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Talks with Sri Kunju Swami by Darlene Delisi

In August, 1978 Darlene Delisi (now Darlene Delisi Karamanos) noted down conversations that she had had with Sri Kunju Swami while visiting Sri Ramanasramam. The guidance and inspiration she imbibed while in the Swami's company helped to establish a solid foundation in her one-pointed life of devotion and dedication. There is hardly a guest at the Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama who has not been touched by her care and kindness. The following was serialized incrementally as fillers in the 1979 and 1980 issues of the Mountain Path.

SRI Kunju Swami conveniently divided Sri Bhagavan's life at Arunachala into three periods. This is a brief sketch of what he described:

Part I

1896-1898: His life prior to his residence on the Arunachala Hill — Gurumurtham, Pachaimman Koil etc. During this period he did not talk. His presence and darshan were all that was needed to give one complete spiritual fulfillment. This could be compared to a 'powerful spring'. One contact, one glimpse from Bhagavan was enough to experience Atma Sakshatkara.

Part II

1899-1922: His life on the Arunachala Hill — at Virupaksha Cave, Skanda Ashram, etc. At this time he spoke sparingly, using very few words, and that too only in answer to questions put to him. His presence radiated peace and quietude (the perfect silence of the first stage) and in addition to his powerful presence were the words of nectar by way of answers to questions. This can be compared to a

'beautiful smoothly flowing river'. A few hours with Bhagavan were enough to give one spiritual fulfillment.

One Mastan Sahib got his Atma Sakshatkara in eight hours. When Sri Kunju Swami asked him whether he had asked Sri Bhagavan any questions, the Sahib replied: "When I came to Bhagavan he was seated like a rock outside Virupaksha Cave, without altering his look which was filled with grace, compassion and steady wisdom. So, I also stood by his side. After giving me a look, he opened the gate of my heart and I was also established in his state. I stood like that for eight hours, absolutely without fatigue but filled with total absorption and peace. Bhagavan in those days used to open our heart with a simple gracious look and it transformed us. There was no need for any questions since he made us, by his look, like himself!"

Part III

1922-1950: His life at Sri Ramanasramam. During the Sri Ramanasramam years, Bhagavan was

extraordinarily brilliant and poured out his experiences and reminiscences. He would sometimes repeat anecdotes four or five times for the benefit of late comers to the hall. Bhagavan had to oblige multitudes of devotees coming for his darshan. This period can be compared to 'an unfathomable ocean'.

It really took months or years for even dedicated devotees to realize themselves, as in the case of Sri Ramananda Saraswati, Major Chadwick, etc.

In Bhagavan's presence, the all-engrossing appearance of the world would cease to hold a position of supreme importance. It would still be there, but there as the play of light and shade on a summer landscape, a fact for the beholder, but only a fact of appearance.

His great calm and his wonderful silence resulted in his increasing association in people's minds with the Arunachala Mountain that he loved so much. His long stay of fifty-four years in Tiruvannamalai by its side was itself a feat of immovable solidity. All knew the fact that he loved the Hill dearly. Did he not write five beautiful hymns in its praise while still a young man? He used to say that Kailas was undoubtedly the abode of Lord Siva but that the Arunachala Hill was Lord Siva Himself. And for thousands of us he himself was the Hill. Even on the hottest days of the year he would go walking on it several times a day without any footwear or covering, when most of us could not even bear to put our feet on the ground. He carried out this practice regularly for years and only ceased near the end when his health began to fail.

Sri Bhagavan never fully stretched himself on the bed like we do to sleep at night. It was a marvelous phenomenon that perhaps might not have been noticed by many. He used to have a few round pillows for his back to recline on, in which position he would remain all night. Sometimes he used to support his head with his hand also, but always only in the reclining pose. We have never seen him sleeping on his back fully stretched or lying down full on his side!

Different Paths of Spiritual Evolution

The uniqueness of Sri Bhagavan in emphasizing all the traditional teachings was stressed by Sri Kunju Swami thus:

Though traditionally it is stated that worship, japa, dhyana and samadhi are the ascending order of spiritual evolution, and Bhagavan also has confirmed it in "Upadesa Saram," verse four: 'Worship, incantation and meditation are performed respectively with the body, the voice and the mind and are of value in this ascending order,' the total emphasis Bhagavan gave to each one of these individually is complete.

Sri Bhagavan stressed that '*worship*' was treating the universe as a manifestation of God. Such worship takes you directly to the goal (God, Self).

'*Japa*' is to be done continuously inwardly like the flow of oil, as a perennial stream. To be in that dhara (one movement, to the exclusion of all objective existence) is nothing short of abiding in the Self.

'*Dhyana*' means 'absorption into the Source'. It is the final peace too.

'*Tapas*' is the realization of That (Ultimate Truth) which subsists when all trace of 'I' is gone. This is good tapas.

'*Samadhi*' is the state in which the mind withdraws from external objects of sense and beholds (i.e., merges in) its own effulgent form. The 'I' vanishes and an 'I'-'I' appears by itself. This is the Infinite (Purnam).

'*Bhakti*' is to remain in the Real Being, transcending all thought through intense devotion. This is 'Supreme Bhakti'.

'*Jnana*'. Whence does the 'I' arise? When you seek for it within it vanishes. This is the pursuit of Wisdom (Jnana). The body, senses, mind, prana and ignorance are all insentient and not the Real (Sat). 'I AM' is the Real. As there is no second being to know that which is, 'That which is' is consciousness. We are THAT. To know the Self is TO BE the SELF. It is unbroken Awareness-Bliss.

Thus Bhagavan stressed that not only these have an ascending order of development, but also each by itself, individually, would directly lead one to the Reality. Bhagavan's emphasis that each could be by itself the final step is unique and not found in traditional texts.

When Sri Kunju Swami was living in Palakottu (near the Ashram), he was going up to Skanda Ashram

daily to take his bath in the spring there. On those occasions he used to adjust his return time from Skanda Ashram after the bath in such a way that he would invariably meet Sri Bhagavan up on the Hill itself.

Once Bhagavan asked him what he was doing while going to Skandashram and coming back. Sri Kunju Swami answered that he was chanting stotras, like “Aksharamanamalai”. Bhagavan approved of it and added: “Yes, when one is alone, either walking, sitting, etc. one should engage the mind in stotras or japa to prevent the mind from getting distracted. As far as possible one should see that the mind is kept introverted and for that stotras and japa are the best aids.”

Ever since this incident Sri Kunju Swami has kept up the habit of chanting stotras or doing Japa while alone, especially while taking a walk.

During Sri Kunju Swami’s stay at Skanda

Ashram, life was absolutely spontaneous. Sri Bhagavan’s own instruction then was: “Go to sleep when the body requires it; when awake engage yourself in sadhana. Do not even think whether it is day or night. Do not doze-off pretending to do meditation. Be sincere and whole-hearted in sadhana as well as in sleep.”

A seeker, Sri Kunju Swami said, should know three things and be very clear about them: (i) The seeker should know what exactly is his aim, viz., the goal; (ii) Once convinced of the goal, he should seek the Guru, receive the teachings from him and diligently absorb himself in them; and (iii) He should then constantly engage himself in self-analysis as to whether he is following the teachings imparted to him by the Guru, and if so, where exactly he stands, i.e., whether he is progressing or not. Constant vigilance is essential for the progress of the seeker. *(To be continued)*

Hurricane Sandy Arunachala Ashrama, New York

ON Monday night, October 29th Hurricane Sandy turned westward off the Atlantic Ocean and crashed head on into the New Jersey and New York coastline. Talk about this directional change of the hurricane, which slowly sauntered northward up the Atlantic coast, was broadcasted daily for about a week before the actual event. The meteorologists’ forecasts were squarely on target.

Still, when we looked out the Ashram window and saw trees falling and broken branches flying down the street like vehicles, we realized that we had underestimated the extreme severity of the coming storm, and it appears that we were not the only ones surprised.

Arunachala Ashram in New York City is on top of a hill, about 350 feet above sea level. The Ashram house and new shrine are solidly constructed with 3-foot concrete basement walls, heavy stone walls on the first floor and reinforced wood and stucco walls on the second and third floors. It is such a solid building that during the height of the storm if we closed our eyes and plugged our ears we would

have had no idea that 90 mile-an-hour winds were causing havoc throughout a 300-mile radius.

Monday night, 29th October, was also a full-moon night, and as usual on the full moon we were performing the Sri Chakra Puja in the new Shrine. Above the rhythmic sound of the sacred names of the Divine Mother, the roar of exploding gusts of



Uprooted tree landed gently on the shrine roof

wind penetrated the walls; branches from the tall oaks above fell, banging on the roof; and at about 7:30 PM the lights flickered and all went dark, but not quiet: the winds howled louder. Uprooted trees fell on power lines all around the Ashram. We saw flashes of light, explosions of wires and transmitters in the neighborhood as the winds ratcheted to their full strength. A battle between man's creations and Nature's power was dramatically unfolding, and it appeared Nature was winning.

Amid all this fury, we quietly lit candles, started the wood stove, watched the flames rise and sat in the warm living room of the Ashram. We soon discovered that the gas supply wasn't interrupted, so we could cook. After three days without power, we were pleasantly surprised to discover that the hot water heater needed no electricity to function. So we had hot water too. And because the storm had knocked out water, heat and electricity of some devotees of Bhagavan nearby, we had the wonderful good fortune to have their company as full-time Ashramites for one or two weeks before their utilities were restored.

As for damage to the Ashram property, two trees fell on the property and one adjoining tree of our neighbors. None of the large 100-year-plus oak trees fell or were damaged. The three trees that fell – one maple and two linden – were near the roadside. One fell towards the Shrine and slightly damaged the gutters, and the others fell towards the street.

Our neighbor's linden tree fell smack across the street alongside our driveway. It took down all the cable and electrical wires with it. The Ashram had no electricity for a full week. The trees and live electrical wires lay on the ground for days before utility workers could clean them up.

For a week we lighted candles, burned wood, used flashlights when needed and enjoyed how easy and simple life could be without electricity. The internet cable and telephone lines were down too, lying on the Ashram sidewalk for two-and-half weeks before three new telephone poles were positioned and the lines restored.

As all of you must have heard, Hurricane Sandy was the worst storm ever to hit the New York City area in a century. Houses burned, some were crushed by the ocean surge, were flooded or floated away. Many residents lost all they owned and some lost their lives and loved ones. But amidst this tragedy we saw a great outpouring of selfless giving, of honest men, women and children sacrificing to provide an ounce of hope to those desperate for help. Amidst the darkness of loss and tragedy, the light of love and hope always rises. And if we all imbibe the simple and direct teachings of Bhagavan Ramana we will be best equipped to withstand any crisis, any loss with equanimity, knowing full well that all can be taken away — and ultimately will be taken away — except the Self, which is our essential and immortal nature.

Ego, Mind and Awareness

The essence of mind is only awareness or consciousness. However, when the ego dominates it, it functions as the reasoning, thinking or sensing faculty. The cosmic mind not limited by the ego, has nothing separate from itself and is therefore only aware. This is what the Bible means by "I am that I AM".

The ego-ridden mind has its strength sapped and is too weak to resist torturing thoughts. The egoless mind is happy in deep, dreamless sleep. Clearly, therefore, bliss and misery are only modes of mind; but the weak mode is not easily interchangeable with the strong mode. Activity is weakness and, consequently, miserable; passivity is strength and, therefore, blissful. One's dormant strength is not apparent and, therefore, not availed of.

The cosmic mind, manifesting in some rare beings, is able to effect the linkage in others of the individual (weak) mind with the universal (strong) mind of the inner recess. Such a rare being is called the GURU or *God in manifestation*.

– Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi, No. 188

Events at Arunachala Ashrama in New York City

THE 100th Birth Anniversary of Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, our venerable founder and beloved friend, was celebrated on Saturday, November 12th. Many years ago, when people offered him praise, Bhagawat used to insist that no one could ever call him a 'yogi' unless and until his dream of building a 'Temple on Fifth Avenue' in New York City had been realized.... Here, in the incomparably beautiful and simple shrine built in the honor of his and our Guru, Sri Ramana, we feel that Bhagawat must surely have relented!

Words of praise, warm memories, humorous anecdotes and instructive stories from friends like Dennis Hartel, Margo Martin, Virat Bhatt, Eric Ford, Darlene Delisi Karamanos and Evelyn Kaselow Saphier brought out the many ways in which Bhagawat guided, encouraged and instructed the young people who gathered by his side in their formative young adult years.

Following words of welcome and an informal narration in which Dennis Hartel described how Bhagawat first explained to him how to meditate by following the sound of a mantra to its Source in the Heart, a video of Bhagawat doing our Evening Recitation of hymns in Sanskrit and Hindi was played and we all sang along. Bhagawat always emphasized to his friends the need for regular spiritual practice or abhyasa first and foremost, a practice which he described as 'digging ditches'.

So, it was appropriate that we all chanted together this hallowed litany that formed the backbone of our evening spiritual practice for over two decades.

Brimming over with the wish to share the wealth of his experience with those by his side, Bhagawat would often regale his friends with stories from the treasure trove of Indian village wisdom. One such storybook he would read from, *Ek Lota Pani*, was brought to life at the celebration by the actor, editor, interpreter and friend Virat Bhatt.

Bhagawat also shared his love and devotion to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in prayer manuscripts that he wrote daily on his beloved

typewriter, "Hermes 3000". Darlene Delisi Karamanos read a page from one such manuscript. Totally unique, these writings offer an insight into the unusual depth of devotion, faith and abidance that Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat enjoyed in silence.

The program concluded with the words of Bhagawat himself as captured in 1989 on a video in the Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram in Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Here, Bhagawat proclaimed his wish 'to never stop serving, worshipping and loving' his friends.



Bronze bust of Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat

Witnessing such depth of love, affection, devotion and friendship, one could easily understand how Bhagawat tied the hearts of his friends not to himself as an individual but to the high-minded life of devotion, dedication and spiritual practice that he aspired for all to follow in the name of Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

A beautiful bronze bust of Bhagawat, created by James Hartel, was unveiled and the original cast was offered as a gift to Bhagawat's son, Bhaskar Prasad Singh, who was also in attendance.

Kartika Masam was celebrated at Arunachala Ashrama on Sunday, December 9th. In the solar religious calendar used in Tamil Nadu, Kartikai begins with the Sun's entry into the constellation of Scorpio and is the eighth month of the year. The famous Kartikai Deepam celebration in Tiruvannamalai takes place during this month. This is considered an extremely sacred time for worship.

In Arunachala Ashrama, led by Sri Vishnubhatla Murthy, an inspired recitation and worship was conducted from 7:30 AM to 3:30 PM, which consisted of Ganesha Puja, Mahanyasa Parayanam, Aruna Prashna, Sahita Panchamruta Abhisham, Rudrabhishekam with Ekadasha Rudra Parayana, followed by prasadam (meals).

The Ashram shrine resounded with Vedic chants, infused with sincere devotion and one-pointed dedication by many devotees who participated in this event.

On Saturday, December 29th, **Sri Ramana Bhagavan's 133rd Jayanti** was celebrated at Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai and also at his humble abode, the New York City Arunachala Ashrama.

After the recitation of "Aksharamanamalai" and other works of Bhagavan, Dennis Hartel welcomed the devotees and requested Virat Bhatt to read out to all gathered Sadhu Arunachala's article from the first 1952 issue of the *Call Divine Magazine*, edited by Swami Chinmayananda and Swami Rajeswarananda. This article convincingly examined the evidence for the continued presence of the Master after his Maha Nirvana against the challenges of devotees who had not sufficiently connected with the Master internally and who felt abandoned after the Maharshi's physical demise.

Prashant Adishesan then gave a heartfelt description of a recent crisis he had experienced and how the overwhelming grace of Bhagavan Ramana removed any thought of loss or fear and bathed him in ineffable peace. He also led the devotees in the singing of Bhagavan's works. Many other devotees contributed songs and recitations and the program concluded with Vedic chants and Arati at 1 PM.

Many of the women devotees prepared elaborate dishes for the celebration and about 100 devotees



Devotees on pradakshina around Bhagavan's shrine

were fed. More devotees, unable to attend the program on Saturday, made their way to the Ashrama on Sunday and enjoyed the peace and grace of Sri Ramana's presence.

It is said that Bhagavan in subtle ways expressed approval of the Jayanti programs held while he still appeared in a physical form, like a father enjoying a gathering of his children. On such days, Bhagavan radiated a special aura of peace and bliss, tangibly felt by all. Even today, many devotees of the Master feel the same nod of approval and the same tangible love, grace and shanti from Bhagavan on the Jayanti celebrations observed here in the New York Ashram.

Letters and Comments

I am writing to seek your guidance on a certain matter.

I feel unable to work in the USA. Work is so hectic that it does not allow any spare time to think about Bhagavan. I had the same experience at my job in India also, but by the regular darshan of Bhagavan and Arunachalam I somehow kept the work going. Now, since I have come here, I have a constant urge to quit the job and go to Arunachalam forever. At the same time I do not have the guts to do so.

I have read that Bhagavan said that one should not worry much about one's outer life and should take life as it comes, but I am not able to control my emotions and feelings about this issue. And for this, I seek your guidance.

– Devotee in Connecticut

You should not quit your work here. That is not the path Bhagavan has taught us. Your job here, the new environment and everything you find difficult has been given to you by Bhagavan for your salvation. He wants you to learn how to surrender to Him, to give up the idea of doership, and to rest in the peace of the Self.

It is not this new job in the USA, which you say is "hectic", that is the obstacle to experiencing Bhagavan's grace and presence. The obstruction to it is only your mind, your attitude, your erroneous

idea about who is the doer, thinker, enjoyer. You need not change anything outwardly to have what you want. The change has to come from within, whether you are in India or America.

So what should you do to experience this inner shift or change? First of all, be at peace. Accept your situation. Bhagavan is in control of your destiny, where you live and what work you do. Leave that to Him and accept, realizing that HE knows what is best for you and knows when, where and how to do what will spiritually benefit you the most.

And now that He has brought you here to the USA, be assured that he will take care of you. Do not insert your own plans or ideas about what you should or should not do to secure your happiness. Leave that to Him and attend to the work at hand with a free and peaceful mind. When you have no work at hand, turn your mind fully on Him, His teachings, His life and His Presence.

Follow this simple formula and all will be well. You will be surprised and moved at how Bhagavan is guiding and protecting you. Leave it all to Him and see.
— Editor

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)

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