to visit the Maharshi or Maharshi, as he is generally called. We were then taken in at once to see the Holy Man, and after making the Indian salutation, by holding the two palms together and raising them thus joined to the forehead, we laid our offerings on the ground before him. He was seated on a divan, upon which was spread a large leopard skin. In front of the divan, sandal-sticks were burning and a small brazier of coals, on which a special kind of incense was constantly being thrown.

About a dozen people were present in the hall. They spoke in low tones to one another, and a child prattled to his mother. But soon these sounds ceased and there was quiet. I sat cross-legged on the floor with the others, though a chair had been thoughtfully provided for me.

For a while nothing happened. I tried to concentrate my mind. Suddenly I became conscious that the Maharshi's

eyes were fixed on me. They seemed literally like burning coals of fire piercing through one. They glittered in the dim light. Never before had I experienced anything so devastating-in fact it was almost frightening. What I went through in that terrible half hour, in a way of self-condemnation and scorn for the pettiness of my own life, would be difficult to describe. Not that he criticised, even in silence-of that he was incapable-but in the light of perfection all imperfections are revealed. To show how little responsible he was for my feelings, he told me later on that doubting, self-distrust and self-depreciation are some of the greatest hindrances to the realization of Reality.

Presently the Maharshi got up and went for his evening walk. This was the signal for a general exodus, and we all trooped outside.

One of the devotees offered to show us around the Ashram, a cluster of small whitewashed buildings and huts, all spotlessly clean, and joined together in some cases by a covered passageway. The Ashram was picturesquely situated at the foot of the famous holy mountain of Arunachala. It was on this mountain side that the Maharshi took up his abode more than thirty years ago, and ever since then it has been his home. He was, at the time of my visit, about fifty years old, but looked older, owing no doubt to the privations and austerities practised in early life.

It was dark when we returned for the evening meditation, and most of the people not living permanently in the Ashram had left. The hall was compellingly still. The eyes of the Holy One blazed no more. They were serene and introverted. All my troubles seemed smoothed out and difficulties melted away. Nothing that we of the world call important, mattered. Time was forgotten. Life was one, in its many aspects.

Late the next afternoon my friend had to return to his home, leaving me behind in charge of my elderly servant, a fatherly and trustworthy man, who saw to it that the water and milk were properly boiled, and that, on my return each night from the Ashram, a suitable meal was waiting for me at the travellers' rest house.

From that time onwards, started a routine that was to be the same for many weeks. The rickety cart would turn up at six in the morning. It took me up to the Ashram and came back again at seven-thirty in the evening for the return journey. I soon acquired a technique of balance that promised safety, if not comfort, and the drive lost most of its original precariousness. However it was never peaceful owing to the small insect life inhabiting the straw on which I had to crouch!

Up at the Ashram I was given a small hut, seven feet by seven, for my use during the day. In it were a wooden plank, a chair and a table on which were a basin, towel and soap. Not luxurious, but the thought and care with which it had been provided touched me more than I can say. However, being a European, my bones were not accustomed to wood unrelieved by a mattress, and the midday rest taken after the noon meal, was hardly one as far as I was concerned.

There were two chief meals, one at eleven thirty in the morning and the other around eight in the evening. I ate with the others at the morning one. The food was more or less the same at both-rice, with an assortment of vegetables and milk curd. Everybody sat on the floor in front of an individual strip of banana leaf.

Everyone gathered in the hall. Most people were quiet and taken up with their own thoughts. But sometimes there were visitors, travelling monks or devotees who came for the Maharshi's blessing, and they would sing sacred songs and tell allegorical tales.

Among those who turned up at the Ashram for a short stay was an American author whose books and translations of Tibetan manuscripts are well known. We had many enlightening talks, and I was glad of his

presence for another reason. Asking questions in the open hall was rather an ordeal, but backed by him I lost some of my diffidence. We pooled our problems and came to the Maharshi with them, trivial or profound. An interpreter was always on hand, for although the Maharshi understands English he does not speak it with ease. He knows immediately, however, whether the exact shade of meaning has been accurately translated, and if not he perseveres until one has understood him completely. One day we brought up the question of guru-ship.

"Is it necessary for spiritual attainment to have a guru or spiritual teacher?"

The Maharshi ordered a certain treatise to be read, in which it was stated that as in all physical and intellectual training a teacher or instructor is sought, so in matters spiritual the same principle holds good.

"And," he added, "it is hard for a man to arrive at the goal without the aid of such a one."

I turned to him. "But you had no guru?"

A rustle of shocked horror ran through the hall. But the Maharshi was not in the least disturbed by my audacious remark. On the contrary, he looked at me with a twinkle in his eye. Then he threw back his head and gave a joyous, wholehearted laugh. It endeared me to him as nothing else could. A saint who can turn the laugh against himself is a saint indeed.

My companion next wanted a ruling on the vexed question of vegetarianism. Everyone had something to say about that. The outcome boiled down to this: Food affects the mind. Certain kinds make it more *sattvic* - alive, vibrant. For the practice of any kind of yoga, vegetarianism is absolutely necessary. But on my asking if one could experience spiritual illumination whilst normally eating flesh foods, the answer was 'yes', qualified by the injunction to leave them off and gradually accustom the body to the purer types of food. "But in any case," went on the Maharshi, "once you have attained illumination, it will make little difference what you eat. It is the early stages that are important. On a great fire it is immaterial what fuel is heaped."

Another problem discussed was that of the different kinds of yoga and the benefit of various methods.

The Maharshi said that in the end there was only one approach to the goal, and that was through the realization of what the Self is. "Why waste time on other roads which at best will only lead to the final path? Better be on that path itself all the time, and lose no precious moments. Meditate on the Self, on That alone. There is no other goal." The Maharshi's philosophy and teaching is the purest Advaita (non-dualistic) as will be seen in a talk I later had with him.

I had been in despair of ever getting the Maharshi alone. It is hard to unburden the soul before a crowd. But early one morning I came into the hall and found him there unattended, emanating a wonderful stillness and peace. I asked quietly if I might talk with him. He nodded, smiling, and sent for someone to translate. On the arrival of a devotee I put my first question.

"What are the hindrances to the realization of the true Self?"

"Memory chiefly, habits of thought, accumulated tendencies."

"How does one get rid of these hindrances?"

"Seek for the Self through meditation in this manner. Trace every thought back to its origin, which is only the

mind. Never allow thought to run on. If you do, it will be unending. Take it back to its starting place-the mind-again and again, and it and the mind will both die of inaction. The mind only exists by reason of thought. Stop that and there is no mind. As each doubt and depression arises, ask yourself, 'Who is it that doubts? What is it that is depressed?' Go back constantly and question, 'Who is the I? Where is it?' Tear everything away until there is nothing but the Source of all, left. And then live always in the present and only in it. There is no past or future, save in the mind."

"How can I help another with his or her problems and troubles?"

"What is this talk of another? There is only the One. Try and realize there is no 'I', no 'he', no 'you', only the one Self which is all. If you believe in the problem of another, you are believing in something outside the Self. You will help him better by realizing the oneness of everything than by any outward activity. The ego pertains to all the waking activities-the emotions and intellect. In deep sleep the body is still, and yet the Self is there. It is the distracting, active mind that veils the real Self."

"What meditation will help me?"

"No meditation on any kind of object is helpful. You must learn to realize the subject and object as one. In meditating on an object, whether concrete or abstract, you are destroying the sense of oneness and creating duality. Meditate on what you are in Reality. Try to realize that the body is not you, the emotions are not you, the intellect is not you. When all these are still, you will find-"

"What?"

"You will discover yourself. It is not for me to say what any individual's experience will be. It will reveal Itself. Hold to That."

"But in trying to still the mind, I am likely to fall asleep."

"It does not matter. Put yourself into the condition as in deep sleep. Then watch. Be asleep consciously, instead of unconsciously. There will then be only one consciousness."

As the days passed, I saw more and more clearly that this was no theoretical philosophy. He himself lived it continuously and joyously. He was one of the few I have met who were not only happy but untroubled. Not that the sorrows of the world left him untouched-on the contrary-but he knew where they belonged and was not identified with them. To any sufferer his compassion was unlimited.

One day a man rushed in and flung himself face down before the Maharshi in a paroxysm of weeping. Great sobs tore his body. The Maharshi said nothing, and no one else dared. I watched the Maharshi. His head was turned aside, and he seemed indifferent. After some little time, the violence of the man's grief subsided and gradually he became quiet. Still no one spoke. Then at last, reverently the man rose and made a deep salutation. The Maharshi turned his head and smiled upon him. I felt suddenly as if all the flowers of the world had poured their fragrance into our midst.

Another time a poor creature who had been bitten by a snake was brought in and laid before the Holy Man. We all watched, fear gripping our hearts. Not so he, who sat looking into the far distance while the victim writhed in pain. Calm and compassion was in that look, and infinite peace. After what seemed like hours, the twitching ceased and the man appeared to sleep. Then the one who had brought in the sufferer gently touched him. The man rose, prostrated himself before the Maharshi and went out cured.

But this was unusual. The Maharshi did not heal, in the accepted term of the word. Talking about it one day,

I asked him if one could use spiritual power for healing. He remarked, "Yes, if you think it worthwhile," but added that it required a great deal of force, which might be used more profitably in other directions.

I was told that the Maharshi had his finger on the pulse of the whole Ashram. For instance, when in the hall, he was supposed to know what was going on even in the kitchen-and incidentally, I was surprised to find that he himself assisted in the cutting up of vegetables for the daily meal. I was also told that he knows what is passing in the minds of people. Of this latter ability I had a small personal experience.

It was in the afternoon and I was in the far corner of the hall reading the translation of a collection of aphorisms written in, to me, a flowery and artificial vein. I was bored and slightly irritated. Suddenly one of the devotees stood before me with another book in his hand-all the Ashram books were bound in brown paper and looked exactly alike-and said, "The Maharshi asked me to give you this. He thinks it will be more sympathetic to your type of mind." It was. How could the Maharshi know what I was reading? I was sitting far away, with many people in between us, blocking his line of vision. But I had previously noticed that many times he would answer a question in my mind, whilst it was only in the process of being formulated. This happened too often to be a coincidence.

Every experience has to end and the last day of my visit to the Ashram arrived, and with it a great sadness filled my heart. I must go back to worries, problems and irritations. Here all was peace. Here it was comparatively easy to live in the mood of the spirit. Is this why so many holy people retire to solitude, I wondered. Is it only in conditions such as these that the hidden verities emerge from under the covering of distractions? Still, all of us cannot follow such a life. Is the answer to live in the world, if we must, but not be of the world? There was nothing new in the idea, yet in this place I seemed to understand it for the first time.

That afternoon I had my farewell talk with the Maharshi. He was so gentle and human. We discussed the difficulties of everyday life and mundane problems. I asked again about the relation of the body to the 'I'. He gave this simile.

"You came up from the bungalow this morning in a cart. Yet you do not say, 'The cart came up'. You say 'I came up'. You did not make the mistake of identifying yourself with the cart. In the same way, look upon your body as you do the cart. Treat it well, and it will be a good servant and instrument. But do not be deceived into thinking it is 'I'." He again stressed the necessity to see only the Self in everything. Act automatically, so to speak, and let 'It' do the work. "And 'It' always will," he added. "Do not look for results. Do what is right in the given moment and leave it behind you."

At the end of our talk, he quoted that wonderful saying from the Upanishad: "When to the man who understands, the Self has become all things, what sorrow, what trouble can there be to him who has once beheld this unity?"

As I went to say goodbye in the evening the Ashram people clustered round in sympathy for my departure. I felt I had made, and was leaving, true friends. They were so simple and yet so genuine.

There was a service taking place in the adjoining temple, and an old Sanskrit hymn was being chanted. Just as I stepped into the cart the temple bell rang. This brought a smile of happiness on everyone's face. Apparently, to hear a temple gong in the act of departure is a wonderful omen and brings peace.

As I left Tiruvannamalai in the dawn of the next morning, I caught a last glimpse of Arunachala, the Holy Mountain, on which lives one as one of the saints of earth. It was red and glowing in the rising sun.

- 'I wept' - from The Mountain Path, Jan. 1970

A Lethal Brew

Mrs. Roda McIver narrated a strange but moving incident. "Worried about Bhagavan's health, in his last days, devotees would send Bhagavan all kinds of medicines and these were carefully arranged in a cupboard. One day He called for a big glass jar and ordered all the little bottles to be emptied into the jar and mixed well. He announced that he would take a spoonful every morning and evening. Some of the medicines were quite poisonous and we were scared. 'People send me these medicines out of their love for me. To please them I must take them all,' argued Bhagavan! A doctor came and he too was terrified. The mixture was fantastic - allopathic, *ayurvedic*, homeopathic, herbs, biochemicals, ashes, powders, poisons - a lethal brew! Bhagavan was adamant. But when we invoked his own rule and demanded a spoonful for each of us, he relented and gave up the idea of drinking the concoction!"

- Moments Remembered

New Books

The following books are a few of the new additions to our 1999 Catalogue, which contains about 90 items. To receive a catalogue or make an order, please write, call or E-mail.

Ramana's Arunachala

By Bhagavan's Devotees. The first fourteen chapters take us through the origin of the Arunachala Hill, the ancient text written about it, the saints and sages who visited, lived there and sung its praise, the great Temple's history, a description of the path around the Holy Hill, its mysteries, etc. A fold-out map of the Hill with its sacred places is provided. The second part chronicles the Maharshi's unique relationship with the Holy Hill. The book is thorough and interesting, and should be read by all those attracted to the holy mountain, Arunachala.

- 122 pages - $5.00

Sri Dakshinamoorti Stotram, Atmabodha, Gurustuti, Hastamalakam Stotram

By Sri Sankaracharya. Finding resonance with Sankaracharya's compositions, Sri Ramana translated into Tamil many of his works. This well-produced book contains four of them. The Sanskrit text and the Maharshi's Tamil translations have also been rendered word for word for easy understanding and study. The English transliteration and meaning makes the book complete and comprehensive.

- 124 pages - $4.00

Nayana

By G. Krishna. A detailed account of the extraordinary life of the inspired Vedic seer in the twentieth century, Kavyakantha Vasishta Ganapati Muni. Much like John the Baptist, this child prodigy and accomplished yogi, heralded to the world the arrival of the Sage of Arunachala, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

- 186 pages - $5.00

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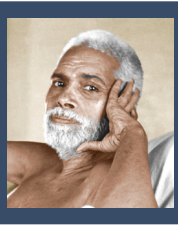

Grace From A Distance

By Elizabeth Lok

When did I first hear of Bhagavan? It is difficult to imagine a time when one had not. Yet I think it was from Brunton's book *Message from Arunachala* (first read in the late 40's), and many good talks with a friend of Brunton's. Then in 1950 there was the article in an American magazine describing Bhagavan's last days.

These sources gave no more than an elusive awareness of something I wanted avidly to learn more about. A pilgrimage to Arunachala became-and remains-an unfaltering and deep desire. Imagine my feelings around ten years later when my beloved sister De Lancey Kapleau was able to do just that! And was good enough to write fully about it and send me Osborne's book on Bhagavan's life!

I read through her description of her stay at the Ashram with mounting excitement; read and reread it. Then devoured the book. The last chapters were read late at night when the children and my husband were all asleep, and my heart nearly burst for joy, while grateful tears sprang from my eyes. When I closed the book I sat still for some time, then quite spontaneously prostrated myself in gratitude. Later, in bed, thinking of my sister's letter, I felt an earthy pang of envy that she, not I, had reached the Ashram. You know the sort of thing: "Oh how wonderful-just imagine-I wish it had been I." The jealousy surprised me, a little, but when I recognised and acknowledged it I had to laugh at the jealous one, and said to myself: "But you fool, if your sister went there of course this was part of her karmic pattern. For you, and for anybody, if Arunachala exists anywhere it must exist most truly in the hearts of those who are open to it. So the significance is always within oneself."

At this the field of my vision was lit by a great glow of golden light, and my heart expanded in almost unbelievable joy. The joy deepened and glowed into an incredible depth of peace, which wells up again as I write this.

A few weeks afterwards I was thinking still of Osborne's book, and particularly recalling the beautiful experience of the disciple who felt the pressure of Bhagavan's hand on his heart, in blessing, while far from the Ashram and Bhagavan. Again a swift little pang of envy, and again a self-scolding: he to whom it happened had made himself ready for the reception of such Grace, and it could happen only to the heart which was ripe for it.

The darkness of the night around me became utterly black, and in my mind's eye I caught a fleeting glimpse of Maharshi's wonderful face. At the same moment I felt a sharp pressure in the chest, just to the right of the breastbone. Everything merged into unutterable peace. I was able to dwell in that peace for several days, during which time errors, disharmonies, misunderstandings, impatience and fatigue became impossible, and my family, who knew nothing of what had happened, responded radiantly in an unbroken harmonious and loving glow. The peace gradually receded, of course, but from that time conscious effort is opening my heart to Bhagavan and I could almost always restore it.

Around this time my mother was taken to a hospital, where she lived for her last three remaining years. Having small children, no household help, and the vagaries of public transportation made it difficult for me to visit her regularly. I have always been deeply fond of this loving mother, and grateful to her for her warmth and enthusiasm.

As her body weakened she was much in my thoughts. I was concerned that for years she had feared death, and while my grasp of spiritual things was tentative, I felt that somehow perhaps one might help. So often at nights or in quiet moments I would think of her, wishing her, willing her peace and love and courage with all the strength of my heart. And while I didn't speak of it, I found that she felt and responded to this. In sending love to her this way the ordinary small surface rumblings of disagreement and awareness of each other's small failings completely disappeared, and we felt ourselves very closely united by love in a very real and freeing sense.

One afternoon on a hospital visit, my mother, who had been rather ill, drifted in and out of sleep while I was with her. I sat very close by, cradling her head in my arms, and while she drifted out, wishing her love and peace with all my heart. I nearly trembled with the intensity of effort. At one point she opened her eyes. As I looked at her it was not my mother's hazel eyes into which mine looked, but Bhagavan's deep brown ones. And from them flooded peace and love without measure, unfathomable wisdom and bliss, until everything disappeared into a vastness of love and peace. There was no mother, no daughter, no hospital room-only that profound peace which passeth all understanding.

Slowly-I don't know when-it receded. But at that time I knew that my mother was soon to die, and would pass in peace. And I believed that it would be granted to me to be with her at the end. It took place within a week, and I was by the bedside watching a frail body struggle its last, while strongly aware that its soul watched with me, wondering but unafraid. How deep was my gratitude.

It has not been my privilege to have known Bhagavan while he was among us as a man, nor yet to visit the Ashram or to walk on Arunachala. But Bhagavan, the Ashram and Arunachala are eternally ready to fill me whenever I truly turn my heart and open it to them.

- The Mountain Path

Doubt About Truth

If you have any doubt about the truth, or if you want to support it by your intellectual skill or learned lore, by all means study the several books. But if you have no doubt about the truth and only want to realize it in actual experience, all that trouble is unnecessary. If a cook wants to serve a tasty dish to another, he has to know what thing and how much of each thing go into its composition and how they have to be prepared and mixed in proportion and so on. The person who is asked to relish it need not have that knowledge. So leave the dialectics of our philosophy to the learned among us. You may confine yourself to the practical enjoyment of the peace and joy of the Self.

- Sri Chandrashekara Bharati Swaminah

Austerity

by

Arthur Osborne

At some point we may wonder what exactly is considered austerity in the light of the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. For a clear understanding of this we can be grateful to Arthur Osborne, whose clarity of thought, complemented by his own personal experience, has provided us with this short exposition.

The introduction to "Who am I?" contains within it the germ of the intellectual explanation of religious

austerity. Everyone is involved in the unending search for happiness. So long as the person mistakes the body or individuality for the Self, he seeks pleasure from events and contacts, but in the measure that he approaches the true Self, he discovers that true happiness which, being his real nature, requires no stimulus to provoke it.

If a man renounces the extraneous and fitful happiness given by pleasure for the deep, abiding inner happiness, there is no austerity-he is simply exchanging the lesser for the greater, the spurious for the true. More usually, however, a man's pursuit of pleasure (or his hankering after it, even if he does not pursue it) is itself what impedes his realization of the Self, being due to his false identification with the ego. Therefore he normally has to renounce the pursuit of pleasure, not after but before the attainment of eternal, indestructible happiness, not because it has ceased to be pleasure but because he realizes partly through faith and partly through understanding and pre-vision, that indestructible happiness does exist and is his goal and his true nature and that it is shut off from him by his mistaken identity and by the indulgence of desires and impulses that this entails. That is to say that he has to renounce the false attraction before it has ceased to attract. Therefore the renunciation hurts him and is austerity.

Religious austerity may bear fruit without understanding the intellectual basis of it and there may be many who practise it without this understanding; nevertheless, this is its basis. To some extent every spiritual seeker must follow the twofold method of turning his energy away from the pursuit of pleasure and towards the quest of happiness, away from the gratification of the ego and towards the realization of the Self. They are two complementary phases of one activity. However, a method may concentrate more on one phase or the other.

That taught by Bhagavan concentrated almost entirely on the positive phase, the quest of the Self, and he spoke very little of the negative, that is, of austerity or killing the ego. He spoke rather of the enquiry that would reveal that there was no ego to kill and never had been. This does not mean that Bhagavan condoned ego-indulgence. He expected a high standard of rectitude and self-control in his devotees but he did not dictate any actual program of austerity.

The basic forms of austerity are celibacy and poverty, further heightened by silence and solitude. Let us see in more detail what was the attitude of Bhagavan in such matters.

In speaking of celibacy one has to remember that the traditional Hindu society with which Bhagavan was familiar has no place for the worldly celibate; either a man is a householder or a mendicant. When any householder asked Bhagavan whether he could renounce home and property and turn mendicant, he always discouraged it. "The obstacles are in the mind and have to be overcome there," he would say. "Changing the environment will not help. You will only change the thought 'I am a householder' for the thought 'I am a mendicant.' What you have to do is to forget both and remember only 'I am.'" He similarly deprecated vows of silence and solitude, pointing out that the true silence and solitude are in the heart and independent of outer conditions.

Yet Bhagavan showed a benevolent interest in the personal and family affairs of his devotees-their marriages and jobs, the birth and sicknesses and education of their children, all the cares and obligations that family life entails. His injunction was to engage in it like an actor in a play, playing one's part carefully and conscientiously but with the remembrance that it was not one's real self.

Neither did he denounce the small indulgences common to the life of a householder. Indeed, there was a time when he himself chewed betel and drank tea and coffee. The only specific rule of conduct that he advocated and that some might call austerity was vegetarianism. He spoke of the benefit of restricting oneself to *sattvic* food, that is to vegetarian food which nourishes without exciting or stimulating. I have also known Bhagavan to say different things to different kinds of people. But they should be taken to suit particular occasions and not as a general rule.

The standard set by Bhagavan was uncompromisingly high but it did not consist in disjointed commands and restrictions. It was a question of seeking the true Self and denying the impostor ego, and in doing this he approved rather of a healthy, normal, balanced life than of extreme austerity. It is true that there was a time when he himself sat day after day in silence, scarcely eating, seldom moving, but that was not austerity; that was immersion in the supreme Bliss after the Self had been realized and there was no longer any ego to renounce, that is, when austerity was no longer possible. His abandoning it was not indulgence of the ego but compassion for the devotees who gathered around. He said that even in the case of the *Jnani* the ego may seem to rise up again but that is only an appearance, like the ash of a burnt rope that looks like a rope but is not good for tying anything with.

- The Mountain Path

Rebirth and the Time Idea

The Maharshi was often questioned about death and reincarnation. He would sometimes answer: "Let us know first who we are" or "The birth of the 'I-thought' is one's own birth, its death is the person's death. After the 'I'-thought has arisen the wrong identity with the body arises. Thinking yourself the body, you give false values to others and identify them with bodies. Just as your body has been born, grows and will perish, so also you think the other was born, grew up and died."

In so many ways Bhagavan tried to bring home to us the true nature of the Self, which is eternal, unborn and free. When an illogical sequence in an apparent death and rebirth were brought to his attention, he would often cite Lila's story from the Yoga Vasistha. Below are several such inconsistencies recorded in Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi. Vasistha's Yoga, a marvellous prose rending of the book by Swami Venkatesananda, lucidly tells Lila's story, from which a small excerpt is also reprinted for further elucidation

Talk No. 129:

An elderly gentleman, formerly a co-worker with B. V. Narasimha Swami and author of some Visishtadvaita work, visited the place for the first time. He asked about rebirths, if it is possible for the *linga sarira* (subtle body) to get dissolved and be reborn in two years after death.

M.: Yes. Surely. Not only can one be reborn, one may be twenty or forty or even seventy years old in the new body though only two years after death.

Sri Bhagavan cited Lila's story from *Yoga Vasishta*.

Talk No. 261:

There was a reference to reincarnation. Reincarnation of Shanti Devi tallies with the human standards of time. Whereas the latest case reported of a boy of seven is different. The boy is seven years now. He recalls his past births. Enquiries go to show that the previous body was given up 10 months ago.

The question arises how the matter stood for six years and two months previous to the death of the former body. Did the soul occupy two bodies at the same time?

Sri Bhagavan pointed out that the seven years is according to the boy; ten months is according to the observer. The difference is due to these two different *upadhis* (limiting adjuncts). The boy's experience extending to

seven years has been calculated by the observer to cover only 10 months of his own time.

Sri Bhagavan again referred to Lila's story in *Yoga Vasishta*.

Talk No. 276:

The U. P. lady arrived with her brother, a woman companion and a burly bodyguard.

When she came into the hall she saluted Maharshi with great respect and feeling, and sat down on a wool blanket in front of Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan was then reading Trilinga in Telugu on the reincarnation of a boy. The boy is now thirteen years old and reading in the Government High School in a village near Lucknow. When he was three years he used to dig here and there; when asked, he would say that he was trying to recover something which he had hidden in the earth. When he was four years old, a marriage function was celebrated in his home. When leaving, the guests humorously remarked that they would return for this boy's marriage. But he turned round and said: I am already married. I have two wives.' When asked to point them out, he requested to be taken to a certain village, and there he pointed to two women as his wives. It is now learnt that a period of ten months elapsed between the death of their husband and the birth of this boy.

When this was mentioned to the lady, she asked if it was possible to know the after-death state of an individual.

Sri Bhagavan said, 'some are born immediately after, others after some lapse of time, a few are not reborn on this earth but eventually get salvation in some higher region, and a very few get absolved here and now.'

———————

LILA asked:

O Goddess, you said that it was only eight days ago that the holy man had died; and yet my husband and I have lived for a long time [in the present birth]. How can you reconcile this discrepancy? [The "holy man" was reincarnated as Lila's present husband, who had now again just died].

SARASVATI said:

O Lila, just as space does not have a fixed span, time does not have a fixed span either. Just as the world and its creation are mere appearances, a moment and an epoch are also imaginary, not real. In the twinkling of an eye the *jiva* undergoes the illusion of the death-experience, forgets what happened before that, and in the infinite consciousness thinks 'I am this', etc., and 'I am his son, I am so many years old', etc. There is no essential difference between the experiences of this world and those of another-all this being the thought-forms in the infinite consciousness. They are like two waves in the same ocean. Since these worlds were never created, they will never cease to be: such is the law. Their real nature is consciousness.

Even as in a dream there is birth, death and relationship all in a very short time, and even as a lover feels that a single night without his beloved is an epoch, the *jiva* thinks of experienced and non-experienced objects in the twinkling of an eye. And, immediately thereafter, he imagines those things (the world) to be real. Even those things which he had not experienced nor seen present themselves before him as in a dream.

This world and this creation is nothing but memory, dream: distance, measures of time like a moment and an

age, all these are hallucinations. This is one kind of knowledge-memory. There is another which is not based on memory of past experience. This is the fortuitous meeting of an atom and consciousness which is then able to produce its own effects.

Liberation is the realisation of the total non-existence of the universe as such. This is different from a mere denial of the existence of the ego and the universe! The latter is only half-knowledge. Liberation is to realise that all this is pure consciousness.

"Why should they build here?"

3rd March, 1939

At about 4 p.m. Sri Bhagavan, who was writing something intently, turned his eyes slowly towards the window to the north; he closed the fountain pen with the cap and put it in its case; he closed the notebook and put it aside; he removed his spectacles, folded them in the case and left them aside. He leaned back a little, looked up overhead, turned his face this way and that and looked here and there. He passed his hand over his face and looked contemplative. Then he turned to someone in the hall and said softly: "The pair of sparrows just came here and complained to me that their nest had been removed. I looked up and found their nest missing." Then he called for the attendant, Madhava Swami, and asked: "Madhava, did anyone remove the sparrows' nest?"

The attendant, who walked in leisurely, answered with an air of unconcern: "I removed the nests as often as they were built. I removed the last one this very afternoon."

M: That's it. That is why the sparrows complained. The poor little ones! How they take the pieces of straw and shreds in their tiny beaks and struggle to build their nests!

Attendant: But why should they build here, over our heads?

M: Well-well. Let us see who succeeds in the end. (After a short time Sri Bhagavan went out.)

- Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, No. 640

Letters

Ethical Practices

Thank you for sending me the picture of Sri Ramana and the booklet "Who Am I?". Can you tell me a bit about ethical practices in this tradition? I am particularly interested to know if you follow traditional precepts of celibacy or more moderate interpretations of *brahmacharya*? Also, what about things like alcohol? Does the Ashram teach only against alcohol abuse, or is any use of alcohol considered wrong? Finally, I know that Sri Ramana is the ultimate Guru and is considered still extant, but are there other leaders of the Ashram and what is their relationship to devotees? Do they give teachings as well?

Thanks again and best wishes,

- Norfolk, VA

As far as ethical living is concerned, the Maharshi never talked much about this subject. The reason is, if we follow his teachings and sincerely try to put them into practice, the correct ethical and moral standards

will automatically become part of our character. The essential thing is to begin to practice his teachings with determination and devotion. If that is done, everything will fall into its proper place, and even a teacher will come to us, if and when we need one.

The Maharshi never made a distinction between married or unmarried. He said the Self is the same for all, and real brahmacharya is to abide in Brahman. He did not deny the use of brahmacharya as an aid, like many other aids for spiritual practice.

In our Ashrama, Sri Ramana Maharshi remains as the living Guru. He is the teacher and we are all his disciples. We find that he still responds to sincere seekers, just as he did when embodied. "I am not going away. Where can I go?" he said to grieving devotees before his Mahasamadhi. He continues to respond with his grace and guidance to all those who open their heart to him.

-Editor

New Books

The following books are three new additions to our 1999 Catalogue, which contains about 90 items.

The 108 Names of Sri Bhagavan

Composed by Sri Swami Viswanathan, and translation and commentary by Prof. K. Swaminathan. These 108 Names of Ramana in Sanskrit ("Ramana Ashtothra") are daily recited with *archana* before the tomb of the Maharshi. Its daily recitation is a *sadhana* for many of his devotees. The book contains a the Sanskrit text, the English transliteration and an English commentary for each name.

- 47 pages $2.00

Sri Lalita Sahasranama

Commentary and translation by C. Suryanarayana, and published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. An ancient scripture on the one thousand names of the Divine Mother Sri Lalita, with an enlightened introduction and commentary that combines modern scientific thought with the age-old tradition of Mother worship and its ultimate Advaitic realization. Complete with transliteration, word-for-word translation, the Sanskrit text in *stotram* form and a fold-out diagram of Sri Yantram.

- 352 pages $8.00

Ramana Maharshi

Amar Chitra Katha, Glorious Heritage of India Series. In thirty pages, the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi is told with colourful illustrations in this popular format. Printed on quality paper, insuring years of use for children of all ages.

- 30 pages $3.50

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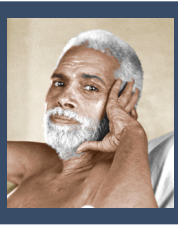

Dr. K. Subrahmanian
(1928-1998)

Dr. K. Subrahmanian's genuine love and devotion, insight, compassion and selflessness formed a vortex that drew hundreds of devotees from Andhra Pradesh into the shining presence of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In 1979, he founded Sri Ramana Kendram in Hyderabad and continued to nurture it until his final day in January of 1998.

The following is an extract from "Dr. K. Subrahmanian (1928-1998), A Tribute", a book publish by the Hyderabad Kendram in his memory. Dr. K. Subrahmanian relates in his own words about his early years and how he was naturally drawn to the Maharshi, and also some anecdotes from his uncle's life.

Coming into the Ramana Fold

Presentation Convent, the school that my father worked for, used to prepare children for taking the Cambridge University examination. The school was run by Irish nuns and almost all the children were European girls. My father was the only male teacher for a number of years. In the 50's, one more male teacher was appointed to teach Hindi.

As the winter vacation was during Dec-Jan every year, my parents would go from Kodaikanal to Tiruvannamalai to attend the *Jayanti* function. My father used to take English vegetables grown in Kodaikanal to the Ashram for the *Jayanti* celebrations. After attending the *Jayanti*, my parents would go to my father's village, Melvayalamoor, which is about 20 miles from Tiruvannamalai. I was taken to Sri Bhagavan when I was two years old. My two younger sisters and I used to be taken almost every year to Sri Ramanasramam for the *Jayanti* celebrations. In our case we could say we were seen by Sri Bhagavan first. We were conscious of seeing him much later.

My uncle, who looked after our lands in Melvayalamoor, was also a great devotee of Sri Bhagavan and Nayana [Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni]. Both in my house and in my uncle's house there was always a picture of Sri Bhagavan in the *puja* room. If not every day, almost every week, there used to be some discussion or the other about the life and teachings of Sri Bhagavan. From childhood I was brought up in a Bhagavan-charged atmosphere.

Viswanatha Swami visited our house and stayed with us for several days together on numerous occasions. Later, when I was teaching at Madras Christian College, he stayed with me a couple of times. He used to spend much of his time talking about the glory and grandeur of Sri Bhagavan and Nayana. He taught us a number of devotional songs. He had a melodious voice and could sing beautifully.

Hearing from my father, uncle and Viswanatha Swami that Sri Bhagavan used to read the letters written by devotees to him, as a boy I used to write to him occasionally, seeking his blessings. As there was no high school in Kodaikanal, my father sent me to study at Sir P. S. Sivaswami Iyer High School, Tirukattupally. I studied there for four years between 1941-45, from III Form to VI Form, and stayed in the hostel attached to it.

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Talking to Sri Bhagavan

In 1941, I was taken by my uncle to Sri Ramanasramam. We had bought some mangoes and my uncle said that I should put them on the small stool near Sri Bhagavan's sofa. I went into the old meditation hall along with my uncle and put the mangoes on the floor and prostrated before Sri Bhagavan and sat near the window that now overlooks Sri Bhagavan's *samadhi*. My uncle sat next to me. When I was looking at Sri Bhagavan, Sri Bhagavan asked my uncle, "Who is this?" My uncle said, "He is my brother's son. He is studying in III Form." Then Sri Bhagavan said, turning to me, " So you are the person writing letters to me." I had a strange feeling of awe, coupled with great joy. I said in a low voice, "Yes." Sri Bhagavan said, "Does your father send money to you so that you can write letters to me?" and laughed. I wasn't quite sure whether Sri Bhagavan was being sarcastic or made the remark in a light vein. I sweated for a while, continuing to look at him. As it was early in the morning, there were only two or three devotees in the hall. When we came out of the hall after some time, my uncle, who had been a frequent visitor to the Ashram for several years, said, "You must consider yourself very lucky. Sri Bhagavan usually does not ask `Who is he?' It is a rare thing."

Observing Sri Bhagavan

Till 1950, I used to visit the Ashram a couple of times every year; the frequency however increased between 1948 and 1950. I attended the *Kumbhabhishekam* of the Mathrubhuteswara Temple. It was an elaborate, solemn affair. After the *Kumbhabhishekam* was performed, in the evening *arati* was offered to the deity in the temple and was brought to Sri Bhagavan by Chinnaswami, Viswanatha Swami and President Venkataraman. I was sitting very close to Sri Bhagavan in the meditation hall attached to the temple. It was a moving sight when Sri Bhagavan extended his hands and touched the *arati* with great reverence, closing his eyes.

Soon after each operation was performed on Sri Bhagavan's cancer, I used to visit him. Sometimes I used to cry uncontrollably looking at Sri Bhagavan from a distance. As far as Sri Bhagavan was concerned, he was ever the same serene, blissful Self. He behaved as if the cancer belonged to somebody else.

The last time I saw Sri Bhagavan was on 7th April, 1950, exactly one week before his *nirvana*. When I heard the news of Sri Bhagavan's *nirvana* at Kodaikanal, on 14th April, 1950, I did not break down, nor did I feel depressed. I felt a peace—a peace that was totally unexpected. Viswanatha Swami, whom I met a month later, also said that he enjoyed an indescribable peace at the time of Sri Bhagavan's *nirvana*. He was one of the few who were inside the room at the time Sri Bhagavan merged with Arunachala.

I was taken to Sri Bhagavan as a small boy and I visited him many times later on, but I never put even a single question to him. I listened to others asking questions and Sri Bhagavan's replies to them, but I never felt inclined to ask a question even once. The only thing I used to do was to sit close to him and take leave of him after prostrating to him. Most often he would nod his head or say in Tamil, "sari, sari" (O.K, O.K.).

Occasionally I used to think that it would be good to read Sri Bhagavan's works in his presence. I tried a couple of times but I could not read anything in his presence. I was either looking at him or meditating.

Close Encounters with Sri Bhagavan

Sometime in 1949, when Sri Bhagavan was still in the meditation hall, I sat at the entrance looking at Sri Bhagavan from outside. His shoulder was bandaged because of cancer. I thought to myself: "I have been coming to the Ashram so often. But I have had no experience of real meditation. Sri Bhagavan has not granted

me this experience." Thinking along these lines, I kept looking at Sri Bhagavan for a considerable time and then closed my eyes. I do not know how long I was in that state. When I opened my eyes I found that the meditation hall was empty. Sri Bhagavan was not there on the stone couch in the meditation hall. Sri Bhagavan and the devotees must have gone past me as I was sitting at the entrance. When I realised that I had been sitting when Sri Bhagavan went past me, I was horrified. I felt how disrespectful I was. But suddenly, I realised that Sri Bhagavan, out of his unbounded grace, granted me an experience whereby I was completely oblivious of my surroundings.

Even today, I am unhappy that I did not get up when Sri Bhagavan and his devotees went past me. Sri Bhagavan gives us rare experiences when we least expect them.

On another occasion, when I was an 18 year old student, around noon or so, I was walking towards the meditation hall. The new meditation hall was not there then; the whole place was an open ground. I was thinking of something and walking with my head down. When I neared the well, I looked up and saw Sri Bhagavan standing at a short distance and talking to a devotee. I was taken unawares as I did not expect Sri Bhagavan to be there. Sri Bhagavan who was talking to the other person, looked at me sideways. I stood still, as I did not want to disturb Sri Bhagavan in any way. When he looked at me that way, I felt a powerful light penetrate me and engulf me. I experienced a bliss that I had not experienced before. I was in that state for about twenty days.

My uncle, V. S. Srinivas Iyer, did his Intermediate at Voorhese College, Vellore and became village Munsiff of Vailamoor village and worked in that capacity for over forty years. He saw Sri Bhagavan even as a student. In the early days, there used to be very few visitors to the Ashram, which was then just a thatched shed. Before he met Sri Bhagavan, my uncle had come under the influence of Kavyakanta and had taken *upadesa* from him. This fact is mentioned in the Sanskrit biography of Kavyakanta, *Vasishta Vaibhavam,* written by Kapali Sastry.

The first question that my uncle put to Sri Bhagavan as a young man was, "Is it true that Ravana had ten heads." Sri Bhagavan replied, "How does it help you to know whether he had ten heads or not?" My uncle said, "Nayana says it is all false." Sri Bhagavan replied, "Nayana has studied a lot and has come to certain conclusions. What do I know?" On another occasion my uncle asked Sri Bhagavan when he was going round the Hill, "Bhagavan, Nayana did *tapas* for the freedom of this country. Do you think we will get freedom?" Sri Bhagavan said, "Why do you ask me? Am I an astrologer?" After some time, Sri Bhagavan turned to my uncle and said, " Why do you worry? There is a Supreme Power which carries the whole burden. Our job is to do our work and submit to it."

Once an Ashram deer was attacked by some animal and the wounds turned from bad to worse. Sri Bhagavan sat near the deer and held its face in his hands, looking at its tearful eyes. Sri Bhagavan sat like that for a couple of hours. Chinnaswami asked my uncle who was standing close to look after the deer and relieve Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan heard this but did not make any response. Sri Bhagavan sat there till the deer breathed its last. That was the compassion that Sri Bhagavan had for that deer. Soon after, Sri Bhagavan went to the hall. There is a Samadhi for the deer in the Ashram.

When the Mathrubhuteswara Temple was being constructed, Sri Bhagavan used to help the construction workers by lifting the bricks and offering them to the mason. When my uncle saw Sri Bhagavan doing this type of work he was astonished. Sri Bhagavan said to my uncle, "I am doing construction work."

He Said, "It is not for the sake of the husband, my dear, that he is loved, but for one's own sake that he is

loved. It is not for the sake of the wife, my dear, that she is loved, but for one's own sake that she is loved. It is not for the sake of the sons, my dear, that they are loved, but for one's own sake that they are loved.... It is not for the sake of all, my dear, that all is loved, but for one's own sake that it is loved. The Self, my dear Maitrey, should be realized, should be heard of, reflected on and meditated upon. When the Self, my dear, is realized by being heard of, reflected on and meditated upon, all this is known." — *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Chapt. IV, verse 6*

Advent at Arunachala - New York And Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia, Canada

On Sunday, August 29, 1999, the Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama celebrated in the Arunachala Ramana Mandiram the 103rd anniversary of Bhagavan's arrival at Sri Arunachala. About thirty devotees arrived the day before the program and many helped with preparations, especially with the cooking of numerous delicious dishes to serve the guests.

Dr. S. Swaminathan performed the worship and conducted the program, which consisted of a *puja* to Bhagavan, a short talk by Dennis Hartel, group recitations of Bhagavan's works, *bhajans* and *arati*. Dr. Swaminathan also gave a lucid and moving account of his three visits to Sri Bhagavan in the 1940's

A meal was served to all the devotees, as they relaxed amidst the sunny open lawns surrounding the temple. Then an expedition of adventurers, young and old, took to the forest trails and climbed up to our own Virupaksha Cave, which adorns the North Mountain behind the Ashrama.

New York City

Bhagavan's 103rd Advent at Arunachala was celebrated at the New York Ashrama on Sunday, September 5th.

The program began with the recitation of Bhagavan's 108 Names, assisted by the children who placed flowers on Bhagavan's statue and photo as each name was recited. Next, Dennis welcomed the guests and introduced Sri Chinmoy who sang his beautiful Bengali song composed on the Maharshi. An English translation of the song was passed out to all *(see below)*. Sri Chinmoy then read out observations and reflections from his June 1999 visit to Sri Ramanasramam *(see page 7)*. He had been sincerely moved and inspired by Bhagavan's presence.

Then the highly talented Rajiv Menon sang his rendering of "Dakshinamurti Stotram," along with a few other songs. Other devotees offered songs as well. All devotees joined in with the familiar refrains and lyrics. Everyone recited "Upadesa Saram," and Dr. Wally Shishkov presented Sri Chinmoy with a wooden-mounted painting of Sri Arunachala before the program was concluded with Siva Arati.

After the *arati*, a delectable assortment of food preparations was served to the full house of guests. And after all had eaten and relaxed, at least half of the devotees gathered again in the shrine room where *bhajans* and Vedic recitations continued for another hour or two. It was well into the evening before devotees dispersed, reluctant as they were to break the spell of the ever-charming smile, simple-direct teaching and ever-flowing grace of Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

My Visit to Sri Ramanasramam

Sri Chinmoy's talk at the N.Y. Arunachala Ashrama September 5th, 1999

In June this year I was in India for a few days to visit my brother who lives at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. On June 9th, I decided to go to Ramana Maharshi's Ashram, which is only two and a half hours away. This was my fourth visit. I went there in 1956, 1958 and again fifteen years ago.

The first thing to greet me when I arrived was a peacock. The peacock was so beautiful. Then I started moving around the Ashram, here and there, taking video and photographs. The entire Ashram was full of peace, peace, peace.

I entered the main meditation hall. The statue of Sri Ramana Maharshi is most sacred. When I first saw this statue of Ramana garlanded in 1956, 1 felt Ramana Maharshi's living presence inside the statue. This time also, this particular statue was absolutely living. Unfortunately, because of the condition of my knee, I was able to go around the statue only once. Then I sat down to meditate. The atmosphere inside the meditation hall was so sublime.

Afterwards, I wanted to go to the cave where Maharshi actually meditated when he arrived at Arunachala. I was told that it was a forty-five minute walk and I could not walk at all. When I went there 15 years ago, I saw the cave and I had a very good experience. But this time it was impossible.

I decided to go and ask the President of the Ashram if it was really such a long walk. The President was not there, but the Vice-president was available. I entered into his office and we began talking and talking. Mani was curious to know if I had known Dilip. We began our conversation with Dilip Kumar Roy, the Golden Voice. I knew him in my adolescent years at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. So I was able to tell the Vice President many stories about Dilipda and my own personal experiences. He was so pleased to hear them.

Then our marathon conversation touched on South India's greatest poet, Subramaniam Bharati, and also the immortal Sanskrit scholar, T. V. Kapali Shastri, who happened to be my Sanskrit teacher.

The Vice-president was extremely, extremely kind to me. He told me his name was Mani, but when I asked him his position, he said, "I am nobody, I am nobody." He was very humble. We spent over an hour together. He repeatedly requested me to stay the night at the Ashram so that I could meet the President the following day, but I could not comply with his loving request.

At one point, Mani asked me, "Was it true that the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram watched the light?" [The star that appeared and floated slowly across the sky at the moment of the Maharshi's *Mahasamadhi*].

I said, "It is absolutely true. We were at that time in the playground. I was one of the captains. I was only twenty or thirty meters away from the Mother. As soon as we saw the column of light, the Mother immediately folded her hands and we also folded our hands. We watched the light. It was like a fireball. Then the radio made the announcement that Ramana Maharshi had passed on."

Mani was very, very moved when he heard that the Mother had folded her hands and we all did the same. He was thrilled.

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As I was taking my leave of Mani, he asked me, "What do you think of our Ashram?"

I said, "I have been to many spiritual places. I live in America, in New York. In America, sound is sound, and silence is silence. Here, around the temple and in the vicinity of Ramana Maharshi's Ashram, I wish to say that the silence is such a deep silence. But inside the sound also I feel silence."

Mani looked at me. So I added, by way of explanation, "Sound is sound and silence is silence. But here at Ramana Maharshi's place, even in the sound, I feel such peace, such joy. I see men and women passing by, and I see such peace in their faces. There is so much peace. Here in sound also I feel silence." Then he was very, very happy.

On my way back to Pondicherry in the taxi my soul was swimming and swimming in the sea of ecstasy. That is when I had the inspiration to write my song in Bengali about Ramana Maharshi. I translated it into English upon my return to New York.

In July, I had the blessingful opportunity to speak to Mani's brother, Sundaram, on the phone. The President and I had a very illumining conversation about *Avatars*. I was telling him that each human being is a God-representative, while *Avatars* like Maharshi Ramana are the direct representatives, supreme representatives, of the Absolute Supreme. We are trying to follow in the footsteps of these mightiest, giant souls who came to earth and whose consciousness is still here on earth and will forever remain here to illumine the world and elevate the consciousness of the world.

My heart is all gratitude to this mightiest soul, Maharshi Ramana. I also wish to offer my deepest gratitude to my esteemed Brother-Friends, Sundaram and Mani, who are now shouldering the responsibility of Maharshi's Ashram.

I am so fortunate to be here with you today on the blessingful anniversary of the Maharshi's arrival at Arunachala and for that I offer my heartfelt gratitude to the genuinely aspiring soul, Dennis, and to all the members of this sacred Ashram.

O Great Sage Ramana
A Compassion-Eye, a time immemorial Dream—
Great Sage Ramana!
The destruction-illumination of the little "i"
And
The perfection-manifestation of the big "I"
In you we have found.
You are the Supreme Utterance
Of the Land of Immortality.
In one Form you are the Darling, King and Light
Of Arunachala.
You embody the Supreme Satisfaction
Of earth and Heaven.

— *Sri Chinmoy*

(Bengali words, June 9th, 1999; English translation, June 12th, 1999)

Letters

"Grace From A Distance"

The article by Elizabeth Lok, entitled "Grace From A Distance," in your Sept/Oct 1999 newsletter, is very moving, particularly when the author refers to Bhagavan's deep brown eyes. It has no rational or scientific explanation, perhaps. We can only say that it is the Maharshi's Grace in action. To those of us who read of the experience, it seems miraculous. To the author, it was revelatory. It seems her heart was so open to the Master that he could not help but respond. I was stirred by this inspiring story and I am grateful that you chose to share it with us. Thank you. Jai Ramana ...Jai, jai, jai... and thank you for your publication. It means so much to me.

- Yours,
Jerrold Posner,
Florida

"As you are so is the world"

I was walking by one of the busiest intersections in Toronto when I saw this message in front of The Church of the Redeemer. The next day I returned with my camera and took this photo.
I was very surprised to see this posted in front of a Christian church where thousands of cars and people pass daily. The message was up for the first week of September, 1999.

- Devraj Shampur,
Toronto

An E-mail

Good morning, My name is Uma Subramanian. We live in Maryland near Washington, D.C. It was by chance that a video cassette of Sri Bhagavan fell into our hands maybe three or four years ago. The first time we saw it, some thing gripped us. The beautiful portrayal, the sensitive narration, left a very indelible impression on my mind. Still for the next year or two, it faded to the back of my mind. But thoughts of Sri Bhagavan were ever with me and I felt like seeing the video again. I borrowed it from our friend, and this time it was a profound experience. Even though I had seen it numerous times before, I was very moved by the experience. I could now identify with the devotees' feeling for Sri Bhagavan, and I was crying most of the time that I was watching it. This led me to get a copy of any book written about Him. Luckily (or it was His grace) I got a copy of Arthur Osborne's book from the bookstore. What can one say about the book? After reading Osborne's book my mind would not accept the other light reading that I normally read. Every time I read it there is something new and I am not bored in spite of re-readings. I think that I've read it more than any text book even. Soon after, I got another book from India called *Ramana Arunachala,* also by Osborne. Also, I log on to Sri Bhagavan's web site almost every day and it is a joy to read the 'newsletters'.

I would like to get more details about the books that could be purchased from you, and also a calendars for the Y2K. Since it is going to be the 50th Mahanirvana year, are you planning something special for the same? Also, do you carry Muruganar's *Hymn of Adoration to Sri Bhagavan*? I saw that Professor TKS has translated the same into English. It would be great to hear from you.

Uma Sahasram

When I was last at Tiruvannamalai, K. Natesan presented me with *Umasahasram,* including Kapali Shastri's Commentary. For some time I have been trying to find someone in Australia capable and interested in translating this important work. Unfortunately I have had no success. As Bhagavan indicated in Suri Nagama's *Letters*, he felt as though he had dictated the last 300 verses himself. This alone should be incentive enough—not to mention the great benefit to the devotees of the Divine Mother—to make this project a top priority. I hope you may feel inspired to find a suitable person. Om Ramana

- Charles Read,
Australia

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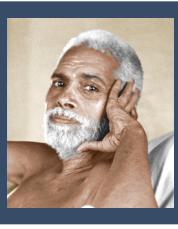

My Father Hari Chand Khanna

By Ranvir Khanna

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 behaviour 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 pilgrims 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 laugh 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 honour. 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 quarrelling 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 travelled 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 honoured 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'

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 Thayumanavar, 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 Thayumanavar, 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

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, let 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 them, even without your knowledge. 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

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

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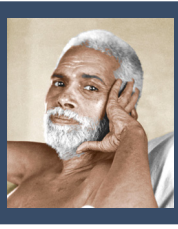

Sundarammal

By Swami Abhishiktananda

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 neighbouring 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.

⇦

Somewhere 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.

- (Rendered from French into English by Father James Stuart)
— *The Mountain Path*, Oct. 1980

The Universe and Mind Control

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 practicer 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 Kanakamma

Srimati Kanakamma doesn't need much coaxing to speak about the wonder of Sri Bhagavan and the blessings he showered on her. In the following video-taped 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 putting a question 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. Subbaramayya, 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, "Oho! 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 behaviour, 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 video-tape me speaking about Bhagavan. Isn't this also Bhagavan's doing?

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

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 endeavour. 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.

Service

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 video-taped interview of Srimati Kanakammal, recorded in March of 1999, were played for the devotees. V. Swaminathan interpreted it into English (for the text, see page 3).

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

A Children's Ashram in Nova Scotia

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 enrol your children, or participate in this programme in any way, please call or e-mail ..... Geeta: (718) 575-3215 — E-mail: Geeta145@aol.com

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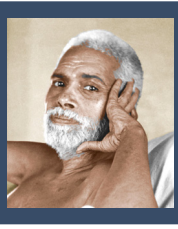

"Where could I go? I am here."

The 50 Mahasamadhi Anniversary

The following string of reminiscences were collected from devotees who had the rare good fortune of coming under the benign glance of the Master.

The unique manifestation of Divine Grace on earth known and loved by us as Bhagavan Sri Ramana receded into its Reality as night set in on Friday, April 14th, 1950. The very moment that Bhagavan entered into Maha-Nirvana, at 8:47 that night, the skies announced the great event with a long, slow trail of light.

Bhagavan Ramana moved with us, as one of us, though he had, even as a lad of 17, found his Unity with the Reality underlying all appearance and had remained ever since as that resplendent Pure Consciousness, the Self. Though he never left Arunachala after his first arrival there, the power of his Light spread silently through the world during the half century and more of his stay there. Many earnest seekers approached him and some found spiritual illumination in his presence. His mode of life was natural, his ways were gracious, his smile brought peace to the heart. His look was an initiation into Divine Mystery; his teaching was simple, direct and profound, based on man's natural experience of I-ness. He directed all to seek and find for themselves the Source of the ego, the Reality behind their individuality, from which all thoughts and actions proceed. His luminous abidance in the Self was itself a teaching conveyed from heart to heart in silence. As all his actions were waves from the Light within, the grace of which attracted and uplifted all who came in contact with him.[1]

Rajapalayam Ramani Ammal

I was at Rajapalayam at the time of Bhagavan's Mahanirvana. That night, I saw a beautiful blue light going up in the sky and I knew Bhagavan had left the body. I did not want to live after that and so I started fasting, hoping to drop the body that way. For five or six days, I did not touch food. But during that time, I had several visions, and in one of them, I was taken inside a cave on the Hill and saw Rishis performing Yagnas. Sri Bhagavan was seated there. Bhagavan said, "Why are you crying? You say that I have gone away, but where have I gone? I am here." Some Rishis brought some Prasad to Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan took some and gave it to me. I could not remember in the dream that I was fasting. For five days afterwards, the smell of that Prasad was with me. Now was that a dream or reality? I consider it to be Bhagavan's Grace.

The aroma of that Prasad even spread around my house. My brother wondered what I had eaten. That aroma was simply out-of-the-world. The morning after the dream, I started taking food and coffee. My brother and sister were also fasting with me, deciding to give up their bodies if I were to give up mine. In the dream, Bhagavan was seated near a tank and Kamadhenu (the celestial cow) was near him. Rishis and Munis were serving him. Bhagavan was looking splendid, like Lord Siva. It was a divine sight indeed. The smell of the Prasad remained for five days. How can I take it to be a dream? From that day onwards I had no thought at all that Bhagavan had left us. He is all pervading. I felt no more sorrow in my heart. He is here too. See how we all are gathered here. What have we done to deserve this?[2]

Major Chadwick

On the last night, Bhagavan was lying in the small room which had originally been built as a storeroom when he had moved into the big hall. We were all seated along the verandah of the temple opposite. Our only view of the room was through a small ventilator window about six feet from the ground. Naturally, seated as we were on the ground, we had no view of the interior of the room where he lay; all we could see was the constant movement of a fan backwards and forwards. This fan was anxiously watched by everybody, for when it stopped we would know that the end had come.

The Ashram authorities were afraid that there might be some trouble from the waiting crowds, as a certain clique had arranged, if possible, to remove the body and bury it outside the Ashram. It would have been quite impossible to do this. There were lots of police about and the majority of opinion was naturally against such a scandal. However the powers were scared. For this reason about an hour before the end the D.M.O., who was present, was prompted by the Manager to come out and announce that there was no immediate danger of anything happening that night. It was a scandalous thing to do. Naturally many of the people went home for their evening meal and so missed the last moments.

There were some American reporters and photographers, who were there just out for a scoop. They were living less than half a mile away. One of them standing outside the house suddenly looked up and saw very bright star or meteor move slowly across the sky towards the North over the top of the Hill. He called out to the rest of the party, who ran out and saw the same phenomenon. One and all agreed that something had happened to Bhagavan. Even though they were without special faith in him, by some intuition they were certain that this must have been the case. It happened exactly at the time of the passing (8:47 p.m. on April 14th, 1950) and was seen by many people, all of whom strangely enough, associated it with the same thing. People in Madras also saw it and some got into their cars immediately and made their way to the Ashram. This is a fact which I will not attempt to explain, but must accept it as it happened.

"Go! Where can I go? I shall always be here."

The power of Sri Ramana, who gave up his physical form has not diminished. He is everywhere, like the light in a room shed by an electric bulb. But the light is found to be far stronger near the bulb, the source of light, than in any other part of the room, though no spot is in darkness. What wonder, then, if the power of our Guru is found near the place where his body is interred?[3]

Attendant Krishnaswami

Bhagavan gave several indications that he wanted no treatment. One day he threatened to drop his body by not eating anything. I pleaded with Bhagavan that I would take care of all his bodily needs, and that he should eat and stay put inside that room. One day Bhagavan refused to drink water, but the next day he demanded huge amounts of water. I pleaded with him to moderate his intake of food and water. So many things like this happened in those last days.

Two days after he drank lots of water, the end was to come. I was with him on that day, too. In the afternoon, I gave him the essence of pomegranate, which Bhagavan could swallow. At 5 o'clock in the evening Satyananda Swami gave him orange juice, which was advised by the doctors, but Bhagavan had some difficulty swallowing it.

On the day of the Mahasamadhi, O. P. Ramaswami Reddiyar, the retired Chief Minister, was attending to the affairs of the Ashram. A police officer came to inquire about Bhagavan's condition on behalf of the District

Police Superintendent, who wanted to have Bhagavan's darshan. I told him to ask the Sarvadhikari. They said that only I would be able to give them the correct picture. So I told them that as far as I was concerned, I did not think Bhagavan's body would last beyond 10 O'clock in the night. So they sent word to the District Police Superintendent to come and see Bhagavan.

There was another problem. Devotees wanted to have the darshan of their Guru. I did not want to incur their anger by denying them one last darshan of their Guru. I requested them to come in a queue and not put any questions or expect any words of wisdom from Bhagavan. Darshan continued till 5 p.m.. devotees came in large numbers, and although police kept the line moving fast, they went back and stood in line again, weeping and crying. It was a sight that moved me very deeply.

Seeing the difficulty that Bhagavan was experiencing, I drew a screen across and didn't allow any more darshan. O. P. Ramaswami Reddiyar came, and I told him that he could come in, but he declined. Seeing how much Bhagavan's body was suffering, O. P. Reddiyar requested the devotees to sing "Aksharamanamalai." He did this because Bhagavan's body was suffering and he didn't want anybody to notice it.

Bhagavan had told me that a Jnani does not mind how his body is dropped, for the body idea has already died. It was only for the naked eye that Bhagavan was suffering. In reality there was no suffering since Bhagavan had no *dehatma buddhi* (I-am-the-body idea). Lots of pillows were placed to prop up his head and He was sitting with his legs stretched. Suddenly, Bhagavan asked me to seat him in *padmasana* pose, and in that pose the last breath went out of him, and he became still.

When Bhagavan dropped the body, I was holding the head, and Subramanian was standing next to me. I was looking at Bhagavan's face, and when the lower jaw dropped, I knew that he had left the body. The women outside sensed it somehow and, beating their breasts, tried to come inside and have one last darshan. But the police prevented it. I helped carry the body to the Mandapam of the mother's temple. My service to Bhagavan ended there.[4]

S. S. Cohen

5th April: Yesterday, Monsieur Cartier-Brassen, the expert French photographer, took a photograph of Sri Bhagavan, which may prove to be the last one of him.

Maharshi's health has remained more or less stationary since about a week. His nausea and scanty urination have not been persistent, yet there has been no improvement in his general condition, which continues to prevent his coming out for darshan.

Yesterday morning, His Excellency the Governor of Madras, the Maharaja of Bhavanagar, and his wife had Sri Bhagavan's darshan in the small room, then worshipped in the Ashram's temple, inquired after the two white peacocks they had presented some weeks back and left.

6th April, 1950: Symptoms of definite toxaemia have set in Maharshi's body. For the whole day his urinary secretion did not exceed one ounce.... Doctors gently argue with him that scanty urination can be relieved only by an increased intake of fruit juice and water. 'And if I can't take?' he would answer, and there the matter must end. He leaves his body to manage its health or diseases as best it can, without the slightest effort of cooperation on his part. His mind is ever sunk in bliss. It is true that his body is suffering, but that is no reason why he should disturb his mind to oblige it. If it dies, well and good; if it remains, so much the worse for it: it

is the business of Him who made it to keep or take it away and do all the worrying—it is none of his own business to interfere and inconvenience himself on its behalf.

13th April, 1950: Tamil New Year, 2 p.m., Morning observations : Maharshi's diastole climbed up to 46, but the systole remained stationary at 68, pulse 94, temperature 98.4 (normal! what an irony!), breathing 22 per minute.

Morning darshan ran for half an hour, during which Maharshi's eyes remained closed and when he occasionally opened them, they looked in front rather than to the left where the devotees were filing past him. His diet consists now of only buttermilk.

10 p.m.: Owing to the very heavy attendance of visitors from all over the South, nearly 1500, the evening darshan had to be lengthened to 45 minutes.

Many devotees remained till late in the evening to receive the final medical oral report for the day. At 9:30, Dr. Krishnamurti, a local physician and a great devotee, walked up to me and said: 'My own impression is that there is no immediate danger. Bhagavan has just told the attendants to go to sleep as he himself was going to do. His breathing is not laboured, and there is no gasping in evidence.'

Friday, 14th April: Maharshi is in a very precarious condition. The whole morning has been spent by devotees in hushed gloom and with bated breath. After evening darshan, the unanimous verdict is that it is positively the last. The Master is now propped on large pillows, almost in a sitting posture, the head resting backward with open mouth, and two attendants briskly fanning him, to enable him to breathe freely—the battle for air, has thus started. At 7 p.m., oxygen is administered to him for about five minutes, but seeing that it gave him no relief, he feebly asked that it should be stopped.

The situation was tense: about five-hundred devotees were outside in sad expectation of the solemn last moment. Blood relations, Ashram workers, a few old disciples, and some new aspirants went in by turn to have a last sight of him. When the end was known to be approaching, the whole congregation with one voice started chanting the Tamil hymns he had many years ago composed in praise of Lord Arunachala: "Arunachala Shiva, Arunachala Shiva, Arunachala!" till it came at about 8:47. Many devotees, grief-stricken and beating their breasts, lost control of their feelings and rushed en masse to the small room where the sacred body lay, but police officers immediately cordoned off the area till it was brought out and placed in the centre of the big darshan hall in yoga asana for all the people to pay their last respects to it. The news spread like wildfire to the town and the neighbouring villages and drew huge crowds. By 9:15, the crowd grew so thick, that it became necessary to give a chance to all to pay their homage and pass the body in an orderly manner. A queue was thus formed— seven to ten broad—at a quick-march pace. It is still (11:55 p.m.) continuing unabatingly.

Around the sofa sat dozens of disciples, some chanting Maharshi's verses and other devotional hymns, but others remained in silent contemplation. Sandalwood paste and jasmine flowers now cover the body and incense burns by its side.

At about 9 p.m., Monsieur Cartier-Brassen, the French photographer, who has been here for about a fortnight with his wife, related an experience of his to me. "It is a most astonishing experience," he said. "I was in the open space in front of my house, when my friends drew my attention to the sky, where I saw a vividly-luminous shooting star with a luminous tail, unlike any shooting star I had before seen, coming from the South, moving slowly across the sky and, reaching the top of Arunachala, disappeared behind it. Because of its

singularity we all guessed its import and immediately looked at our watches - it was 8:47 - and then raced to the Ashram only to find that our premonition had been only too sadly true: the Master had passed into Mahanirvana at that very minute." Several other devotees in the Ashram and in the town later told me that they too had seen the tell-tale meteor.[5]

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Sunday, April 16, 1950

RELIGIOUS RECLUSE MOURNED IN INDIA

Shri Ramana Maharshi Was Called a 'Living Saint' — Made Abode in Cave

Special to the New York Times
NEW DELHI, India, April 15 —

Hindu India mourned today the death of one of her greatest "living saints" and a remarkable man of his time, Shri Ramana Maharshi, who died last night at the age of 71 in his Ashram retreat at Tiruvannamalai near Pondicherry.

Shri Ramana was renowned as a religious recluse and seer whose piety and philosophy of self-abnegation gained him followers in many countries. His devotees in Tiruvannamalai, who include men and women of many nationalities, held to their master's own philosophy as he was taken from them. They believe, like him, that there is no death, but that Shri Ramana's physical form has ceased to function, while his inner-being continues on an exalted plane.

It was his development of this theory that made the second son of an obscure village lawyer one of India's most revered sages.

Shri Ramana had humble beginnings, and his school record was far from brilliant. Neglecting his studies, he brooded on religious subjects. One day in July, 1896, while reflecting on the mystery of death, the young Venkataraman, as his name was then, conceived the idea that death of the body is a relative thing and that the intellect belongs to a power beyond which never dies.

After a month of profound meditation on this subject, he left home abruptly and repaired to the temple of his particular God, Arunachala, in Tiruvannamalai. Here he shaved his head and adopted the robe of the Sanyasi (holy man). Soon he came to be regarded in the neighborhood as a queer one and he was jeered, stoned and eventually disowned by his family.

To escape persecution, the young ascetic took abode in a cave. He became so immersed in meditation that, according to his own later accounts, he was totally unaware of the terrible ravages to his physique by starvation and the bites of scorpions and insects that nearly devoured him alive.

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1. *The Last Days & Maha-Nirvana of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*
2. *Videotaped, Arunachala Ashrama*
3. *A Sadhu's Reminiscences*
4. *Videotaped, Arunachala Ashrama*
5. *Guru Ramana*

Though he rarely spoke—but composed religious expositions that later became famous throughout the Hindu world—the recluse attracted followers. Eventually, his dwelling became a place of pilgrimage. In later years, the large Ashram grew about the odd man, who made no effort to proselytize and continued in silent meditation and writing. His followers changed his name to Maharshi, which means great saint.

Here in India, where thousands of so-called holy men claim close ties with the infinite, it is said that the most remarkable thing about Shri Ramana Maharshi was that he never claimed anything remarkable for himself, yet became one most respected of all.

Eternal Existence

Grief exists only so long as one considers oneself to be of a definite form. If the form is transcended, one will know that the one Self is eternal. There is no death nor birth. That which is born is only the body. The body is the creation of the ego. But the ego is not ordinarily perceived without the body. It is always identified with the body. It is the thought which matters. Let the sensible man consider if he knew his body in deep sleep. Why does he feel it in the waking state? But, although the body was not felt in sleep, did not the Self exist then? How was he in deep sleep? How is he when awake? What is the difference? Ego rises up and that is waking. Simultaneously thoughts arise. Let him find out to whom are the thoughts. Wherefrom do they arise? They must spring up from the conscious Self. Apprehending it even vaguely helps the extinction of the ego. Thereafter the realisation of the one Infinite Existence becomes possible. In that state there are no individuals other than the Eternal Existence. Hence there is no thought of death or wailing.

— Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 80

Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat

1912 - 2000

All devotees of Arunachala Ashrama in New York and Nova Scotia were very saddened to hear of the passing of the founder of Arunachala Ashrama, Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat.

At the New York City Ashrama, in the early morning of Monday, April 10, Sri Bhagawat was found completely merged in His Master, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Eighteen months earlier, near his 86th birthday, he suffered a stroke which left him partially paralyzed. From then on he was unable to walk, and yet except for occasional lapses remained stable and strong. A smile was never far from his lips and he rarely asked for anything other than a warm blanket. His deep love for all of Sri Bhagavan's devotees was still being expressed in many subtle ways and his daily absorption in the Heart was his only source of joy and comfort. The seed of love and service he planted in many devotees will continue to grow and guide them throughout their lives.

The July/August issue of the *MAHARSHI* will be dedicated to his memory.

Sometimes I touch this friend (typewriter) with my prayers, and sometimes I sit back, close my eyes and drink deeper, deeper, and yet deeper in the Ocean of Peace, Bliss and Happiness that Thou art for the world. Every expiration and inspiration of my breath has slowed down, reminding me to abide in the Self, nothing but the Self, and thus transfer all my burdens to Thee. Every atom and proton of my life is pulsating, heaving, bubbling, bursting and dancing with Self-Awareness, and how I would like to resound and reverberate the land with the chanting and recitation of Thy Name.

No sooner I close my eyes than I find myself absorbed in the Holy Hill of the Beacon Light, and there is not the least desire in me for anything but Thee. Like an inebriated, intoxicated and drunken person I find myself sunk in the Ocean of Sri Sachchidananda Ramana Bhagavan. I call on Thee to shower Thy Infinite Grace and Mercy upon me and make me the instrument of Thy Mighty, Powerful and Inscrutable Will, Sri Ramana Arunachala Dakshinamurty Parabrahman! Thou lifted me from the dust and dirt of my village Sahuri and carried me across the seven seas so that Thou would take the work from me of building Thy Fifth Avenue Temple in New York. Thou art my only wherewithal, and on the sheer strength of Thy Name I must trudge along to the Holy Hill of the Beacon Light, my Master and Lord, Ramana!

Thou hast reduced the entire creation into the Self in the Lotus of my Heart, and I sit here with my eyes closed and drink deep in the nectar of Self- Inquiry of WHO AM I? Under the mighty impact of Ramana Bhagavan's Infinite Grace and Mercy, I continue to abide in Thy Name day and night. Many times I find myself swinging in the chair, drunk with the celestial wine of Bhagavan Sri Arunachala Shiva. Although there is not the slightest trace of any aid for the construction of Thy Fifth Avenue Temple in New York City, my Heart-Lotus is ever dancing in the sunshine of the Dazzling Sun of Self-Enquiry of WHO AM I? How wonderful it is for me to abide in the Self with one-pointed attention, and leave all my burdens to Thee, Sri Ramana Arunachala Bhagavan.

— Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, New York, 1980

With special guest:
SRI V.S. RAMANAN,
President, Sri Ramanasramam, India
The program will include a puja, recitations, bhajans and readings, followed by a lunch.

Location:
Community Center
Hindu Temple Society Of North America
(Ganesha Temple)
143-09 Holly Avenue
Flushing, Queens, Ny 11355

YOU, YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO JOIN US IN COMMEMORATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF

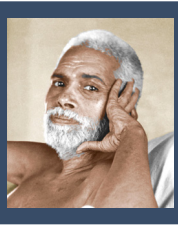
Sri Ramana Maharshi's Mahasamadhi

ON SUNDAY, MAY 7TH, 2000 - 11 A.M.

The *Maharshi* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil K. Sharma. Produced and distributed by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, 66-12 Clyde Street, Rego Park, New York 11374, USA. Tel: (718) 575 3215. E-mail: ashrama@aol.com. All editions of this newsletter can be found on the internet at - "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

JULY / AUGUST 2000 EDITED BY - DENNIS HARTEL & DR. ANIL K. SHARMA VOL. 10 - NO. 4



Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat

IN THE NEW YORK Arunachala Ashrama, on Monday morning, April 10th, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat looked as if he were asleep. On closer examination it was found that his life breath had left the body and he had left with it. From all appearances no one could have guessed that he was about to depart. The previous night he was quietly absorbed listening to both the morning and evening Veda Parayanas, one after the other, then had a meal, smiled and conversed with the Ashrama friends who had gathered that night, but showed no signs that this was his final night.

Since suffering a stroke eighteen months earlier he had been unable to walk and, of course, was weak. He would routinely sit in a wheel chair for five hours every day and, although functioning in a limited way, he was hardly conscious of his frailty, occasionally forgetting that he was unable to walk. Nevertheless he remained ever cheerful and grateful, rarely asking for anything other than a warm blanket and to be helped into bed when he was tired.

"It is now fifty years since Bhagavan's Mahanirvana." was the last thing he was told before he fell asleep and the lights were dimmed. He nodded his head, closed his eyes and that was it. We will never look at him who affectionately watched over us through those kind eyes again. Little did we know then that on April 14, exactly fifty years to the day, we would be cremating Bhagawat's physical remains.

Once he told us, "Who knows, this body may go any day. What do I have to show for all these years? What will I leave behind? 'Have I stopped serving, loving and worshipping all of you?' Everyday I question myself thus and that is what I want you to remember when this body goes." That was not his dying message to his friends, but was said twenty-five years earlier. It was what he wanted us to remember, and it is not difficult to remember this now, for all through the succeeding twenty-five years he continued to demonstrate his intense love for all of Sri Bhagavan's devotees who made their way to the Maharshi's tiniest of abodes in the West, Sri Arunachala Ashrama.

He knew that the love that flooded his heart came to him by the blessings of his Guru, Sri Ramana Maharshi, and as that flood inundated his heart it would overflow in such measure that he longed to deluge the entire creation with it. "You are all Sri Bhagavan for me," he would say. He never tired of serving devotees and expressing the joy and happiness that filled every pore of his body.

But from all appearances, his ascent on the royal road to realization was not an easy one. Although endowed from birth with a deep faith and natural devotion he had to struggle at every step, beginning with extricating himself from the quagmire of illiteracy and stagnation in his village. Let us read his own words on this matter:

"My mother Srimati Pancha Devi, and father Sriman Girivar Roy, although illiterate, were a very religious and God-fearing couple. I was their youngest child and was brought up in the hope of being given a formal education so that I might be able to read and recite the religious epic poem Ramayana of Goswami Tulsidas, the immortal saint-poet of the Hindi language. Thus, my Lord, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, inspired my parents to name me 'Bhagawat' (a devotee of the Lord) and to put me under the care of the village teacher, so that I might read and learn about the world.

"From my earliest childhood I remember being given to contemplation and very serious and deep conversation. That is why the villagers often called me 'an old man in the body of a child,' and I can picture myself as I used to go about the village with a serious countenance and deep purpose.

"My village was in the backwoods, devoid of even a place of worship. India is a land of God-intoxicated people, and it is very strange that this village could not even build a temple for its residents. To reach my village one had to make a great effort. No road led to it and all of us had to walk through fields, farms, floodwaters and sun-baked lands, and there was every likelihood of losing one's way in the night."

Even before reaching the age of ten Bhagawat became active in the Non-Cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi. This may have disconcerted his older brothers and parents, but Bhagawat was an incorrigible idealist right from his youth. Any high ideal outside the normal pursuits of life invariably captivated his heart and mind and he would throw his whole being into it with the utmost sincerity and intensity. It happened again when he read the life of Gautama Buddha in upper primary school. As a teenager his motto became, "National Liberation and Self-realization." His zeal for independence landed him in prison when he was seventeen years old.

His education was interrupted. In spite of financial difficulties, Bhagawat's family was still keen to send him for higher studies. After his release from jail he completed his high school in Calcutta, and then attended the Varanasi Hindu University and finally completed his B. A. at Patna University in Bihar. He then took employment as a teacher in a Hindi school in Darjeeling, a Himalayan hill station. It was here, about a month before his 29th birthday, he first read the Hindi version of A Search in Secret India. The moment his eyes fell on the photo of Sri Maharshi he wanted to fly to his abode at Arunachala.

He writes: "Near around 10th October, 1941, I received the book Gupt Bharat Ki Khoj, a Hindi translation of Paul Brunton's book, A Search In Secret India. I did not know about the book, but had simply come across an advertisement of it in a Hindi magazine. I must have been drawn towards it because it contained the stories of seers and sages of India. From the moment the book landed in my hands I was glued to it, and on finishing it, decided to go down to South India to have darshan of Bhagavan Ramana. I was also at that time instinctively drawn towards astrology and was very much impressed with the description in the chapter "Written In The Stars." As it turned out, I went to Ujjain to learn astrology, instead of going to Arunachala for Bhagavan's darshan.

"Although I spent some time in Ujjain and applied myself to astrology, I never wavered in my devotion to Bhagavan Ramana and tried my best to draw the attention of my teacher to the wonderful Sage who was radiating His Grace from Arunachala. With my mind's eye I saw Bhagavan sitting in Arunachala and looking at me. He was pouring His Grace on me, but He did not make it possible for me to go to Him. Instead, I pursued the study of astrology."

Because Darjeeling was considered a security-sensitive area by the British, Bhagawat was not permitted to return there to teach. The authorities had discovered his record of political activity. He then channelled his energy into Gandhi's Quit India Movement, but being hard pressed for income took several jobs as a journalist with newspapers in Ujjain and Calcutta.

As an idealist, Bhagawat was always inspired by the American Independence movement of the 18th Century and the purest forms of American democratic ideology. A longing in his heart arose to travel to the "New World," even though he had no contacts in the West or financial means to make the journey. He somehow intuitively felt his future was linked to America and no one could dissuade him from this apparently impracticable

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dream. Only his sister encouraged him by saying, "I do not know where you will find the money to go to America, or how you will do it, but you are so intent on going, so sincere in your desire, I believe God will make it possible for you to go." And he did go-in 1947, the year India attained independence.

He received a fellowship from the University of Iowa and a sympathetic friend arranged to lend him the money to make the ocean journey.

After two years in Iowa he received a Masters degree in journalism and began a job as the Information Officer at the Indian Embassy in Washington, D.C.

In accordance with the prevailing custom in India, Bhagawat was married to Yoga Maya Devi when he was just a boy of 17. She was only 8 at the time. Because of his constant moving about for education and to procure an income during his early years, he was unable to stay with her for any lengthy period of time. She joined him in the U. S. only in 1952. They gave birth to their first child in 1953. It was the following year that Bhagawat experienced a dramatic surge in his inner life:

"On Wednesday, October 13th, 1954, I was in the guest cottage of a Quaker couple, Helen and Albert Baily Jr., located on their farm in West Chester, Pennsylvania. The cottage was situated in a valley near their residence. On the second floor of the cottage my wife, Yogamaya, our 15 month old boy, and I were occupying the large wooden-framed bed that night. In the second half of the night I saw Bhagavan Ramana sitting on the bed near my head. Although this was a dream, I saw it as clearly as I see the sun during the day, and remember it vividly. His famous figure was near my head and His legs were dangling. Arunachala Shiva Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi stayed near my head for quite a while so that I could drink deep in Him. Bhagavan simply kept on looking at me and I was filled with joy and happiness and could not turn my eyes away from Him. I do not know how long this lasted. But once I woke up I could not return to sleep and sat on the bed meditating on Him. All morning and day I kept on thinking of the darshan Bhagavan had given me in my dream.... That dream enabled the sugar doll to be dissolved into the Divine Ocean of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Since then I have not been the same Bhagawat I used to be."

The following night he had another stirring dream wherein he saw the Sanskrit word "Upanishad" written on a loose leaf. Then the leaves of text began to turn one by one until he woke.

These experiences rekindled the fire of devotion to Guru Ramana that was first sparked in 1941. Though the Maharshi had left his body four years earlier, Bhagawat began writing letters to him at Sri Ramanasramam, as he was beginning to experience him as a living Presence.

On an invitation to teach in Iowa, Bhagawat resigned from the Indian Embassy in 1957. The teaching position did not materialize and he looked elsewhere for employment. He thought he might teach in a U. S. college, write books and travel. But no promising offers came. He inwardly felt that his Master, Sri Ramana, was removing all worldly ambitions from his mind and was steadily pulling him deeper into his spiritual center for sustenance.

In 1959, Bhagawat, with his family returned to India. Now He was able to fulfill his long-cherished dream of visiting Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai.

"We returned to India in February, 1959. We lived in my village and the world of cold, corrugated, cement and concrete was replaced by the village life. We were completely destitute in the true sense of the term. It

was a very trying period for all of us. But the Grace of Bhagavan kept surging inside me and was the main sustenance of my life. The desire for the darshan of Arunachala Ramana at Sri Ramanasramam remained unquenched within me because I had no money to travel. At about this time, Rambahadur, my nephew, was inspired to visit Arunachala and he invited me to accompany him to Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai, South India.

"As soon as we caught the first glimpse of Sri Arunachala, I was swimming in the Bliss of Bhagavan. After 19 years Bhagavan had brought me to His Lotus Feet. The greatest dream of my life was fulfilled. On December 30th, 1960, Friday morning, Rambahadur and I were in Sri Ramanasramam.

It was here at Sri Ramanasramam that Arthur Osborne, a staunch devotee, author of several profound books on Bhagavan and founder of the Mountain Path magazine, encouraged Bhagawat to start some regular meetings in the U. S. centred on Sri Maharshi when he returned. Bhagawat did not know for sure at that time he would return, but he did, taking up a position at the Indian Mission to the United Nations in New York City in 1962.

In 1965, Bhagawat, reflecting on the recent events of his life, writes: "Bhagavan made it possible for me to find employment once again in the United States. But New York was the last place we wanted to live. In spite of my best efforts to get away from New York, Bhagavan held me here. He must have some purpose in not helping me find employment elsewhere."

The purpose would soon reveal itself. On November 12th, 1965 Bhagawat began weekly meetings in a room at the American Buddhist Society on the West side of Manhattan. He wanted it to be a meeting place for sincere aspirants who wished to deepen their spiritual lives in the light of the Maharshi's guidance and grace. In 1966, Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center was incorporated and registered as a charity with the state and federal governments. With the renting of a meeting room at 78 St. Marks Place in 1967, the weekly meetings became daily. In 1969 the Ashrama moved to a rented storefront on 342 East 6th Street, near First Avenue and remained there for the next seventeen years.

Bhagawat's dream for a country residential Ashrama was realized in 1972 when the Nova Scotia, Canada, Arunachala Ashrama was founded at the foot of the rolling hills of the Annapolis Valley.

All along Bhakta Bhagawat would emphasize to all visitors the need for spiritual practice. He would say, "This is Arunachala Abhyasa Ashrama." Abhyasa means 'spiritual practice.' Pointing to Sri Bhagavan's photo, we would often hear him repeat to new visitors, "He teaches and we practice. He has made me His servant and servitor, His doorman and doormat"

He was now consumed day and night, dedicating all his time and energy to the Ashrama and the constant remembrance, or "Self-abidance" as he would call it. He behaved like a man possessed, living from moment to moment, acting on whatever inspiration entered his heart. Intuition and inspiration where the forces that now motivated his life. The intellect and self-will were losing their hold and his life began to take its commands from that inner voice spoken by the Lord of his Heart. "I wander about like a drunken person who does not care what the world thinks of him, as he is oblivious of the physical world in his inebriated state..." He wrote in 1966.

Bhagawat was a prolific writer. He would say, "Unless my mind sinks into the Heart, I cannot write." And it would sink, and the writing went on and on. All his spare time would be occupied with "Worshipping at the altar of Hermes 3000 [typewriter] with the fruits and flowers of my breath." He would be seen either sitting

inwardly absorbed in front of the typewriter or outwardly absorbed typing thousands of pages of what he called "Prayer Manuscripts."

In 1970, he began writing a piece titled, "Bhagavan! Thou Art the Self" This went on for 3,500 pages. "From the top of my voice I declare to the world that Thou art the very breath for me and day and night I find myself immersed in the surging Ganga of the Silent Sage of the Holy Hill of the Beacon Light, Sri Arunachaleshwara Shiva Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi..." Thus he writes on the last page in 1973, only to begin another piece titled, "Bhagavan! Thou Art My Breath." He would never read what he wrote unless asked to. He would make many carbon copies, and when the Xerox machine hit the market he was the most diligent of customers. He would ask us to send copies to this or that person, thus fulfilling, in his own unique way, the desire to share whatever grace and experience Sri Ramana had blessed him with.

"Openness of Heart" was a favourite expression of his. "Guilessness, humility," he would of say, "these are the essential qualities of an aspirant." He longed for the pure company of those rare souls who embodied these qualities. He would travel any distance at any time of day or night to benefit from serving and associating with such friends. "I need your company more than you need mine," he would tell us. And he believed it, though we certainly thought otherwise. In him we found a devotee on whom Sri Ramana Maharshi had showered his grace in full measure. He experienced his living Presence both within and without, and like us, had never seen Sri Bhagavan in the body. Bhagawat provided us with an example of how to gain the Master's grace and attain the purpose of human existence in the light of the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Bhagawat was a man who could inspire and mould seekers into genuine devotees. "In Sri Bhagavan's Ashrama, I have never been able to say anything unless I have realized it first in my own life." Those few who could see into his pure heart had little trouble benefiting from his guidance and love. He was a married man with a son- he would never say 'my' son but 'our' son. Because of his sometimes impractical idealist way of life he regretted that his family had to suffer. When his wife became blind from diabetes Bhagawat served her with tender kindness and love. During this period someone once asked him what he was doing with his life. He replied with deep feeling, "I serve Mother." She predeceased him by three years.

Few who had met him during the last ten years of his life could realize his inner state. He would keep silent most of the time, inwardly absorbed. The Heart was everything for him. He would often tell us, "Watch wherefrom the breath rises; it is the Heart. Watch wherefrom the sound rises; it is the Heart. Watch wherefrom the 'I' rises; it is the Heart."

Bhagawat loved books that were divinely inspired, but often had much difficulty reading them. "Words from these books are like the keys that open the door to the Heart, but once the door of the Heart is open, what is the need of a key?" he once asked. Sometimes he would pick up one of the Maharshi's books or the Tulsidas Ramayana, read a few passages, put down the book and resume his absorption in the Heart.

Occasionally he would call us at odd hours of the night while in ecstatic moods. His desire was to somehow convey it and share with us, but being unable to pull out any words from a mind totally immersed in the ocean of peace and joy he would remain silent and weep. Only after several minutes of cajoling could we get him to utter a single word. We will not get calls like this any more. We will not see the "man from the village" whose inner lustre was hidden from the world by an uncommon simplicity and humility. His intense, unwavering devotion carried him to the heights of inner freedom and joy. Yes, we will not see him again, but what he has given his few friends will not be lost either. He will live with us just as before and we will strive to continue the work he was inspired to begin right here in the "heart of the New World," New York.

Jean Marie Marely

The devotees of New York were very sad to hear about the sudden passing of Jean Marie Marely on May 7th. She was an early member of Arunachala Ashrama in New York City and was instrumental in providing for the first rented facilities to conduct daily meetings. She moved to a small farm at Long Eddy, NY in 1969, but would sometimes spend a few months during the winters residing in the New York Ashrama in Queens.

She is seen here in this 1967 photo with Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat holding the August issue of The Mountain Path magazine. She will be missed by all friends and devotees in New York.

Sri Ramana Maharshi's 50th Aradhana

In New York and Nova Scotia

ON Sunday, May 7, at the Hindu Temple Society of North America (Ganesha Temple) in Flushing, Queens, New York Arunachala Ashrama commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Maharshi's Mahasamadhi. The Western calendar date for this event fell on April 14, the Tamil calendar date fell on May 1, but the New York Ashrama postponed the program on receiving the news that Sri V. S. Ramanan, President of Sri Ramanasramam, India, and his wife Susila would be arriving in the USA a few days prior to May 7th and would sanctify our function with their presence.

The well-attended program began with the singing of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Marital Garland of Letters let by Susila Ramanan, followed by welcoming remarks by Dennis Hartel. A ten minute film, titled "The Last Days and Mahasamadhi of Sri Ramana Maharshi: A Garland of Images," with music by M. S. Subbalakshmi was shown. Sri V. S. Ramanan then described the 50th Aradhana functions that took place at Sri Ramanasramam and Chennai a week earlier. He went on to elaborate in a very interesting manner the significance of the 50th anniversary of the Maharshi's Mahasamadhi. Also, with much emotion he expressed his sadness at the absence of Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat and how sad he was to hear of his recent passing.

Then his wife, Srimati Susila Ramanan, captured the minds and hearts of the devotees with her enchanting rendering of "Saranagati" (Surrender). Srimati Raksha Vaidyanathan also sang a hymn from the Devi Mahatmyam with much feeling and skill. Then the large gathering sang as if with one voice "Upadesa Saram" and "Arunachala Pancharatnam".

Ambassador Ramlal Bhutani, a close friend of Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat since 1949, then gave a talk, "Remembering Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat," which was not only moving, but equally entertaining. He said, "In April 1950, Bhagawatji sadly came to me and showed me the obituary of Sri Ramana Maharshi from the New York Times. He told, 'How unfortunate. I was unable to go to him while he tenanted his body, and now he has shed his mortal frame.' I said it was too bad that he had died. Bhagawatji rejoined, 'I did not say he had died. HE IS STILL PRESENT, he has simply shed his mortal frame." Ambassador Ramlal's talk was certainly enjoyed by all.

The function was concluded with Siva Arati and the recitation of Na Karmana. Food had been prepared and was then served by a band of dedicated devotees.

Nova Scotia Ashrama

Dr. Anil Sharma reports: The Fiftieth anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Mahasamadhi was observed on May 6, 2000 at Arunachala Ashrama in Bridgetown, N.S., Canada. Approximately 30 devotees from various locations joined to bathe in the glory of Sri Bhagavan, whose light continues to inspire and illumine all who seek shelter at his feet.

Shiva Puja was performed with one-pointed devotion by Dr. V. Sastry, who led the congregation in chanting the 108 names of Shiva, followed by the 108 names of Sri Bhagavan. Darlene Delisi-Karamanos welcomed all, and expressed warm words of praise for the utter and selfless devotion of the founder of Arunachala Ashrama, Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, who was absorbed at the feet of his Guru on April 10, 2000.

Bhajans were sung by, among others, Sri Michael Fahey, Srimati Ruth Kelly, Darlene and Alexi Karamanos, and Sri Swaminathan Venkataraman, who graced the Ashrama with his visit on his return trip to Madras. Excerpts from Sri Bhagavan's video "The Sage of Arunachala" were shown during the function.

Prasad was served after the function, thanks to the untiring efforts of Mrs. Lakshmi Raju and fellow devotees. Group pictures were taken in the temple, with Sri Bhagavan's countenance illumining all, and with Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat sitting steadfastly at the feet of his Guru, inspiring, as before.

After the prasad, Jon Karamanos played some cello selections as the devotees listened. Bhajans continued, and Bhagavan's Peace pervaded all.

Arunachala Stuti Panchakam
(Five Hymns to Sri Arunachala)
Now on Compact Disk

This is the first CD production from the professionally recorded Tamil Parayanas from Sri Ramanasramam. These highly melodic songs written by the Maharshi in praise of Sri Arunachala are sung before his tomb every Monday night. It is performed by two groups of devotees, the men sitting on one side of the Maharshi's Samadhi and the women on the other. It contains the most popular of the Maharshi's compositions, "Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai" (The Marital Garland of Letters to Sri Arunachala).

- 53 minutes, $12.00, plus postage

The *Maharshi* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil K. Sharma. Produced and distributed by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, 66-12 Clyde Street, Rego Park, New York 11374, USA. Tel: (718) 575 3215. E-mail: ashrama@aol.com. All editions of this newsletter can be found on the internet at - "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

THE MAHARSHI NEWSLETTER

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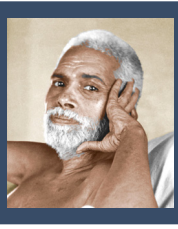

Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary

1975 — 2000

It was the first year of classes in the newly-built, one-room school house, picturesquely located in the quiet rural community of Clarence in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia. The year was 1879.

At the same time, far across the globe in another quiet, remote place, a village in South India, on the night of December 30, a son was born to Alagamma and Sundaram Iyer. Who could have ever imagined that this rural school house and that new born boy, then linked in time, would once again be linked in spirit ninety-five years later?

Soon after the 130 acre Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center was founded in 1972, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat began his regular visits from New York City. Immediately, he was attracted to the property on the Ashrama's lower field, just off the Clarence Road, about 50 yards from the Ashrama house. It was the 100 by 75 foot corner lot donated to the local school board in 1879 by the then owner of the Ashrama farm. The Ashrama did not own this lot. Someone had bought it from the school board three years earlier.

Bhagawat would almost daily visit this small plot, always commenting on its "tortoise shape," with lower ground on all four sides. On this lot the Clarence West School stood up to 1969. It was then bought, loaded onto a flatbed truck and moved one mile down the road. The granite slabs that served as its foundation and an old hand-powered water pump was all that remained. Bhakta Bhagawat would daily stroll the grounds, reciting the "Sri Lalita Sahasranam Stotram," praying to the Divine Mother to bless her children by building a Temple on this land for devotees to gather in and immerse themselves in the direct teachings of Self-enquiry. After two years, in 1974, his dream began to materialize.

Mr. B. K. Raju, a very prominent, but humble and devoted businessman of Nova Scotia, began to take an active interest in the prospect of buying the lot and the old school house, reuniting them once again for yet another type of schooling, the training of the spirit. He started a trust for borrowing funds, arranged for the purchase of the school, engaged an architect, all of which injected the necessary impetus in the hearts of Joan and Matthew Greenblatt and Dennis Hartel, who then lived in the Ashrama, and Darlene Delisi, who lived nearby. They felt charged with energy and genuine inspiration, watching their lofty ideals of head and heart now taking shape in the form of a Temple.

The logistics of returning the school house back to the Ashrama, lifting the thirty-ton structure five feet high and then sliding it onto its new, raised foundation were certainly mind boggling for the

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young devotees. But every obstacle was calmly met with a growing faith that, by the Temple's completion, established itself in their hearts so firmly that it has been serenely carrying them safely through life's trouble waters ever since.

More than the physical obstacles were the financial hurdles. Mr. Raju's trust fund proved unproductive and was terminated. Daily wages had to be met, supplies bought, contractors paid. The young aspirants of the Ashrama were not fund raisers, nor were they financially savvy. Their only wealth was the devotion and faith that filled their hearts. They solely depended on this to meet their needs. Their faith and devotion were at times severely tested, but proved ultimately triumphant. The Maharshi repeatedly assured them of his all-pervasive presence in many seen and unseen ways. Faith remained steady and help came, especially from the courageously noble hearts of the late Alexander Hixon and Dr. Mohender Goomar, both of which generously expressed themselves, relieving the debts and insuring that Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram would stand as a lasting tribute to the Silent Sage of the Holy Hill of the Beacon Light, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

The Term Hridaya

Sri T. K. Sundaresa Iyer was one among the few who had the privilege of not being addressed by Bhagavan in honorific terms: He fondly addressed him as 'Sundaresa' or 'Sundaram'. However, he was known popularly only as TKS in the Ashram. His erudition in Vedantic literature was deep; he was proficient in Sanskrit, Tamil and English. So, he aptly fitted in to act as an interpreter to Sri Bhagavan, though most of his time he spent in the Ashram office attending to correspondence. Of course, in this also he was blessed because he had to show letters to Bhagavan and get hints from Him while answering certain letters...

"A staunch devotee living in England, Harry Dickman, was soaked in Sri Bhagavan's teachings, though he could not have His darshan. He wrote asking for an explanation as to the term 'Hridayam' and its significance. I got from Bhagavan hints on how the reply should be formed. The following is the gist of the reply, which was approved by Bhagavan and sent to Harry Dickman:" —TKS*

JUST AS THERE IS a cosmic center from which the whole universe arises and has its being and functions with the power or the directing energy emanating therefrom, so also is there a center within the frame of the physical body wherein we have our being. This center in the human body is in no way different from the cosmic center. It is this center in us that is called the *Hridaya*, the seat of Pure Consciousness, realized as Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. This is really what we call the seat of God in us.

It is this *Hridaya* that is said to be different from the physical heart, regulating the blood circulation. The *Hridaya* has its being on the right side and is not commonly known or felt. The primary thought in us arising as 'I,' when traced to its source, ends somewhere in us and this place, where all

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* Dr. Harry Dickman later moved to New York City and befriended Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat.

thoughts die, where the ego has vanished, is the *Hridaya*. From this center is felt and enjoyed the Pure Consciousness.

Hridaya described as 'the literal, actual, physical seat of the intuition of the Self' has the meaning explained above. Perhaps the words 'physical seat' may create some confusion. What it really means is that there is a center of Pure Consciousness in the physical body. It is related to the physical, but is not itself physical.

The word *Hridaya* is a composite of *hrid* and *ayam* — "center, this". It is the center on the right which we reach as a result of meditation. From the *Hridaya*, consciousness arises to the *sahasrara* through the *sushumna* and from there spreads out to all the parts of the body through the several *'nadis'*. Then alone we become conscious of the objects around us. Man, due to the illusion that these have real existence, experiences suffering, as he strays far away from his Self. The seat from where all these arise and manifest is the *Hridaya*.

Whether in sleep, joy, sorrow, fear or satisfaction, we return to this heart and that is why we feel lost to all consciousness of things around. If by meditation or *Vichara* we attain to our center, the *Hridaya*, and thus are our real Self, we enjoy unalloyed bliss.

In the course of tracing ourselves back to our source, when all thoughts have vanished, there arises a throb from the *Hridaya* on the right, manifesting as *'Aham' 'Aham'*. This is the sign that Pure Consciousness is beginning to reveal itself. But that is not the end in itself. Watch wherefrom this *sphurana* (throbbing) arises and wait attentively and continually for the revelation of the Self. Then comes the awareness, oneness of existence.

When we steady our breath we feel the steadying of our thoughts. Then the thoughts turn inward and melt away at a point. Watching this point, where the thoughts vanish, will also help us to merge ourselves in the *Hridaya*.

—From Moments Remembered

The Gift of Life

IT WAS THE FIRST FEW WEEKS of my pregnancy when I was diagnosed with an internal haemorrhage. The prognosis was grave and surgery was an option only as a last resort at the risk of losing the foetus. I was ordered complete bed rest with absolutely no movement, so to give the wound a chance to heal itself. I lay in bed all day and night staring at the ceiling most of the time. The only welcome distraction to my eyes was the picture of Bhagavan and Sri Arunachala that I had asked to be glued on the closet door at the foot of my bed. I tried to concentrate on my prayers, repeating "Sri Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai" as much as possible. But the physical pain was immense, not to mention the agony of being bed ridden.

Though I was under excellent medical care and had full attention from my family, I felt my strength draining from my body with each passing day. One afternoon, I had an experience. I felt the heat

dissipating from my body and a chilliness setting in. My hearing began losing its sharpness, vision blurring and a cloud of darkness set in. I could not move my hands nor could I voice a single word, even though I was trying to scream from within. I felt suffocated, was aware of my consciousness slipping away and felt myself sinking into something that I have no words to describe. I panicked inside, gripped by the fear of death and thoughts of unfinished responsibilities. I experienced my life slipping away. At that moment, I cried inside to Bhagavan, begging Him, that if this was death, he should take me to Him.

Then, I had the vision of the holy Sri Arunachala Mountain zooming back and forth and Bhagavan standing at one side of the hill. There was an arc of light leaving my body, like what you see in children's fairy tale movies. Bhagavan raised his hand and pushed the light back into my body.

He then said, "This is not the time for you to go. You have a purpose in life. Do your duty." Then in the most gracious and affectionate way, he put his hand where I had been hurting and said, "Is this where you hurt?"

After this I became conscious. I had no idea how long I was unconscious. All I knew was that this experience had transformed me, for when I became aware of the world, I had absolutely no pain. I immediately rose from my bed and walked briskly across the room. I felt and appeared perfectly healthy. The next visit to the doctor showed a completely healed wound.

Now I have been blessed with a beautiful, healthy baby. Bhagavan gave me a chance to bring a gift of life into my family. Everyday I remind myself that I live by His grace alone.

—A New York Devotee

Namaskaram and the Seer

Bhagavan used to say with a laugh, "A person performs namaskaram to the Swami or an idol, and expects all his prayers fulfilled and boons granted. Who wants this namaskaram? Even before they prostrate physically, I prostrate to them mentally." Bhagavan would add, "Who wants all this namaskaram? Try to know Who You Are. That is the import of the namaskaram. I would not be taken in by all this gymnastics."

One day He told me "One could produce God through alchemy. But even if that God tells you something don't believe it. If I come in front of you don't believe it. The Seer is most important. YOU ARE!. That's most important. Concentrate on the seer, not the seen. All that you see is false and the seer alone is true. All that you read, all knowledge you gather is useless, until you hold on to your Self. YOU ARE THE TRUTH, not what's being told to you, not what you see. What you read in books may be knowledge, but not the truth."

— Attendant Krishnaswami,
from a 1989 video-taped interview

Children's Ashrama 2000

INFECTIOUS enthusiasm reigned throughout the course of the five-day celebration which took place in the first week of July in Nova Scotia, where Arunachala Children's Ashrama 2000 was attended by approximately 13 children over the course of five days.

Those children fortunate to attend were regaled with stories of Sri Bhagavan and his love of animals and his love for the sacred hill, Arunachala. The children's day began with hatha yoga, walking meditation *(pradakshina)*, and instruction in the basic elements of traditional Ganesha Puja. The stories of Sri Bhagavan were reinforced with storytelling, crafts, music, art projects, puppet shows, and a visit to a riding stable. The children also enjoyed days of hiking, canoeing, and picnicking. A hike to the top of the North Mountain was a high point, in which the children sang bhajans in the cave at the mountain's peak in the company of Yogi Arthur Coucouvitis.

At nightfall, all the children gathered in the temple where they received specific instruction in meditation from our camp organizer par excellence, Geeta Bhatt.

Camp counsellors Darlene Delisi, Mamtha & Prakash Adiseshan, Raju Parekh and Evelyn & Paul Saphier felt fortunate to share the blessings of Sri Bhagavan's loving presence with our Ashrama children. Mention should also be made of the invaluable aid of Chancy Bhatt and Radha Mohan, for the loving care and attention with which they looked after our campers throughout the day.

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

Letters and Comments

Guru Available

In our initial correspondence, I had asked if there was anyone available to assist with the "Who Am I?" meditation. You indicated that you knew of no one in Oregon that I could contact and that I should pray to Sri Ramana Maharshi. I am sure that was/is good advice, but Ramana Maharshi himself said that the process was not possible without a Guru. I find that to be true. Is there anyone in North American that is of the Guru status and has realized the Self? If so, is he/she available? If not, is there such a person at the Arunachala Ashram?

Thank you for your assistance on this matter.

— Oregon, USA

Sri Maharshi did say that a Guru was necessary. He also said that the Guru may not be external, as in his case. Again, upon his physical demise he also said that he was not leaving, as he was never identified with the body; meaning, he is present even now.

The truth is that no one can give us liberation. The way can be pointed out, directions can be given. Our intense earnestness and total dedication to the goal is the most essential factor. If we become obsessed with this one thing—realizing Truth—Truth, a physical Guru (if necessary) and all else will be drawn to us automatically. The Guru will come to us when we are ready. We simply need to attend to making ourselves ready and the rest is automatic. For those with faith in the Maharshi's living presence there are no doubts in this matter.

Other than the above, there is no other advice we can give you regarding the Guru. We know this to be the true and proven method.

— Editor

What is "I - I?"

I am writing to ask if you can explain something to me that has been puzzling me—probably is very simple....

Here it is: The mundane self is referred to as the "I-thought". Okay, but why, or what is the significance of the Self being referred to as a double-I, like this: "I - I"?

Hoping you can illuminate that for me.

— Sussex, England

The Pure Self is the constant "I-Awareness". It underlies our waking, dreaming and deep sleep states. It is our inherent natural state which is obstructed by thoughts, the primary being the individual "I" thought, the ego. When the "I-Awareness" is constant it has been described as "I - I". It could be written "I - I - I - I..." infinitely. Thus the limitations of language to express the inexpressible.

— Editor

Death and Devotion

I just got to know that the prasadam from Sri Ramanasramam reached Trichy the night before Mother died. Talking with her about the puja was the last conversation I had had with her just a few hours before she collapsed.

I feel the tight embrace of Sri Bhagavan, not only on us, but also on our loved ones.

What can one say... even though I have been finding it difficult to silence my mind during meditation, I feel the ever gushing shower of Bhagavan's Grace stronger and stronger.

Like this evening, when I was panicking on the number of things that needed to be done before leaving for India. Right then, Kiran (Bhagavan's devotee) called, and with such sweetness and assurance said that she and her husband Shri would come over tomorrow and do whatever needs to be done.

My husband said that the funeral ceremony was extraordinarily peaceful after he and his brother-in-law started to sing Bhagavan's songs. Even those who had been hysterical with uncontrollable emotions calmed down. He said that he felt the power of Bhagavan when he touched his mother's body.

I don't know what to say...

— A Devotee from Michigan

New Releases

Arunachala Stuti Panchakam
Five Hymns to Sri Arunachala

Now on Compact Disk

This is the first CD production from the professionally recorded Tamil Parayanas from Sri Ramanasramam. These highly melodic songs written by the Maharshi in praise of Sri Arunachala are sung before his tomb every Monday night. It is performed by two groups of devotees, the men sitting on one side of the Maharshi's Samadhi and the women on the other. It contains the most popular of the Maharshi's compositions, "Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai" (The Marital Garland of Letters to Sri Arunachala).

— 53 minutes, $12.00, plus postage

All is One

Originally written by a 19th Century anonymous author in Tamil and titled *Ellam Ondre*. First translated into English in 1951, this carefully revised edition was one of the favourite small Advaitic Tamil texts often recommended by Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Annamalai Swami has said that the Maharshi "laid particular stress on *Ellam Ondre*, telling me, 'If you want *moksha,* write, read and practise the instructions in *Ellam Ondre.*'"

— 44 pages, *$2.00, plus postage*

104th Anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala

Sunday 10 September 2000
At the New York Ashrama

You, your family and friends are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the 104th Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's arrival at the holy Arunachala Mountain.

The program will begin at 11:00 a.m.
and will be followed by the serving of prasad.
Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center
66-12 Clyde Street, Rego Park, New York 11374
Tel: (718) 575-3215

1975 - 2000
The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of
Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram

Bridgetown, Nova Scotia

Sunday 3 September 2000

You, your family and friends are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama Temple.

The program will begin at 11:00 a.m. and will be followed by the serving of prasad (meals).

For accommodations, please call.
1451 Clarence Road, Bridgetown,
Nova Scotia B0S 1C0
(902) 665-2090

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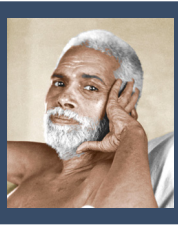

The Maharshi and the Mahatma

By H. G. Nilkant

The following has been translated from a passage in Sri Narayan M. Desai's Gujarati book, Santa Sevata. *Sri Narayan is the son of Sri Mahadev Desai who was Mahatma Gandhiji's secretary.*

LET ME DESCRIBE right here an incident that happened during our return from the South India Hindi Prachar meeting.

Bezwada (Vijayawada) is a station on the railway route from Madras to Wardha. The talk came up before we reached Bezwada. Jamnalalji (Sri Jamnala Bajaj) had then recently been to Ramanashram. He was lavish in his praises before Bapu (Mahatma Gandhi) of the holiness and peace of that Ashram's atmosphere. Whenever a saint happened to be the subject of a conversation, my father's heart would melt like butter. With devotional interest he began to inquire about Ramana Maharshi. Jamnalalji, Bapu and my father started on the subject with equal interest. In the course of the talk Bapu suggested, "Mahadev, why not visit the Ashram yourself?" On hearing this, father's heart leapt from sheer joy. Jamnalal-ji also urged him: "Yes, yes. Do it. It is really worth a visit. And now that you have come so near the place, you can go there right away. When, otherwise, are you going to have the leisure for it?"

My father asked me to pack up his kitbag. The train had by then already reached the Krishna Bridge. Jamnalalji was telling Bapu, "The peace I felt at Ramanashram, I did not even find at your Ashram." After a short while Bapu said to father, "Don't be in a hurry to return. If you have the same experience of peace as Jamnalalji, you may stay on longer. Don't worry about the work."

Bapu uttered these words in quite a natural tone and manner. But the very thought of keeping away from Bapu for any length of time was unbearable to my father. He turned towards me and said, "Babla (a pet name), unpack the kitbag." I was stunned. Bapu too looked on in mute surprise.

"Why Mahadev, what makes you ask him to unpack?"

"I have given up the idea."

"But why?"

"One Swami is enough for me."

—The Mountain Path, 1969

D. How can I get peace? I do not seem to obtain it through vichara.

M. Peace is your natural state. It is the mind that obstructs the natural state. Your vichara has been made only in the mind. Investigate what the mind is and it will disappear. There is no such thing as mind apart from thought. Nevertheless, because of the emergence of thought, you surmise something from which it starts and term that the mind. When you probe to see what it is, you find there is really no such thing as mind. When the mind has thus vanished, you realise eternal peace.

Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata

August 26, 1989

On August 26, 1989, James Hartel, with his new video camera, video-taped Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat in the Temple of the Nova Scotia Ashrama. This year at our 'Advent at Arunachala' programs in Nova Scotia and New York we showed a twelve minute segment from this video. Everyone enjoyed watching the vigorous 77 year old Bhagawat tell the stories and relate the teachings we had heard many times in bygone days.

Soyi janayi jehi dehu janayee
Janata tumhahi tumhayi hoyi jayee.

Here Goswami Tulsidas says, "O Lord, only he knows You whom You grant that grace, whom You make to know You, and the devotee who knows You becomes one with You."

Chhutayi mala ki malahi ke dhoyen
Ghrta ki pava koyi bari biloyen.

"Can dirt be got rid of by cleansing with dirt? Can one produce ghee by churning water?"

Prema Bhagati jala binu Raghurayee
Abhiantara mala kabahun na jayee.

Prema. What is Prema? Prema is affection; Prema is love; Prema is dedication; Prema is devotion; Prema is simpleness. The darkness of the heart, the dirt of the heart cannot be removed, O Bhagavan, without devotion, without dedication, without guilelessness, without openness. Without these the ignorance and arrogance of the heart cannot be removed. These are simple things. No discussions or debates are needed.

Bhagavan has taught to simply go to the source—"Who am I?" From whatever group the person belongs to, there is no question of interfering with others' faith or thought. A teacher simply shows the path, guides one to the correct route. So, Sri Bhagavan says, "Go to the Heart." When we breathe, the breath comes from the Heart. Just by saying "I - I" one can experience the breath and sound coming from the Heart.

Sri Bhagavan showed me this [in a vision]. He put His hands on my head and Heart and told me in Hindi, *"Dekho hridaya ke under se kahan se avaz aatee hai. Jahan se avaz aatee hai, usee par dhyan karo."* Since I speak Hindi, He spoke to me in Hindi: "Watch wherefrom the sound emanates in the Heart. Meditate on the centre wherefrom the sound emanates." So that's the simple teaching for who ever wants to learn, who ever wants peace and happiness.

This is the purpose of this Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, and not to interfere. It is like the sun is shining, the wind is blowing, the river flowing. If an individual wants to be warmed by the sun, feel the breeze or be cooled in these waters, he or she will have to be ready.

Jesus said, "Don't throw pearls before the swine." So only those who are eager, honest, sincere and fit—give it to them. A patient goes to a doctor, is diagnosed and then prescribed a medicine. The patient must take the medicine with faith and report to the doctor.

I always call this place "the Annapolis Valley of peace and happiness." The North Mountain behind the

Ashrama is situated just like the Arunachala Mountain in South India, where Sri Bhagavan's Ashram is located at the southern foot of the mountain.

Where this temple now stands, years ago it was a school. This building was picked up and moved a mile from here. Some wealthy person wanted to use it for a utility building at a ski resort. He couldn't do it. Somehow or the other Bhagavan helped us and we carried this building back here to its original location. When the temple was being designed, I used to request from New York to include plenty of windows so the first floor doesn't look like a basement. So this was a new design in those days. Even downstairs there is so much light, and there is also much light streaming through the windows in the temple hall.

Sri Bhagavan appeared before Arunachaleswara on the morning of Tuesday, September 1, 1896, and Sri Bhagavan has been inspiring us to celebrate this occasion since 1972 here in the Nova Scotia Ashrama. Since September 1st usually occurs near Labour Day Monday, we normally observe it on the Sunday before Labour Day. On the Friday before this Sunday, Dr. Lakshminarayan will arrive and start the prayers, petitions and supplications, which will continue till Sunday morning. Sunday will be the public celebration, after which enough food or Prasad will be served to all the friends and devotees gathered that day.

As it was the custom in Sri Bhagavan's Ashrama that whosoever arrived was sent to the kitchen to eat, whatever time of day, Arunachala Ashrama continues this practice in the West. Whether the person takes the food or not, it doesn't matter. Food and friendship are offered all the time. The ancient Vedic scriptures say, "Food is God; God is in food."

Here we always emphasise practice. We call this Ashrama the triple 'A' Ashrama: Arunachala Abhyasa Ashrama. Whether the visitor is from the West or East we always tell them practice, abhyasa, is necessary. If you want to become a doctor you first have to learn your A-B-C's. No one can become a doctor by just looking at a medical college. We use the term 'GRIND.' Everyone must go through the grind. The ego must somehow be crushed. Nothing can grow unless we plow the field. *"Tasmat sarveshu kaleshu...* Thus remembering ME all the time, fight on, fight on."

Work we have to do. Creation has come in and different people have different jobs and different missions. "Keep on doing, remembering ME," says Sri Krishna to Arjuna.

I always say, "Do you have five minutes, Sir? Do you have five minutes, Deviji? Do you have five minutes, Madam? Early in the morning sit down for five minutes, don't do anything. On the floor or in a chair just sit in peace and quiet. The most important thing is the practice."

Whatever we do here in the Temple—sit, recite, read—the practice is the most important thing. We always say, *"Soyi janayi jehi dehu janayee... He* or she only knows You on whom You grant Your grace."

"Why do I not feel it?" you may ask.

I say, "Do you have eyes? Can you see the sun? Can you breathe?" Grace is there whether you believe it or not. You believe in the wind, you believe in the river, the trees. You believe in the grass—all these. Pay a little attention: "...remembering ME all the time, fight on!"

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in his silent, simple and direct way said, "Go to the Source." "WHO AM I?" Cutting through all ancient dogmas, philosophies and intricacies, Sri Bhagavan came and said very simply,

"Go to the Source. Go on repeating 'I'- 'I' - 'I'." The breath, the sound comes from the Heart. Watch the breath. Practice is necessary, faith is necessary.

It is said, *"Sraddha van labhate jnanam..."* Those who have faith, have humility and yearning, they receive knowledge, they receive help. And *"Sansyatma bina swasti..."* Those who forever have doubts and questions, will be destroyed.

Let me close with this:

With Sri Bhagavan's infinite grace and mercy He brings some selected people and gives them the job, the mission, the work. It is for them to keep on doing.

When God came to Moses He told him: "I Am That I Am." In the Bible it is written that Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you." What did Jesus say? Go to the Heart. Peace is there. Again, "Ask and it shall be given; seek and you shall find; knock and the door shall be opened."

So it is only a question of different lands, different religions, different languages, but the Source is the same.

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

Protecting Sri Arunachala

The Legal Efforts

The following talk was given by Sriram Pachu on September 10 at the 104th Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's 'Advent at Arunachala' program in New York City. Sriram Pachu of Madras is on a research and teaching fellowship at New York University. He has been visiting Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai for the last two years.

CONSTRUCTION around the Holy Hill has been going on for sometime; worse still is that some has come up on the Hill itself. This has been the subject of litigation in the Madras High Court. Under India's public interest law, any citizen may draw the Court's attention to a matter of public interest and seek remedial relief.

The first case was filed in the early 1990's and was directed against the proposal of the Government to set up the office of the Collectorate between the Hill and the Giripradakshina Path. It was pointed out that such a location would mar the sanctity of the Hill and would interfere with the pilgrimage around the Hill. An interim order of injunction was made by the High Court. Subsequently, after representations were made by Sri Ramanasramam and others, the Government relocated the new Collectorate elsewhere.

Around 1995 another case was filed by the Arunachala Devotees Association, drawing the Court's attention to construction coming up on and around the Hill. No orders were passed in this case, and it was kept pending. Since the situation was worsening, T. V. Chandramouli of Tiruvannamalai filed another case in 1998. He sought directions to prohibit such construction, to remove the illegal ones which had come up, and other reliefs to preserve Tiruvannamalai as a temple and heritage town. In this case an order was passed in the latter half of 1998 by the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court prohibiting further construction on the Hill, and between the Hill and the Giripradakshina Path.

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In early 1999, the Court appointed an Expert Body to study the situation and report on the measures that could be taken to preserve the town, the Hill and the Path. A former Judge of the Madras High Court, Mr. Justice Arunachalam, was named as the Chairman of the Committee. Among other members were senior Government officials from the departments of temple administration, forests, archaeology and traffic planning; also appointed was a prominent architect, Mr. P. T. Krishnan, who is also the Convenor of the Madras Chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage.

The Committee received representations by affidavit and also held public hearings. A large number of representations were made by people from different parts of India and the world stressing the sanctity of the Hill and the need to preserve it by all means possible. A substantial number of representations came from local residents, especially owners of land which lay between the Path and the Hill, who strongly resisted any move to prevent them from constructing on land that they owned. There was also resistance to removal of construction which had come up on the foot of the Hill. On several other aspects which did not interfere with private ownership of land, there was consensus on the steps to be taken.

The Expert Body made its report in early 2000. It set out the historical and spiritual facts and background. It dealt with the current position and stressed the need for preventive and corrective action. It made as many as twenty-nine recommendations. These relate to prohibition against fresh construction on the Hill and between the Path and the Hill, the removal of illegal construction thereon, afforestation and environmental measures, the preservation of water bodies, facilities for pilgrims, moving the highway and heavy traffic zone away from the Path, etc. It called for protection under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites Protection Act and for declaration of the Hill, the Path, the Temple and Town as national heritage sites and ultimately as World Heritage Sites. The Expert Body's report is featured on the website: http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/appeal.zip

In August 2000, the High Court heard arguments in the case. The State Government agreed not to construct on the land owned by it in the area between the Path and the Hill but was against an absolute ban on privately-owned areas. With regard to removal of illegal construction it stated that large scale removal was difficult and may lead to law-and-order problems. The Central Government stated that it had declared the Virupaksha Cave, Skandashram and the Path leading to it as national monuments (and thus to be protected against encroachment). However, with regard to the plea that the entire Path, and the land between the Path and the Hill be so protected, it stated that the excessive construction which had taken place on this area would prevent it from being declared a national monument. (This is ironic, because it was the Government's duty in the first place to prevent such construction.) The other parties, namely, the Petitioners and the local residents, also submitted arguments.

The basis of the plea for preserving the area can briefly be stated as follows:

The Constitution of India (Article 25) protects religious practices. Lakhs of devotees come every month to have darshan. Many people from other parts of India and abroad make such pilgrimage often and residents of Tiruvannamalai make frequent pradakshinas. Going around the Hill is the accepted form of worship; the sighting of the Hill from all possible points is an integral and cardinal part of such worship. In this case, the Hill itself is the deity, and therefore the case is no different as one which prevents a devotee from seeing the Lord in a temple.

Such pradakshina from time immemorial constitutes a customary right and qualifies for protection under the law.

Environmental reasons also mandate prevention of construction on and at the foot of the Hill. Tiruvannamalai

is a water-starved place. The water runoff from the Hill cannot reach the tanks and lake beds on account of the construction. Tiruvannamalai has a well-connected system of water bodies which, in the past, collected the water coming down the Hill slope and recharged the ground water table.

The Hill is the object of veneration for countless numbers of people and forms the focal point of their belief, faith and practice. Thus, the right and ability to circumambulate the Hill is in the nature of a public right. Where private rights cannot survive along with a clearly established public right, it is the former which must yield to the latter.

The Hill and the Path qualify for protection and preservation as ancient monuments and archaeological sites. The Hill is believed, from time immemorial, to be the very embodiment of Lord Shiva. The scriptures say so, and saints and sages down the years have taught so. Furthermore, geological experts estimate that the Hill is one of the oldest rock formations in the world, substantially older than the Himalayas. Few monuments can possess the great spiritual, historical and geological importance of the Hill.

The High Court's judgment is awaited.

Advent at Arunachala Celebrations

New York and Nova Scotia

ON SUNDAY, September 3rd, 2000, devotees gathered at Arunachala Ashrama in Bridgetown, Nova Scotia to celebrate the 104th anniversary of Sri Bhagavan's arrival at Arunachala, and also to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram, in the heart of the Annapolis Valley.

The program began with the performance of Ganesha Puja, followed by Sri Ramana Puja conducted by Dr. Anil K. Sharma. The rendition of Sri Bhagavan's 108 Names was done by Srimati Geeta Bhatt, who was assisted by the young children at the Ashrama. During the chanting, the children laid flowers at Sri Bhagavan's feet.

Welcoming remarks were given by Dennis Hartel, who shared with all his memories of the initial days of the Mandiram, including the actual physical moving of the entire building to its current location in the year 1975.

A statue of Sri Ramana was installed in the Mandiram during this function. This is a lifelike replica of the statue of Sri Ramana present in the New Hall of Sri Ramanasramam, India. This work was the result of the dedication of James Hartel, who also gave a brief talk on the making and installation of the same.

With rapt attention, devotees listened to a video-tape of Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat which had been recorded in 1989, explaining the nature and purpose of Sri Arunachala Ashrama. We could all feel that Bhagawat's utter devotion to Sri Bhagavan continues to inspire us, despite his having shed his mortal coil.

Bhajans were offered by devotees. Following the bhajans, Mr. B. K. Raju, whose friendship the Ashram continues to cherish, gave his recollections of the early days of the Ashram in Bridgetown in his usual simple and moving manner.

Following the puja and the chanting of "Upadesa Saram," prasad was served to all by Mrs. Raju and her band of dedicated devotees.

Bhagavan's grace was showered upon all.

The New York Ashrama

On Sunday, September 10th, 2000, devotees gathered at Arunachala Ashrama in Queens, New York to celebrate Sri Bhagavan's arrival at Arunachala 104 years ago. Early in the day, devotees began arriving to assist with the preparations. The flower arrangements were once again lovingly provided by Ron Ridolfo, and general preparations were done by Abhijit & Jyoti Champanerkar and other Ashram devotees.

Sri Ganesha Puja and Sri Ramana Puja were performed by Dr. Anil K. Sharma, while the chanting of Sri Ramana's 108 Names was accompanied by the offering of flowers by Bhagavan's younger devotees.

The welcoming address was given by Dennis Hartel. This was followed by an update on the legal situation at Arunachala, given ably by Sriram Pachu (see page 5).

Again, excerpts of a video taped in 1989 depicted Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat exhorting us all to abide at the feet of Sri Bhagavan by means of Self-Inquiry. This, given in Bhagawat's simple and unassuming way, visibly moved all.

The singing of Bhagavan's works and bhajans was offered with deep devotion by all those present.

The celebration concluded with the chanting of "Purusha Suktam" and the aarti, symbolic of Bhagavan's divine light, was shared by all present.

Prasad had been prepared by the untiring ladies of the Ashram, and this was distributed to everyone.

Chanting of *Vedas*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and stotras, by Arthur Coucouvitis, Peter Fell, Mr. Parekh, Ramaswami family and others continued for the rest of the day. Sri Bhagavan's presence was palpable, and his grace was, and is, guiding us all.

New Releases

Be Still, It is The Wind That Sings

Arthur Osborne's thorough understanding of the Maharshi's teachings was not simply the result of a refined intellect. It was a heart illumined by spiritual experience. His language is robust; his knowledge of spirituality pervasive. This was most evident in his editorship of the Mountain Path magazine. When articles on spiritual topics were not forthcoming, Mr. Osborne would write them himself with remarkable clarity and insight under several pseudonyms. This comprehensive collection of articles and poems—16 poems previously unpublished—is a tribute to the author's stature as a writer and his illustrious spiritual journey.

475 pages --- $13.00

Sri Devikalottara

One of the *Upa-agamas* highly valued by the Maharshi, so much so that he spontaneously translated it into Tamil verse during his stay in the Virupaksha Cave. It contains Lord Shiva's instruction to Parvati, outlining the direct Advaitic path to liberation. This edition contains the Maharshi's Tamil verses, original Sanskrit text with English transliteration and translation.

91 pages --- $4.00

The Veda Parayana

The Veda Parayana consists of Vedic Sanskrit chants carefully chosen for recitation by Sri Ramana Maharshi. During his lifetime the Veda Parayana was held twice a day, morning and evening. This practice is still continued in Sri Ramanasramam. The Maharshi obviously encouraged aspirants to attend it, as it was a time of tremendous silence when he sat immobile as though carved in rock. Sri Bhagavan said it was not necessary to know its meaning, that it was sufficient that the chanting serve as a support for meditation. These recordings were made under special arrangements in the Old Hall of Sri Ramanasramam, India.

Two CD's, Total time: 86'48" --- Price $18.00 - (digitally enhanced)

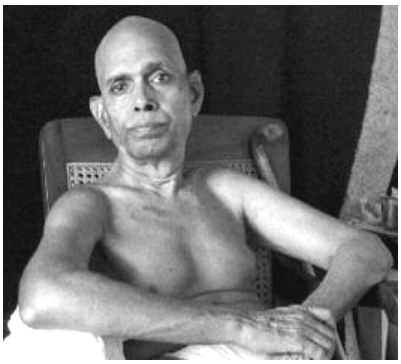
Visiting Arunachala Ashrama, New York

All the friends of Arunachala Ashrama in New York were happy to have Sri V. S. Subramanian (Mani), Manager of Sri Ramanasramam, his wife and son, Srimati Ramani and Ramanan, visit with us from October 10 to October 25. Mani and his wife were visiting their son Ramanan for the first time in the U. S.

Travelling to Niagara Falls, Washington D.C. and other nearby places the Subramanian family was the guest of Prof. Ram Desai in Buffalo, Krishna and Padma Sastri in Ontario, Drs. Aruna and Ramkumar in Hartford and Drs. Nitya and Venkat Ramanan in Maryland. In New York City they also visited the homes of Mohan Ramaswami, T. S. Vaidyanathan and Geeta Bhatt, who attended on them with genuine warmth and affection.

They will remain in California with their son until their December 12th departure for India.

The *Maharshi* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil K. Sharma. Produced and distributed by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, 66-12 Clyde Street, Rego Park, New York 11374, USA. Tel: (718) 575 3215. E-mail: ashrama@aol.com. All editions of this newsletter can be found on the internet at - "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".



The Maharshi

JAN/FEB 2001 VOL.11, NO. 1

The five hymns to Arunachala

Kartikai Deepam, the annual nine day festival which concludes with the lighting of the beacon on the top of the Arunachala Mountain, is attended by a million pilgrims, broadcast on South Indian television, and this year was available for viewing around the world through the Internet. The holy mountain's growing attraction would not have surprised Sri Ramana Maharshi who never tired of praising its glories and always felt at home strolling upon its slopes. Though a Jnani of the highest order he wrote a number of inspired devotional hymns in praise of Arunachala. In these, he poetically narrates how Arunachala captured him in his youth, stilled his mind, swallowed him whole and made him one with Arunachala, which is none other than the Supreme Self. These inspired poems also provide us with precise directions on the easiest and most direct path to reach the peak of spiritual experience. Every aspirant can find something directly relevant to his or her individual needs in the Five Hymns to Arunachala.

In the following article, Prof. G. V. Subbaramayya, an intimate and respected devotee of Sri Maharshi, clearly lays before us the ground upon which we can easily walk toward a greater understanding and true veneration of these sacred hymns.

ONE EVENING Sri Ramana related to us how in his vision Arunachala appeared a citadel of Heaven full of shrines and gods. On a morning when Sri Ramana delayed to return from his constitutional and this writer with another devotee went up and met him, he said smiling. "As the weather is fine I have been strolling here. This Hill is like my own home. Whenever I am on Arunachala I forget myself." While relating the glories of Arunachala he would indeed forget himself. The story of Arunachala was his favorite theme. He often used to say that while all other sacred hills and shrines were but the abode of various gods, Arunachala is the Supreme God Himself and that going around Arunachala is the direct worship of God Almighty.

The last forty-four years of Sri Ramana's life were spent in Arunachala alone. Within the temple compound, in the outskirts of the town, up the Hill and down the Hill, he dwelt throughout his life. Never once, not even during the time when the place was declared dangerous on account of epidemics, did he stray from the environs of Arunachala. The very thought of leaving Arunachala never seems to have occurred to him. So many people, from his mother down to a casual visitor, attempted to induce him to go elsewhere. His written reply to his mother's entreaties was typical and significant: "Whatever is destined not to happen will never happen, try how hard you may. Whatever is destined to happen must happen, do what you may to prevent it." In other words, he declared that Arunachala and he were destined to be inseparable.

Marital Garland of Letters

The *Five Hymns to Arunachala* are the magnum opus of Sri Ramana in devotional lyric poetry. Of them the first is "Aksharamanamalai" (the Marital Garland of Letters). It was composed in Tamil by young Ramana in response to the request of a devotee for a song to be sung while wandering in the town for alms. It is an acrostic of one hundred and eight couplets with the initial letters in alphabetical order and with a popular refrain "Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva." It unfolds an allegorical love story and depicts the *madhura bhava* (love-aspect) of devotion. Arunachala is the lover and the singer is the beloved.

The lover made secret love to the beloved while she was in her parental home. At the mere thought of his name, he stole her heart. He eloped with her stealthily and brought her here. While she is now harassed by so many enemies, he remains unmoved as a mountain. She remonstrates and complains of her lover's neglect and indifference. "Having entered my home and lured me to yours, why do you keep me prisoner in your cavern?.... Having seduced and ravished me, if you deny me union and abandon me now, would it be chivalry? Nay, such desertion will be a memorial of shame for you.... Having called me and lured me here, it is writ large on your forehead to look after my well-being.... If you will not unite with me, I shall be melting away in tears of anguish .... Pray rain your mercy on me ere your fire consumes me to ashes." So runs her love-plaint. Then for her harsh words of remonstrance, she apologizes to her lover and prays for the bliss of complete union and merging. "Pray close me in, limb to limb, body to body, or I am lost.... Let us embrace, one in the Real Self on the soft flower-bed of the Mind.... Come and sport with me in the open space of the Heart where there is neither night nor day.... May I be absorbed into you as food is assimilated into the feeder." At last the prayer is fulfilled. The love is consummated in marriage, and with the bride's invocation to the bridegroom: "0 Lord Arunachala, throw around me your garland and let me place on your breast this garland strung by me," the song concludes. In this poem Arunachala is described and addressed in the most fascinating terms. Arunachala is "the real meaning of OM unexcelled, unparalleled," "the magnet that attracts the iron filing of devotees and holds them fast," "the Ocean of Grace in the mould of a mountain," "the gem of fire sparkling all round," "the treasure of Divine Grace got without seeking," "the elixir of all life's ills," "the spider whose spreading webs entices into its meshes and devours all egos," "the wizard who exercises the ghost of the ego and then himself possesses the being," "the mountain drug for all madness."

The word *Arul* (Grace) occurs in nearly every stanza, so that the whole song may be called a rhapsody of Grace. This love-lyric is indeed an allegory of Sri Ramana's own life story and so is full of autobiographical interest. While sounding the depths of philosophical wisdom, this song stirs the tenderest chords of the human heart and makes the most daring rites of love romance in the spiritual firmament. It was and is sung on all auspicious occasions in the Ashram. Though Sri Ramana always declined to be drawn into a discussion of its diverse interpretations, he would sit up in a trance of ecstasy whenever it was sung. Just before Sri Ramana's Mahanirvana this hymn was being sung in a chorus by the devotees who assembled outside his room. Sri Ramana opened his eyes, looked in the direction from where the voices came, and then as he closed his eyes, tears of ecstasy gushed from their outer edges and he breathed his last. So this song into which Sri Ramana had breathed the essence of his Divine Spirit became appropriately the background music to his life's finale, like the glow of mellow light around the setting sun.

The Garland of Nine Gems

Next in chronological order comes "Navamanimalai" (The Garland of Nine Gems). This is a collection of nine casual verses in various meters. Its underlying sentiment is also love and devotion to Arunachala. It explains at the outset the idea of *achala tandavam* (motionless dance) of the Lord. He is static and dynamic at the same time. The glorious source that absorbs and transcends both the aspects is this Arunachala. The verbal root meaning of A-Ru-Na is also set forth. It means respectively either Sat-Chit-Ananda (Being-Consciousness-Bliss) or the Supreme Self, the individual Self, and their identity or That-Thou-Art. *Achala* means the Great One. That is why the mere recollection of the name 'Arunachala' confers *mukti* instantly. The rest of the poem is a call to complete self-surrender and a moving prayer for forgiveness of faults and for deliverance. It is impossible to cross the sea of *samsara* and climb the shore unless Arunachala, out of His more-than-maternal love, stretches forth His hand of Grace. This song is also autobiographical. It relates how Sri Ramana was born of virtuous Sundaram and Alagu in sacred Tiruchuzhi and was rescued from the coils of ignorance even in early

youth and raised by Arunachala to His own seat. The poem is in short a paean of praise and thanks-giving.

Ten Verses on Arunachala

The next hymn is "Arunachala Padikam" (Ten Verses on Arunachala). It really consists of one invocatory verse and ten stanzas, all in the same meter. It observes the rule of *mukta-pada-grastam*, that is to say, the last word of each verse is repeated as the first word of the next verse so that the whole poem reads like a chain of linked sweetness long drawn out. It is also a devotional love-lyric and is full of autobiographical interest. Arunachala, the lover, steals the guileless singer' heart in early youth for thinking of Him but once and, having drawn the beloved to His Feet, keeps her long like a frog amidst the lotus-stalks, and slowly consumes her (ego). The singer surrenders to the will of her Lord and prays He complete the process of devouring her, thereby changing the frog of her mind into a bee that tastes the honey of the lotus blossom. The song concludes with a warning and an appeal. It warns the worldly-wise, saying: "Lo, I have newly discovered a magnet mountain that attracts all beings who think of it even once, makes them still like itself and preys upon their sweet lives (egos). That magnet-mountain is Arunachala. So beware and keep off. "At the same time, the singer makes a clarion call to all kindred spirits who have renounced the worldly life in quest of the means of deliverance. The singer shouts: "Here is the panacea, the sovereign remedy, the wonder-drug for all the distractions and ills of life. If you merely think of it but once, it cures you. It kills without killing. It kills the ego without killing the Self. Many have been thus saved like me. It is none other than Arunachala. You, all afflicted beings, know this and be saved."

The Eight Verses on Arunachala

The next and grandest hymn is "Arunachala Ashtakam" (The Eight Verses on Arunachala). Sri Ramana himself related how it was composed in the course of a walk around the sacred Hill. All of a sudden the first word of the hymn flashed into his mind and with an irresistible urge composed itself into the first stanza. Then the last word of the stanza lingered in the mind and clamored for further expansion into the second stanza. The same process was repeated in the other stanzas, and at the end of the eighth stanza the urge for expression automatically ceased. So the stanzas are of uniform meter and observe the rule of *mukta-pada-grastam* like the previous hymn. This hymn is a masterpiece of philosophical poetry in which both thought and style reach their high water mark. For its superb symphony it is a universal favorite among music lovers. It is also autobiographical and reveals the mysterious association of Arunachala with Sri Ramana from childhood and the part played by Arunachala in his process of Self-Realization. Arunachala is the real Self that manifests Itself when the ego-mind traced back through Self-enquiry merges in its Source. This song is distinguished by the daring originality of its thought and imagery. "To search for the essential inner truth of Thyself (Arunachala) is like going around the earth to see the sky. It is like the sugar-doll diving to measure the depth of the ocean." "To quest for God elsewhere turning away from Thyself (Arunachala) is like searching for darkness with a light." "Those who fail to visualize the one matchless, resplendent diamond of Arunachala are like the blind that cannot see the sun before them." "The mind that has contacted Thee (Arunachala) and is sparkling itself like a cut or polished gem will not need another light to kindle it, just as a sensitive plate exposed to the sun will not take on impressions afterwards." "A mysterious Shakti (Power) in Thee (Arunachala), which however is not apart from Thyself, illumines with the reflection of Thy pure Light the latent, subtle dark mists which then manifest within as thoughts whirling in the vortices of *prarabdha* (past karma) and are projected without, across the lens of the mind and the outgoing senses as the passing world-picture upon the unchanging screen of Thyself (Arunachala)." "Just as the waters rising from the sea as vapor and coming down as rain must flow back into the sea in spite of all obstacles, just as a bird soaring into the sky, fatigued, must needs return to the earth for rest, so every being must finally retrace its way

to the Source and merge in Thee, Thou Ocean of Bliss, 0 Arunachala." It will be seen that in the above passages the poet makes use of irony and of metaphors culled from nature, from the arts and science such as photography and cinema. This is all the more remarkable as Sri Ramana had never handled a camera, nor had he ever been to a cinema show.

Five Gems to Arunachala

The last and most famous hymn is the one entitled "Arunachala Pancharatnam" (Five Gems to Arunachala). While the other four hymns were Tamil compositions, this one was composed by Sri Ramana in Sanskrit at the request of Kavyakantha Ganapathi Muni to serve as an introduction to *Sri Ramana Gita*. It was later rendered into Tamil by Bhagavan himself. It has become the daily prayer of all devotees. These "Five Gems" have been praised by Kavyakantha who said that they contain the quintessence of the whole Vedanta and, though terse and brief, are all-comprehensive like *Sastras* (Scripture). As Sri Ramana never studied Sanskrit we wonder how he could have composed this Sanskrit classic, which can only be explained on the ground that he had realized "THAT by knowing which everything else is known." As it was to the Maharshis of yore, so was it for Sri Ramana Maharshi. The usual order of thought and speech was reversed. Words flashed first, and their sense followed.

In their depiction of Arunachala as *Sarvatman* (the Universal Self) these "Five Gems" resemble the famous "Dakshinamoorti Ashtakam" of Adi Shankaracharya. The opening stanza invokes Arunachala as the "Ocean of Nectar full of Grace by whose splendor the entire Universe is engulfed" and it prays to Him the Supreme Soul "to be the sun for the full blossoming of the lotus-mind." The second stanza expounds Arunachala as *Swarupa* (the Source) in whom "all this panorama arises, exists and dissolves." It further explains how Arunachala manifests in the Heart as 'I', the Self, and so is Himself named the Heart. The third stanza describes the path of *Jnana* (Self enquiry) and how on knowing one's Self one merges in Arunachala as the river in the ocean. The fourth stanza unfolds the path of Yoga (meditation). "The Yogi with controlled breath and concentrated mind, meditating on Thee within, beholds in Thee, 0 Arunachala, Thy Light Transcendent." The final stanza depicts both the paths of *Bhakti* (Devotion) and *Karma* (Action). Both the devotee, who with dedicated mind beholds Arunachala alone, or the man of action, who reverentially serves all as the form of Arunachala, shines immersed in the Bliss of Arunachala. So this hymn within a brief compass is all-comprehensive and stands out as the most glorious monument of Sri Ramana's relationship to Arunachala.

This mysterious relationship was most impressively demonstrated by the celestial phenomenon at the time of Sri Ramana's Mahanirvana. At that very moment a brilliant light in the shape of a huge star emanated in the southeast corner of the horizon and trailing majestically across the sky, seemed to merge in the highest peak of Arunachala. This was witnessed by many people. It was to all mortals an ocular, heavenly revelation of the Life-Light of Sri Ramana ascending and merging in the Universal Light of the Supreme Self that is Arunachala. Indeed, Sri Ramana was Arunachala's Self incarnate in human form, and Arunachala is Sri Ramana himself in mountain-mould. In essence, both Sri Ramana and Arunachala are one and the same. That is the Supreme Self.

—From the Mountain Path, April 1980

The 121st Jayanti
of
Sri Ramana Maharshi
will be celebrated in the New York Arunachala Ashrama
on
Sunday, January 7, 2001
The program will begin at 11:00 A.M.

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for more information, please call
(718) 575-3215

Bhagavan Ramana and Herbal Medicine

By Dr. Manikkam

On a new 1000-page information multimedia CD, Ramana Arunachala, *to be released in the spring, there will be some pages devoted to "The Maharshi and Medicine." In these pages Ayurveda and Siddha medicine will be discussed and a number of Bhagavan's herbal treatments will be given. The two recipes printed below follow a description of how they were learnt by Dr. Manikkam, a devotee-doctor living in Tiruvannamalai.*

I was born at Pavalakkundru in Tiruvannamalai as the last child of my parents. My mother Alamelu and father Venu were both ardent devotees of Sri Bhagavan. When Bhagavan was staying at Pavalakkundru, the place was being managed by a *math*. The head of that *math* introduced my grandfather to Bhagavan. Later it was the same head of that *math* who introduced my father also to Bhagavan. My parents have sat at the Maharshi's feet a number of times to learn from him the secrets of herbs and herbal medicine. The Maharshi would give them detailed instructions on the preparation methods of various medicines which my parents duly and faithfully recorded. Once, during a conversation with Bhagavan, my father told him that the castor plant did not possess enough juice. It was also hard to find the plant in the environs of Tiruvannamalai. Bhagavan then asked my father to go to Athimur on the Javadhu hills, near Polur. There, he was told, was a lake on the banks of which the plant would be found and ample juice could be extracted. My father went to Athimur and found the plant at the exact location mentioned by Bhagavan.

Following in the footsteps of my parents, I am also deeply devoted to Bhagavan. I pray for his grace always and I have no doubt in my mind that it is he who is guiding me in my profession. I scrupulously follow Bhagavan's recipes and formulas of herbal medicines and use them for treatment of patients. By Bhagavan's grace, I have been able to cure patients who come to me for treatment.

It may not be superfluous to mention that Bhagavan's medicinal recipes are perfect and eminently curative. The credit therefore goes to the Master. I consider myself only an instrument in his hands. It is also a matter of great satisfaction for me that many of Bhagavan's devotees consult me on their health. This is what gives me soul-fulfillment. I have also made it a point to give free treatment to the poor who cannot afford the costs of treatment and medicine.

I am happy to share with the world some of the herbal medicinal recipes of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Saraswatha Churnam

Ingredients required: dry ginger, liquorice, rock salt, the long pippali, cumin seeds, turmeric, barberry, calamus root, saussurea, omum. All these should be bought in equal measure.

Preparation: All the above ingredients should be carefully ground, made into fine powder and mixed together. Take a teaspoon of ghee (clarified butter) and a half teaspoon of the powdered mixture and mix thoroughly. Consume twice a day.

Parts of herbs used in the above: roots, seeds and salt.

Body parts for which the above is used: Brain and nerves.

How does it act?: Soothes nerves, restores calmness to an agitated brain and mind, acts on tissues, restores vitality.

What are the symptoms and indications that will necessitate the use of the above medicine?: Loss of memory, sluggish brain, insomnia, weak muscles and tissues.

Precautions: None, there are no side effects.

Ashta Churnam

Bhagavan Ramana's recipe for this particular medicine is different from the traditional practice, and herein lies Bhagavan's speciality. In most traditional recipes, the physician follows a set pattern. All ingredients are taken in equal measure. Bhagavan also follows this method in some of his recipes. But mostly, he differs from the common physician in this aspect. Each ingredient is proportionately selected and mixed, depending upon the strength

and properties of the ingredient. This is the essential difference between Bhagavan's recipes and those traditionally followed by physicians. Bhagavan's formulations are more potent and effective. Another great advantage is that these recipes are the handiwork of the supreme Jnani and therefore not only the physical, but also mental and spiritual results of these recipes are manifold and invaluable.

Ingredients:

Black pepper — 9 parts,
Dry ginger — 7 parts
the bigger Cummin Seed — 5 parts
Rock Salt — 5 parts
Long Pippali — 5 parts
Cummin Seed — 3 parts
Omum — 2 parts

Clean all the above ingredients well and convert them into fine powder. Rice should be well cooked and mixed with ghee. Take a spoon of the above churnam and mix it well with the rice and then consume it. The above prescription cures indigestion, poor appetite, stomachache and is also good for rheumatism.

Removal of Misery

D.: When *duhka* (misery) overpowers me, enquiry is impossible.

M.: Because the mind is too weak. Make it strong.

D.: By what means?

M.: *Sat-sanga, Isvara Aradhana, Pranayama* (association with the wise, worship of God, breath control).

D.: What happens?

M.: Misery is removed; our aim is removal of misery. You do not acquire happiness. Your very nature is happiness. Bliss is not newly earned. All that is done is to remove unhappiness. These methods do it.

D.: Association with the wise may strengthen the mind. There must also be practice. What practice should be made?

M.: Yes. Practice is necessary too. Practice means removal of predispositions. Practice is not for any fresh gain; it is to kill the predispositions.

D.: *Abhyasa* (practice) should give me that power.

M.: Practice is power. If thoughts are reduced to a single thought, the mind is said to have grown strong. When practice remains unshaken it becomes *sahaja* (natural).

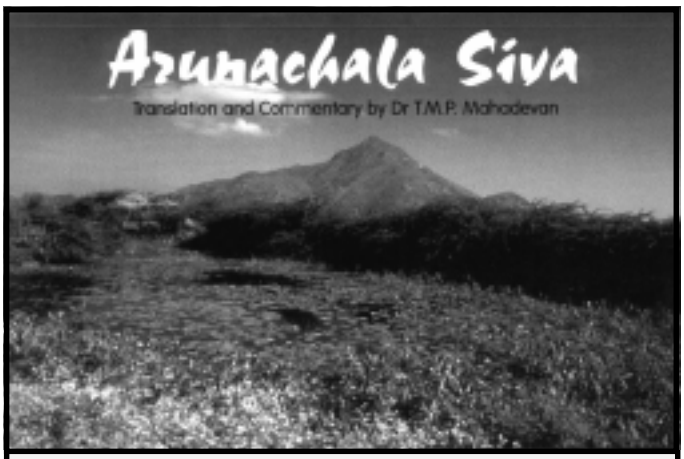
D.: What is such practice?

M.: Enquiring into the Self. That is all. *Atmanyeva vasam nayet* ... Fix the mind on the SELF.

D.: What is the aim to be kept in view? Practice requires an aim.

M.: *Atman* is the aim. What else can there be? All other aims are for those who are incapable of *atmalakshya* (having the Self for the aim). They lead you ultimately to *atma-vichara* (enquiry into the Self). One-pointedness is the fruit of all kinds of practice. One may get it quickly; another after a long time. Everything depends on the practice.

—Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, No. 290



Arunachala Siva

By Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan

This newly reprinted book contains transliterations and translations of two of Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Five Hymns to Arunachala*: "Aksharamanamalai" (Marital Garland of Letters) and his Sanskrit "Arunachala Pancharatnam" (Five Gems on Arunachala). Each verse is followed by an English translation and further illuminated by short, insightful commentaries. This book, long out of print, is a valuable addition to the literature published by Sri Ramanasramam, India.

108 pages *Price $5.00*

Letters and Comments

Concentrating on the Heart

I found your e-mail address on both your websites, where it said that you would not consider it an imposition to be asked for advice and assistance. I have a fairly fundamental question about practice that I hope you might answer for me.

Arthur Osborne in *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* states: "The instruction, then, was to sit concentrating on the heart at the right side and ask 'Who am I?' When thoughts arise during the meditation one is not to follow them up but to watch them and ask: 'What is this thought? Where did it come from? And to whom? To me—and who am I?'"

Graham Boyd on the www.ramana-maharshi.org website states that he chose to cite certain passages from *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi:*

"[B]ecause of their reference to Self-enquiry and the Heart-centre, specifically because they clarify the method of enquiry and remove the idea that the devotee is supposed to concentrate on the chest—after all, who is concentrating on the chest other than the Self?" In my reading, I have not yet come across any conclusive statement by Sri Ramana Maharshi about whether the Heart-center is to be concentrated upon or not when practicing Self-enquiry.

Is there an authoritative answer to this question? If so, I would appreciate it if you would tell me what the proper method of practicing Self-enquiry is. Also, if I should be asking some other question(s) or if there is any other information you think I should know, I would appreciate your passing it along to me.

Thank you so much for your help.

Sincerely,

USA

Your question is a good one. Sri Bhagavan has clearly explained the role of the spiritual Heart in the method of Self-enquiry. He has said that the Heart is the center wherefrom the I-thought springs and by tracing the I-thought back to its source we experience the Heart, which is synonymous with the Self.

His method of Self-enquiry does not require that we meditate on any point, whether it be the heart, the point between the eyebrows or some chakra. Rather he has asked us to trace the I-thought to its source by questing 'Who am I?' The former would be a form of concentration which implies a subject/object relationship.

What actually happens is that the last physical awareness before the mind sinks into the Self is that of the Heart, and upon returning from that experience the first awareness is the experience of the Self in the Heart. That is only in relation to the body. The Self is actually beyond all time and space. Because we identify ourselves with the body, the Heart is mentioned. It is the seat of experience, not the object of meditation.

Read chapters four and five in the Maharshi's Gospel. *There the Heart and its place in concentration is explained.* —*Editor*

"To enable the *sadhaka* to steer clear of possible doubt, I tell him to take up the 'thread' or the clue of 'I'-ness or 'I-am'-ness and follow it up to its source. Because, firstly it is impossible for anybody to entertain any doubt about his 'I'-notion; secondly, whatever be the sadhana adopted, the final goal is the realization of the source of 'I-am'-ness which is the primary datum of your experience.

If you, therefore, practise *Atma-vichara* you will reach the heart which is the Self."

—*The Maharshi's Gospel*

The *MAHARSHI* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil Sharma and distributed in North America by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. For those with Internet access, this issue and all back issues are available at "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

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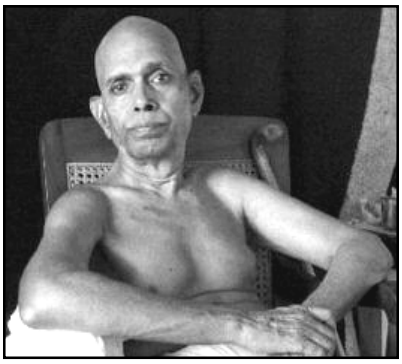


The Maharshi

MAR/APR 2001 VOL.11, NO. 2

IN DAYS OF GREAT PEACE

by Mouni Sadhu

In Days of Great Peace, *a book recounting Mouni Sadhu's (M. Sudouski) visit to the Ashram of Sri Ramana Maharshi in 1949, was first published in 1953. It has been out of print for many years and is now in the process of being republished by Sri Ramanasramam. We hope to have it available in our book store in a few months.*

In Days of Great Peace *inspired many Westerners to seek spiritual guidance from Sri Ramana Maharshi in the years following his Mahasamadhi.*

Through a narrative that is both simple and profound, the author takes us on his journey to the quiet hermitage of the renowned Sage of Arunachala in South India. Basking in the radiance of the 'Great Rishi' his mind turns inward, following the path of Self-inquiry of 'Who Am I?'. He describes, with perceptive insight and emotion, how in the gracious presence of the Master, thoughts are stilled and one rests calmly in the thought-free, egoless state.

Below are a few excerpts from various chapters of the book.

The First Meeting

When I arrived at the abode of Maharshi, called 'Ramanashram,' and jumped out from the two-wheeled cart just in front of the temple, in spite of the late hour, but in accordance with the custom of the place, I was taken straight into the presence of the Sage.

He was sitting in a large hall near one of its walls, apparently at the end of his meal. There were a number of people — all Indians sitting in rows on the floor between the pillars. I was led to within three or four yards of Maharshi, and my companion said a few words to him of which the name of the country from which I came was the only one I understood. The Saint lifted up his head, looked at me, and made a gesture with his hand as if inviting me to come a little nearer. I was struck by the softness and serenity of this movement, so simple and dignified that I immediately felt I was facing a great man. His attitude was so natural that the newcomer did not feel any wonder or shyness. All critical faculty of thought and curiosity dropped away. So I was unable to make observations or comparisons, although subconsciously I may have had this intention when previously imagining this first meeting. The image of the Sage was, in this very first moment, vividly engraved on my mind without any qualifications, like a picture cast on a sensitive photo-plate. But as nothing can be conveyed without words, I will try to describe his appearance.

Maharshi, as I saw him, was a thin, white-haired, very gracious old man; his skin had the color of old ivory; his movements were easy, calm and soft; his countenance breathed a natural state of inner concentration without the slightest effort of will. Or may I say that he had reached that stage when willpower no longer needs to be used for overcoming any hindrance or for achieving any purpose, for the simple reason that everything has already been achieved.

A modest Indian supper was served — a little rice,

vegetables and fruit on a banana leaf. By the time I had finished, Maharshi had gone. As soon as I found myself in the small one-room cottage prepared for me in the Ashram's compound, I immediately fell asleep, being very tired after my whole day's journey.

Life in Maharshi's Ashram

The next day was occupied in getting acquainted with the routine of the Ashram: the hours of meditation in the presence of the Sage, the time of meals in the dining-hall, and so on.

The simple way of life in the Ashram helps one to concentrate and dive deep into oneself. The very atmosphere, charged with the thoughts of so many people seeking their real Self, according to the teachings of the Master, turns the mind inwards and is favorable to introspection. The invisible yet powerful influence of the sacred hill of Arunachala also has its part in creating this peculiar atmosphere, but of that I will speak later.

At 7 A.M. there was the loud sound of a gong calling us to breakfast. When I reached the dining hall, Maharshi was just mounting the few steps leading to it. He was accompanied by several Indians, his permanent attendants. Here, in full daylight, I noticed for the first time that the physical state of Maharshi was really precarious. He walked with difficulty, as his joints and knees were affected by acute rheumatism. His left arm and elbow were bandaged because of a malignant tumour, which had begun its growth about six months earlier and, in spite of two operations, had continued to spread its devastating work, causing Maharshi's death one year later. Sometimes his head shook slightly and this increased the impression of serious ill health; the whole frame, once tall and powerful, was now bent and weak.

After reaching the hall, Maharshi took his place near the wall, opposite the entrance. He sat alone while, facing him, plantain leaves were spread on the floor for the rest of the residents. I occupied a place on his right, about three yards away, and that spot remained mine during the whole period of my stay.

The Sage ate with his hand according to the general Indian custom. His movements seemed to be automatic. I saw that he was quite aware of his surroundings and reacted in a normal way to all the phenomena of the outward world, but I felt certain that his real Self had nothing to do with the functions and actions of his visible vehicle.

There are three communal meals in the Ashram: lunch or dinner at about 11:30 A.M., supper at 7.30 P.M. and also tea at 3.30 P.M. for the Ashram guests and occasional visitors. One is given tea, coffee, or by special request, milk, as was the case with me. The dishes are well prepared, but some vegetables and pastry have many condiments added and are too hot for the European palate. [Less spicy preparations are now available for Westerners]

Maharshi took a little of everything. At the end of the meal, when buttermilk was distributed, he made a kind of round wall of rice, leaving a space in the middle for the liquid. When he had enough he stopped, with a gesture to the Brahmin who was serving. He never left a single grain of rice on his leaf.

During the first weeks of my stay in the Ashram, Maharshi spent the whole day, with the exception of the hours of sleep and food, under a small bamboo roof near the library building, facing the dining hall. He reclined on a big stone couch covered with mats, cotton rugs and a few pillows.

His disciples and visitors sat on the concrete floor facing Maharshi. For the morning and evening meditations certain sadhus, pupils of the Master, often came from the caves of Arunachala. Every day the Vedas were recited and before the night meal holy hymns were chanted, often those composed by Maharshi himself in his younger days. Every fortnight one of the permanent residents, a learned Brahmin, sang a most beautiful hymn; it was, as I learned, in praise of the 'Lord of the Universe'. It was full of melodic implications and the endings of the words, which of course I did not understand, will forever remain in my memory, like so many other things in this abode of peace.

It took some time before I could adjust myself to the rhythm of the Ashram life and could inwardly

approach Maharshi. At first I had to struggle with mental distrust, with the tendency to look for blemishes in the lives of those who surrounded the Sage. I was simply wasting precious time in a vain fight with my mental windmills. I was looking on Maharshi from the narrow citadel of the ego, of my own small personality. I was aware that I should not do so, that I should step out of my self into a broader path, and that only thus could I find enlightenment.

Yet as days passed, the radiance emanating from the Sage was slowly doing its invisible work. At first I wanted to have a talk with him, but I was disheartened by the shallowness of what I tried to say. Then at last, intuition showed the proper way:

Silence is the most powerful form of teaching transmitted from Master to pupil. There is no word by which one can convey the important things, the deepest truths. — From Maharshi's Sayings

I began to listen intently to the silence surrounding the Master. I understood what a high degree of concentration, of the control of the movement of thoughts, is necessary to be able to open the door of the mind to the subtle vibrations constantly radiated by Maharshi, which led one to high initiation. I also came to understand that my previous exercises were not of the best, that here they would prove insufficient. At first it was rather depressing to see that my former methods had to be re-examined and changed.

I realized that the amount of knowledge I could find and assimilate here depended upon my own attitude and that I myself was responsible for catching and using to the full this unique opportunity of being at Maharshi's feet, an opportunity which would never again be repeated. In other words, the amount of light penetrating my being would depend directly upon the opening of the doors of my consciousness.

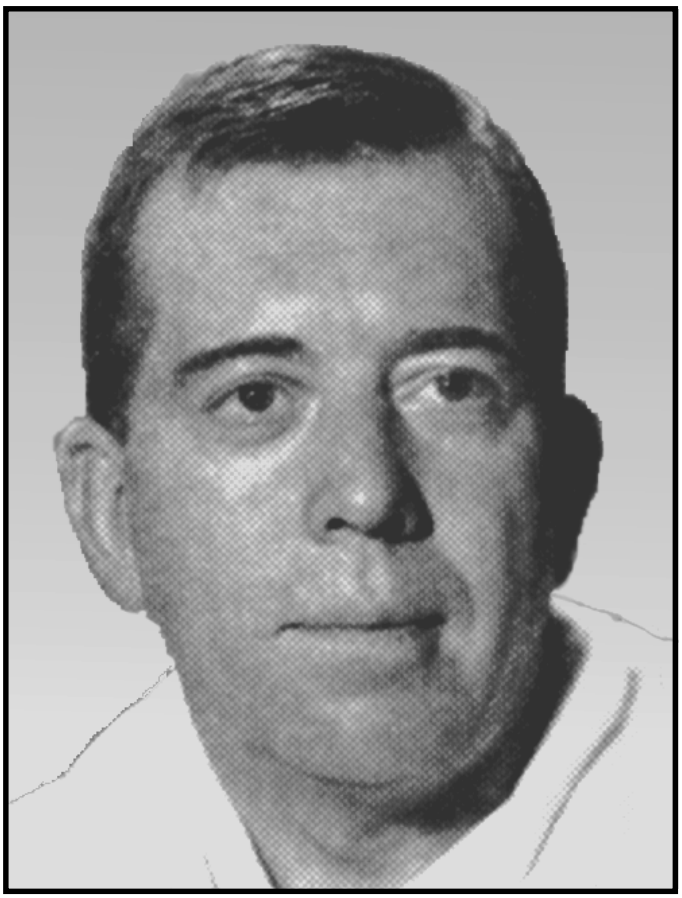
There were many other doubts and hesitations, but I do not think it useful to repeat here all such misconceived ideas. The answers to my doubts came quite unexpectedly and simply, as did everything in this strange abode.

I had read much about Maharshi before coming to the Ashram. I knew that he sees the content of the inner being of every man who approaches him, although he never shows that he does so or speaks about it. So this case was not surprising to me. But I had also personally to experience this extraordinary power of the Master. It was essential, for without a complete trust in the Master, without a belief that his consciousness is one with the Absolute, as well as one with that of his pupil, the realization of Self-knowledge is impossible.

As week after week is spent near him, the shell of the separated personality bursts and dissolves. I always feel this process when I am with him....

The Darshan Resumed

It is the morning meditation. The temple hall is full. I see many new faces, not only Indian but from other lands as well.... One thing is clear: we take farewell of the Maharshi, each one according to his own capacity. The form of it does not matter. We are



Mouni Sadhu (M. Sudouski)

all united at the feet of the Master in adoration and in Silence.

Yogi Ramiah, immovable in contemplation with a face as if cut from granite, is sitting at his Master's feet surrounded by Brahmins of the Ashram staff. An elderly lady just opposite me is gazing intently at Maharshi with an expression of boundless devotion, but also of despair and a kind of inner revolt, as if she is unable to accept the certainty that soon she will no longer see him in his earthly form.

And Maharshi? After this new operation, he is thinner than ever; the features seem to be transparent, the color of his face more fair, as if there were nothing earthly about him. A statue, an abstraction incarnate, if this expression can convey any meaning. No, it is the spirit, which, from the sphere of matter, returns to its own realm, and is only in a very loose and subtle way in touch with what we see as the physical body of the Saint.

His peace is permeating everything all round us. There are no more unsolved problems, no unfulfilled desires, no movements in my consciousness. It is now clear that there is no need of thinking as it seemed before — for thinking is an unnecessary, purposeless thing.

What is it that concerns me now? What is happening to me?

Where is that man who had a name, and many thoughts? All this now seems so far from 'Me'. Oh, if I could only hold this state at any cost, and not return to the world of shadows and illusions! If I could only remain in this silence wherein there is no 'I' and 'you', no time, no space!

The light is now pouring out in such abundance that everything is inundated by it. The open eyes see nothing but light.

I know that this form, now so foreign to me, seems not to breathe any more. Would its breath disturb the peace of eternity? I do not know.

In this light, boundaries of the 'past' and the 'future' are vanishing. Both are now like open plains. No, it is not true, for the momentary awe before the opening of the great gate now gives way to the happiness of awareness that time does not exist any more. Like a lightning flash come to my memory, the words of the Revelation of St. John: " . . . that there should be time no longer".

Yes, I now realize that true life is independent of time, and that if we are still living in time it is not real life. Resurrection, that unfathomable mystery, becomes a realized truth here in this invisible life.

Farewell

I am returning from the temple hall where people were passing before Maharshi's couch as in a procession. I have not taken part in it. I am waiting for 6 P.M. when the flow of visitors stops. From six till seven-thirty the Master is often alone. Hence, it is the best time to approach and take leave of him.

The night is exceptionally hot with no breeze, not even a breath of the usual cooler eastern wind. The road is empty and there is no one at the Ashram gate, only several motor cars stand in its large courtyard.

Twilight reigns in the temple hall. I stop for a moment at the door. Maharshi is sitting in his habitual posture, reclining on pillows and looking into space. One of the young attendants is sitting in a corner, almost invisible in its darkness. No one else is in the hall.

Maharshi now sees me and a slight smile appears. I approach him, but all the well-prepared words of farewell and the last requests disappear from my mind. It remains empty, there is not even a single thought.

I salute and stop quite near to him. He looks into my eyes. I plunge into the light of his. No words are now needed. I know that the Saint reads my heart. He has seen each word in my mind even before I put them together.

Deep down some sadness flutters in me. I see for the last time the one who is my Master and my Friend, whose like I shall never find again were I to search all the worlds. Yet a subtle but irresistible wave of strength flows from Him. It carries away this cloud and penetrates the whole of my being. Now my consciousness is pure and transparent; I feel it is thus that I wanted to stand before Him.

I see a kind of encouragement to express myself in words emanating from His beautiful face. Well,

I say to myself, I shall try if it is necessary.

And I begin to tell Him slowly and clearly that I have to leave the Ashram and beg His permission, and after He nods in consent, I proceed to ask His blessing for my present, my future, and forever. His eyes seem even more luminous; the face, expressing a superhuman kindness, seems to become more serious. He gives me the blessing. I know He sees my next, still-unexpressed entreaty. I do not hear any words, yet I feel He is asking me whether I am aware of the meaning of my own prayer. And without moving my lips, I give Him my answer. Yet all is so natural, so simple, so real, that I would rather doubt my standing here than this mute conversation. A short silence follows.

Oh, I could stand like this, near him without end, for all eternity, with no other wish in my heart. Minutes seem to pass, though they may be only seconds.

The last request which I wanted to express is, according to the Master's teaching, a kind of concession to the visible, hence the unreal, world. It is for the pupil to have a visible, tangible sign of the Guru's grace, sanctified by ages of tradition. I had been told that Maharshi never gives it, and even in his biographies I had read the answers given by him to such requests. It meant that he was careful and strict even with appearances.

But here, now, when I am standing before him with an open heart, feeling all that is taking place with joy and certainty, how could I be refused ?

As soon as I begin my sentence somewhat shyly, his wonderful smile comes to encourage me.

I bow my head and feel the touch of his hand on my brow, the delicate touch of his fingers along my head. A subtle current of power and purity passes through my whole frame.

In a lightning flash, I realize that the power of this moment will sustain me in all the years to come, and its light will for ever shine on my life.

We do not talk any more. I salute for the last time, he nods in the Hindu way which denotes consent or approbation and I withdraw slowly towards the door, looking at His face with all intensity to engrave it forever in the depths of my heart. I walk in a joyous peace back to my cell, through the dark paths of the garden. A few Ashram friends accompany me to my gate in perfect silence, for Indians know how to behave in solemn moments.

The inner voice says: "Separation from the Master is no more possible." And so it has proved.

Protecting Arunachala

The Legal Efforts

An Update, March 4, 2001: The High Court in Madras has put forth a draft scheme for the maintenance, development and conservation of the Giripradakshina Path in Tiruvanamalai. This was done during the week ending March 2. Fuller details of the scheme are awaited.

The draft scheme contemplates some restriction on construction and activities between the Path and the Hill, though not a complete ban. A provision is made for the creation of a regulatory body with representation from government departments and the ashramas. The Court will shortly hear reactions of the parties to the draft scheme and then pass final orders.

The Children's Ashrama in Nova Scotia

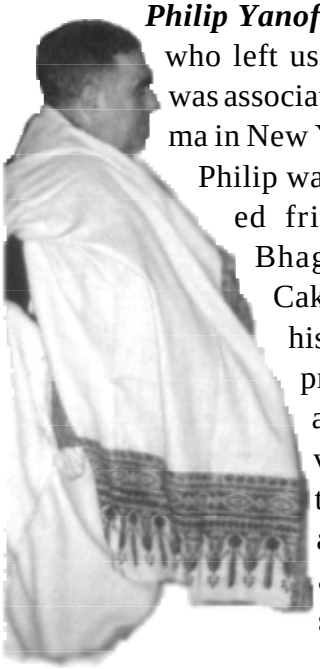
This year the Children's Ashrama at the Bridgetown, Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama is scheduled to commence on Sunday, August 19th and continue for five days. Those parents who wish to have their children participate, or desire more information, please call:

Darlene in Nova Scotia
902-665-2263
or
The New York Ashrama
718-575-3215

Remembering

"FOR what is inevitable, one should not grieve," say the scriptures. Yet we all experience some difficulty coping with the loss of someone who had filled a large portion of our lives. The ultimate lesson is clear in the light of the Maharshi's teachings. It was the intimation of death and an intense desire to understand its implications that transformed the limited awareness of the boy Venkataraman into the Pure Awareness of the Sage of Arunachala. Following his lead, we, in whatever measured way possible, can certainly gain maturity of thought and deep insight by contemplating what death is. We must admit that 'death,' even with all its connotations of 'finality,' has the single-most power to take our attention away from the irrelevance of the world and into the awareness of Eternity, our True Home. Then we understand that life is not a pleasure garden but a training ground to prepare us for the final absorption into the Heart, our Source, the abode Peace and Joy.

Since the passing of Arunachala Ashrama's founder, Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, last April, we have experienced an unusual number of deaths among close friends, parents of friends, and devotees.



Philip Yanofsky was one among those who left us during this past year. He was associated with Arunachala Ashrama in New York since the early 1970s. Philip was a warm, generous-hearted friend who highly valued Bhagawat's 'CCC' (Coffee, Cake and Conversation). With his imposing rotund physical presence, innate humor and an innocent, yet highly convoluted and perplexing intellect, he never failed to amuse us, enrich our lives and deepen our understanding and appreciation of friendship. He had a relentless zeal for meditation and believed that all life's ills could be overcome by 'making the effort' through meditation.

In 1990, after retirement, he moved with his wife to Florida. Last October, about two weeks before his passing, a few of us had the opportunity to visit him there. Amidst his physical suffering, he was cheerful, overwhelmed with gratitude and a deep devotion to God.

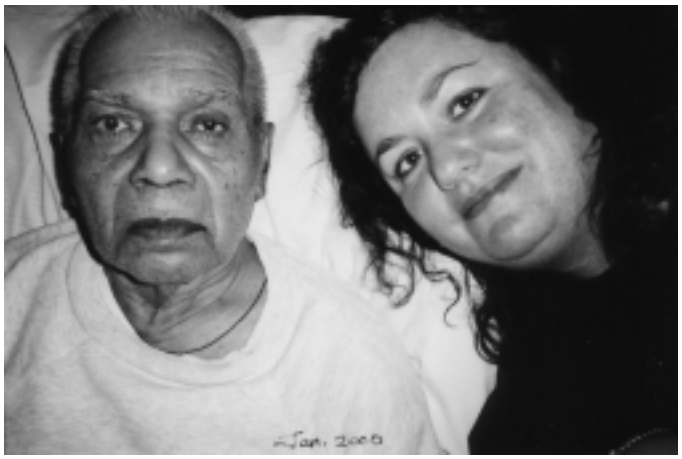
Another friend who recently was absorbed in Eternal Peace, and who had been associated continually with Arunachala Ashrama since the early 1980s, was ***Olivia Satenberg***. A couple of years ago she moved to Chicago with her husband Dick. Nevertheless, she and Dick remained an intrinsic part of the Ashrama.

Olivia was blessed with an unusually warm, generous and open heart that immediately embraced any acquaintance as her own personal family member. Most all of the New York Ashrama family had an opportunity to spend time with her during her illness. She passed on peacefully at home with her husband by her side. Below is an account of the funeral which many of the Ashrama friends attended:

Olivia very peacefully breathed her last on January 26, 2001. Her funeral was on Monday, January 29th at the Bohemian Crematory in Chicago. A good number of friends from Arunachala Ashrama, both in person and in spirit, joined Dick in paying their respects to dear Olivia.

Olivia had earlier on expressed her wishes about the funeral. As the funeral commenced, it was clear that it had taken on a life of its own. It felt like yet another "Sunday afternoon at the Ashrama," just as Olivia wished.

The ceremony began by reading a message from Dennis Hartel who was then at Sri Ramanasramam, India. Dick then placed *kumkum* on Olivia's forehead and garlanded her. Following the instruction from Sri Sundaram, President of Sri Ramanasramam, the garland that was on Bhagavan's picture was then placed on Olivia's body, which was beautifully draped in the lilac-colored saree of her choice. The chapel resonated with the sounds of the same



Olivia with Bhagawat in January 2000

holy recitations that are usually sung in the evenings at the Arunachala Ashrama, the hymns and chants which Olivia adored.

Passages from the Tulsidas *Ramayana* were read out. Olivia held the stories from the Tulsidas *Ramayana*, especially the stories about Hanuman, very close to her heart. Even when her body was very frail she would ask friends to read to her passages from the *Ramayana*. Till the last she spoke about the story of Hanuman baring his chest to reveal the images of his beloved Rama and Sita therein.

Also, the chapter on "Surrender" from *Gems from Sri Bhagavan* was read. Evelyn Saphier then presented a beautiful memento — a picture of Olivia and Dick printed along with a passage about Olivia composed by Paul, her husband, who was unable to attend the funeral. Evelyn led the gathering in a simple heartfelt song composed by Margo Martin in memory of Olivia:

Oh Bhagavan, My Bhagavan
Hold Me Close
Shelter Me
Om Bhagavan Sri Bhagavan
Sharanam, Sharanam

Everyone present — friends, family and colleagues — were united in the openhearted and friendly spirit of Olivia, as they shared stories, memories, and tributes. Dick spoke about how his heart was completely shattered with the loss of Olivia, and yet he sincerely felt that the purpose of the years spent with her was to start him on his journey to Arunachala.

We all bid our final good-bye to Olivia with flowers and chants of "Arunachala Shiva". Pictures of Sri Bhagavan and Hanuman were placed on Olivia's body before the cremation. After the poignant ceremony, the group gathered in Dick's home to share warmth and friendship in Olivia's memory.

Those of us who have been involved in Olivia's life, have been truly inspired to turn inwards, towards Sri Bhagavan even more strongly.

The 51st Aradhana
of
Sri Ramana Maharshi
will be observed in the New York Arunachala Ashrama
on
Saturday, April 21, 2001
The program will begin at 11:00 A.M.

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for more information, please call
(718) 575-3215

The *MAHARSHI* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil Sharma and distributed in North America by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. For those with Internet access, this issue and all back issues are available at "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

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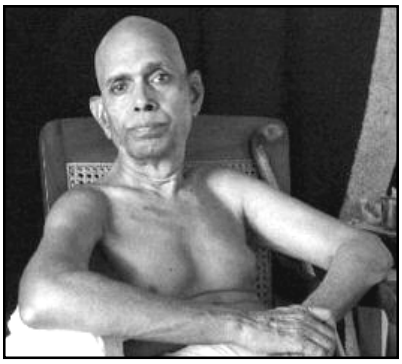

The Maharshi

MAY/JUN 2001 VOL.11, NO. 3

More Than A Dream

By T. P. Ramachandra Aiyer

"Is there any significance in a dream or is it a mere phenomenon?" was the question I put to Sri Bhagavan in writing. In those times, the subjects of 'guru and *sishya*,' of 'initiation and *diksha*' were the foremost topics of general discussion. Does Sri Bhagavan give *diksha* to us and if not, why not?

IN THE EARLIER DAYS, the presence of Bhagavan was sought above all by people who desired liberation. Our ambitious aspirations saw no bounds in the grace of his presence. My intense feeling was, that whether there was significance or not in all these *dikshas* and initiations, if Sri Bhagavan was to give me initiation, it would be a blessing for me in any case. His pithy utterances were very cryptic, ever pregnant with meaning and power: "Who is the Guru? Who is the *sishya*? Who is to give and to whom? What is there to give? You think the 'Self' to be the body and take yet another body for the 'Guru' and demand the one to bless the other. Is the 'Guru' regarding the body as the 'Self'? There is neither Guru nor disciple other than the 'Self'. Guru is Self."

Though convinced by his presence and utterances, there yet remained a lurking sense of something missing and unfulfilled. It was at that time that I had an extraordinary experience which left an impress on my whole being. It was neither a dream nor a waking state experience. I was perfectly alive to it and aware of its permeating nature, which consumed and overpowered me. After the experience, I immediately wrote the following in a notebook and later went to the Ashram. Reaching Sri Bhagavan's presence before dusk, I left my notebook with him for his perusal.

This was the record:

18th November, 1939, 3:00 a.m.

It was an apparent dream. I was in a huge quadrangle of some college buildings. I was studying when I suddenly saw that Sri Bhagavan had come down, youthful and vigorous in appearance, and had the impression that he was going to manifest himself and speak. Oh, it was a wonderful sight. Thousands of people gathered round at a distance encircling Bhagavan, perched on all walls, upper floors and any available space around. I saw Dandapani sitting at a distance echoing Sri Bhagavan's speech which was in turn echoed by another. It had never occurred to me that this would happen or that Sri Bhagavan would ever come here, and I, who was at a distance could not stand any separation. I darted towards Sri Bhagavan and embraced him with so firm a grip the like of which I have not the strength to do or achieve in physical consciousness. And Sri Bhagavan embraced me. In each other's embrace, we left the place. At once I found him in my house. First welcoming Sri Bhagavan was my mother, more robust than she ever was in life. Then my father, calm and unperturbed as he always was, followed by my sister. Sri Bhagavan had a cold bath, myself pouring pots of water over him. Then in a few moments he went up and down our house throwing us all in confusion, but I alone followed him without a second thought. By this time my

mother appeared to be losing her confidence and faith. In the midst of this embarrassment, and in her presence, Sri Bhagavan appeared to put me to the test, as it were, and asked me, pointing to my sacred thread and other things: "What is all this! Now I say, throw, throw them away and I shall give you this." He was holding in his hands a bunch of *darba* (kusa grass) and I did not perceive how it came into his hands. At first I hesitated for a moment to discard my sacred thread for kusa grass, but a moment's reflection made me surrender to his will and with all vehemence I tore off the sacred thread and flung it on the ground, to the dismay of my mother and perplexity of my father. Immediately, Sri Bhagavan gave me two handfuls of kusa grass in a 'horseshoe' shape, and the moment I touched and received them a great serenity pervaded my entire being. Just then I experienced a descent of dynamic force into my being, flowing as it were from and through the *sahasrara*, permeating downwards slowly to the heart-centre, at which moment I felt apprehensive that my physical frame could not withstand this permeation and impact any more without jeopardy.

With courage and determination I looked up at Sri Bhagavan to ask him what all this was about. There was no answer, but I saw Sri Bhagavan's form change into the shape of Sri Rama and tell me something that I could not catch. So I asked, "Who are you?" and the reply was "I am Sri Rama, Sri Rama," whereupon this vision disappeared and I saw Sri Bhagavan in its place.

My mother began to cry aloud, having lost her balance of mind by this time, and said, "I will die, I will die, thinking I fell a prey to Sri Bhagavan's lures."

The mention of death caused irrepressible laughter in me, and Sri Bhagavan said at once, "Yes, die; you should die." When Sri Bhagavan said so, I turned around to my mother and with ferocity cried out, "Yes, die! Die!"

She was rolling on the ground when Sri Bhagavan asked me, "What is the earliest train to Bombay and the cheapest route?" He said he had to go there and to one or two more places, and then go on a tour in the north. I was thinking how best to take Sri Bhagavan and go with him when I felt completely awake and began reflecting on the event. Did it have any significance or was it merely a dream phenomenon?

As usual, the following morning I entered the Old Hall. Sri Bhagavan's welcome nod and penetrating look overwhelmed me, and even as I was halfway through doing my obeisance he turned to the shelf beside him, took out the notebook and handed it to me. Immediately he began, "Don't you know what Madhavan did? One day he was massaging my limbs. Leaving him to his job I reclined, closing my eyes. After some time I felt some variation in the friction, so I opened my eyes and saw him with his head bent down clutching my feet in his hands. I asked, 'What are you doing?' 'Nothing,' he replied, resuming his task. He took it as *diksha* by the feet."

Immediately I said that I had had an unusual experience by Sri Bhagavan's touch, which stirred my being, though in a dreamy condition, and asked if initiation or *diksha* could be had in this way also and whether these were real and effective regardless of the *swapna* (dream) state? Sri Bhagavan slowly spoke, interspersed with short intervals of silent gaze: "*Jagrat* and *swapna* are states that come and go. If these states are real they must be unchanging, permanent. Our real nature is constant being. It never changes. Be it *upadesa* or *diksha*, the efficacy of the Guru's influence or God's grace is not conditioned by the different states. The influence is an experience being itself. Guru, God and Self are one and the same. So long as the Guru, God or the Self are deemed external, all *upadesa*, initiation and the several *dikshas* mentioned have a relative meaning and significance. But 'Guru' is external and internal, and is the very Self. Such influence is efficacious whether the experience is in the *jagrat* or *swapna* states"

—This article and the following two have been reproduced from early editions of the Mountain Path *magazine.*

The Mahatma and The Maharshi

By K. Arunachalam

THIS HAPPENED in the summer of 1932. I was working in those days with a group of young men in the slums of Bangalore under the leadership of Brahmachari Ramachandra. He suggested that I should visit Sri Ramana Maharshi on my way back from Madurai. I had been to my village in Madurai district for a brief visit and I was returning to Bangalore to resume my work in the Gandhi School run by the Deena Seva Sangh.

Tiruvannamalai, the abode of the Maharshi, is not on my regular route. So I had to go to Villupuram and change trains. Tiruvannamali is a midway station on the Villupuram/Katpadi line. I got down at the Tiruvannamalai station and went to the famous Arunachaleswara Temple.

To my surprise I found there a *sannyasi* spinning on the *Charkha* in one of the *mandapams* within the precincts of the temple. I stood in front of him for a considerably long time. Spinning was common in those days. Anyone who was politically conscious spun either with a *charkha* or with a *takli*. But for one who has renounced the joys and sorrows of the world in favour of God-realisation, to be spinning was something beyond my comprehension. Furthermore, this *sannyasi*, dressed in *khadi gerua* cloth, was using a pedal-*charkha*, and that was why I stood in front of him in great amazement. Later on I came to know that this *sannyasi* was one of the disciples of the Maharshi.

After a while I made enquiry about Ramana Ashram. This institution solely built around the Maharshi was not as famous then as it grew to be in the forties and thereafter. I was shown the way and walked along the road under the shadow of the Arunachala Mountain.

I reached the Ashram and met the person in charge of arrangements. He showed me a place where I could keep my things and stay. After the necessary formalities — they were simple enough — I entered the hall in which the Maharshi was seated on a sofa. In another corner of the hall, there was cupboard on top of which I saw an eighteen inch statue of Mahatma Gandhi (with a *khadi* yarn garland). I sat in front of the Maharshi along with several others. Some of the devotees were seated in *ardha-padmasana* in meditation. A few were reading silently some religious literature. The Maharshi himself was in *samadhi*. Some were reciting *slokas* in a soft melodious tone. On the whole the atmosphere was an elevating one.

I sat in silence for hours together. When it was time for the night meal all the devotees got up and walked toward the adjoining dining hall. I also went with them. The hall was divided by a cloth curtain. On one side of the curtain some of the orthodox devotees sat for their meal. On the other side were all the nonorthodox. The Maharshi sat in a place visible to one and all, for he did not differentiate between man and man. This was a great lesson to me. After the meal some of us went back to the hall and sat there. Occasionally the Maharshi would say something which was not quite audible and the scribe sitting by his side would write it down. I decided to sleep in the hall as some others did. I could not sleep because I was inquisitive to know what the Maharshi would do. He got up from the sofa at 3 o'clock in the morning and walked towards the tank. After ablutions he had a dip in the pond. He changed his *khadi kaupeenam* (loincloth) and washing the used one left it outside to dry. After doing all this, he walked back into the hall and sat as usual on the sofa. Sometimes he reclined on the sofa and dosed off. Early in the morning the Maharshi got up, went into the kitchen and joined the group that was cutting vegetables. He supervised the breakfast and ate with the visitors and ashramites.

During the day there was a stream of visitors who went near the Maharshi and prostrated before him. Sometimes he opened his eyes and blessed them with a smile. Occasionally he spoke a few words. When the daily newspaper arrived it was placed near him. He glanced through the pages and put it aside. Most of the time his eyes remained half closed. There was a calm peace in the whole environment that surpassed all understanding. I sat silently watching and enjoying the holy presence of the Maharshi. After spending a full three days like this, I wanted to take leave of the Maharshi and go to Bangalore. I was waiting for an opportunity.

The Maharshi opened his eyes. I got up and prostrated myself before him and requested him to clear a doubt of mine. He showed his willingness by

a broad smile. Taking courage I posed the following problem: "The Maharshi by his example directs his followers to keep quiet, but Mahatma Gandhi whose statue is here, by his own example, goads everyone to be continuously active. I am puzzled as to whom to follow." The Maharshi's face broadened with an unparalleled smile. He asked, "Who told you that I am sitting quiet?" I replied in all humility that I had seen this with my own eyes. He said, " Why do you think that what you are seeing with your physical eyes is the truth?" I had no answer for this question.

Once again I repeated the question as to whom to follow? Then he enquired about what I was doing. I gave him an idea of the slum-settlement work in Bangalore and told him how we were intensively engaged in *Harijan* uplift and prohibition work. He blessed the work and asked me to continue this work in the manner which Mahatma Gandhi wanted such work done, i.e., with great devotion and detachment. I was given a set of Ashram publications to be used by the workers. I asked the Maharshi for his autograph. He did not agree, but requested the Sarvadhikari who was standing nearby to write my name. The Maharshi immediately said, "How can Arunachalam have a father?" and he laughed.

I stood in his presence for how long I don't know. When I regained my consciousness I took leave of him and left for Bangalore.

In 1951-52 I was in the USA. While touring the Southern States, I came in touch with a group of whites who were deeply involved in the desegregation movement. They did not differentiate between man and man, whether black or white. I found in the study of the leader of this group a photo of Sri Ramana Maharshi whom he had never seen. He revealed that it was the Maharshi's teaching that was the driving force in all his activities undertaken for bringing about equality between the two races—the Whites and the Negroes. He evinced a deep interest in the Maharshi's mode of Self-enquiry for Self-realisation. Now I understood the true import of the *Gita* teaching: "He who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men; he is a yogi, who has accomplished all action."

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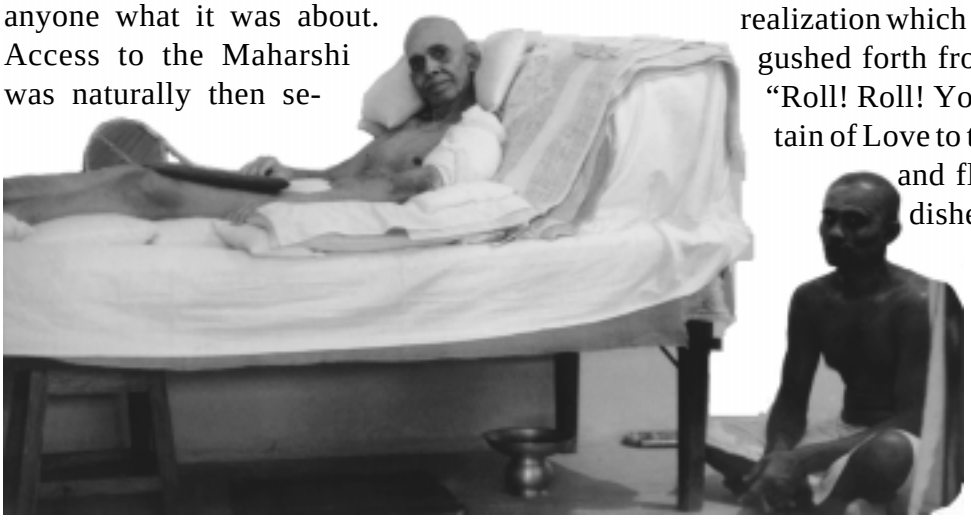
The Great Event

R. Narayana Iyer

The following was written by the author just months after the Maha Nirvana of Sri Bhagavan.

"Before some stars appear, light appears. After they vanish from vision, light alone remains. That is the state of a *jnani*—his birth and death." These were the words of Sri Bhagavan in a talk about *Jnanis*. The exact import of the words is as puzzling as the strange phenomenon that passed vividly before our eyes on the 14th April, 1950. It was about a quarter to nine at night. I was sitting in the open space in front of my house facing east. The sky was clear, the air still. A grave and subdued solemnity pervaded the atmosphere as though reflecting the anxiety of so many sincere devotees of the Maharshi who had come to Tiruvannamalai on account of his illness.

Suddenly a bright and luminous body arose from the southern horizon, slowly went up and descended in the north, somewhere on Arunachala Hill. It was not a meteor as it was bigger than what Venus looks to our vision, and its movement was slow. It was so lustrous that at its zenith the light shed by its trail stretched all the way back to the horizon like an arc. The sight dazed me. Instinctively, as it were, I jumped to my feet and ran as fast as I could to the Ashram, a hundred yards off. There was a crowd of people moving about and quite a hustle and bustle. It didn't strike me to enquire of anyone what it was about. Access to the Maharshi was naturally then selective and restricted to a few. I cared not for the Ashram rules and regulations, but like a tethered calf let loose and running to its mother, I took a short cut, jumped into the garden, scaled the parapet and rushed into the room where the Maharshi, Bhagavan, my Ramana, Guru, Father, God in flesh and blood was lying.



Lo! My heart thumped; breath choked. He was no longer in the flesh and blood. He had just breathed his last. As the star descended on the Hill, he had left the body. It was held in *padmasana* position by the attendants. I touched the body. There was no warmth. In a frenzy I clasped hold of his hand, the mere touch of which used to give the thrill of eternity. Coldness of death froze my nerves. All was over like a dream. Sobs, hymns and chantings filled the air, and my head reeled with dizzy thoughts.

We will no longer see our dear Bhagavan in that beautiful form of molten gold, which charmed and enchanted us for decades! We will no longer see those compassionate eyes that gleamed like twin stars, peered into our innermost depths and dispelled the shadows that blurred our vision and understanding! No more that kind and godly look of Grace that solaced our wearied souls and inspired our depressed hearts in speechless silence with peace unbounded, or that bewitching and enchanting radiant smile that fascinated us and drew us to him, to heights of bliss, far, far above this world. No more could we hear that sweet and ringing voice, the talks of sparkling wit and humour, or those words of profound wisdom from the depths of deep realization which intellect could not fathom! Tears gushed forth from my eyes as from a fountain. "Roll! Roll! You beads of Love, from the fountain of Love to the Ocean of Love!" It is not fruit and flowers, nor sweets and savoury dishes that can be offered at Thy feet any more. The only oblation that would reach Thee are tears of love from that perennial spring that is the core of our Being, of which you are the Source in your disembodied fullness. The Divine *Leela* is over.

Letters and Comments

I was wondering if someone could help clarify a confusion I have over one of Ramana's points.

He states that we are not the doers.... Yet, if we are not the doers, then who is, if all is one consciousness?

I have heard from the Advaita side that because we are not the doers, then apparently we are not responsible for our actions.... How can this not be a harmful teaching? Haven't all the religions and countless masters encouraged people to act in loving ways?

I would really appreciate any guidance what-soever. Thank you and blessings to you...

An American Seeker

The teaching is correct: "We are not the doers." But as long as we live an ego-centered life we are unable to experience the truth of this teaching and will have to suffer the consequences of our actions. That is called the Law of Karma.

Once we completely surrender to the Higher Power, or completely efface the ego by Self-enquiry and realize the Self, we know for certain that we are not the doer. It is an ever-present experience. Up to this point we must make effort to realize the truth that we cannot, in fact, make any efforts, that we are only tools in the the hands of the Higher Power. Such are the contradictions in verbalizing spiritual truths.

No true teacher will ever say you are not responsible for your actions. Only when individuality is lost, when we are fixed in the realization of the One Reality, are we not responsible for our actions. In that state there is no one but the Higher Power to be responsible.

Editor

Could you please, if you have time, answer the following questions:

1. Besides asking and yearning for Grace, what are the major ostacles we need to remove to be able to receive It?

2. In my earlier years, ultimate salvation seemed a sure thing once all the earthly puzzles are resolved. Now I live in that future with all the puzzles still in place and I have no excuses left.

3. Is there a membership requirement at the Ashram for someone like me, some distance away? What are the rules? How can I be a part?

Oregon, USA

1. The very fact that one yearns for 'Grace' is the surest sign of the presence of Grace in one's life. Multiplicity of thoughts alone obstruct the reality of the ever-present Grace.

2. All the puzzles in life have no actual foundation other than thought. They do not occur to you in your deep sleep. Simply make the effort to still your thoughts and you will very soon see that all obstacles and puzzles have somehow evaporated.

3. There are no membership requirements for this Ashram; in fact, everyone is a member. As no one is separate from the all-pervading Self, no one falls outside the realm of this Ashram dedicated to the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. By remembering the true meaning and purpose of life, by turning inward towards the Source of awareness, one can truly feel they are not only part of this Ashram, but one with all creation.

Editor

Namaste! I recently read a dialogue with the Master Sri Ramana that described a very simple method to liberation based on the realization that we are ONE with GOD. However, when I did research into the life of the Master, I found a lot of rituals, and still note significant rituals at his Ashram in South India. Have I missed something here, or did the Master promote his simple, direct teachings shortly before his physical death?

American Seeker

Yes, you missed something.

The Master is seated on the very top of the spiritual mountain. He sees seekers approaching that summit from all sides and by various pathways. He does not discourage anyone from climbing. That is, in fact, what we should be doing; it is the purpose of this human existence. Aspirants may use different aids to help them climb. The aid may be a ritual, may be japa, may be pranayama or disinterested service. Some may take directly to Self-enquiry. He encourages all, as the goal is the same for all—the summit.

We should apply ourselves to the practice of the teachings. That is the essential thing. We must make the mind one-pointed and turn it within. "Know the Self and all is known," he tells. Take up the spiritual practice that appeals to you most. Be sincere and persevere throughout your whole life, if necessary. Everything will become right in the end and success is assured.

Editor

Observing the 51st Aradhana in New York City

"In Sri Bhagavan's vicinity the mind's distractions were overpowered by an austere and potent calmness and the unique bliss of peace was directly experienced. This I would call Ramana Lahari, 'the blissful atmosphere of Ramana'. In this ecstasy of grace one loses one's sense of separate individuality and there remains something grand and all-pervading, all-devouring. This indeed is the spirit of Arunachala which swallows up the whole universe by its gracious effulgence."

THE CELEBRATION of Sri Bhagavan's 51st Aradhana took place at 11 a.m., Saturday, April 21st at Arunachala Ashrama on Clyde Street in Rego Park, New York City. Shortly after the program I heard the above words of Swami Viswanathan read one early morning in the Ashram. I felt that Sri Bhagavan had indeed given to this beloved disciple the gift to express the ecstatic bliss of His Presence which had pervaded every aspect of the Aradhana celebration and seemed to linger for days afterwards.

The Ashram appeared to be bulging at the seams with devotees, many of whom had traveled long distances. On this bright spring morning, friends old and friends new converged, some from distant Vermont, Maryland or Colorado! There was an overflow of fresh flowers, of trees in blossom, a new life emerging from a winter pause, affirming the reality that the body is not 'I' — that life must triumph over the illusion of death! Of course, nothing could have confirmed this more than the experience of 'Ramana Lahari' which infused the atmosphere.

The celebration began with the chant of "The 108 Names of Sri Bhagavan" composed by Swami Viswanathan, as children offered flower petals at the sacred shrine. Dennis Hartel welcomed all and read a most inspiring story of Sri Bhagavan's *aradhana* day (see page 5), which described the descent of the comet over the Holy Hill at the moment of His leaving the body. All enjoyed immensely two excerpts from the yet-to-be-released interview video, *Guru Ramana - His Living Presence*, in which two Professors, Prof. T. N. Krishnamurti Aiyer and Prof K. Swaminathan, tell their unforgettable experiences with Sri Maharshi.

Sriram Panchu, a lawyer representing devotees interested in preserving the sanctity of the Arunachala Hill and its surroundings, brought the congregation up to date regarding the case before the courts in Madras.

Bhajans and the recitation of Sri Ramana Maharshi's compositions ensued with enthusiastic participation, followed by Vedic recitations and *Aarati*.

Food preparations, a veritable feast, which included *iddlies* and *sambar*, was enjoyed immensely by all.

Chants and bhajans continued to resound the sanctuary throughout the afternoon and evening as people lingered on, enjoying the good will of fellow devotees in silence, song and speech, amidst the atmosphere of the infectious bliss of Sri 'Ramana Lahari'.

Words cannot express the profound gratitude we feel for the blessing of the living presence of our Divine Teacher who communicates by silence the assurance "Where can I go? I am always here." On this day, in the company of devotees and friends, gathered to remember His Living Presence, we experienced this all the more.

—Evelyn K. Saphier

The Children's Ashrama in Nova Scotia

This year the Children's Ashrama at the Bridgetown, Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama is scheduled to commence on Sunday, August 19th and continue for five days. Those parents who wish to have their children participate, or desire more information, please call Darlene in Nova Scotia (902-665-2263) or the New York Ashrama (718-575-3215).

The *MAHARSHI* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil Sharma and distributed in North America by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. For those with Internet access, this issue and all back issues are available at "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm". For information on books, videos, audio CDs and tapes on Sri Ramana Maharshi go to: "http//www.arunachala.org".