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## How Ramana Maharshi Came Into My Life

*By Shoshi Shophrony*

I was born in Hungary into a warm, loving family. At the age of sixteen I lost my parents and my only sister in the Holocaust. I got married very young, and in 1949 we emigrated to Israel. My husband and I built a new life and a new family.

I began yoga training in 1969 with Swami Venkatesananda. I learned *hatha* yoga and *raja* yoga, the spiritual and philosophical part, along with meditation. I loved my teacher very much and he inspired me to become a yoga teacher myself. In the course of time, I left behind the physical part of yoga and concentrated only on the spiritual yogic approach to life with meditation and Self-enquiry.

### **Dreams that changed my life**

One beautiful summer afternoon in 1972 some remarkable things began to happen to me. It began with a dream that was unexpected and surprising. I was lying on the hot sand at the seashore, near Tel Aviv, with my husband and our two sons. I fell asleep and dreamt that I was an Indian boy walking down the street with my Indian mother. I asked her to send me to school, but she explained that we were poor and had no money for school. Suddenly my mother stopped and pointed at an old man walking in the opposite direction. She said to me, "Run my son, run to him, because he can teach you far more than you could ever learn in any school." And so I did. I ran after the old man. Hearing my heavy breathing, the old man stopped, looked at me with a warm, loving glance and put his hand on my head. And that was it! I woke up finding myself with my family beside the sea, with a very strange feeling about the experience. But as life's rhythm is so very fast, as we swam,

went home, prepared and ate lunch, and talked, the unusual dream began to fade somewhat.

After lunch I went to bed for a siesta and immediately fell asleep. Strangely, the whole dream appeared before me again, exactly as the first time; it was as if I were seeing the same cinema film twice. Now I became tremendously impressed, but hardly understood the dream and what it all meant.

That was the beginning. From that day on I continued to dream about the loving old man without any idea who he might be, and so I referred to him as my old uncle. The man, my old uncle, appeared in my dreams teaching, advising, sometimes reassuring or protecting.

He appeared and reappeared more often around the days of the Yom - Kippur War (October War, 1973, Middle East), at which time our elder son, Reuven, served in the army. He had been in great danger together with others, and we worried very much about him and everyone. The news on the radio was exciting and at times terrifying, but in my dreams my old uncle came, comforting and consoling me lovingly. I felt that he intended to protect not only me, but also our son, who was in danger. Indeed, how grateful we felt later on when we heard the story of his escape 'by chance' from death.

There was another prominent dream with my old uncle related to my younger son, Rafy, who was sixteen years

old at that time. Rafy asked for our permission to buy a small motorcycle. He worked during the summer and had earned the money for it. We didn't give our permission, explaining how dangerous it would be because of all the crazy drivers on the roads. We asked him to wait two more years, by which time he would be old enough, by Israeli law, to drive our car. Rafy, however, has a very strong will. When his heart is set on something he will not give it up easily. We, the parents, had a serious conflict with him. On the one hand, we knew very well how risky a motorcycle could be for a young boy, while on the other hand, we felt that our veto might be too much interference — that it was his life and not ours.

Once again my old uncle appeared in my dream. The three of us, my uncle, Rafy (holding a motorcycle) and I, stood in the middle of a very busy street in Tel Aviv. My uncle asked me to wait at the side while both of them rode the motorbike in the heavy traffic. They began driving awfully fast and dangerously. I looked at them breathless, quite frightened. After a while they returned wearing broad smiles and my loving uncle said to me: "I took your son into very difficult situations. He is clever, skilful and cautious. You should allow him to buy the motorcycle. Trust him and don't worry." When I woke up the next morning I was so happy and felt relieved of a difficult problem. I immediately turned to my husband, and said, "I approve, I approve of the motorcycle." He was the only one whom I told about my dreams. My enthusiasm inspired and convinced him to also give his blessing concerning the motorcycle. I sincerely believe the dream helped me to remain calm and quiet each time Rafy came home late. Thank God, he never had any accidents.

### Old Uncle Identified

Nearly two years had past since my first dream on the seashore. One day I visited a library in a yoga center. I stood in front of a bookshelf and randomly picked out one book. I opened it up and nearly fainted! My loving uncle's beautiful face with a brilliant warm glance was staring at me from a picture on the first page. The name printed at the bottom of it was Sri Ramana Maharshi. The book's name happened to be *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, by Arthur Osborne.

I began to read the first lines and found out that the 'uncle' from my dreams is one of the greatest spiritual masters of the century! I can't express in words my feelings at the moment of this new revelation. Suddenly a curtain was lifted from my eyes and a new kind of perception opened up in me.

I felt an enormous thirst to learn each word of Bhagavan, to live thoroughly his teachings and to let them be absorbed in me. As the Direct Path was being revealed through these teachings, I never had any doubt and knew inside my heart that I had found my way, the purpose of life. I became indescribably grateful to Ramana Maharshi and to my fate.

Since then, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi has been holding me by the hand in day-to-day life and showing me the way to Self-realization. His teaching is complete and perfect. His answers to devotees' questions are the most direct and effective, clearing every doubt or misunderstanding. There is never an unnecessary word, nor is there ever a missing one.

I must confess, that since I found my master and his teachings in many wonderful books, he appears very rarely in my dreams. But from the very first dream I was irresistibly drawn to him; I felt a natural love for Bhagavan. That is something beyond logic: how dreams, books and the radiating visage of my master could so greatly enrich my soul. Previously I had never experienced anything so enlightening; my devotion to Bhagavan is the most important happening in my inner life. I love my family very deeply and I am grateful for the good fortune of their company. Even so, no one can compare this sort of love to the tie which binds me to Bhagavan. That love is happening as if on another sphere. Deep inside me, it plays on like constant background music, as if I were living a double life. So anchored deep inside is he that I feel that there is no distance, nor ever could there be any distance, between Bhagavan and me. He is in my soul.

### Visit to the Ashram

It was a great surprise to me in the early 1970s to find out that Sri Ramanasramam had continued to grow, more than twenty years after Bhagavan's Mahasamadhi. I wrote to the editor of the *Mountain Path* and was happy to become a life subscriber, and also asked for a list of available books. As I got to know that the Ashram receives visitors, a great longing arose in me to see the places where my master lived.

I wanted to meditate in the Old Hall where his radiation vibrates in the air, to walk on the footpaths of Arunachala where he walked and which he so loved. I longed to be near to His Samadhi.

Unfortunately, I was unable to travel to Bhagavan's Ashram for many reasons, including fam-

ily problems and others. The greatest hindrance was the anxiety of my husband. He feared for my safety. At that time there were no diplomatic relations between Israel and India. A fear for my life and security made the decision to undertake the travel more difficult. I didn't want to travel under these conditions and have my husband worry. I decided to wait until circumstances would come together to make it possible. It happened only after sixteen years of waiting and longing. My husband gave his blessing and let me go

I arrived at the Ashram in December 1987, in the middle of the night, with a million stars shining in the sky. Immediately a strong feeling that 'I am home!' gripped me. In the first days, I was so overwhelmed that I couldn't stop shedding tears of happiness.

By that time I had no more questions; I only needed to learn to strike down the restless mind and to remember to Be, only to Be! Bhagavan's love had brought me to Arunachala and his Grace continued to guide me to

eternal Consciousness. The Ashram manager, Mani, received me very kindly, and I feel grateful to him.

My good fate brought me also to Lucy Ma (Lucy Cornelssen), an indweller devotee, with whom I had corresponded during the following two years until she left her body. Her letters were so wise, loving and instructive, that some parts of them were printed in the *Mountain Path* magazine in December 1991.

I visited the Ashram two more times, happily enjoying the warm radiant atmosphere of Bhagavan. These days, by Bhagavan's grace, I don't feel anymore the need to be there physically, as I feel Ramana Maharshi is with me always.

What have I received from him? Inner peace during the turmoils of life, and infinite love. What have I learned? A new angle of vision, understanding the truth of the underlying oneness and unity of existence and knowing the Self, the core Being of the whole universe. I owe you all this, dear Bhagavan. Thank you.

## Consciousness

By T. P. Ramachandra Iyer

**M**Y special subject in college was philosophy and so I had some knowledge of both Eastern and Western systems of thought, and to some extent I was conscious of this. My first appearance in the Old Hall set me free from any such ridiculous feelings. When I entered the Hall there was a discussion going on about the nature of Self and of consciousness and unconsciousness. Book learning being fresh in my mind, I began to express what I had read about the various grades of consciousness in Western systems, and particularly mentioned and explained the super-conscious and subconscious. Sri Bhagavan listened and reacted sharply and remarked: **"What is, is only Consciousness. It is only with reference to something that is, that you can postulate a super or sub state to it. Only to that which exists can you postulate higher or lower grades; you never talk of adding to or subtracting from non-existence. Consciousness is Existence and every living being agrees that it exists; so that which is, is consciousness. Consciousness is Truth; other postulations of it are the creation of ignorance, clouding the mind but appealing to the intellect. Peel off the postulations, ignore the supras and subs and be as you are. You ARE: that is the truth known even to a child. Truth is simple and direct. Being always IS, it knows no variation. That which IS - Consciousness - has neither appearance nor disappearance. Therefore, what exists is Consciousness, call it by any name, Self, God, Atman, Brahman ...."**

I did not only hear the words of Bhagavan but experienced something else also. I felt and experienced my nature, dived deep into my consciousness and swam in the ocean of Bliss. I fell prostrate before Bhagavan and cried aloud within myself: "O Bhagavan! My Master! Dispeller of my darkness! Obeisance to you! Accept me as your servant!" How can I speak of the joy and bliss I experienced that day, which still surges in me by the Grace of the Master, Sri Ramana Sat-Guru!

— *The Mountain Path*, October 1966

## Bhagavan's Writing

By T. K. Sundaresa Iyer

To be still and know that "I am that I am" is the essence of Bhagavan's teaching. He wrote little and what he did was nearly always at somebody's request. The "Marital Garland of Letters to Sri Arunachala," the first and foremost of the "Five Hymns of Sri Arunachala," appeared in response to the request of his *sadhu* devotees in the days when they used to go round begging for food before there was an Ashram. They used to walk round singing spiritual songs and the householders would give them food liberally, knowing that it was to be shared with Sri Bhagavan. Knowing this, a few unscrupulous beggars used to pose as Ramana *bhaktas* and also go round singing. On account of this his *bhaktas* asked Bhagavan to make a special song for them to sing.

At first he did not respond to their request, but some time later, while they were walking round the Hill, the 108 exquisite, profound verses sprang forth from him spontaneously as a marriage garland for Sri Arunachala. They are the outpouring of a pining soul to its divine Lover. They still remain the solace and delight of his devotees.

Next came the "Navamani Malai" (Nine Gems). These were born on different occasions but were later strung together like jewels on a string. The first of them explains the dance of the motionless Arunachala, while the second equates the term Arunachala with

*Satchitananda* (Being-Consciousness-Bliss). Here is a strange thing: while at other holy centres the *Shakti* dances while Siva looks on, here the display of the Mother's activities ceases and merges in Siva while He dances as Arunachala.

The 'Dasaka' and 'Ashtaka' (Ten and Eight Verses), which come next, are a group by themselves. The former begins with the word *karunaiyal* (by Thy Grace). This word kept ringing in Bhagavan's ears, he said. Several times he shook it away, asking what he had to do with it, but still it came back until at last he uttered it. The stream thus started flowed on until the ten superb verses of the hymn had been written. Bhagavan then thought that the flow had worked itself out, but it still continued, although in a different form and with different contents until it had built up the "Ashtaka" as well. While the "Dasaka" was more an appeal for Divine Grace, the "Ashtaka" is a superb and full explanation of the significance of Arunachala, the Absolute Being-Consciousness-Bliss which, as the 'I-I' of our being, transforms itself into all that is. It also shows the way back to the Source, to that state of Being which is supreme Peace.

The "Arunachala Pancharatna" or "Five Verses to Arunachala," the last of the series, was first composed by Sri Bhagavan in Sanskrit and then translated by him into Tamil. He first casually composed the first stanza. Long afterwards someone showed it to Kavyakanta Ganapati Sastri who urged him to write four more, so that the first would be a benedictory, the second on the Divine, and the next three on the three paths of *Jnana*,

## 125th Jayanti of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Celebrated in New York City

You, your family and friends are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the 125th birth anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi

on

**Saturday, 1 January 2005**

**The program will begin at 11:00 a.m.**

at the

Community Center

Hindu Temple Society of North America (Ganesha Temple)

143-09 Holly Avenue, Flushing, Queens, NY 11355

*The program will include recitations, bhajans, puja,  
followed by prasad (lunch). For more information, call (718) 575-3215*

*Yoga and Bhakti*. Thus the five gem-like verses comprise a complete treatise in themselves.

The “Ulladu Narpadu” (*Forty Verses on Reality*) and their “Supplement,” a second forty, were written on various occasions, this time under the urging of the poet Muruganar, and later strung together in a sequence. These are the less devotional, more philosophical works of Bhagavan. The “Upadesa Saram,” (*Instruction in Thirty Verses*) was also written on the request of Muruganar.

As long ago as 1927, such of Bhagavan’s works as were already written were put together as *Collected Works* in the original Tamil. The pundits, sitting in the presence of Bhagavan, were talking about the need for a preface to it, all agreeing that one was needed but none undertaking to write it, each one excusing himself and saying that he was not qualified for the task. This went on for some time, each one proposing someone else for the task and that one declining, while Bhagavan sat and watched without saying anything.

Later in the evening I was passing by the hall when Bhagavan looked at me and said, “Why don’t you write the preface?” I was taken aback at the suggestion. “I would venture to if I had Bhagavan’s blessing for the task,” I said.

Bhagavan said, “Write it and it will come out all right.”

So I began writing at dead of night and to my great surprise within three quarters of an hour had got it written out as though driven by some Higher Power. I changed not a word or comma of it and at two o’clock in the morning took it into the hall and placed it at the feet of Bhagavan. He was pleased with the arrangement of the contents and the simplicity of style. He passed it as satisfactory and asked me to take it away.

But when I had taken up the sheets of paper and gone only a few steps he called me back to show him it again. I had ended up by writing: “It is to be hoped that this work in the form of Bhagavan’s Grace will give all who aspire to eternal Truth liberation through gaining the Supreme Bliss by the removal of all misery.” Bhagavan said: “Why have you written ‘It is to be hoped?’ Why not say ‘It is certain?’” So saying, he took the paper and with his own hands and changed *nambukiren* into *tinnam*. Thus did he set the seal of his approval on the book, giving it to his devotees as a charter of liberation in the form of his teaching (*upadesa*), which leaves no trace of doubt in the mind.

— *The Mountain Path*, January 1966

## Sri Ramana Maharshi’s 108th Advent at Arunachala Celebrations

*In the USA and Canada a number of Advent at Arunachala programs were organized by devotees. The following two reports have been received.*

### California

Arunachala Ashrama, California celebrated the 108th Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi’s Advent at Arunachala on September 12, 2004 at the Fremont Hindu Temple Community Hall. The program attracted a gathering of about sixty devotees, including Dennis Hartel from Arunachala Ashrama, New York and Sri Natarajan, the son of Sri T. N. Krishnaswamy, who was the official photographer of Sri Ramanasramam and responsible for producing the vast majority of the pictures of Bhagavan now in the Ashram archives.

The program commenced with the rendition of “Akshara Mana Malai” by all gathered and was followed by a short address by Dennis Hartel. Dennis spoke about Bhagavan’s journey to Arunachala and his complete surrender to the Divine will, the force that rose like a mighty flood and carried away the boy Venkataraman like a speck of dust. Dennis quoted a few verses that Bhagavan had

later composed which eloquently illustrate his state of mind in 1896 when he arrived at Arunachala.

This year also commemorates Bhagavan’s 125<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary. To celebrate this event Sri Ramanasramam organized a grand *ratha yatra* that traversed about 108 towns in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh. The *yatra* commenced in mid-July, in keeping with Bhagavan’s words that the great change in his life took place about six weeks before he left Madurai for good. The *ratha*, a specially-constructed vehicle that carried an image of the Maharshi, was given a grand welcome in Tiruvannamalai on September 1<sup>st</sup>. Over 70,000 people were fed by the Ashram on that day. Ravi Ramanan, the son of the president of Sri Ramanasramam, who lives in the San Francisco Bay area and who participated in the *yatra*, shared his experiences with the gathering, complete with a slide show of photographs from the *yatra*.

This was followed by a talk by Sri Natarajan, who

reminisced about his several trips to Sri Ramanasramam with his father in the 1930s and 40s, and who shared with us his impressions and memories of Bhagavan. The program continued with bhajans rendered by Mrs. Mangalam Kalyanam of the Atlanta satsang group, who has been in the Bay area for a few months, visiting with her daughter. The program concluded with Vedic chanting and arati, followed by the excellent prasada prepared by the lady devotees. All enjoyed the opportunity to be together with a large group of devotees under the watchful eye of our father, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

### Nova Scotia, Canada

Sunday the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 2004 was a beautiful day, although partly overcast. Arunachala Ashrama, a sentinel of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi in the serene rolling hills of Annapolis Valley, beckoned more than fifty devotees from far and near. At 1100h, on behalf of Sri Arunachala Ashrama, Bridgetown, Subba Rao V. Durvasula welcomed the gathering to the 108<sup>th</sup> Advent Day function, sitting before the beautifully decorated shrine of Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram.

The absence of Dennis, Darlene, Paul and Evelyn, who were away either in New York or in Tiruvannamalai, was felt. In their stead, Mr. Robert Dodds, an ardent *sadhaka* who has spent considerable time at the Ashrama in Tiruvannamalai, India and in New York, cheerfully shouldered the responsibility of looking after the Ashrama and keeping the facilities ship shape. Other visitors included Ms. Josilda from Brazil, Ms. Stephie of New York and Mike of Vancouver, all of them eager to learn about the Ashrama and study Sri Bhagavan's teachings.

In his introductory remarks, Subba Rao expressed his gratitude to the Ashramites for having given him the privilege of performing puja to Sri Bhagavan on that day. Further, he observed that Sri Bhagavan had completed fifty-four years at his chosen place, Arunachala, before his Mahanirvana in 1950, and this year, 2004, marks fifty-four years since his Mahanirvana, totalling 108 years, which is a very sacred number for Hindus and Buddhists alike.

The significance of Ramana Ratha Yathra, a six-week pilgrimage that started at Tiruchuzhi on July 17th and stopped at 108 places in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra, was mentioned. This *yathra* served to spread the holy message of Sri Bhagavan by the chanting of "Aksharamanamalai" and the simple, direct teaching of Self-enquiry of "Who Am I?" for realizing the Self.

Following Guru puja and Sri Ganesh puja, Subba Rao performed Ramana Ashtotthara puja with sincerity and devotion. Then several devotees sang *bhajans* in praise of the Lord.

Sri B. K. Raju recollected his contact with Arunachala Ashrama since the early 1970s. He explained how he was drawn to the Ashram and its ideals, its enchanting location and surroundings. He also narrated how he had been amazed to read of Bhagavan's greatness while in New York City in 1950 when a detailed report of his life and demise was reported in the New York Times.

He expressed his admiration to Ashram principals, with particular reference to Dennis Hartel, who has dedicated his life to the observance of Bhagavan's teachings by adopting yogic simplicity and commitment to Bhagavan's precepts. Mr. Raju explained how Dennis was unable to be present but yet was participating in a sense by doing *seva* to a friend who required his attention. Mr. Raju mentioned the need to imbibe Bhagavan's core teachings of Self-inquiry of "Who am I?" as a means of attaining peace and perfection.

Dr. Swaminathan recalled how thrilling it was to sit at the feet of Bhagavan as a young boy during a Karthigai Deepam Festival in the early forties. He said that Bhagavan is unique among the saints of India in the way in which he spread his message, by adhering in practice to every aspect of his own teaching. "The annual August/September function at this Ashram is a good time for everyone to remind himself or herself of the 'Who am I?' self-introspection advocated by Sri Bhagavan," he said.

As an introduction to group recitation of "Upadesa Saram," Sri Yashwant Rai talked about it as a priceless composition among Hindu scriptures, for in just thirty verses Sri Bhagavan has explained all the techniques that an aspirant may follow for Self-realization.

Then the temple hall resounded with the chanting of "Upadesa Saram," "Arunachala Siva" and "Mantra Pushpam." At 1300h the puja concluded with *arati*. Freshly prepared prasada was served on the spacious grounds of the Ashram. The function was a joyous and blissful occasion for all the participants.

### Mahanyasa Purvaka Rudrabhishekam

Will be performed in the New York Ashrama on Saturday, 13 November, 2004 at 8:30 AM to 3:00 PM. All are welcome.

## Letters and Comments

### Prarabdha and Effort

I have read as much as possible the books written on Ramana Maharishi and more in the 'Maharishi' newsletters. Through my research I came to the conclusion that according to his teachings there is a succession of rebirths for the individual self; that is, as long as the ego is not dropped, there will be rebirth. This teaching of his on reincarnation is confirmed when he mentions that some individuals realized the Self in a short period of time while others struggled long because he said it was their 'prarabdha.' Even the reason for leaving his home at sixteen he explained as his 'prarabdha.'

So here is my confusion: when I began reading related Advaitic teachings of other teachers I learned that there is only Consciousness, and everybody (they call it "body mind organism") is preprogrammed by karma and thus there is no free will. Therefore, there is no rebirth and no reincarnation. I have no problem believing that there is only Consciousness or the Self and there is no free will. However, preprogramming is the part which I am struggling with. According to the teachings of Ramana Maharishi, as I understand them, this preprogramming (or no free will) is only because of the *prarabdha* or past karma. But according to other Advaitic teachers there is no such thing as rebirth and at death there is no difference between a realized person and an unrealized person, i.e., individuality dissolves into the Consciousness, regardless or whether

he or she were realized or not.

Did I miss something from the teachings of Ramana Maharishi regarding rebirth? Is *sadhana* worth an effort if the end result is the same? Please help.

Devotee in California

*Of course these writings of Advaitic teachers you have read are bound to cause some confusion. According to the creed of Advaita known as Ajatavada there is no birth or death, no liberation or bondage and not even an individual. The one Supreme Reality alone exists. Those who can immediately grasp the absolute truth of these statements and realize it have nothing more to do with the body, the world and duality. But such a one is extremely rare. For the vast majority, dedicated, one-pointed effort is required.*

*About realization the Maharshi has said: "...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."*

*By such statements that you quoted we shouldn't be lulled into thinking we are already liberated. In a delusive way we may think it is so, but vasanas will continue to rise, attraction and aversion will continue to cloud our vairagya and viveka, detachment and discrimination. You will have to control the mind by Self-enquiry or any other method and allow it to sink into the Heart.*

Editor

## Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation have been going on in a few places near or in large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please contact the individuals below for more information.

**Ann Arbor, MI** — Gayatri & Mohan (734-623-7199 cedararbor@yahoo.com)

**Atlanta Area** — Mangalam Kalyanam (678-423-7324 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

**Boston Area** — David & Anna Klegon (617-928-1487 /dklegon@rcn.com)

**Miami, Ft. Lauderdale Area** — David & Janet Rubinson (954-755-4758 / arunahill@earthlink.net)

**Ottawa, Canada** — Anantha Padmanabhan (613-733-8250 / padmanabhan\_ananth@hotmail.com)

**San Francisco Area** — Swaminathan & Sangeeta (510-979-1679 / nachiketas@hotmail.com)

**Toronto, Canada** — Krishnan & Padma Sastri (905-849-6005 / psastri@hotmail.com)

**Washington, D.C. Area** — Prakash & Mamtha Adiseshan (703-502-4892 /adiseshan@worldnet.att.net)