

THE MAHARSHI

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Karma and Grace *By Swami Brahma Yogiesir*

How can the concepts of Grace and Karma exist together? This is shown in a letter that the late Swami Brahma Yogiesir wrote to one of his disciples just before leaving this life. The disciple has kindly passed it on to us for publication.

YOU must understand that this human body has been vouchsafed to us as an expression of God's unmotivated Grace. It is in this body and this body alone that we can understand the inwardness of His Grace and become an object of supreme love to God. Life is ebbing every moment and it is impossible to obtain such an opportunity again. The time that has already passed will not return to us. This valuable human life should not be idled away or wasted in enjoyment of worldly pleasures, in hugging shadows and clasping illusions and indulging in forbidden pursuits.

General benefit from Divine Grace is shed on all uniformly, but he who becomes a special object of this Grace can derive benefit from it in a special degree. The light and rays of the sun are equally available to all so that all derive equal benefit in a general way, but the rays falling on a lens are focused by it and can cause fire. Similarly, he who possesses a heart as pure and transparent as a lens is able to derive special benefit from the Divine Grace.

As you know, there are three types of human karma: sanchita, the accumulated actions of the past which have yet to bear fruit; prarabdha, those which have already begun to bear fruit and are to do so in this lifetime, and kriyamana (agama), new karma which is being made now and added to the store of sanchita. All three are closely

connected with the Divine Grace which has been responsible for our past meritorious actions. And the divine dispensation by which such actions are rewarded with enjoyments in the present life, also operates for the good of creatures and is inspired by God's mercy. Virtuous actions in the present life are also to be ascribed to God's Grace. It is His grace which guides us along the path of virtue. This Divine Grace is eternally associated with every form of human karma. The divine dispensation which regulates enjoyment and suffering according to virtuous and sinful deeds committed in the past is also inspired by Grace. Moreover, the Divine Law by which the accumulated sins of innumerable births are expiated by even a little japa, meditation and association with holy men shows the infinite Grace of God.

Man should learn to see the operation of His Grace in all circumstances, favourable or unfavourable, that is to say in the possession or loss of objects of worldly enjoyment such as wife, children, wealth and home, in good or ill health, in adversity and sorrow as well as in prosperity and abundance. When there is an abundance of objects of enjoyment, one should consider that God has allowed them as reward for past meritorious acts in order to enable one to minister to the needs of others, to perform more virtuous acts and to develop love of God. When objects of enjoyment are lost, one should consider that they were hindrances in the path

of devotion insofar as we developed attachment to them. That is why the supremely merciful Lord has removed them – in order to draw us closer to Him – in an act of Grace. Similarly, when the body is in sound health one should cultivate the feeling that this is in order that one may serve all creatures, seeing the Presence of God in them and realizing His all pervasiveness, and in order that one may practise bhajan and meditation on God. When the body is in the grip of disease, the feeling should be cultivated that the affliction has been sent by God out of compassion in order to enable one to work off one's past sins and guard against committing new ones, to help one cultivate an attitude of dispassion and indifference towards the body, to teach one how to make capital out of physical ailments by treating them as austerities and reaping the fruit thereof, and finally to remind one constantly of God. In this way one should learn to see the operation of Divine Grace through every incident at all times and under all circumstances. The glory of Grace is infinite, man can

secure as much advantage from it as he likes. But so long as its truth and secret is not understood, it operates only in a general way.

Therefore take refuge in God or Ramana and pray daily as follows:

“O Lord, Sustainer of the Universe, Gracious Protector of the distressed, Ocean of Mercy, Knower of the Heart, Saviour of the Fallen, Almighty Lord, Friend of the Poor, O Lord Ramana, Narayana, Hari, Arunachala, have pity on me! O Reader of Man's Heart and Mind, Thou art famous throughout the world as an Ocean of Mercy, therefore it is right for Thee to show compassion on me, O Ramana!”

As requested, I enclose herewith prasadam of Lord Viswanath Annapurni. May God bless you. I am nearing the goal by His vision and grace. Only a few more breaths remain to draw before I cast off this physical sheath. I am quite happy and comfortable by His Grace.

—*The Mountain Path, Vol. IV, No. 2*

Maha Sivaratri at Arunachala Ashrama New York

Sunday 19 February 2012, Night

Brian Alle, a resident of the the Ashram in New York, wrote the following report.

AT AROUND 7 P.M. Sunday evening the devotees were gathered in anticipation. Those officiating as priests, led by Murthy Vishnubhatla, arrived at about 7:30 p.m. The fruit was brilliantly arranged in front of the Siva Lingam just as the devotees were determined to place the fruits of their devotion at the feet of Bhagavan.

The priests waved their hands and lo! the new Ashrama shrine hall became permeated with a steady rhythm of peace that stilled the minds of those eager to lose themselves in His presence. All concepts of seconds, minutes and hours vanished in the holy void of para vak, the source of OM in which the Vedic chants originate.

Sometimes the sound of the bells shook the ether of the hall. We then fixed our eyes on the light of the camphor flame, reflecting in us the eternal light shining in the Heart.

In the shrine, about 20 devotees were always present throughout the night; at times the numbers would increase to 30 or 40.

We had a break in the chanting midway through the program. Some ate and some continued fasting. His divine love and warmth united us all and dissolved the transient appearances of man and woman, child or adults.

At about 4 a.m. the program concluded and Prasad was served. The banana and apple dish was very good! We all ate joyfully.



Seshadri Swamigal's Maha Samadhi

By Viswanathan Arunachalam

I was going through Part V of the article "If Only It Were Chadwick", appearing in the March/April 2012 issue of *The Maharishi* and thought I should share the following reminiscence from my mother Rajalakshmi, who was raised by Venuammal, the sister of Echammal.

In the second paragraph of the above-mentioned article, there is a reference to Seshadri Swamigal's place of living and some doubts were raised as to whether he lived in cave on the hill. In this context, I would like to share some of my mother's childhood experiences about Seshadri Swamigal.

My mother was living with her grandmother Venuammal in the first house on the northern end Sannadhi Street, which is the street just facing the present chappal stand of Arunachala Temple. Seshadri Swamigal was living in the third house, which was the house of a gurukkal (a priest who performs puja in Arunachala Temple). In fact, there used to be a raised portion in the entrance of the house (known as a tinnai in Tamil) and he used to stay on this raised portion. Just before Swamigal's samadhi on the 4th of January 1929, he was lying on the tinnai motionless for three days due to illness. On the way to school, my mother used to pass Swamigal's house. She would prostrate to Swamigal and then only go to school. Even on the day of Seshadri Swamigal's samadhi, my mother prostrated to Swamigal and went to school. In school, the headmaster, aware that my mother came from the vicinity of the house where Swamigal stayed, would enquire about his health during the last three days of his illness. On the day of his samadhi, as soon my mother reached school, the headmaster asked her about Swamigal, and later in the afternoon the news spread that Swamigal had attained samadhi. When the above incident took place my mother was 9 years old.

During the course of years, the house where Swamigal attained samadhi has undergone many modifications. The front portion is now converted to a small shop. Swamigal's photo is hung on the wall in this shop.



Rajalakshmiammal

My mother told me an interesting event that took place on the day of the samadhi of Seshadri Swamigal. She said that as soon as Swamigal attained samadhi, his Brahmin devotees on Sannidhi Street were busy with the rituals associated with the death of the saint, reciting Vedic mantras and performing rituals to the body of Swamigal in the house where he attained Samadhi. At the same time a group of non-Brahmin devotees of Seshadri Swamigal were waiting outside the house for an opportunity to take away the body of Swamigal and bury it with honors at an appropriate place of their choice. At one point, all of a sudden, the group trooped into the house where the Brahmins were performing the rituals and forcibly took away the body of Swamigal to be buried at the present samadhi site next to Sri Ramanasramam.

Bhagavan was known to be present when Seshadri Swamigal's body was buried and due to his presence guidance the rituals associated with the burial went off peacefully.

Srimati Rajalakshmi and her son Viswanathan live in Chennai. Viswanathan visits his two daughters in Virginia almost every year. For more stories from Rajalakshmi, see the April and October, 2008 issues of the Mountain Path.

Time to Renounce

By *Ramakrishna G. Kulkarni*

I had a great desire for a fully-realized guru and was in search of one when by chance (really by the guidance of Bhagavan) I came upon a Gujarati book by one Madhavanand of Baroda in which he spoke highly of his visit to Sri Ramanasramam. I therefore wrote to the Sarvadhikari of the Ashram expressing my desire to have darshan of Bhagavan. I received a favourable reply and accordingly left for the Ashram. This was in 1944. I stayed there for five days. During the first two days I was annoyed to find all the worst vasanas (latent tendencies) in me coming to the surface. I therefore prayed to Bhagavan to wipe out my sins and initiate me as his disciple, not being aware as yet that he had already done so and that my heart was being purified by the powerful current of his Grace. I appreciated this only on the third day when peace began to flood my heart. There was such a surging of peace that on the fifth morning I stood before Bhagavan, prostrated and expressed my feeling of complete

peacefulness. Thereupon Bhagavan raised his hand over my head and blessed me. After that I returned home. Through his Grace, awareness of the Self has continued since then and my sadhana is proceeding. I had his darshan again a few years later, on the occasion of the consecration of the Mathrubhuteshwar Temple at the Ashram.

In the year 1956, six years after Bhagavan had left the body, I decided to renounce home life and live as a sadhu at some lonely place on the banks of the Ganges. While searching for a suitable place I wrote to the Ashram about it and, through the inspiration of Bhagavan, received a reply that I should pay a visit there before deciding to settle down elsewhere. Accordingly, I went again to Sri Ramanasramam. Arriving there, I sat in meditation before Bhagavan's samadhi (shrine) during the night. While doing so I experienced a voice from Bhagavan telling me that it was not yet time for me to renounce the world. I had therefore to cancel my plans to return home. Since then I have been eagerly awaiting a message from Bhagavan that the time has come for my renunciation.

—*The Mountain Path, Vol. II, No. 2*

If Only It Were Chadwick

By *Louis Buss*

The scrutiny of the hand-written inscriptions found in a 1935 edition of the book Self-Realisation bought on Ebay takes the author on a journey of inspiration and expectation.

Part VI The Trail Goes Cold

IF a conventional type like me finds Chadwick's presence at Bhagavan's side reassuring, Brunton's is slightly unsettling. He seems to have been involved in some rum goings-on in his youth, and a whiff of the occult hung around him till the end of his days. Unlike Chadwick, he did apparently set himself up as a guru, or was at any rate regarded as one by a few people, some of whom eventually became disillusioned with him. With his name changes, his love of magic and his cavalier attitude to the truth, he comes across as a sort of spiritual mountebank, full of tall stories and miracles, but ready to pack up his tent and melt away at the first sign of trouble. Everything that is slightly suspect

about him is epitomised for me by the goatee beard he affected in later life, which made him look like nothing so much as a music-hall hypnotist.

Yet Brunton's faults somehow only serve to make his genuine regard for Bhagavan all the more touching. In that, at least, he was utterly sincere, and anyone who doubts it need only read the article he wrote in his later years, saying that his first meeting with Bhagavan was as fresh in his mind as if it had happened yesterday, and generally leaving no doubt that, through all his adventures, Bhagavan had remained the guiding light of his life. One is left feeling that, like all of us, Brunton was ennobled by his contact with Ramana Maharshi. If he'd never made that fateful first trip to Arunachala, he might have remained all his life a mere peddler of wonders. Thanks to

Bhagavan, he became something far greater than that – he became a devotee. So ultimately, just as much as Chadwick, Brunton too was ‘one of us’. Devotion to Bhagavan was his redeeming feature, just as it is mine, and even his worst faults appear somehow endearing in the light of that love.

All the same, I hope I have said enough to explain my feeling that a book sent home by Brunton in 1936 would be quite a different sort of find from one sent by Chadwick. In fact, the evidence for the Brunton Hypothesis was never very strong. True, he was about the right age to have had parents still alive, and he might conceivably have been in the Ashram when the book was sent. Also, like Brunton, the Mystery Devotee had referred to Bhagavan as the Maharishee. Beyond that, there was almost nothing in his favour. Although he made some extended visits, I am not sure if Brunton would ever have described the Ashram as the place in which he was living. And, if he was sending a book home from there to his parents, why should he have specifically drawn their attention to the two chapters that were based on his own most famous work? Why not just send them *A Search in Secret India* and let them read all about it in their son’s own words? Come to that, was it really possible to imagine that Brunton’s parents had not already read his celebrated book? And if they had, why would he have felt such a compelling need to tell them about Bhagavan and convince them of His greatness? Surely he would have gone through all that with them years before, on his return from his momentous first visit.

The more we threw the idea around, the less likely the Brunton Hypothesis appeared. Then a bit of digging on the internet uncovered a thesis on Brunton which contained the following words:

“The four months of summer 1936 were devoted to a unique experience: a retreat in complete solitude in the heart of the Himalayas.”

So that was that. At the time our Mystery Devotee had been walking home from the temple each night to meditate with Bhagavan in the Old Hall, poor old Brunton had already been off on another of his adventures. This put him even more categorically out of the running than Chadwick.

The field of possible candidates for Mystery Devotee was already starting to look decidedly ragged. Grant Duff

and Evens-Wentz were considered, but quickly ruled out on the basis that they had been fairly old men themselves by 1936, and so would probably not have had parents at home in England. Duncan Greenlees was more the right sort of age, but seemed to have made his first visit in October 1936, just slightly too late to have sent the book in August, and much too late to have got into the Mystery Devotee’s settled daily routine. In any case, he seems to be one of those who had a low opinion of Brunton, so would have been unlikely to draw his parents’ attention specifically to the two chapters based on his work.

The field was getting thinner and thinner. M. A. Piggott (and I would have been rather pleased if it had been her) and Pryn Hopkins had been there at the right sort of time, and *Talks* mentions somebody called Knowles who ‘came for darshan’ in 1935, but we knew so little about these people that I despaired of ever determining whether or not the Mystery Devotee had been one of them. Then there was always the possibility that it had been someone completely unknown to Ashram posterity, some Western resident so unassuming and humble that he had managed to live there for months or years without ever cropping up in any of the literature.

Of course, there was one other way of finding out. So far, we had been searching, so to speak, at the Ashram end. We hadn’t yet tried looking in England and tracing the history of the book that way. So I contacted the Ebay seller, who seemed to be a professional book dealer, and asked her what she knew. It turned out that she had bought the book from a friend, who I seem to remember was in his later years. This gentleman had amassed a large collection of books about India, yoga, the martial arts and similar subjects, and now needed to sell a lot of them off because he was moving house. She thought it very unlikely that he would remember where he had picked up *Self-Realisation*, but said that she would ask him and let me know.

All in all, this hardly sounded optimistic. The collector obviously hadn’t been a devotee of Ramana Maharshi, or even remotely interested in Him, because otherwise he would certainly have held onto a book as unusual as this. From the sounds of it, he had been the sort of person who picked up lots of books from second-hand shops

(and, yes, probably from jumble sales). If he had obtained this one from such a source, there seemed no hope of tracing it back, even assuming he managed to remember the exact time and place of its purchase.

The trail, as it does at a certain point in all the best thrillers, seemed to have gone cold.

For several weeks, the book remained in pride of place in the corner where I have gathered everything I own connected with Bhagavan. Feeling that it was more of a relic or a museum exhibit than an ordinary book, I had bought it a special perspex stand and placed it proudly on display. After seventy-five years of mistreatment and indignity, the old campaigner was finally getting the respect that it deserved. It now seemed to show off its coffee-ringing and other scars with a certain quiet pride, like a returning war-hero in a victory parade. The other items nearby might have been chosen specifically to make it feel at home. There were a couple of little reddish stones I had picked up near Skandashram on my first visit to Arunachala in 2009. The mountain itself was represented in a picture from the Ashram bookshop and a little black relief bought from one of the local carvers. There was a tiny box containing packets of *vibhuti*. On the shelf below the book, between two large volumes of restored photographs, was a small, framed Welling Bust. The next shelf down contained all the ordinary books – I mean ordinary, of course, in comparison with the great find – my little Bhagavan library. Above it all hung a large coloured photograph of Bhagavan Himself, the one where He is

sitting cross-legged on a tiger-skin, holding His right foot in His left hand and giving ... I suppose one can only call it a smile, though the word seems woefully inadequate. When you try to describe that expression, you realise just how limited the English language is. It is like suddenly realising that your mother-tongue has no proper word for the sun, and finding yourself reduced to talking about a big torch or lamp up in the sky. The word smile will never be anything more than an oblique metaphor for the expression on the face of Ramana Maharshi. That smile of His is so enigmatic that it makes the Mona Lisa's look like some painted leer. It is so godly, so gentle, radiant and divine, that you sometimes want to give up everything, even practising His teachings and reading about His life, and spend the rest of your days just staring up at Him in idiotic adoration.

Over the previous few years, I had fondly assumed that I was assembling this little collection of books and pictures, ashes and stones, for my own benefit. The Bhagavan corner of the room was all meant to be about me and my Guru. But now I couldn't help feeling that, without my realising it, I had been driven to do it all in preparation for the arrival of this battered little book. I had been like the keeper of a menagerie preparing for the delivery of some exotic new specimen, creating an environment as close as possible to that of its distant land. When everything was ready, the mysterious creature had duly appeared and taken its place, like some tiger or falcon from Arunachala, with the pictures and the little stones a

Stages in Realization and Being a Guru

Bhagavan explained that although there are no stages in Realization, there are on the way to it. Or perhaps it would be better to say that there are stages of descent from the Absolute to objectivisation. Chit or pure Awareness projects its light down through Mahat, known in the West as 'cosmic consciousness' to the ahankara or ego. Thus manas or mind arises, followed by the conception of body and world. What appears as a process to us is just a shadow for the Self-realized being. The Self is one and indivisible. There is no becoming there is only being.

Bhagavan advised his disciples not to take on the onerous duty of being a guru. It would only lead to trouble. Their disciples would expect all sorts of impossible things of them and look up to them as Jnanis, and in trying to satisfy the disciples they would resort to hypocrisy. Even if one could work miracles it was not a good thing to do, as they would deflect the devotee from the true aim of Self-realization.

—*Sadhu Arunachala (Major A. W. Chadwick)*

pitiful attempt to recreate the grandeur of its mountain home. But it was a wild thing still, charged with a spiritual power which might wreak havoc if allowed to break out, very different from the tame, artificial items that formed the rest of my collection – for this was a survivor from the Ashram of the 1930s, from some mythical age of giants, when Ramana Maharshi walked the earth.

I could almost have imagined that the arrival of the book had wrought an imperceptible change in that divine expression. Bhagavan seemed even more enigmatic and knowing than ever. It was as if these events, so

unexpected and incredible to me, were just moves in a long game which He'd planned and anticipated from the start. He knew full well who had originally sent the book, just as He had known all the vicissitudes it would suffer before finally appearing on Ebay and ending up on the bookshelf of an obscure London devotee. I had just been one cog in a complicated machine that Bhagavan had set in motion for reasons of His own. If there was any more of the mystery to be revealed to me, He would make sure I got just the information I needed at just the right time. *(To be continued)*

Ramana Satsangs

Regular satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation are conducted in or near 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 (678-546-0378 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

Ann Arbor, MI — Nirupama & Ramesh (574-514-4766 / <neeru_2@hotmail.com)

Birmingham, AL — Sai Kand (205-441-6859 / kandsai@yahoo.com)

Boston, MA — David & Anna (617-928-1487 / annaklegon@gmail.com)

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

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

Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Rubinson (954-755-4758 / arunahill@gmail.com)

Houston, TX — Kumar Saran (832-435-3761 / saran01@earthlink.net)

Los Angeles, CA — Natarajan and Indira Venkatesan (310-473-9441 / nvenky30@yahoo.com)

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