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The Silent Ministration of Bhagavan

By Swami Desikananda

The highest ideal for man is to realize God, his real Self. Three prerequisites for fulfilling this sublime purpose of life are: a human body as it is only in such a state that we can work out our destiny and practice *sadhana*, the desire to be free and the help of a Guru who has crossed the ocean of delusion. This objective unfolds itself commensurate with our spiritual effort and growth.

It was Grace and good fortune that brought me to the presence of Bhagavan Sri Ramana in 1927. On entering the Ashram I saw the Maharshi seated on a couch wearing nothing more than a loincloth and appearing to gaze at some distant void. He was surrounded by devotees sitting at his feet and the whole scene was reminiscent of sages of yore. I stood for a while in his presence. He looked at me casually and I made my *namaskarams*. He made kind enquiries as to where I came from and about my stay. Next morning I went to the Ashram and sat before the Maharshi in meditation. The mind was quiet and unwavering. Sri Maharshi was sitting on the couch as usual, apparently gazing at the Hill.

Next morning I again returned to the Ashram to sit at his feet. I found I could easily concentrate in his presence and have progressively longer spells of undisturbed meditation such as I had never been able to achieve before anywhere else. When I told the Maharshi about it and how enjoyable it was, he asked me whether I was sleeping at the time of meditation. On my replying in the negative he laughed and enquired about my method of meditating, which was to con-

centrate on a light in the heart and offer a flower to my *Ishtam* (chosen God) whenever the mind wavered as instructed by Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, second President of the Ramakrishna Math Mission. The Maharshi said it was all right for me and I could continue in this way.

The third day after a lengthy meditation in front of the Maharshi I told him about a picture that I had seen in a church of Jesus, surrounded by all sorts of animals at peace with one another. He replied that this was due to the fact of animosity having been conquered by the sage. Even snakes would not harm anybody here in this Ashram and added that in the presence of sages evil natures would be conquered and friendliness prevail. That is how the *rishis* of old used to live in forests and caves unharmed by wild creatures.

A visitor asked the Maharshi in the evening if he saw any form of God in meditation. He replied smiling that the Self or Atman is our real nature and has no form. He quoted a verse of Sankaracharya: "You are not the body, you are not the mind, senses or *buddhi*. You are beyond all these. You are the Atman." When one becomes perfected in medi-

tation, having discarded all desires, and merges in the Self the mind loses itself without any objectivity. The mind then is no mind. The mind losing itself in Atman is what is called *samadhi*. This is the real nature of man and sublime happiness.”

“The highest goal of man is to enquire ‘Who am I?’ and realize the Self. If a human being does not try to realize this he lives in vain. This state in which he enjoys the highest peace and happiness is dearer than anything else in the world. It is in all beings in the innermost heart. Unless one realizes this state one will have to be born and die again and again. In this real state one goes beyond grief and sorrow. It makes a man immortal.”

Young as I was, I found it difficult to follow this teaching and asked for clarification when I returned to the Ashram the next morning. This was the first time I addressed the Maharshi as ‘Bhagavan’. He replied that the path was indeed difficult, as difficult as walking on a razor’s edge, but sincere effort is sure to bring result. “You (meaning me) could meditate for two or three hours, not because of this life’s practice, but as a result of effort in past lives.”

The fifth day of my visit I saw a young woman with a small baby seated at Bhagavan’s feet sobbing bitterly. She had recently lost her husband and was grief stricken. Bhagavan looked at her with compassion and told her: “Husband, wife and children are for the body. Go home and know who you are. Go home and do not weep.” The words of a *jnani* have power to transform. ‘Home’ can also mean spiritual home, the source. His command “Go home and know who you are” might have taken effect in a heart one pointed and purified by sorrow. In the case of another young woman, Echammal, heartbroken at the loss of her entire family, Bhagavan’s very Silence was enough to effect the transformation and lift her grief.

The remaining days went off as usual. Bhagavan’s routine was to sit on the couch mostly in silence till noon and again after food and a little rest. He used to look through the mail twice a day and go for a short walk on the Hill. He said on one occasion that since there was no mind at all, there was also no concept of anything. All was one full expanse in peace and happiness. He quickly added that we cannot even say one expanse, as there was no second. He was immersed in *sat-chit-ananda* (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). Now his nature is That always.

On the ninth day of my stay, when I was ready to leave, I told Bhagavan so. Kneeling before him I wept profusely. He remarked: “You can stay on. Nobody asked you to go.” However, I took leave of him the next day and he told me to continue my meditation as usual and that everything will be all right in the course of time.

By Bhagavan’s Grace not only was I drawn into the fold of a sage who had the highest realization but was helped in every way to experience periods of supreme peace and bliss. This indeed formed the sheet anchor of my life that was, that is and that will be. The silent ministration of Bhagavan will indeed remain an eternal spring of spiritual joy and peace.

It is but appropriate that I close this account with salutations to Bhagavan Ramana who keeps on inspiring ever increasing numbers of seekers as time goes on.

How gracious art Thou, Lord Dakshinamurthy,
To have blessed mankind by Thy ministration
in human form.

To Bhagavan who is but the form of *Satyam*,
Sivam and *Sundaram*,

Do I offer my salutations again and again.

Sri Ramana Children’s Ashrama

The camp will be conducted at the Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama from

Monday, July 23 to Friday, July 27

Those wishing to participate, or receive more information regarding the program,
can call Darlene in Nova Scotia at (902) 665-2263 or send email to “darlene@arunachala.org”.

Accommodation is available within the Ashrama for all participants, and longer visits can be arranged.

Only He Can Make Us Think of Him

By K. Subrahmanian

Sri Bhagavan once said that even to think of God, we must have the Grace of God. There is no real quest without Grace. When we think of Him, when we meditate on Him, we are not doing anything of our own accord. He makes us think of Him and meditate on Him. We can't take any credit for this ourselves. *We* are not doing these activities, we are *made* to do these. The moment we are fully conscious of this, we shall be utterly humble. Whatever happens during meditation, happens because *He makes it happen* the way it happens. So there is no cause for joy or sorrow.

Sri Bhagavan never said, even once, that he thought of Arunachala. He said that Arunachala made him think of Arunachala and that he was grateful to Him for that. In Verse 3 of *Arunachala Padigam* Sri Bhagavan says: "I had no idea of thinking of you at all. And yet you drew me with your cord of Grace..." In Verse 49 of *Aksharamanamalai*, Sri Bhagavan says; "Wealth benignant, holy Grace that came to me unsought..." Everywhere Sri Bhagavan talks about the Grace that was showered unsought. He didn't seek Arunachala, but Arunachala chose him. Sri Bhagavan talks of his own utter insignificance and of the majesty, grandeur and glory of Arunachala. In Verse 5 of *Arunachala Padigam* Sri Bhagavan says, "From out of all the creatures in the world,

what did you gain by choosing me? You saved me, did you not, from falling into the void and you have held me firmly fixed at your feet. Lord of the Ocean of Grace, my heart shrinks in modesty even at the thought of You. Long may you live, O Arunachala, and let me bend my head in praise and worship of You."

Whenever we feel depressed at not progressing in our *sadhana* despite our efforts, we must remind ourselves that we are not doing any *sadhana* of our own accord but that He is making us do it out of His Grace. It is up to Him to do what He wills with our *sadhana*. We cannot choose Him, only He can choose us. The *Kathopanishad* says: "This Atman cannot be attained by the study of Vedas or by intelligence, nor by much listening. It is gained by him alone whom it chooses. To him this Atman reveals its true nature." (1.2.23)

We cannot choose to do or to avoid *sadhana*. When chosen, we must be grateful and humble and not complain about the results. We must leave everything to Arunachala who, Sri Bhagavan says, will not stop until He makes us still like the holy Hill itself, once we turn to Him (Decad 10).

We are made to turn to Him through His Grace. It is through His Grace also that we think of Him and it is for Him to do what He likes with us and our *sadhana*.

— *Uniqueness of Sri Bhagavan*, Ch. 24

Inward Turning

21. Worthy Rama! You are indeed fit to reach that goal because you have now turned towards the right way of investigation.
22. This is due to the grace of God which puts you in the right way of investigation. Who can attain anything worthy, without divine grace?
23. The beneficent work of the self-inhering divine grace is finished when the inward turning of one's mind increases in strength day by day. — *Tripura Rahasya*, Chap. XV
70. When the Supreme Devi is well pleased with the worship of the devotee, She turns into *vichara* in him and shines as the blazing Sun in the expanse of his Heart. — *Ibid.*, Chap. II

Interviews

The following are transcribed from interviews recorded at Sri Ramanasramam.

Chakkubai Srinivasan

My father Srinivasa Iyer was a lawyer in the High Court. My mother passed away when I was very young. My father left my younger sister, Shantabai, with his sister-in-law Azhagulakshmi who was settled in Tiruvannamalai. When my sister was four years old she was afflicted with polio. My father took her to Madras and put her under the care of an expert Ayurvedic doctor who treated her for six months. After this she was able to walk aided by a specially designed brace.

My aunt and my father took Shantabai to Bhagavan and tearfully told Bhagavan that thereafter the child was his and that he should look after her. At that time she was just four. Bhagavan blessed her and told my father not to worry about her future, that she would marry at the age of eighteen and prosper in life. Although these comforting words of Bhagavan soothed my father yet he had his doubts.

My sister was again left with my aunt at Tiruvannamalai. She would visit Bhagavan daily and play there. Once there was a cry from the garden and Bhagavan said, "It is Shantabai's voice," and sent someone to fetch her. My sister was reeling with pain. She came to Bhagavan crying and said that a bee had stung her hand. Bhagavan took her hand and caressed it. Immediately the pain of the sting vanished. Being innocent the child told Bhagavan, "Why did you make me cry so long? If you had wanted it you could have stopped it then and there." My Aunt who was there at the time was shocked at the audacity of my sister's complaint. However, Bhagavan smilingly asked what she had done to the bee before it stung her? She said that she was pelting stones at the mangoes and one of the stones disturbed the bee. Bhagavan smilingly said to her, "You see, the stone you threw hurt the bee and so it stung you. So hereafter never harm anyone." Young as she was she understood what Bhagavan meant and thereafter never hurt any living being. Later, whenever she recalled this incident, she felt grateful to Bhagavan for giving her this lesson on non-violence.

Later on, as Bhagavan predicted, when Shantabai

turned eighteen a boy came from Trichy and after seeing her insisted that he would marry only this girl. The marriage went off well and her husband was very kind to her. She felt that it was all due to Bhagavan's blessing.

Once when my sister was about nine she was in Madras. Suddenly she started crying and came and told my father, "Father! Bhagavan appeared to me and took leave of me, saying, 'Child! I am leaving the world but I will always be with you. So do not worry'." Hearing this my father slapped her for uttering these inauspicious words. But my sister kept on sobbing and refused to have her dinner at night.

Early in the morning my father opened the newspaper and there the Mahasamadhi of Bhagavan was reported. Only then did my father realise the purport of my sister's words and realising that she had the blessings of Bhagavan he never scolded her again.

As for me whenever I came to Bhagavan during summer holidays I used to keep on watching his eyes which never blinked. When I reported this to my aunt she would say, "Because he is Bhagavan he never blinks his eyes like we do." Since I was associated with Bhagavan from a very young age I feel his guidance at every moment of my life. Even in everyday matters he helps me.

V. S. V. Mani

I was born at Madurai in 1924. I had my first darshan of Bhagavan in 1937 when I was just thirteen. When I saw him I fell prostrate at his feet. I was so overwhelmed that I did not get up for a minute. I got up only after others told me to stand up. When I first heard about Bhagavan I thought he must be an ordinary *sannyasi* like others, but when I saw him I realised that it was God who was sitting in front of me. Hence, forgetting myself, I fell flat at his feet on that day.

Tiruchuzhi Lakshmiammal was there at that time. She had been a playmate of Bhagavan at Tiruchuzhi. She introduced me to Bhagavan as her relative. Bhagavan asked me, "O, from Madurai? Which school are you studying in?" I answered that I was studying in Sethupathi High School. Bhagavan commented, "Oh! That school is very old."

Lakshmiammal had four sons and Lalita was the daughter of her second son, Dr. Narayana Iyer. Her first three sons, Ramakrishna Iyer, Narayana Iyer and

Mahadeva Iyer were all Licensed Medical Practitioner doctors, certified from the Tanjore Medical College. The fourth son, Guruswamy, was a teacher.

When Lalita was born in 1926 and brought to the presence of Bhagavan, he named her Lalita, telling her parents, “You worship Sri Chakra and Sri Vidya, so name her Lalita.”

When we were young Lakshmiammal told my parents that her grand daughter Lalita and I were made for each other and that we should marry. In 1943 when I was 19 and she 17 our marriage took place.

My wife Lalita was the one who had been with Bhagavan right from her childhood. Bhagavan taught her cooking, grinding, mixing condiments, making garlands, etc. He would even play children’s games with her. When they were young, my wife Lalita, Manavasi Ramaswami’s daughter, Lalita Venkataraman and others would play in the Ashram. Bhagavan would sometimes call them, ask them to come near, and narrate stories to them.

We built a new house at Madurai and we went to Ramanasramam and invited Bhagavan to come and grace our *grihapravesam* (house warming ceremony). Bhagavan laughed and pointing to the Hill said, “You make this Annamalai to come and then I too shall come.”

Once when my wife and mother-in-law were assisting Bhagavan in grinding rice and black gram for the next day *iddli* preparation, utilizing a mortar, Lalita said, “Bhagavan you push the flour and I shall grind,” to which Bhagavan replied, “No Lalita, if I push the flour I may forget myself and crush my fingers. So you push the flour and follow my grinding.” Casual utterances like these by Bhagavan were pregnant with meaning. This indicated his state.

When we were there, occasionally Chinnaswami would report to Bhagavan that the storeroom was almost empty and that he was at a loss for what to do for the morrow. Bhagavan would advise him not to worry. Then some devotees like us would bring rice, dhal, provisions, leaf-plates, etc.

Once somebody who saw Bhagavan sitting on the sofa in the old hall commented, “For a sadhu what need is there of a sofa?” Hearing this Bhagavan smiled and told Lalita, “Look Lalita, am I sitting for my sake on the sofa? It is for others that I am here. For me, actually, I do not require anything at all.”

Bhagavan used to talk to me freely when we were

alone. When I was with him every morning at 4 ‘o clock he would sometimes tell about his days in the Arunachala Temple, life on the Hill, etc. His boyhood classmate and playmate, Vilachery Ranga Iyer, would also tell me about his association with Bhagavan. He once told me that one day at Madurai while swimming in a tank he got trapped in the outlet. Bhagavan immediately went and rescued him. Later on, he would say, “Bhagavan you rescued me once from the tank now you should rescue me from *samsara*.” It was usual for boys in those days to plait their long hair. Once when Venkatoo (son of Chinnaswami) was a child staying at Skandashram he refused to allow anyone to plait his hair. Then a snake slowly slithered into the Ashram. Bhagavan just told it to go away and it obeyed. Turning to the boy, Bhagavan said, “Even the snake obeys. Why don’t you too obey.”

Bhagavan used to sit on a raised platform at the entrance to Skandashram every morning. Around that time of the day visitors from out of town would usually arrive by rail. Whenever he saw any devotee or devotees climbing up towards the Ashram he would tell others to prepare extra food for the newcomers.

One of my wife’s uncles set up a medical practice near Courtalam and donated a piece of land to one of the devotees of Bhagavan, named Sivaiya. Sivaiya established an Ashram there and came to be known as Mouna Swami of Courtalam. Later hearing that there were herbs on the Arunachala Hill that would turn base metal into gold he came to Bhagavan and asked about the herbs. Bhagavan told him, “You are a *sannyasi*. Why do you want to be an alchemist? Don’t be interested in all these *siddhis*. They will lead you astray,” and sent him away.

Bhagavan would tell me about the greatness of the Hill — how it is a hill of effulgence. Just because trees grow on it we should not take it to be an ordinary hill. He would extol the merits of going round the Hill.

In 1946 when we visited the Ashram, we were standing near the newly built hospital and Bhagavan was returning from the hill after his evening stroll. When he came near he told my wife Lalita, “You are a doctor’s daughter. Your father and your uncles, Dr. Narayana Iyer, Dr. Mahadeva Iyer, Dr. Ramakrishna Iyer are all doctors. So go and help in arranging medicines in dispensary.” Accordingly, my wife and I stayed there for three days and arranged the medicines.

Once when we were taking leave of Bhagavan, he

told us to stay for two more days. We obeyed him and on the next day there was a heavy downpour and part of the railway track from Villupuram to Trichy was inundated. The trains were cancelled. Now we understood why Bhagavan wanted us to stay for two more days.

Once when my wife informed Bhagavan that she was going to Tiruchuzhi, he told her to visit his house, the temple, the primary school where he studied, the tank where he swam and other places where he used to play, etc.

People who come to Bhagavan think that he is just like any other sage and casually bow to him and go away,

but he is Dakshinamurti himself. Whether at Virupaksha Cave, at Skandashram, in the Old Hall, outside the hall, in the Jubilee Hall or in the New Hall he always used to sit facing south like Dakshinamurti. Even while lying down in the Nirvana Room the door was facing south and he gave us his darshan facing south.

When Bhagavan had the tumour on his arm my wife saw the wound and started sobbing uncontrollably. Bhagavan looked at her and said, "After coming to me for so long she still doesn't know that it is the body that suffers and not I. Am I the body?"

Letters and Comments

Seeker of Peace

I am a 26-year-old female living in Chennai. I have lots of mental torture and confusion because of my family problems. I came across Ramana Maharishi through the internet and I am deeply impressed by his teachings. I would like to do meditation to handle my problems. I want to know how to start. Is it possible to do meditation at home without any guidance? Please help me by replying.

Thank you.

Yes, you can begin at home because the peace and happiness you seek is always present wherever you may be. You simply have to attune yourself to it.

By studying the teachings of Ramana Maharshi and practicing them in your life, you will come to realize that your problems are not external to you. They are in your mind, your thoughts only. Meditation is a process of stilling the mind and thereby allowing it to sink into its natural place, the Heart, where peace, happiness and immortality reign.

As you go deeper into this life of spiritual practice you will someday be grateful for the difficulties and problems you experienced, because to solve them you were lead to a path which takes you to the ultimate experience of existence — your Source, or God.

The Maharshi has always said that God, Guru and Grace are one and the same. In times of need, pray to the Guru, Sri Ramana, and He will take on the burden of your soul and guide you to everlasting peace and happiness. You should have no doubts about this.

Editor

Is There An Approved Mantra?

In reading Sri Ramana Leela, on page 305, 2nd paragraph, it says that Sankarananda authored several items, including the method of performing Ramana japa, and that all these were approved by Bhagavan. I would be very interested in learning the correct method for performing Ramana japa, as approved by Ramana Maharishi himself. Is this available on the website or is it in a book? If the latter, please let me know which book.

Thank you.

Hawaiian devotee

Sankarananda did compose in Sanskrit eight verses, five slokas and 108 names, as well as a method of performing Ramana japa. These were all offered or 'submitted' to Bhagavan, as the book says. The text does not actually say that Bhagavan 'approved' or authorized the Ramana japa method of Sankarananda, though it is very likely that the Maharshi encouraged him in whatever form of *sadhana* he was persuading, including his method of *japa*. That was his usual way.

We know that Sankarananda's 108 Names ("Ramanashtotarasata Namavali") was popular with devotees prior to Swami Viswanathan's 108 Names composition. The latter is daily recited before the Maharshi's samadhi. Regarding the Ramana japa method mentioned, however, we have no information.

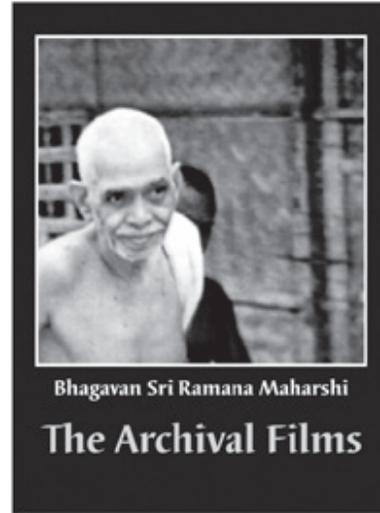
But we do have a record of an instance where the Maharshi gave the mantra of his name to a devotee and asked her to repeat it always. This happened in the case of Kamakshi, the daughter of Munagala

Venkataramiah. He was the compiler of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. It happened like this:

Kamakshi, when just a girl, was visiting her father at Ramanasramam in the mid 1940s. One morning after taking an early bath she went to the Ashram and prostrated before Bhagavan. At that moment there was no one in the immediate vicinity of Bhagavan. Bhagavan began talking with her and asked her how she was spending her time at the Ashram. She said that she was playing with the dogs, monkeys and various other pastimes. Bhagavan then handed her a piece of paper on which were written the words 'Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya.' He asked her to repeat them. She did. He then asked her to hand back the paper and told her to repeat this mantra when she had nothing to do, and that it was best to repeat it always.

Kamakshi and her father kept this sacred incident a secret. It was only on her deathbed in 1973 that others were told about it. Some New York devotees had the good fortune to meet her during her last days in a Madras hospital and have testified to her profound spiritual stature and serenity, which was most certainly the fruit of a lifelong remembrance of Bhagavan in the form of this mantra.

Editor



The Archival Films of Sri Ramana Maharshi 1935 To 1950

A collection of all the known films of the Maharshi, restored, edited and arranged in chronological order. These films, taken mostly by his devotees, affords us a remarkable opportunity of viewing a fully-enlightened sage who in the 20th century

lived like an ancient rishi of yore. Two of the films were professionally produced by the Indian Information Bureau as newsreels with soundtracks and shown throughout India in cinema houses.

Research Booklet: Included with the purchase price you will receive this thirty-five page Research Booklet, which provides interesting details, dates and identifies individuals seen with the Sage. Printed time-code references will enable you to quickly look up and read about whatever you find especially interesting.

65 min, color and black & white, mostly silent
1 DVD disc: \$20.00

Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation are being conducted in a few locations 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.

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

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

Connecticut Area — Prashanth & Shobana (860-691-1862 / vprashanth@msn.com)

Dublin, Ohio — Abilash & Madhavi (614-789-9058 / mungamuru@hotmail.com)

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

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