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Talks with Sri Kunju Swami Part II

By Darlene Delisi

In August of 1978 Darlene Delisi (now Darlene Delisi Karamanos) noted down the conversations 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. Few are the guests to the Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama who have 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.

The Holy Hill Arunachala and Sanchara Samadhi

Sri Kunju Swami said, "Once Bhagavan pointed to the Holy Arunachala Hill and said: 'This is the storehouse of all spiritual power. Going round it you benefit in all ways. Just as it is highly beneficial when you perform japa in Varanasi, so also by going round the Hill you get countless benefits. It is called sanchara samadhi. While walking round the Hill the body is active but the mind is at rest at its source. The mind is then free from distractions. Through sanchara samadhi one easily gets sahaja samadhi. Hence, our forefathers praised the value of pilgrimages. A pilgrimage (on foot) enables one to get established in sanchara samadhi.' "

Kunju Swami once asked Bhagavan, "If thoughts rise up while doing pradakshina, what are we to do?" Bhagavan replied, "Just do nothing. Ignore them. Keep yourself away from them as you automatically do when a donkey or dog crosses you while walking round the Hill. If you ignore them they will go away of their own accord."

Sri Bhagavan also joked at that time: "For you the problem is how to eradicate the thoughts; for us (meaning himself) the problem is how to bring forth thoughts, how to raise a thought!"

Sri Muruganar's Experience While on Giripradakshina

Some time after he came here, Sri Muruganar, one of the oldest devotees of Bhagavan, asked Bhagavan about the spiritual benefit of going round the Hill (giri pradakshina). Bhagavan asked him to go round it first and then come to him. Sri Muruganar followed his advice and told Bhagavan that he had lost his dehatma buddhi (body-consciousness) after a while and regained it only after reaching Adi Annamalai. He reported to Sri Bhagavan that the experience was unexpected and unique.

Sri Bhagavan smiled and said, "Do you now understand?"

Sadhus' Association with Trees and Animals

At Skandashram there was a certain tree under

which Bhagavan used to sit. Even though it was fully grown, it did not bear fruit, for which the tree is famous. When once this was brought to the notice of Bhagavan, he remarked jokingly, “What to do? It is all due to its association with us! It has become like us.” (Meaning, childless like a sadhu.)

On another occasion, when devotees like Kunju Swami and others at Skandashram were planting onions, Bhagavan too was persuaded to join them and plant an onion. After some time all the onions planted by others gave off shoots while Bhagavan’s did not. Then also Bhagavan made the same remark.

It is a fact that the jackfruit tree, coconut tree and others did not yield fruit as long as Bhagavan was seated beneath them at Virupaksha Cave, Skandashram, etc. By the touch of the pure jnani that Bhagavan was, the cycle of births was rendered extinct even for seeds and plants!

Monkeys would sit in samadhi in front of Sri Bhagavan. Once one of the monkeys started moving and was looking restless when Sri Bhagavan asked him: “What kingdom do you have to conquer?” The monkey again became still.

Bhagavan and Chyavanaprash Lehyam

Once Swami Atmananda gave me Chyavanaprash Lehyam, an ayurvedic tonic good for strength and vitality, and asked me to give it to Bhagavan with details of how it should be taken with milk, etc. He also asked me to write to him after giving it to Bhagavan and to report how Bhagavan was taking it. I went to Bhagavan and narrated everything and gave the tonic to him. After a few days I requested Bhagavan what I should write to Sri Atmananda. He said that I should write to him that Bhagavan was taking it according to his instructions (Bhagavan was never in the habit of taking milk). So I asked him, “Bhagavan is taking the tonic only with hot water”. Bhagavan, with a smile, said: “Write that he is taking it with payas!” When I blinked, not knowing what he meant by it, he told me that payas in Sanskrit means both milk and water!

Bhagavan with Brahma and Vishnu

Bhagavan’s classmate, one Vilacheri Mani Iyer, together with his friend, Vembu Iyer, used to visit Sri Bhagavan at Skandashram often. One day, early in the morning, outside Skandashram, near the spring, on a

big boulder, two persons were seen lying. They beckoned to me and asked me to go to Bhagavan and seek his permission as to whether ‘Brahma’ and ‘Vishnu’ could come in. This gave me a great surprise, but anyhow I went inside and announced the ‘names’ to Bhagavan. He smiled and bade me to let them in. When I went and told them, they entered and had Bhagavan’s darshan. They also stayed for a few days and went away.

After they had gone I asked Bhagavan what they meant by saying ‘Brahma’ and ‘Vishnu’ had come. Bhagavan said in his usual calm manner, “What is to be done? They have the bhavana (mental attitude) that I am Lord Siva and Mani is Brahma and Vembu is Vishnu!”

Sanskrit Pundit

There was once, Kunju Swami said, a great pundit, an erudite scholar in Sanskrit, who spoke to Sri Bhagavan on spiritual matters entirely in Sanskrit for nearly ten days, quoting profusely from the scriptures. Devotees around were annoyed that the pundit was disturbing Bhagavan and others all the time. On the eleventh day, the pundit entered Sri Bhagavan’s Hall and sat down calmly. He did not speak a word.

Bhagavan gave a significant smile and told Kunju Swami, who had been most annoyed by the pundit’s torrential talk, “Hum, see, he also has become silent like us!”

Sri Ramakrishna Swami and His Experience of Seeing Chidambaram

Sri Ramakrishna Swami, who was known to Kunju Swami even from his boyhood, served Bhagavan fervently and faithfully. Once he wanted to live alone, away from Bhagavan; hence, with the permission of Bhagavan he went and stayed at Virupaksha Cave.

While there he had a vision of Chidambaram. He saw as in a movie, clearly, the temple entrance and then finally the interior and the sanctum sanctorum. Elated at this vision, he hurried to the Ashram to tell the other devotees and Sri Bhagavan.

As he narrated the experience, Sri Bhagavan was far from pleased and said, “Was that what you went into solitude for?” His reprimand brought Sri

Ramakrishna Swami to his senses; his elation disappeared and he became normal again.

Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni's Yogic Experience

When Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni had his wonderful yogic experience of kundalini rising to his head (sahasrara), he had intense pain in his head. We had all gathered around him and he asked us to pass our hands over his head and we were all thrilled to feel the remarkable heat of prana streaming out of the top of his head. I was one of them.

That day as Bhagavan was returning from his round of the Hill (giripradakshina), he was taken to Nayana (Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni) who was then living in the Mango Tree Cave. As soon as Bhagavan arrived, Nayana took his hand and put it on his head. Bhagavan kept it there for some time and uttered, "Everything will be all right," and left for Skandashram.

On his way back, Sri Bhagavan said: "He has divulged his pain to me, but to whom am I to turn to?" A devotee nearby asked Bhagavan, "Has Bhagavan also had such an experience? If so, is it then what he refers to in the 'Marital Garland of Letters' v.55: *Rain Thy Mercy on me ere Thy fire burn me to ashes, Oh Arunachala.*"

Sri Bhagavan, with a benign smile said: "Hum, hum." (Yes, yes.)

Grab Hold of the Four

The following conversation took place on the southern slope of Arunachala on August 21, 1978, about an hour before sunset. Sri Kunju Swami was recalling incidents in his life with Bhagavan. He told

me about their first meeting at Skandasramam... how he had been left alone with Bhagavan and was anxiously awaiting Bhagavan's first words, which he (Kunju Swami) was going to take as upadesa. Bhagavan said nothing, but was carefully mixing something in a bowl. Sri Kunju Swami said he took this to be some special potion which would be given to him. However, to his amazement, Bhagavan placed it on the ground and opened up a nearby basket. Out of the basket ran four little puppies! Sri Bhagavan then told Kunju Swami, "Grab hold of the four, and let them go one by one." Of course, Kunju Swami took care of the puppies as directed, but he also took these first words of Bhagavan to mean 'grab hold of the four Vedas.'

Coincidentally, many years later when the Ashram had grown up at the foot of the Hill, the residents of the Ashram were expected to help by doing some sort of work. Sri Kunju Swami went to Bhagavan to ask what kind of work he should do. Sri Bhagavan replied, "stotra, japa, dhyana and vichara" (see *The Mountain Path*, April, 1972).

Sri Natesan, who was interpreting Kunju Swami's talk for me, asked me if I understood what had been said. "Yes," I said.

"But it's not that easy to do, is it?" said Natesan.

"Oh, no! It isn't! You don't know the wild horses of my mind!" I replied.

As soon as Natesan related to Kunju Swami what I had said, Kunju Swami immediately looked at me directly and said firmly, "But it works!"

What a flame those three words enkindled! "But it works!" "It works!" stotra, japa, dhyana and vichara . . . coming from one who knows.

Ramana Satsang

Regular satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation are conducted in cities throughout North America. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please check online for a group in your area: <http://www.arunachala.org/ashrama/satsangs/>

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First Visits to Sri Ramanasramam

Bhagavan Ramana has said that no one can come to Arunachala unless he or she is called by Arunachala Himself. That call often comes when the devotee is ripe to receive His grace. Below are three examples of devotees called and the grace vouchsafed them. The first two are written by a husband and wife from Tennessee and the third by a devoted mother and wife residing in Florida.

I HAVE tried really hard to put into words what I felt during our first visit to Sri Ramanasramam. Every time I did, I had to go back and re-do it. It seems words are not adequate, and given my limited grasp of English I had to really struggle to put it together. So many experiences happened after our visit to Sri Ramanasramam, which I have not mentioned in this piece, that keep drilling into my head the transitory nature of everything and the futility of worldly existence. It's all Bhagavan's infinite grace. That's all I can say.

Our first visit to Ramanasramam from December 3rd to December 6th, 2012 was the most important event of my life so far. It seems Bhagavan called me when he felt I was fit to be admitted, even though I had thought about going there many times since 2004. When he did call, he showered his Grace in such abundance that I cannot possibly describe it. It seems like he has kicked my mind into a different gear. There is more peace, more contentment and more detachment from all things other than the pursuit of the only worthy goal of life.

This first visit clearly convinced me of the greatness of Sri Arunachala, whom I so far had never really truly understood or appreciated. Now I am beginning to feel the pull of Bhagavan in the form of Sri Arunachala. The first glimpse of the Arunachala Hill moved me to tears and I continued to feel its magnetic pull throughout our stay. Since I have returned to the USA it is attracting my mind more and more. Now I spontaneously look upon its form with love and contemplate its greatness.

The first two days in Tiruvannamalai for me were like a mixed bag. There were moments of immense peace; however, the background noise of the mind did not fully subside as anticipated. I had doubts and a lot of undesirable feelings and emotions rose up within me. I started feeling miserable and frustrated and did not know what to do. On day three, I at once experienced

great peace while walking around Bhagavan's Samadhi. All my doubts and restlessness completely evaporated and uncontrollable tears burst out in torrents. I experienced waves of love enfolding me from Bhagavan's Samadhi and my mind was filled with immense gratitude. From that moment everything turned around! The remainder of my stay was full of peace and serenity and many events happened that revealed to me Bhagavan's omnipresence and Grace.

Shortly after this, we ran into Brian, a devotee-resident of our New York Arunachala Ashram, who asked us if we had done the Giripradakshina. We had not, and I had been feeling sad about it since we had to leave the next day and it didn't appear as if we would be able to do it this time. He offered to take us the next morning at 3:00 AM. We went with him and thoroughly enjoyed his company during the walk. On the way back to town he asked us if we had been to the Arunachala Temple. Once again, we had not, and he graciously offered to take us in to the temple as well. I felt a deep peace and happiness the moment we entered the temple as if Arunachaleswara himself had pulled us to Him!

While leaving Tiruvannamalai, I looked back one last time at the holy Arunachala Hill and with its blessings went into a meditative state without any effort. I remained in this blissful state throughout the whole taxi ride to the Chennai airport.

On December 5th, prior to leaving Sri Ramanasramam, we had gone to the Book Depot and looked at both the wall and desk calendars. We really liked the wall calendar but decided to buy the desk calendar instead. I was not very keen on hanging the wall calendar on display in our house since I like to keep our devotion to Bhagavan to ourselves. My wife, on the other hand, really wanted the wall calendar. Upon our return to the USA we started to go through the mail and found to our amazement that the same wall calendar was there. It had been shipped to us

from the New York Ashrama on December 5th, the very same day we were looking at it in India! And, it had arrived here on my birthday! I opened it to see Bhagavan smiling with an umbrella in his hand, as if he were saying, “Where will you run away from me?” Yes indeed, there is no escape for us now. The tiger will have his way. Thank you, Bhagavan, for everything!

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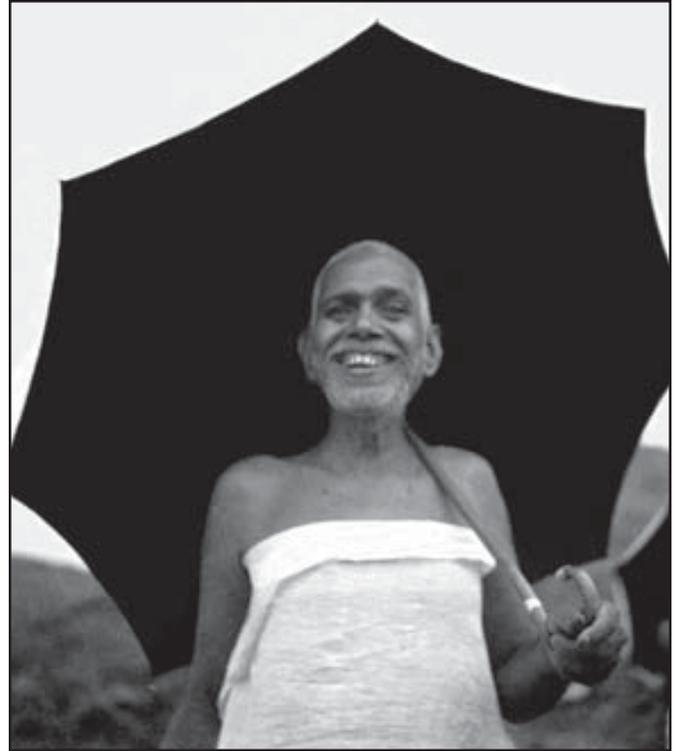
EVERY time I started writing this piece I felt that I was not conveying my experience properly. I still feel that I have not been able to do justice to it.

I had been looking forward to our trip to Tiruvannamalai for months and this short three-day visit turned out to be the highlight of our India trip. We plan to go back again next year and hope to be able to stay longer, Bhagavan willing.

When we reached Sri Ramanasramam, I simply felt as if I belonged there. It did not feel like a new place at all. We first entered the New Hall and, from there, the Mathrubhuteswara Temple. From the Mother’s temple we entered the Samadhi Hall. The moment I entered the Samadhi Hall I felt a very strong inward pull and sat down under one of Bhagavan’s photos. I could not understand what was happening. I still cannot put into words the peace and the contentment I experienced at that moment. My mind was completely calm and I felt a vibration that is difficult to describe. I did not want to leave the place. Throughout our stay, I kept returning to the Samadhi Hall and spent most of my time there.

On the other hand, when I sat in the Old Hall for meditation, unpleasant emotions and feelings of resentment began to rise up within. It happened quite strongly on the first day, but on the subsequent days these feelings slowly subsided. With Bhagavan’s grace, the rest of my stay was very peaceful. I felt carefree like a child.

We visited Skandasramam on the second day. There was a dog near the Ashram that sat quietly minding its own business, not at all concerned with what was happening around it. It felt as if he was in a deep meditative state. The same peace that we experienced in the Ashram at the foot of the Hill was there as well. We collected a few stones from Arunachala on our way back.



Before going to Ramanasramam I never thought much about the Arunachala Hill, but now it feels as if Arunachala has returned home with me. I do not even have to close my eyes to see it! My faith in Bhagavan and Arunachala has been strengthened with this visit and I pray to Bhagavan to bring me closer to him.

* * * * *

WITH Bhagavan’s grace, I had a wonderful experience during my visit to India. All I can say is that it was amazing. I spent three nights at the Ashram. I visited Skandasramam and Virupaksha Cave on the second day, and on the third day I was able to do the girivalam.

The Ashram gave me a room right behind Bhagavan’s Samadhi Hall. Staying in the Ashram and visiting the caves where Bhagavan sat and spent his time – just to think of this makes the heart feel so light. While there I felt so secure and now, remembering all of this, I feel so light as if I am gliding on air. Many simple but wonderful things happened to me at the Ashram with no effort on my part. This might sound silly. I visited many temples and in each one of them I was placed right in front for darshan. Even when I took the domestic and international flights with an extra suitcase and extra

luggage, they did not charge anything extra or say anything. I feel Bhagavan is with me and taking care of me.

I am holding on to his feet as the baby monkeys at the Ashram hold on to their mothers so tightly. But when I feel so light and forget to hold on to Him, He holds me.

I visited Thiruchulli also. I walked there barefoot from my husband's village which is some miles away. The priest who stays there was so nice to me. It was late and I was concerned that I might not be able to go to Bhagavan's birth house. When I was at the Bhuminatha Temple he told me that for Bhagavan's devotees the house is open 24 hours a

day. I prayed and meditated in the room where Bhagavan was born.

My English is not that great and I am not good at expressing my thoughts and feelings, but I am still feeling like a bee that had too much honey to drink. Even if I am not there at the Ashram, I always experience this sweet feeling, like I am gliding in the air. How to express it? Just to remember my visit to where Bhagavan stayed I have this inexplicable feeling and wonder how it would be to be with Him always in my heart. With Bhagavan's grace and blessings it will happen.

I bought some books at the Ashram. I am trying to follow Bhagavan's teachings.

Harbour S. Narayana Iyer

By V. Viswanathan

I AM V. Viswanathan, 75 years old and a mechanical engineer by profession. I wish to introduce myself as a grandson of Rao Bahadur S. Narayana Iyer, a direct devotee of Bhagavan.

He used to be referred to in Ramanasram as "Harbour Narayana Iyer" or "Port Trust Narayana Iyer" to distinguish him from "Sub-Registrar Narayana Iyer" of the same period.

Although he began visiting Bhagavan during the Virupaksha Cave days, he is seen only in the attached group photo taken on Bhagavan's 49th Jayanthi Day celebrations on 28th December 1928. Harbour S. Narayana Iyer is also referred to in pages 2 and 3 of the Ashram publication *Crumbs from His Table*, by Ramananda Swarnagiri.

My grandfather was a brilliant mathematician and held the post of the Chief Accountant of the Madras Port Trust. He clearly recognized the mathematical genius of Srinivasa Ramanujan and gave him a clerk's job in the Port Trust from 1912-1914. He also helped him prepare letters to present his mathematical discoveries to G. H. Hardy at Cambridge and assisted him in preparations to proceed to England. My grandfather and Ramanujan would often stay awake late into the night discussing and working on mathematical problems.

In the November 2011 issue of the *American Mathematical Journal*, there is a 10-page article by the

distinguished academic Bruce C. Berndt, wherein my grandfather's mathematical contributions are discussed. His personal and mathematical relationship with Ramanujan are also examined and emphasized.

This article was written after the author had gone to Bangalore to attend a conference relating to the life and work of Ramanujan. A film on Ramanujan titled "God, Zero and Infinity" was screened for the delegates. At one particular juncture in the film, the author was saddened to hear one of the narrators condescendingly proclaim that S. Narayana Aiyar, Chief Accountant of the Madras Port Trust office, was an "amateur mathematician" who was unable to appreciate the work of his employee, S. Ramanujan. Since S. Narayana Aiyar was not able to defend himself from this uncharitable remark, Dr. Berndt, a scholar who had devoted much of his career to explaining Ramanujan's life and mathematical contributions, decided to construct this defense for him. For the full 10-page article, please go to:

<http://www.math.uiuc.edu/~berndt/articles/snarayanaiyer.pdf>

As a young boy, I saw Niranjanananda Swami, (Bhagavan's younger brother) visiting my grandfather's house, then at 119 Big Street, Triplicane, Chennai. My grandfather left for his heavenly abode in January 1937 and I was born in May 1937. Niranjanananda Swami knew the entire family – my mother Kamakshi, who was Narayana Iyer's

daughter, and my father, M.S.Venkatraman, and Narayana Iyer's son Subbanarayanan.

My oldest sister, Ramani, now 88 years of age and residing in Chennai was named after Bhagavan by Narayana Iyer; a grandson through his other daughter Meenakshi was named Ramanan, but his official name was S.Sankaranarayanan* – he is now no more. Ramani recounts how she would accompany her grandfather to the Ashram and how she had gone on giripradhakshinam with my grandfather and Bhagavan. She had seen Bhagavan help cut vegetables to feed the devotees and saw him stand and personally supervise food being served to the devotees after ascertaining that nobody was waiting outside.

Narayana Iyer's first love was mathematics, followed by Bhagavan and his philosophy. My mother Kamakashi used to narrate to me how, when she was 7 years old during the First World War, she saw the

* *S. Sankaranarayanan passed away in 2004 and was introduced into Sanskrit studies by his grandfather S. Narayana Iyer. He was a Devi upasaka, initiated by Kapali Sastriar and over the years contributed many articles and translations to Ramanasramam for publications. At the time of his passing he was working on a translation of Ganapati Muni's "Uma Sahasram".*

famous German cruiser S. S. Emden bombard the oil storage installations in the Madras Harbour. The tanks with oil burned for four days and nights. Narayana Iyer and his family watched the raging fire from the terrace of his house at Triplicane.

Out of fear, my seven-year-old mother hugged her father uttering, "My darling Appa (father)". Narayana Iyer would ask her, "Which Appa do you like? The one before you in flesh and bones or the one inside me?" My mother said that even at the tender age of seven her father had started teaching her about the inner quest of Bhagavan, "Who am I?"

When I saw this article in the November, 2011 issue of the *American Mathematical Monthly*, I thought I should forward the same to devotees of Bhagavan Ramana so they could read another interesting, unknown side of the life of my grandfather, Harbour Narayana Iyer, an unassuming devotee of the Master.

*Note: An interesting life sketch of S. Narayana Iyer from one of Prof. Berndt's books, *Ramanujan: Essays and Surveys*, can be read online. In it the author mentions how Narayana Iyer was greatly influenced by Ramana Maharshi. To read this go online to Google Books and type in *Ramanujan: Essays and Surveys* in the search field. "Part IV, S. Narayana Iyer" begins on page 96.*

