

The Maharshi



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Grant Duff (Douglas Ainslie)

Part III

Grant Duff stayed in South India at least two years, part of which he spent visiting Ceylon. Retired from government service and born into a family embedded in the upper echelon of the British Empire, he could comfortably travel and reside in the most luxurious British guest houses available. Soon after he arrived in the Ashram his intense sincerity conferred upon him such an exalted experience in the presence of the Master that he was most grateful for the simple, humble accommodation offered him there. Never had the Ashram seen the likes of a devotee from this stratum of British society who was well-versed in literature and philosophy.

IN 1935, the same year Grant Duff first made his appearance in Sri Ramanasramam, two important English translations of the Maharshi's works were published: *Five Hymns to Arunachala* and *Truth Revealed, Sad-Vidya*. Taking advantage of Grant Duff's literary skills, the Ashram felt no hesitation in requesting him to write the preface for both these publications.

Duff was a student of philosophy, had been a teacher of Hegel and the first to translate the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce's works into English. He had a clear understanding of present-day philosophies, both East and West, as well as those from past centuries. And now that he had glimpsed the ultimate Truth in the Maharshi's presence, he seems to have lost all patience and respect for these 'thinkers' of his time. In his preface to the *Five Hymns*, he comes down hard on all the contemporary philosophers, summarily dismissing them for their intellectual foibles, which may be clever but lead nowhere. He begins his introduction to the *Five Hymns to Arunachala* defining his own philosophical quest.

The Five Hymns to Arunachala

First Edition 1935

PREFACE

My definition of the philosophic quest may not be acceptable in the East, or for that matter in the West. It is contained in six words: "Technique of the approach to God."

There is also a Greek saying which I translate thus: "Going by many paths they reach the same end."

Both in the East and West a great deal of time is wasted in clever dialectic that does not lead anywhere but to the enhancement of philosophic pride. With that, couple the use of algebraic formulae in philosophy and the absurd "new" logic of Professor Moore and what is called The Cambridge School.

On the other side, in the West we have the Hegelians who, at any rate, dispense with mathematical proofs and, thanks to Hegel having carefully read many Hindu religious works before writing his treatises (though his acknowledgement of this is at best perfunctory), there is a good

deal of truth in his dull, ponderous and often obscure writings.

Bradley too contains a good deal of truth in his "Appearance and Reality" and he also is deeply indebted to the East as anyone who knows the Indian sacred books can perceive at once on perusal of the Oxonian professor's writings.

Bergson's "Vital Urge" is a clever assimilation and adaptation of the Tantric notion of Shiva-Shakti to European tastes and this very year one of our leading novelists, my old acquaintance, Edgar Jepson, came to me full of his "discovery" of Bergson's wonderful idea.

Being already acquainted with my friend Sir John Woodroffe's admirable versions of the Tantric teaching, I was able to explain to Edgar Jepson that he had far better turn to English translations of Tantra than be fobbed off by a French philosopher's adaptation of the theme.

Soon after that conversation I came to India already convinced of the fact that only in India is there any real knowledge of the divine and by good fortune chanced to be directed by the excellent Mr. Raphael Hurst [Paul Brunton] to Tiruvannamalai. There it did not take me long to see that I was in direct contact with one who had passed beyond the boundaries of the senses and was indeed already merged in the absolute of his true Self, though manifesting here for our benefit for a few brief years.

I may be asked how it was that I received such an impression. I can only reply, as I should to one who asked me how I saw the Sun on looking out of the window, by saying that I did so by the use of my eyes and incidentally of all my other senses collaborating. I did not need any algebraic or other proof of the existence of the Sun. I do not need any other proof of the divinity of Ramana Maharshi.

In these lyrical hymns to the Arunachala Hill he sets forth in burning words what he has himself experienced, and constructs so far as is possible (as did the Buddha for other audiences) a raft to enable all of us to cross over and obtain a like contact. But he tells us plainly that in order to reach our true Self, which dwells beneath the surface on the right side of the chest, we must first of all discard that self which is the aggregate of sense impressions reflected on the mind. Now this is not at all an easy thing to do, but I can assure the readers of this divine work that it has been done by others and that the guidance afforded by this work and by its predecessor

"Sat-Darsana Bhashya" forms an admirable raft to aid the aspirant in his attempt to make contact with his own real Self: God.

It is said in the *Brahma Siddhi* that rites and ceremonies are of use in obtaining divine knowledge because they shorten the time necessary for the approach, just as a person mounted on a horse will reach his destination sooner than a pedestrian however fast the latter may oblige himself to walk.

I refer back here to my own definition of philosophy in the true sense of the word and urgently counsel all readers to get into touch as soon as possible with the truth as made clear by Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Why wander about for the few years that the most fortunate of us have at our disposal in the morasses of Western philosophy or in the equally imperfect and marshy swamps of Christian and Islamic religion (though here too as elsewhere there exist long paths to the Truth) when you have actually within your grasp the very Truth itself?

The head of one of the great Indian Universities whom I met this year in Mysore, said to me, "You have been fortunate in your Indian quest, for Ramana Maharshi is the only man that I know of, now living and teaching in India, who can be compared with the ancient teachers, of whom Shankara is the greatest."

I do not give my friend's name [Dr. S. Radhakrishnan] as I have not asked his permission, but it is a name well known not only in India but also in Europe as one of the leaders of philosophic thought. Yet he made me quite clearly to understand that he did not regard himself or any of the other Brahmin teachers of philosophy as *in any way comparable* to the divine Being who still honours the sacred Hill of Arunachala with his presence.

I am deeply moved and honoured by the request thus made to me to write this preface which is simply an attempt to erect a sign post at the entrance to the garden which all who think will wish to enter, sooner or later. Why not go straight in rather than walk many miles and possibly break your necks by attempting to scale the walls erected by dogma or dialectic?

THE MANOR HOUSE
COONOOR
(South India)

GRANT DUFF
The Athenaeum
Pall Mall, London

(To be continued)

Blessed Days in the Company of Viswanatha Swami

Part I

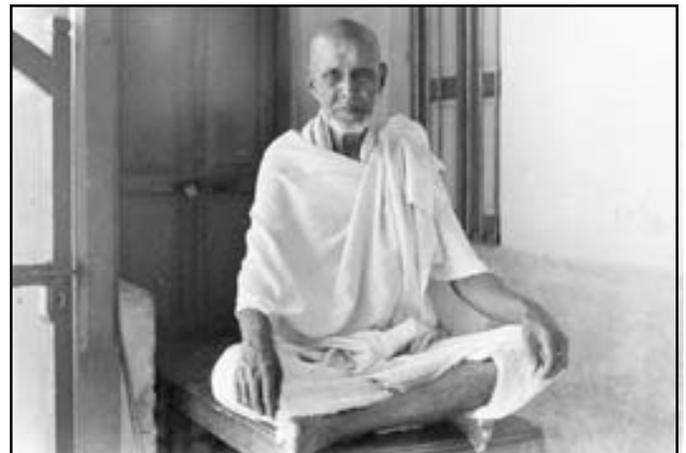
By Evelyn Kaselow Saphier

WHEN we first arrived at Sri Ramanasramam in 1973, in the company of Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata, it was dawn. We unfurled the Arunachala Ashrama banner – a glorious creation of bright ochre cloth and bold letters declaring the name of Arunachala Ashrama – and marched to the Old Hall chanting “Arunachala Siva Ki Jai!” This was to be the fulfillment of an inspiration conceived by Bhagawatji inspired by his days of moving and marching in the service of the Indian Independence Movement. In reality, when we arrived at the gates of the Ashram, we newcomers were quite overwhelmed; in fact, so overwhelmed that it was difficult for us to utter the cries that would have made any impression. Sri Ramanasramam then as now was clothed in a cloak of the most pristine silence at the dawn. Well, this is how I remember it and others may remember it a bit differently. I am mentioning this incident as it marked our entry into Sri Ramana Loka – the blissful atmosphere of Sri Ramanasramam – that drew us and continues to draw ever-increasing crowds of devotees to itself like metal filings to a magnet.

It was on that very day of wonder that we were ushered into the small and austere room of Viswanatha Swami, who sat cross-legged on a *chauki* in white cotton dhoti and cloth wrapped over his shoulders. Our band of devotees included Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, his wife Yogamaya and son Bhaskar, Joan and Matthew Greenblatt, Dennis Hartel and myself. The Swami’s room was devoid of decoration and there was no evidence of any possession whatsoever. Viswanatha Swami was in a state of bliss when we were ushered in and seated in a row on the bench opposite his choki. His first words to us penetrated my heart like an arrow and resonated with what, in our hearts, we already knew: ***“There is a center in man where there is no ignorance... where there is Pure Awareness.”*** At that moment, I understood that we were in the presence of one like Bhagavan. One felt his absolute authenticity, his spiritual greatness. Yet,

Viswanatha Swami’s spiritual wealth was cloaked in the guise of a devotee. Bhagavan had advised his closest disciples to avoid the role of spiritual preceptor and its complications, and Viswanathan had taken this to heart. Years later, in 1979, Viswanatha Swami had confided to me with a modest laugh, “When I was born, my father consulted an astrologer who told him, ‘This child will rise high.’ What could be higher than to be a devotee of Bhagavan?”

It was soon after that we went on our first pradakshina with Swami Viswanathan. At this meeting, he was ebullient. Clearly his natural state of mind was filled with the bliss of total immersion in Bhagavan’s presence. As we walked with him around the Hill he opened our eyes to its wonders and to the carefree happiness that he and his fellow disciples had experienced while going around the Hill in the presence of Bhagavan. Those were, of course, different days – days before noisy trucks and busses and days in which the Hill was covered in vegetation and inhabited by wild animals of all sorts. Bhagavan and those close to him, at that time, might spend days going round the Hill, cooking at different locations. Viswanatha Swami would take us to various places where they had lingered with Bhagavan and say “This is where we sat” or “This is where we cooked—Let us sit here awhile.” At one spot he faced the Mountain and called out in a booming voice: “Annamalai!” and we heard the name of the Holy Hill echoing back as if the Mountain itself were rejoicing in the sound of its sacred Name! Ah, what joy! It was to us all as close to being in the physical presence of Bhagavan, as we might have imagined. We could not see him, and yet we could feel him – the bliss, love and delight of His proximity.



It was on this circuit of the Hill, our first pradakshina, shortly after sunset, that Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata began to describe the practice of Evening Recitation that we did in Arunachala Ashrama, located at that time in the East Village on East Sixth Street near First Avenue in New York City. Somehow, as we approached the town, we burst into song and sang as we marched quite oblivious to whatever strange impression we might be creating! As we began the Ashrama chants of Arunachala Siva, our fervor and innocent enthusiasm overtook us and we marched in the blissful presence of Arunachala Siva back to the Ashrama. I have no recollection of sore feet.... We must have been truly out of our bodies for we were going without sandals at the time, eager to accrue the punyam of being barefoot while circumambulating the Hill! When we went to Viswanatha Swami's room the following day, he told us, "When I first was introduced to you, I did not understand your spirit. No one has had the courage to do that!" He also pulled us up on our pronunciation of the holy name of Arunachala, as we had been doing it in the North Indian style... "Arunachal"!

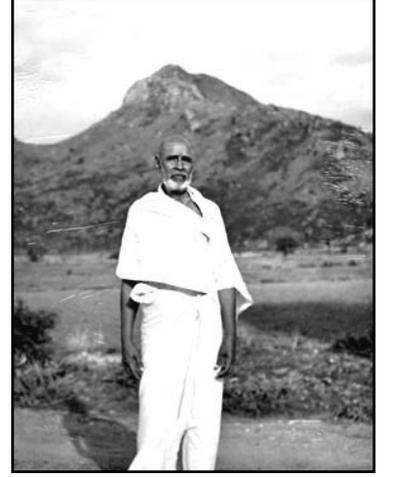
After that first evening pradakshina, Viswanatha Swami took an active interest in our small band. What an unspeakable gift! He took us on two more pradakshinas and also to many places where Bhagavan had lived and moved. It was as if we were given a complete reprise of the life of Bhagavan filled with interesting anecdotes punctuated with humor and laughter. We would ask him questions to encourage his flow of reminiscences and he would share stories of Bhagavan without the least hesitation. As we walked, he would also sing, in ecstasy, various Sanskrit compositions, and from time to time he would suggest that we take the Name of Bhagavan....

Viswanatha Swami told us that the Bhagavan he knew and grew into manhood with was very different from the aloof person presented in so many books. Bhagavan, he said, was the most entertaining, the most humorous, the most human of preceptors. When he told a story, he became the protagonists. At times, Viswanathan and his fellow disciples would be dissolved in laughter while listening to the stories of Bhagavan. This was the carefree attitude of Bhagavan with those completely and totally surrendered to Him. He was not just their preceptor, but father and mother as well.

In October of 1973 our two-month sojourn in India

had come to an end and we returned to our life and routines back in New York City. Viswanatha Swami's letters came infrequently, so our hearts took a leap when we saw his beautiful hand on a letter addressed to the devotees of Arunachala Ashrama.

Some excerpts from letters received from Viswanatha Swami follow:



"May Sri Bhagavan and the Mother grant you unswerving Abidance at the Heart. The Heart is the whole of Bhagavan's Teaching in one Word; and it has been clearly expounded in Chapter Five of *Sri Ramana Gita*. If possible, one should study it in the Sanskrit text itself; it is so inspiring.

भुवनं मनसो नान्यदन्यन्न हृदयान्मनः ।
अशेषा हृदये तस्मात्कथा परिसमाप्यते ॥ ५ ॥१२ ॥

*bhuvanam manaso nānyadanyanna hṛdayānmanah
aśeṣā hṛdaye tasmātkathā parisamāpyate || 5.12||*

"The Universe is nothing but the mind and the mind is nothing but the Heart. Thus the entire story of the universe culminates in the Heart."

If one gives up selfish activity, that is sannyasa according to the *Bhagavad Gita*. The life of such a one, his every breath, will be for the good of the whole world. Bhagavan was an example to all of such unselfish activity.

May the blessings of Bhagavan be upon all of you forever.

Leave alone individual relationships. Study "The Five Verses on the One Self of All" (*Ekatma-Panchakam*) again and again and realize that there is but One Self. We are all one in it. It is the last of Sri Bhagavan's utterances.

Feel one with the whole universe. That is universal Love.

Sri Ramana Jayanti Retreat in Tampa, Florida December 31 – January 3



ABOUT 70 devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi from throughout the U.S. and Canada gathered to celebrate the third annual Jayanti retreat in the simple and serene setting of the Franciscan Retreat Center located on the Hillsboro River in Tampa, Florida.

Once again the members of the Tampa Ramana Satsang group spared no efforts to make the retreat an inspirational feast for devotees and followers of the Master.

On Thursday, December 31, they first gathered at the Hindu Temple of Tampa where the retreat opened with a most moving Jayanti puja. As the Vedic chants offered in the temple before the images of Sri Bhagavan and Sri Arunachala increased in power and presence we felt ourselves evermore immersed in the grace of Arunachala Ramana.

Back at the Center after the Puja and a delicious South Indian meal, a text message was sent around to all, that read: Aksara Mana Malai at Midnight! There was little hope of sleep anyway as the apparently quiet neighborhood around the retreat center seemed to explode with New Year's Eve celebration fireworks!

I walked down to the gazebo beside the river and found a few other devotees also enjoying the river's beauty and the sight of fireworks shooting into the sky and exploding in celebration all about. Close to midnight we found the Arunachala-Ramana shrine serenely before us, adorned with soft lights in the dark meditation hall. In one voice we welcomed the New Year with Sri Bhagavan's ecstatic hymn to Sri Arunachala, the bridegroom!

In the still setting of the Franciscan Retreat Center, our

mind naturally drew away from distractions of the world. As our focus narrowed, our spirits became elevated, our acquaintance of devotees widened and our experience and understanding of the teachings of Bhagavan deepened.

The following three early mornings settled into a familiar routine: Morning Vedas, reading, unison chanting of "Sri Lalita Sahasranam Stotram," an extended silent meditation, followed by another reading from *Talks*. In the dark hours before the dawn, the readings from the teachings of Bhagavan fell like seeds into the deepest recesses of our minds. May such blessed seeds bear fruit in our lives, we prayed!

On Friday afternoon, the genesis of the Archival Films of Sri Ramana was discussed and scenes from it were viewed and described. Saturday morning Mangalam Kalyanaramam gave a talk on her grandfather, Sri Bhagavan's brother, Niranjanananda Swami. She paid tribute to Chinna Swami's total dedication to Bhagavan and his role in the development of Sri Ramanasramam, in the face of extraordinary challenges. She closed most movingly with Chinna Swami's last words: "I am departing with a clear conscience and clean hands. I have not utilised even a pie of the Ashram funds for my own benefit. Everything here belongs to Bhagavan, and should be guarded with care and vigilance as such. Devote yourselves heart and soul to the service of the Lord, and in return He will shower His grace on you. Be sincere and truthful to the core of your heart. Uphold our revered ancient tradition in the working of this Ashram, as I have upheld them all my life."

During the period of questions and answers that followed we were treated to many personal stories of Mangalam's life as a young girl growing up in the family of Bhagavan and came to understand at least in part the sacrifices that such an extraordinary blessing entails. Mangalam's talk sparkled with graciousness, sweetness, forbearance, surrender and loving kindness.

Saturday afternoon, by way of a video recording, we enjoyed listening to the reminiscences of Srimati Rajalakshmi. In the company of Echammal and her sister Venamma, Rajalakshmi, who is now 96 years old, moved closely with Bhagavan throughout her childhood and still recalls many unforgettable moments in his company.

The presentation on Saturday was given by Evelyn Saphier in which she shared the blessings of our association with Viswanatha Swami during the years of 1973 to 1979. Some of these recollections can be read in the previous article.

Our evenings were devoted to the recitation of Hymns on and by Bhagavan, bhajan and silent meditation. On Friday evening we gathered beside the river and, in a circle of friendship and joy, immersed ourselves in devotional songs provided by the many talented singers among us. Saturday evening the weather kept us in doors where the lovely shrine became the setting for our singing and the silence. After many had gone to bed, some friends lingered on to sing "Sri Hanuman Chalisa" and other bhajans.

Of course, all things must pass. But our cherished memories of time spent at the Tampa Jayanti Retreat linger on, elevating and inspiring us to ever renew our practice of Self-surrender and Self-enquiry.

Mahasivaratri at Arunachala Ashrama

86-06 Edgertown Blvd.

Jamaica Estates, Queens, NY 11432

7 PM - Monday, 7th March to
6 AM - Tuesday Morning, 8th March

PROGRAM

Veda Parayana, Ashvamedha Prashna and Mahanarayana Upanishad, Mahanyasa Parayana, Ekadasha Rudrabhishekam, Puja with Sri Rudra Trisati, Siva Ashottaram, Guru Ramana Ashottaram, Arati and Mantrpushpam, followed by Prasadam

The Trapped Bird

by Sadhu Natanananda

THE cause of all misery and evil, beginning with the birth experienced by jivas, is forgetfulness of the way they came. This is illustrated by the following story.

In the hall where Bhagavan used to give darshan there was a chimney. The chimney was closed on all sides with steel mesh, except at the bottom. One day, a beautiful small bird somehow entered it and became trapped inside this chimney.

The bird found itself trapped in conditions diametrically opposed to its natural environment: the vast space where it could fly freely. From the moment it entered the chimney, it was frantically struggling to escape, but all its efforts proved futile. Why? Because, forgetting the way it came, it was repeatedly trying to escape through all the closed routes. Sri Bhagavan took this opportunity to reveal a great truth:

"The bird has given up the all-pervasive space, its natural place of residence. It has been caught in this limited space which is opposed to its nature. Not knowing how to escape from this prison, it is agitated and afraid. Like the bird, jivas also give up their natural place of residence, the vast space of consciousness. Through the delusion of ignorance they have become trapped in the prison of the body. Without knowing how to escape, they are tormented by various afflictions. The ceaseless efforts of this bird to reach its natural place of residence are unsuccessful because they are directed upwards, the way of bondage, instead of downwards, the way it came. Similarly, the reason why the jivas' ceaseless effort to attain freedom are unsuccessful is because they too are directed outwards, the way of bondage, instead of inwards, the way they came. The natural tendency of the bird to go upwards asserts itself even in its attempt for freedom. Likewise, the natural tendency of jivas to roam outwards asserts itself even in their attempts at liberation. This is the jivas' natural tendency. If, through true discrimination and awareness, the jiva is made to turn back from the outward-directed sight to inward sight, and if it remains fixed there, it is certain that it would attain liberation in an instant."

This one upadesha will be sufficient for those genuinely thirsting for liberation.

– From *Sri Ramana Darsanam*

A Saint Passes Away

ONE day while Baba [Neem Karoli Baba] was talking to people at Haldwani Furniture Mart, he suddenly became absorbed in deep thought and remained silent for some time. Then he said faintly, "Pooran [Pooran Chandra Joshi], give a spoonful of water to drink. He is in great agony." I could not understand what the matter was, but I nevertheless poured two spoonfuls of water into Baba's mouth. After some time two tears fell from Baba's eyes, and he said to me, "Ramana is no more. India has lost a great saint today." This incident occurred on the day that Ramana Maharshi left his physical body in Arunachala.

– from *Divine Reality*

Ramana Satsangs in the USA and Canada

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)
- Canada, Ottawa** — Anantha Padmanabhan (613-733-8250 / madhupaddy@rogers.com)
- Canada, Toronto** — Thiru (416-876-1942 / thirusivasamy@hotmail.com)
- Canada, Vancouver** — Akash (778-321-4499 / eternalshiva@hotmail.com)
- Canada, Victoria** — Saibish (250-818-2875 /saibish@gmail.com)
- Chicago Area** — Jean-Luc & Rita (719-480-3530 / blueskyvalley@mac.com)
- Connecticut Area** — Aruna & Ram (860-284-0078 / rsankaran2000@yahoo.com)
- Chapel Hill, NC** — Ranjani Ramanan (919-338-2551 / ranjanil@yahoo.com)
- Dublin, Ohio** — Abilash & Madhavi (614-789-9058 / mungamuru@hotmail.com)
- Florida, Ft. Lauderdale Area** — David & Janet Rubinson (954-600-1967 / arunahill@gmail.com)
- Florida, Tampa** — Rohit (813-766-0145 / rohitrkvaitya@yahoo.com)
- Florida, Palm Coast** — Shriram & Recha (904-347-3434 / ssmarathemd@gmail.com)
- Houston, TX** — Kumar Saran (832-435-3761 / saran01@earthlink.net)
- Los Angeles, CA** — Natarajan & Indira Venkatesan (310-473-9441 / nvenky30@yahoo.com)
- New Jersey, West Windsor** — Gurunath & Leena (609-273-6216 / gsnetravali@hotmail.com)
- Puerto Rico** — Rosa & Scott Mathewson (787-531-5295 / rosilinm@hotmail.com)
- San Francisco Area** — Karthik & Sunita (510-656-2752 / sunita_parasuraman@yahoo.com)
- San Francisco Area** — Subadra & TKS (925-373-6909 / subadra2001@yahoo.com)
- Seattle, WA area** — Sunil Bala (425-996-4144 / sunil.n.bala@gmail.com)
- Washington, D.C. Area** — Uma & Santosh (301-528-5526 / uma_santosh@hotmail.com)

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