

Sri Ramana Jayanti Retreat Tampa Old Hall Readings

I. EXCERPTS FROM REMINISCENCES.....	1
1. Dr. Paul Brunton.....	1
2. Eleanor Pauline Noye.....	3
3. Duncan Greenlees.....	4
4. Prof. K. Swaminathan.....	6
5. N. Balarama Reddy.....	8
6. Grant Duff.....	10
7. Chhaganlal V. Yogi.....	11
8. Ethel Merston.....	13
II. EXCERPTS FROM TALKS WITH SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI	15
1. Talk #285.....	15
2. Talk #246.....	15
3. Talk #487.....	16
4. Talk #640.....	19
5. Talk #251.....	19
6. Talk #594.....	23
7. Talk #595.....	24
III. EXCERPTS FROM DAY BY DAY WITH BHAGAVAN	25
1. 16-3-45.....	25
2. 12-4-46 Afternoon.....	25
3. 1-6-46.....	26
4. 29-12-45 Night.....	27
5. 21-1-46.....	27
6. 29-4-46 Afternoon.....	28
7. 18-6-46.....	28
8. 18-4-46 Afternoon.....	28
IV. EXCERPTS FROM BHAGAVAN IN THE KITCHEN	30
1. In the Kitchen - I.....	30
2. In the Kitchen - II.....	31
3. Bhagavan's Protection.....	32
V. EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS FROM SRI RAMANASRAMAM	33
1. (245) Kindness to Animals.....	33
2. (97) Birth.....	34
3. (62) Ekam Aksharam (The One Letter and The One Imperishable).....	35
4. (160) The Holy Beacon.....	36

I. EXCERPTS FROM REMINISCENCES

1. Dr. Paul Brunton

Dr. Paul Brunton, a British journalist, attracted by Indian mysticism first visited India in 1930. He is generally considered as having introduced meditation to the West. He provides a dispassionate, illuminating and intimate account of the Maharshi's divinity and its impact in his *A Search in Secret India* published from London in 1934. In his inimitable way he says:

There is something in this man which holds my attention as steel filings are held by a magnet. I cannot turn my gaze away from him. I become aware of a silent, resistless change, which is taking place within my mind. One by one, the questions which I prepared with such meticulous accuracy drop away. I know only that a steady river of quietness seems to be flowing near me; that a great peace is penetrating the inner reaches of my being, and that my thought-tortured brain is beginning to arrive at some rest. I perceive with sudden clarity that intellect creates its own problems and then makes itself miserable trying to solve them. This is indeed a novel concept to enter the mind of one who has hitherto placed such high value upon intellect.

I surrender myself to the steadily deepening sense of restfulness. The passage of time now provokes no irritation, because the chains of mind-made problems are being broken and thrown away. And then, little by little, a question takes the field of consciousness. Does this man, the Maharshi, emanate the perfume of spiritual peace as the flower emanates fragrance from its petals? I begin to wonder whether by some radioactivity of the soul, some unknown telepathic process, the stillness which invades the troubled water of my soul really comes from him. The peace overwhelms me.

The Maharshi turns and looks down into my face; I, in turn, gaze expectantly up at him. I become aware of a mysterious change taking place with great rapidity in my heart and mind. The old motives which have lured me on begin to desert me. The urgent desires which have sent my feet hither and thither vanish with incredible swiftness. The dislikes, misunderstandings, coldness and selfishness which have marked my dealings with many of my fellows collapse into the abyss of nothingness. **An untellable peace falls upon me and I know that there is nothing further that I shall ask from life.**

The Sage seems to carry something of great moment to me, yet I cannot easily determine its precise nature. It is intangible, imponderable, perhaps spiritual. Each time I think of him a peculiar sensation pierces me and causes my heart to throb with vague but lofty expectations. I look at the Sage. He sits there on Olympian heights and watches the panorama of life as one apart. There is a mysterious property in this man which differentiates him from all others I have met.

He remains mysteriously aloof even when surrounded by his own devotees, men who have loved him and lived near him for years. Sometimes I catch myself wishing that he would be a little more human, a little more susceptible to what seems so normal to us.

Why is it that under his strange glance I invariably experience a peculiar expectancy, as though some stupendous revelation will soon be made to me? **This man has freed himself from all problems, and no woe can touch him.**

The Sage seems to speak not as a philosopher, not as a pandit trying to explain his own doctrine, but rather out of the depth of his own heart. I am not religious but I can no more resist the feeling of increasing awe which begins to grip my mind than a bee can resist a flower in all its luscious bloom. The [Maharshi's] hall is becoming pervaded with a subtle, intangible and indefinable power which affects me deeply. I feel, without doubt and without hesitation, that the centre of this mysterious power is no other than the Maharshi himself.

His eyes shine with astonishing brilliance. Strange sensation begins to arise in me. Those lustrous orbs seem to be peering into the inmost recesses of my soul. In a peculiar way, I feel aware of everything he can see in my heart. His mysterious glance penetrates my thoughts, my emotions and my desires; I am helpless before it.

At first, his disconcerting gaze troubles me; I become vaguely uneasy. I feel he has perceived pages that belong to a past, which I have forgotten. He knows it all, I am certain. I am powerless to escape; somehow, I do not want to, either.

I become aware that he is definitely linking my own mind with his, that he is provoking my heart into that state of starry calm, which he seems perpetually to enjoy. **In this extraordinary peace, I find a sense of exaltation and lightness. Time seems to stand still. My heart is released from its burden of care.** Never again, I feel, shall the bitterness of anger and the melancholy of unsatisfied desire afflict me. My mind is submerged in that of the Maharshi and wisdom is now at its perihelion.

2. Eleanor Pauline Noye

Eleanor Pauline Noye of California visited the Ashram twice in 1940 and stayed for about ten months.

My heart throbbed with expectation as I was taken to the hall. As I entered, I felt the atmosphere filled with Sri Bhagavan's Purity and Blessedness. One feels a breath of the Divine in the Sage's presence. **When He smiled it was as though the gates of Heaven were thrown open. I have never seen eyes more alight with Divine Illumination – they shine like stars.** His look of Love and Compassion was a benediction that went straight to my heart. I was immediately drawn to Him. One feels such an uplifting influence in His saintly presence and cannot help but sense His extraordinary spirituality.

It is not necessary for Him to talk, His silent influence of love and light is more potent than words could ever be. I do not think there is another like Him on earth today. To see Him is to love Him. As I looked upon Sri Bhagavan's serene face and into His eyes which beamed with mercy, my soul was stirred. He knew how much I needed Him, while He looked straight into my heart. Everyone who comes to Him is blessed; the inner peace which is His is radiated to all.

I had not slept well for years, although I had been taking medicine. I said nothing to Sri Bhagavan about this. The amazing thing was that I slept soundly the first night and thereafter without taking any medicine. I received 'the Medicine of all medicines', the unfailing grace of the Lord. I arose next morning, feeling refreshed, as though I were born anew. Soon after, as I was standing by the gate one afternoon, Sri Bhagavan stopped while on His way to the hill and asked me, "If I had more peace." His loving solicitude made me feel quite at home; and when He smiled my joy knew no bounds.

When I left America, I longed for peace. **Here at the feet of the Lord of Love, peace and happiness garlanded me and enriched my being.** I know that Bhagavan led me to this heaven of rest. Mere words can never express the peace and joy felt in His Presence; it must be experienced. There one truly has a glimpse of the Eternal. **The most Blessed experience of my life was my stay at the feet of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.**

The Ashram is so primitive, but therein lies its charm. It is truly the Holy-land. The air is permeated with His peace and love. On full moon night it is especially inspiring to go round the hill. In this deep silence and quietude one readily hears the voice of God.

I reluctantly made plans to leave the place. I had grown to love it and was very sad during those last days. Sri Bhagavan said, "I will always be with you, wherever you go."

When the last day arrived, I could not stop crying. In the afternoon when I sat before Sri Bhagavan He smiled and said, "She has been crying all day; she does not want to leave me!" Later I went to Him for His blessings. The pain of parting was almost more than I could bear; with tears in my eyes I knelt with deepest reverence and devotion before my beloved Master. May He always be my Father, Mother and God; and may I always be His child, and whatever I do, may it be in His name.

3. Duncan Greenlees

Duncan Greenlees, M.A. (Oxon.), a scholar and a Theosophist, visited India on a teaching assignment in the 1930s.

I saw the Maharshi. It did not take long for me to be sure that I was in front of one who had, in that very body, solved life's problem for himself. The radiant peace around him proved it beyond all cavil. **The calm, like that of the midnight sky, was something too real to question for a moment. The part of my search thus was over, even at the first glimpse. In a flash I had seen a 'Master'.** I *knew* he was what the books call a *jivanmukta*. Please don't ask me how I *knew* for I cannot answer that. It was just as one knows that water is wet and the sky is blue. It could not be denied – self-evident is the word.

I had brought the usual list of questions to be asked. Shyness kept me silent while sitting in the Hall during those first days. And before I broke that silence, the unspoken questions had solved themselves in their own irrelevance. It was a common experience; I only add my own testimony to that of many others. Before I left that hallowed spot, I did put questions to the Maharshi, which were answered in a wonderful way that was new to me. I was wholly satisfied and filled with joy.

The four days I had planned were soon over. But I could not tear myself away before the last date of the vacation [of the educational institution where he was teaching], and stayed on, delighted, enthralled and pacified. That stillness of eternal depths had somehow seeped itself into my heart. I had met a Master who could quell the waves with a silent word, 'Peace, be still!' I knew myself to be absolutely one with that incarnate Peace on the sofa, and therefore to be one equally with the Unmanifest in whose stillness he was so obviously poised.

God's grace is such that He gives at His will what He likes to give to any soul. We cannot *earn* His grace, even by crores of years of effort. One can never be worthy of His blessings, but receives it purely out of His mercy. His *darshan* can never be the fruit of *sakama tapasya*, whatever certain books may say. It is only the overflowing love of the Lord that brings Him to us.

The peace that Bhagavan had put upon me remained in my heart, like a shining cloud of transparency through which all things passed dreamlike for about three weeks. **The mind was caught and held in that peace in a blissfulness it had never known before. It is a pity I cannot bring about this mood at my own will: it can come only from the touch of the real Teacher of souls, as I have found.**

I have taken all the descriptions of the *jivanmukta* I could find in any scripture – Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Christian, Muslim, Jain etc. I have watched Bhagavan under all kinds of circumstances, and checked up what I have seen with those descriptions. I have not the smallest doubt that he alone, of the men I have seen, dwells always in *sahaja samadhi*. Of course, I am not qualified to judge, for none but the saint can know the saint.

I have seen him in a humorous mood. I have seen him play the host with delicate grace that seemed almost awkward at times. I have seen him quickly, motionlessly, challenging and defeating injustice or unkindness. I have seen him cutting vegetables for the Ashramites long before the dawn. I have seen again and again how he solved the doubts, the agonies, the loss of faith of people of many types – often with a word, often with his healing silence and a soft distance in his unmoving gaze. I have looked at his perfect handwriting in many scripts, all a model of beauty and care. I have heard him correcting the singers of hymns in his own glory, with an absolute impersonality that was obvious.

I have watched his reactions to the noisy devotee, the lazy worker, the mischievous monkey, the crazed adorer, the over-bold flatterer, the one who would exploit his name. I have seen how totally impervious he was to all considerations of power, place, prestige, and how his grace shined equally on prince and peasant. **Then, can I doubt that here indeed we have, if not God Himself – for He is omnipresent – at least Greatness incarnate, the majesty of the ancient hills blending with the sweetness of the evening star?**

Sit before him, as we used to sit those summer evenings, and we knew that we were not that foolish excited little person sitting there, but the eternal Self out of whom this world has spun its cobweb yarn of forms.

I know no other man whose mere presence has thus enabled me to make the personality drop down in the abyss of nothingness, where it belongs. I have found no other human being who so emanates his grace that it can catch away the ordinary man from his stillness and plunge him deep in the ecstasy of timeless omnipresent being.

His grace, which of course is the grace of God whose representative and messenger he is, has been enough to give brief glimpses even to me of that infinity, wherein he always seemed to live. He will brush away all this nonsense of my talk with a wave of hand and a smile, while saying as he once did, “It is the same in this and in another place. That bliss you feel is in the Self, and you superimpose it upon the place or environment in which you are bodily set.” But, Bhagavan, we say what we like about you and the blessings we have received *from you*; we shall not let you interrupt our foolish words. It is our chance to publicly proclaim our debt to the silent Teacher of Tiruvannamalai.

Those who are in the Ashram are very gentle, considerate and kindly. The generous services were given by a friend who used to translate for me the Tamil answers to my English questions and got translations approved by Bhagavan himself before giving them to me. Even the human hospitality of Bhagavan himself, though sometimes a little embarrassing to my innate shyness perhaps, was always a delightful thing.

His very presence among us is a benediction. His attaining a clear and unflickering vision of the Self has raised the whole world a little nearer to the Truth. His words have been an unfathomed ocean of comfort and inspiration to thousands. His silent peacefulness has revealed the Eternal in human form, as mountains, seas and skies above can usually reveal It.

4. Prof. K. Swaminathan

Prof. K. Swaminathan taught English at the Presidency College, Madras. He was the Chief Editor of the monumental 100- volume *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* and for some time edited *The Mountain Path*.

I was told about Bhagavan in 1927, but then I was not interested in someone sitting still and doing nothing when so much was needed to be done to change this mad, bad world, and Mahatma Gandhi strode the land doing so many things ‘socially relevant’. In 1940, I had many baffling problems and mental conflicts. Sir P.S.Sivaswami Iyer, my *pater familias* after my father’s death, advised me to take a series of lessons on the *Brahma Sutras* from a great Sanskrit pandit in Bangalore. Then I could see that behind this apparent laziness of Bhagavan there was something very profound. And, that man said, this is not mere theory, you go to Tiruvannamalai and see for yourself.

As one deeply interested in poetry, I have read the poems of Muruganar [No.53] and said to myself, good heavens, the man who could inspire this kind of poetry is divine. It moved me completely; Muruganar completely converted me. Then, when Grant Duff [No.7] came to my college, I took him around. After I spent a week with him, he casually asked me, “Have you seen Ramana Maharshi?” I said to myself, here is an Englishman steeped in Italian philosophy telling me about the Maharshi. I felt ashamed, and I was ashamed. All these events convinced the obstinate camel that the oasis he badly needed was near and easy to reach.

When I told Sir Sivaswami about my decision to visit the Ashram, he said, you are a young man with many responsibilities; when you go to Bhagavan you will be swept off your feet and fall into an abyss. Don’t go alone, tie yourself in many bonds; take somebody you like, you are attached to, to hold you. So I took my wife and two of my students with me.

My first *darshan* of the Maharshi on September 29, 1940, was the most memorable event of my life. The last *darshan* occurred a fortnight before his *mahanirvana* on April 14, 1950. In between, during many weekends and college vacations, repeated visits to the Ashram kept me (as spells of sound sleep keep one) in health, happiness and taut efficiency. **The pure happiness I enjoyed was that of a child when it sits securely in its mother’s lap.**

Bhagavan was a perfect Impersonality, like the sun in the sky or like unnoticed daylight in an inner chamber. This impersonal being would suddenly become a Person full of *sattvic* power, highly human, charming, mother-like, who could communicate with sharp precision his own Awareness Bliss to other persons according to their needs and moods. The sun now came down and played with us as the light of the moon to illuminate the mind, or as the fire in the home to cook our food.

The Maharshi was fond of the story of Tattvaraya who composed a *bharani* in honour of his guru and invited an assembly of learned men to hear him. The pandits raised the objection that a *bharani* could be sung only in honour of a warrior who had killed a thousand elephants and certainly not in honour of a mere ascetic. Then the poet said, “Let us all go to my guru and settle

the matter in his presence.” They went to the guru and the poet reported the pandits’ objection. The guru sat silent and so did all others. Thus days passed, with no thought at all occurring to any of them. At the end of the long, silent session the guru made a slight movement of his mind and the assembly declared with one voice: “Vanquishing a thousand elephants is nothing before this man’s power to quell the rutting elephants of our egos.” And they called upon Tattvaraya to proceed to read his *bharani*. Bhagavan’s special mission was to convince all and sundry that by self-enquiry, ‘Who am I?’ (his *brahmastra*), and self-surrender, anyone of us can and should live securely, comfortably and happily in both worlds, the Timeless and time.

Once in the 1940s, I was sitting outside the hall with many devotees. Bhagavan was reclining on a couch. A group of learned pandits was discussing passages from the Upanishads with great enthusiasm and profundity. All, including Bhagavan, appeared to be attentively listening to the interesting discussion when, all of a sudden, Bhagavan rose from the couch, walked some distance and stood before a villager who was standing looking lowly with palms joined. All eyes turned to Bhagavan and the villager who was standing at a distance. They appeared to be conversing. Soon Bhagavan returned to his couch and the discussion was resumed. Being curious to know why Bhagavan had to go out to meet a villager, I slipped away from the discussion and caught up with the villager before he left the Ashram. He told me that Bhagavan was asking why I was standing so far and also asked my name, about my village, what I did, and about my family etc. I enquired, “Did you ask him anything?” The villager replied, “When I asked him how I could earn his blessings, he asked whether there was a temple in my village and the name of the temple deity. When I told him the deity’s name, he said, go on repeating the name of the deity and you would receive all the blessings needed.” I came back to Bhagavan’s presence, but lost all interest in the discussions. I felt that the simple humility and devotion of a peasant had evoked a far greater response from our Master than any amount of learning. I then decided that though a scholar by profession, I should always remain a humble, ignorant peasant at heart and pray for Bhagavan’s grace and blessings.

5. N. Balarama Reddy

N. Balarama Reddy was brought up in spiritually-oriented surroundings in a village in Andhra Pradesh. He switched over to Sri Ramana in 1937 from Sri Aurobindo ashram, where he had gone in 1931.

Sri Bhagavan was a being whose advent into this world would bless the earth goddess. There is a line in the *Bhagvatam* which says: “They put their feet on the earth and the earth feels blessed.” To my mind, Bhagavan was one of the most glorious beings that have ever visited this earth. **The more you live with him, the more you feel that you had done something in the past, something great which entitled you to deserve association with Bhagavan. Being with him is being elevated.** You need not talk with him; you need not try to learn from him through speech. He was pouring out his grace like the rays of the sun – no stopping ever. Even now he will answer your call provided you are sincere – utterly sincere.

It is hard to describe and a wonder to see how Bhagavan bound all with his love. Words would never pass between Bhagavan and his longstanding devotees. Nevertheless, these devotees – whether men, women or children – knew that Bhagavan’s love and grace were being showered on them. By a single glance, a nod of the head, or perhaps by a simple enquiry from Bhagavan, sometimes not even directly but through a second person – the devotee knew that he was Bhagavan’s very own and that he cared for him. In his presence all distinctions and differences were resolved.

In Bhagavan we found a being that was so surcharged with Reality that coming into his presence would effect a dynamic change in us. The Divine Power of his presence was something remarkable, entirely outstanding.

I always felt there was something tangibly distinct in Bhagavan’s hall. **When we walked into the hall and sat down, we immediately felt that we had entered a different plane of existence. It was as if the world we knew did not exist – Bhagavan’s presence, his other-worldliness, would envelop the atmosphere. When we walked out of the hall we were again confronted with the old world we knew all too well.**

Usually, we could not tell if Bhagavan was asleep or awake, though in reality he was always awake – awake to the Self. How he managed to remain in that unbroken state of universal awareness and still functioned in a limited, physical form remains a mystery. We cannot understand that state. In spite of his exalted state, he interacted with us at our level. He took considerable interest in the functioning of the Ashram and the accommodation of visitors.

His actions were spontaneous and natural, and by watching him we learnt how to live in the world. His example was the greatest teaching, and his divine presence far outweighed a lifetime of strenuous *sadhana*. **Just to think of him or sit in his presence used to raise us to higher levels of blessedness.**

He understood human frailty and was determined to teach us how to transcend it, not dwell upon it. Bhagavan’s whole life was simply an offering to the world. Everything he did was for

others only. He wanted to liberate us from the mistaken belief that we are this body, mind and ego. For this he gave the method of Self-enquiry and showed us how to practise it. He effectively aided seekers by his powerful presence and grace.

Many incidents in my life have instilled faith in the guiding presence of the Maharshi. I also felt assured that surrendering to him as my Guru was the best decision I had ever made.

6. Grant Duff

Grant Duff (Douglas Ainslie), a scholar and a senior government official in Madras Presidency in the 1930s, was nephew of Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff, Governor of Madras in the 1880s.

I do not know what happened when I saw the Maharshi for the first time, but **the moment he looked at me, I felt he was the Truth and the Light.** There could be no doubt about it, and all the doubts and speculations I had accumulated during the past many years disappeared in the Radiance of the Holy One. Though my visits to the Ashram were brief, I felt that every moment I was there I was building up within me what could never be destroyed.

There it did not take me long to see that I was in direct contact with one who has 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. How did I get 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 other senses collaborating. I do 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.

Should those who have it in their power to visit the Ashram delay, they will have only themselves to blame in future lives. **Never perhaps in world history was the Supreme Truth – Reality, Sat – placed within such easy reach of so vast a multitude.** Here and now through no special merit of our own, we may approach Reality. The sole difficulty is that of paying for the journey¹ but the reward is Knowledge of the Self. The Maharshi has extraordinary insight into other beings. He sees and knows everything about all those who come before him. **The Maharshi has particularly appealed to me because of his extreme politeness and gentleness. He is gentle to a degree that surpasses gentleness.** My visit to the Sage of Arunachala has been the greatest event in my life.

7. Chhaganlal V. Yogi

Chhaganlal V. Yogi was a businessman of Bombay who authored *SriRamana Mahima*. He first visited Sri Ramana in 1939.

On my first visit to the Ashram, I found Sri Ramana seated on a couch, as quiet and unmoving as a statue. His presence did not seem to emanate anything unusual and I was very disappointed to discover that he displayed no interest in me. I had expected warmth and intimacy, but unfortunately I seemed to be in the presence of someone who lacked both. From morning till evening I sat waiting to catch a glimpse of his grace, of his interest in me, a stranger who had come all the way from Bombay, but I evoked no response. After pinning such high hopes on him, his apparent lack of interest nearly broke my heart. Eventually, I decided to leave the Ashram. My mind, which was deeply tormented, felt that the psychic atmosphere in the hall was stuffy and choking. Unable to bear it any longer, I walked outside to get a breath of fresh air.

A young man called Gopalan came up to me and asked where I had come from. “Bombay”, I replied. He asked me if I had been introduced to the Master and led me to the office and then proceeded with me to the hall where he introduced me to Bhagavan. The Maharshi sent for a copy of the Gujarati translation of the *Upadesa Saaram* by Kishorelal Mashruwala, and asked me to chant verses from the book. While chanting, I could feel Bhagavan keenly observing me. **It seemed that the light of his eyes was suffusing my consciousness. Even without my being aware of it his silent gaze brought about a subtle but definite transformation in me.** My erstwhile sadness completely disappeared leaving in my heart an inexplicable emotion of joy.

That evening I sat close to Bhagavan in the dining room. **In my exalted state the food I ate seemed to have an unusual and unearthly taste. I quite literally felt that I was participating in some heavenly meal in the direct presence of God.**

During the three days of my stay in the proximity of the Divine Master, I found my whole outlook entirely changed. After that short period, I could find little evidence of my old self, a self that had been tied down with all kinds of preconceptions and prejudices. I felt that I had lost the chains that bind the eyes of true vision. I became aware that the whole texture of my mind had undergone a change. **The divine magician opened up for me a strange new world of illumination, hope and joy. I felt that his presence on earth alone constituted sufficient proof that humanity, suffering and wounded because of its obstinate ignorance, could be uplifted and saved. For the first time I fully understood the significance of *darshan*.**

In 1945, I decided to wind up my printing press in Bombay and settle down at Sri Ramanasramam. I had no prearranged plan for closing down my business. I merely relied on Bhagavan. One day, in the early hours of the morning, while I was still in bed and only half awake, I saw a vision in which Bhagavan appeared before me. By his side stood a gentleman whom I recognised as a friend of mine. He had neither been to the Ashram nor had he ever

exhibited any faith in Bhagavan. The following conversation took place between Bhagavan and me.

Bhagavan: You want to sell your press, don't you?

Me: Yes Bhagavan, but I must find a buyer.

Bhagavan: Showing my friend standing by my side – 'Here is the buyer. He will buy your press, so sell it to him.'

Me: Since Bhagavan has been kind enough to show me the buyer; may he also favour me by stating the price at which I should execute the sale? Bhagavan then showed me a five-digit figure on the opposite wall shining as a neon sign. The amount indicated was reasonable.

Bhagavan and my friend then disappeared and the vision ended. By itself the vision was astonishing enough, but there was more to come. When I entered the press that day at 11 a.m., my friend from the vision was waiting for me. Of course, he had come to see me about some other work and had no idea that he had been singled out as a prospective buyer. Feeling that Bhagavan had sent him to me, I told him about the vision I had a few hours before. He listened to me very attentively. When I had finished my tale, he simply commented, "I will buy your press at the price indicated by your guru." There was no limit to my joy. My desire to sell was fulfilled by his grace and the sale was completed in less than a minute.

My original plan was to dispose of my printing press in Bombay and move to Sri Ramanasramam. However, when the devotees heard what I was planning to do, it was suggested to me that I could be of more use to the Ashram in Bangalore. I was asked to start a printing press there that could execute all printing work of the Ashram. I agreed to the idea and soon found myself in Bangalore, looking for suitable premises. I began to suspect that Bhagavan had assisted the sale of my original press because he had work for me to do in Bangalore.

Bhagavan used to say, "The state that is beyond speech and thought is called *mauna*. Silence is eternal speech. It is the perpetual flow of language; it is the supreme language."

Bhagavan was undoubtedly one of those rare *mahatmas* who had the power to banish the suffering through his presence, merely through giving *darshan*.

8. Ethel Merston

Ethel Merston, a French devotee, came to Sri Ramana in 1939. She settled down near Sri Ramanasramam for many years before and after Sri Ramana's *mahanirvana*.

In 1937-38, a small group of seekers in Paris was discussing teachings of J.Krishnamurti and others. All of us had read Brunton's *A Search in Secret India* [No.1]. One of us – Pascaline Mallet [No.75] had visited the Ashram and been much impressed. Pascaline had asked me to help her to translate '*Who am I?*' into French. The book made a deep impression on me. We were curious to see the great man so eulogized by Brunton.

Bhagavan drew me to Tiruvannamalai in 1939. It took me a few moments after entering his hall to know that **I was in the presence of the greatest teacher I have ever met**. From the first moment in his presence he made me feel at home, and the peace in that little hall drew me as nothing had before. We had planned to stay for two days. When finally I had to leave, I knew that sometime I should return. The return came two years later and from then on for five consecutive years, I visited the Ashram each summer to sit in Bhagavan's presence. Then in 1944 with my work in North India coming to an end, I came to live permanently near him.

In the early days, the women sat on either side of the entrance, facing the couch, while the men sat down on the other side at the foot of the couch. Every kind of caste, creed and nationality came for *darshan*. To each and everyone, from maharaja to sweeper, Bhagavan was the same gentle twinkling-eyed friend. Newcomers including me, would begin by asking him questions, but soon found no necessity to voice them; in one way or another, without asking, the questions would be answered and problems solved.

Once I had been mulling over a problem for three days without finding the solution. The fourth day, while sitting opposite to Bhagavan, and still harassed by the problem, Bhagavan suddenly turned his eyes upon me. After a moment, he asked one of his attendants to find him a certain book of *puranic* stories; he turned over the pages until, finding the passage he wanted, he handed over the book to one of the men who knew English and told him to read the story aloud. That story gave me the answer to my problem. He taught each seeker as suited his need. He was clairvoyant and could read our thoughts. Of psychic powers, I saw him use none, beyond **conveying thoughts silently and so powerfully that the vibrations would sometimes roll in waves down the hall almost hurting one by the force with which they impinged on the body**, not only of the recipient, for whom the thought was meant, but on many of us sitting there.

Bhagavan's gaze was spellbinding. Once an elderly *sannyasi* entered the hall. Bhagavan, who was reading, dropped his book immediately and looked straight up at the man who took two strides forward and stood near Bhagavan's feet, returning his gaze. There was such love and joy in Bhagavan's gaze that one could almost hear him say, "So you have come at last, my beloved brother." **The two went on gazing at each other, without a word spoken aloud, but I could literally feel them speaking to each other**, the flow of the

current going back and forth between them. They talked thus voicelessly for some ten or fifteen minutes, then suddenly the *sannyasi* dropped to the floor and passed into *samadhi* for the next two hours. Bhagavan quietly took up his book again and went on, remaining as though nothing had happened, as doubtless indeed for him it had not. But for us it was an unforgettable experience.

Quite apart from solving our problems, or helping us to do so, just to sit in Bhagavan's presence was to realize or get a feeling of what true relaxation and a quiet mind might mean. It did not mean shutting oneself away, isolating oneself, on the contrary, it meant being with all, yet remaining within, being in the world and yet not of it.

During the last years of Bhagavan's life, we learned many lessons from him. But one, which he never ceased to hammer into us was that he was not the body, the body might go, but he would not go. He always was and always would be there with us, as now. I saw only three people cry as we spent the night keeping vigil of the corpse. We just knew that Bhagavan had not gone, so why cry for him, or rather, cry for a non-existent loss? We who knew him in the body are not the only ones to feel his presence. Even after he left the body, people in England who never knew him in the flesh, have told me that after reading about him, they have had the experience of his actual presence near them, even of his touch, ready with his grace to help.

II. EXCERPTS FROM TALKS WITH SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

1. Talk #285.

D.: Why does not Sri Bhagavan go about and preach the Truth to the people at large?

M.: How do you know that I am not doing it? Does preaching consist in mounting a platform and haranguing to the people around? Preaching is simple communication of knowledge. It may be done in Silence too.

What do you think of a man listening to a harangue for an hour and going away without being impressed by it so as to change his life? Compare him with another who sits in a holy presence and leaves after some time with his outlook on life totally changed. Which is better: To preach loudly without effect or to sit silently sending forth intuitive forces to play on others?

Again how does speech arise? There is abstract knowledge (unmanifest). From it there rises the ego which gives rise to thoughts and words successively. So then: Words are therefore the great grandson of the original source. If words can produce an effect, how much more powerful should the preaching through silence be? Judge for yourself.

2. Talk #246.

Language is only a medium for communicating one's thoughts to another. It is called in only after thoughts arise; other thoughts arise after the 'I-thought' rises; the 'I-thought' is the root of all conversation. When one remains without thinking one understands another by means of the universal language of silence.

Silence is ever-speaking; it is a perennial flow of language; it is interrupted by speaking. These words obstruct that mute language. There is electricity flowing in a wire. With resistance to its passage, it glows as a lamp or revolves as a fan. In the wire it remains as electric energy. Similarly also, silence is the eternal flow of language, obstructed by words.

What one fails to know by conversation extending to several years can be known in a trice in Silence, or in front of Silence - e.g., Dakshinamurti, and his four disciples. That is the highest and most effective language.

3. Talk #487.

Afternoon

D.: What is the object of Self-Realisation?

M.: Self-Realisation is the final goal and it is the end in itself.

D.: I mean, what is the use of Self-Realisation?

M.: Why should you seek Self-Realisation? Why do you not rest content with your present state? It is evident that you are discontented with the present state. The discontent is at an end if you realise the Self.

D.: What is that Self-Realisation which removes the discontent? I am in the world and there are wars in it. Can Self-Realisation put an end to it?

M.: Are you in the world? Or is the world in you?

D.: I do not understand. The world is certainly around me.

M.: You speak of the world and happenings in it. They are mere ideas in you. The ideas are in the mind. The mind is within you. And so the world is within you.

D.: I do not follow you. Even if I do not think of the world, the world is still there.

M.: Do you mean to say that the world is apart from the mind and it can exist in the absence of the mind?

D.: Yes.

M.: Does the world exist in your deep sleep?

D.: It does.

M.: Do you see it in your sleep?

D.: No, I don't. But others, who are awake, see it.

M.: Are you so aware in your sleep? Or do you become aware of the other's knowledge now?

D.: In my waking state.

M.: So you speak of waking knowledge and not of sleep-experience. The existence of the world in your waking and dream states is admitted because they are the products of the mind. The mind is withdrawn in sleep and the world is in the condition of a seed. It becomes manifest over again when you wake up. The ego springs forth, identifies itself with the body and sees the world. So the world is a mental creation.

D.: How can it be?

M.: Do you not create a world in your dream? The waking state also is a long drawn out dream. There must be a seer behind the waking and dream experiences. Who is that seer? Is it the body?

D.: It cannot be.

M.: Is it the mind?

D.: It must be so.

M.: But you remain in the absence of the mind.

D.: How?

M.: In deep sleep.

D.: I do not know if I am then.

M.: If you were not how do you recollect yesterday's experiences? Is it possible that there was a break in the continuity of the 'I' during sleep?

D.: It may be.

M.: If so, a Johnson may wake up as a Benson. How will the identity of the individual be established?

D.: I don't know.

M.: If this argument is not clear, follow a different line. You admit "I slept well", "I feel refreshed after a sound sleep". So sleep was your experience. The experiencer now identifies himself with the 'I' in the speaker. So this 'I' must have been in sleep also.

D.: Yes.

M.: So 'I' was in sleep, if the world was then there, did it say that it existed?

D.: No. But the world tells me its existence now. Even if I deny its existence, I may knock myself against a stone and hurt my foot. The injury proves the existence of the stone and so of the world.

M.: Quite so. The stone hurts the foot. Does the foot say that there is the stone?

D.: No. - 'I'.

M.: Who is this 'I'? It cannot be the body nor the mind as we have seen before. This 'I' is the one who experiences the waking, dream and sleep states. The three states are changes which do not affect the individual. The experiences are like pictures passing on a screen in the cinema. The appearance and disappearance of the pictures do not affect the screen. So also, the three states alternate with one another leaving the Self unaffected. The waking and the dream states are creations of the mind. So the Self covers all. To know that the Self remains happy in its perfection is Self-Realisation. Its use lies in the realisation of Perfection and thus of Happiness.

D.: Can it be complete happiness to remain Self-realised if one does not contribute to the happiness of the world? How can one be so happy when there is a war in Spain, a war in China? Is it not selfishness to remain Self-realised without helping the world?

M.: The Self was pointed out to you to cover the universe and also transcend it. The world cannot remain apart from the Self. If the realisation of such Self be called selfishness that selfishness must cover the world also. It is nothing contemptible.

D.: Does not the realised man continue to live just like a non-realised being?

M.: Yes, with this difference that the realised being does not see the world as being apart from the Self, he possesses true knowledge and the internal happiness of being perfect, whereas the other person sees the world apart, feels imperfection and is miserable. Otherwise their physical actions are similar.

D.: The realised being also knows that there are wars being waged in the world, just like the other man.

M.: Yes.

D.: How then can he be happy?

M.: Is the cinema screen affected by a scene of fire burning or sea rising? So it is with the Self. The idea that I am the body or the mind is so deep that one cannot get over it even if convinced otherwise. One experiences a dream and knows it to be unreal on waking. Waking experience is unreal in other states. So each state contradicts the others. They are therefore mere changes taking place in the seer, or phenomena appearing in the Self, which is unbroken and remains unaffected by them. Just as the waking, dream and sleep states are phenomena, so also birth, growth and death are phenomena in the Self. which continues to be unbroken and unaffected. Birth and death are only ideas. They pertain to the body or the mind. The Self exists before the birth of this body and will remain after the death of this body. So it is with the series of bodies taken up in succession. The Self is immortal. The phenomena are changeful and appear mortal. The fear of death is of the body. It is not true of the Self. Such fear is due to ignorance. Realisation means True Knowledge of the Perfection and Immortality of the Self. Mortality is only an idea and cause of misery. You get rid of it by realising the Immortal nature of the Self.

4. Talk #640.

At about 4 p.m. Sri Bhagavan, who was writing something intently, turned His eyes slowly towards the window to the north; He closed the fountain pen with the cap and put it in its case; He closed the notebook and put it aside; He removed the spectacles, folded them in the case and left them aside. He leaned back a little, looked up overhead, turned His face this way and that; and looked here and there. He passed His hand over His face and looked contemplative. Then He turned to someone in the hall and said softly:

M.: The pair of sparrows just came here and complained to me that their nest had been removed. I looked up and found their nest missing.” Then He called for the attendant, Madhava Swami, and asked: “Madhava, did anyone remove the sparrows’ nest?”

The attendant, who walked in leisurely, answered with an air of unconcern: “I removed the nests as often as they were built. I removed the last one this very afternoon.”

M.: That’s it. That is why the sparrows complained. The poor little ones! How they take the pieces of straw and shreds in their tiny beaks and struggle to build their nests!

Attendant: But, why should they build here, over our heads?

M.: Well - well. Let us see who succeeds in the end.

5. Talk #251.

An aristocratic lady looking very intelligent, though pensive, asked: “We had heard of you, Maharajji, as the kindest and noblest soul. We had long desired to have your *darsan*. I came here once before, on the 14th of last month, but could not remain in your holy presence as long as I wished. Being a woman and also young, I could not stand the people around, and so broke away hurriedly after asking one or two simple questions. There are no holy men like you in our part of the country. I am happy as I have everything I want. But I do not have that peace of mind which brings happiness. I now come here seeking your blessing so that I may gain it.”

M.: *Bhakti* fulfils your desire.

D.: I want to know how I can gain that peace of mind. Kindly be pleased to advise me.

M.: Yes - devotion and surrender.

D.: Am I worthy of being a devotee?

M.: Everyone can be a devotee. Spiritual fare is common to all and never denied to anyone - be the person old or young, male or female.

D.: That is exactly what I am anxious to know. I am young and a *grihini* (housewife). There are duties of *grihastha dharma* (the household). Is devotion consistent with such a position?

M.: Certainly. What are you? You are not the body. You are Pure Consciousness. *Grihastha dharma* and the world are only phenomena appearing on that Pure Consciousness. It remains unaffected. What prevents you from being your own Self?

D.: Yes I am already aware of the line of teaching of Maharshi. It is the quest for the Self. But my doubt persists if such quest is compatible with *grihastha* life.

M.: The Self is always there. It is you. There is nothing but you. Nothing can be apart from you. The question of compatibility or otherwise does not arise.

D.: I shall be more definite. Though a stranger, I am obliged to confess the cause of my anxiety. I am blessed with children. A boy - a good *brahmachari* - passed away in February. I was grief-stricken. I was disgusted with this life. I want to devote myself to spiritual life. But my duties as a *grihini* do not permit me to lead a retired life. Hence my doubt.

M.: Retirement means abidance in the Self. Nothing more. It is not leaving one set of surroundings and getting entangled in another set, nor even leaving the concrete world and becoming involved in a mental world. The birth of the son, his death, etc., are seen in the Self only. Recall the state of sleep. Were you aware of anything happening? If the son or the world be real, should they not be present with you in sleep? You cannot deny your existence in sleep. Nor can you deny you were happy then. You are the same person now speaking and raising doubts. You are not happy, according to you. But you were happy in sleep. What has transpired in the meantime that happiness of sleep has broken down? It is the rise of ego. That is the new arrival in the *jagrat* state. There was no ego in sleep. The birth of the ego is called the birth of the person. There is no other kind of birth. Whatever is born is bound to die. Kill the ego: there is no fear of recurring death for what is once dead. The Self remains even after the death of the ego. That is Bliss - that is Immortality.

D.: How is that to be done?

M.: See for whom these doubts exist. Who is the doubter? Who is the thinker? That is the ego. Hold it. The other thoughts will die away. The ego is left pure; see where from the ego arises. That is pure consciousness.

D.: It seems difficult. May we proceed by *bhakti marga*?

M.: It is according to individual temperament and equipment. *Bhakti* is the same as *vichara*.

D.: I mean meditation, etc.

M.: Yes. Meditation is on a form. That will drive away other thoughts. The one thought of God will dominate others. That is concentration. The object of meditation is thus the same as that of *vichara*.

D.: Do we not see God in concrete form?

M.: Yes. God is seen in the mind. The concrete form may be seen. Still it is only in the devotee's mind. The form and appearance of God-manifestation are determined by the mind of the devotee.

But it is not the finality. There is the sense of duality. It is like a dream-vision. After God is perceived, *vichara* commences. That ends in Realisation of the Self. *Vichara* is the ultimate route. Of course, a few find *vichara* practicable. Others find *bhakti* easier.

D.: Did not Mr. Brunton find you in London? Was it only a dream?

M.: Yes. He had the vision. He saw me in his mind.

D.: Did he not see this concrete form?

M.: Yes, still in his mind.

D.: How shall I reach the Self?

M.: There is no reaching the Self. If the Self were to be reached, it would mean that the Self is not now and here, but that it should be got anew. What is got afresh, will also be lost. So it will be impermanent. What is not permanent is not worth striving for. So I say, the Self is not reached. You are the Self. You are already That. The fact is that you are ignorant of your blissful state. Ignorance supervenes and draws a veil over the pure Bliss. Attempts are directed only to remove this ignorance. This ignorance consists in wrong knowledge. The wrong knowledge consists in the false identification of the Self with the body, the mind, etc. This false identity must go and there remains the Self.

D.: How is that to happen?

M.: By enquiry into the Self.

D.: It is difficult. Can I realise the Self, Maharaj? Kindly tell me. It looks so difficult.

M.: You are already the Self. Therefore realisation is common to everyone. Realisation knows no difference in the aspirants. This very doubt, "Can I realise?" or the feeling, "I have not realised" are the obstacles. Be free from these also.

D.: But there should be the experience. Unless I have the experience how can I be free from these afflicting thoughts?

M.: These are also in the mind. They are there because you have identified yourself with the body. If this false identity drops away, ignorance vanishes and Truth is revealed.

D.: Yes, I feel it difficult. There are disciples of Bhagavan who have had His Grace and realised without any considerable difficulty. I too wish to have that Grace. Being a woman and living at a long distance I cannot avail myself of Maharshi's holy company as much as I would wish and as often as I would. Possibly I may not be able to return. I request Bhagavan's Grace. When I am back in my place, I want to remember Bhagavan. May Bhagavan be pleased to grant my prayer!

M.: Where are you going? You are not going anywhere. Even supposing you are the body, has your body come from Lucknow to Tiruvannamalai? You had simply sat in the car and one conveyance or another had moved; and finally you say that you have come here. The fact is that you are not the body. The Self does not move. The world moves in it. You are only what you are.

There is no change in you. So then even after what looks like departure from here, you are here and there and everywhere. These scenes shift.

As for Grace - Grace is within you. If it is external, it is useless. Grace is the Self. You are never out of its operation. Grace is always there.

D.: I mean that when I remember your form, my mind should be strengthened and that response should come from your side too. I should not be left to my individual efforts which are after all only weak.

M.: Grace is the Self. I have already said, "If you remember Bhagavan, you are prompted to do so by the Self." Is not Grace already there? Is there a moment when Grace is not operating in you? Your remembrance is the forerunner of Grace. That is the response, that is the stimulus, that is the Self and that is Grace. There is no cause for anxiety.

D.: Can I engage in spiritual practice, even remaining in *samsara*?

M.: Yes, certainly. One ought to do so.

D.: Is not *samsara* a hindrance? Do not all the holy books advocate renunciation?

M.: *Samsara* is only in your mind. The world does not speak out, saying 'I am the world'. Otherwise, it must be ever there - not excluding your sleep. Since it is not in sleep it is impermanent. Being impermanent it has no stamina. Having no stamina it is easily subdued by the Self. The Self alone is permanent. Renunciation is non-identification of the Self with the non-self. On the disappearance of ignorance the non-self ceases to exist. That is true renunciation.

D.: Why did you then leave your home in your youth?

M.: That is my *prarabdha* (fate). One's course of conduct in this life is determined by one's *prarabdha*. My *prarabdha* is this way. Your *prarabdha* is that way.

D.: Should I not also renounce?

M.: If that had been your *prarabdha*, the question would not have arisen.

D.: I should therefore remain in the world and engage in spiritual practice. Well, can I get realisation in this life?

M.: This has been already answered. You are always the Self. Earnest efforts never fail. Success is bound to result.

D.: Will Maharshi be pleased to extend Grace to me also!

Maharshi smiled and said "Um! Um!" With blessings and salutation, the interview came to a close and the party departed directly.

6. Talk #594.

The Spanish lady, Madam Mercedes De Acorta, has written a letter to Mr. Hague, the American mining engineer who is here as a temporary resident for the last two months. She has raised a few questions there: “If the individual Self merges into the universal Self, how can one pray to God for the uplift of humanity?” The question seems to be common among the thinkers of the West.

Sri Bhagavan said: They pray to God and finish with “Thy Will be done!” If His Will be done why do they pray at all? It is true that the Divine Will prevails at all times and under all circumstances. The individuals cannot act of their own accord. Recognise the force of the Divine Will and keep quiet. Each one is looked after by God. He has created all. You are one among 2,000 millions. When He looks after so many will He omit you? Even common sense dictates that one should abide by His Will. Again there is no need to let Him know your needs. He knows them Himself and will look after them.

Still more, why do you pray? Because you are helpless yourself and you want the Higher Power to help you. Well, does not your Creator and Protector know your weakness? Should you parade your weakness in order to make Him know it?

D.: But God helps those who help themselves.

M.: Certainly. Help yourself and that is itself according to God’s Will. Every action is prompted by Him only. As for prayer for the sake of others, it looks so unselfish on the surface of it. But analyse the feeling and you will detect selfishness there also. You desire others’ happiness so that you may be happy. Or you want the credit for having interceded on others’ behalf. God does not require an intermediary. Mind your business and all will be well.

D.: Does not God work His Will through some chosen person?

M.: God is in all and works through all. But His presence is better recognised in purified minds. The pure ones reflect God’s actions more clearly than the impure minds. Therefore people say that they are the chosen ones. But the ‘chosen’ man does not himself say so. If he thinks that he is the intermediary then it is clear that he retains his individuality and that there is no complete surrender.

D.: Are not the Brahmins considered to be the priests or intermediaries between God and others?

M.: Yes. But who is a Brahmin? A Brahmin is one who has realised Brahman. Such a one has no sense of individuality in him. He cannot think that he acts as an intermediary.

Again, as for prayer, a realised man does not see others as different from oneself. How can he pray at all, and to whom and for what? His very presence is the consummation of happiness for all. So long as you think that there are others different from you, you pray for them. But the sense of separateness is ignorance. This ignorance is again the cause of feeling helplessness. You know that you are weak and helpless. How then can you help others? If you say, “By prayer to God”, God knows His business and does not require your intercession for others.

Help yourself so that you may become strong. That is done by complete surrender. That means you offer yourself to Him. So you cannot retain your individuality after surrender. You then abide by His Will. Thus Silence is the Highest of all achievements.

Silence is the ocean in which all the rivers of all the religions discharge themselves. So says Thayumanavar. He also adds that the Vedic religion is the only one which combines both philosophy and religion.

7. Talk #595.

The two lady visitors returned in the morning and the younger one asked: “Is the experience of the Highest State the same to all? Or is there any difference?”

M.: The Highest State is the same and the experience is also the same.

D.: But I find some difference in the interpretations put on the Highest Truth.

M.: The interpretations are made with the mind. The minds are different and so the interpretations are different.

D.: I mean to ask if the seers express themselves differently?

M.: The expressions may differ according to the nature of the seekers. They are meant to guide the seekers. One seer speaks in the terms of Christianity, another in those of Islam, a third of Buddhism, etc. Is that due to their upbringing?

M.: Whatever may be their upbringing, their experience is the same. But the modes of expression differ according to circumstances.

III. EXCERPTS FROM DAY BY DAY WITH BHAGAVAN

1. 16-3-45

A visitor: Should I give up my business and take to reading books on Vedanta?

Bhagavan: If the objects have an independent existence, *i.e.*, if they exist anywhere apart from you, then it may be possible for you to go away from them. But they don't exist apart from you; they owe their existence to you, your thought. So, where can you go, to escape them? As for reading books on Vedanta, you may go on reading any number of them. They can only tell you, 'Realise the Self within you'. The Self cannot be found in books. You have to find it out for yourself, in yourself.

Almost the same question was put by another visitor in the afternoon and Bhagavan said, "Where can you go, fleeing from the world or objects? They are like the shadow of a man, which the man cannot flee from. There is a funny story of a man who wanted to bury his shadow. He dug a deep pit and, seeing his shadow at the bottom, was glad he could bury it so deep. He went on filling the pit and when he had completely filled it up he was surprised and disappointed to find the shadow on top. Even so, the objects or thoughts of them will be with you always, till you realise the Self."

2. 12-4-46 Afternoon

Question 4: What is the best way of dealing with desires, with a view to getting rid of them - satisfying them or suppressing them?

Bhagavan: If a desire can be got rid of by satisfying it, there will be no harm in satisfying such a desire. But desires generally are not eradicated by satisfaction. Trying to root them out that way is like pouring spirits to quench fire. At the same time, the proper remedy is not forcible suppression, since such repression is bound to react sooner or later into forceful surging up with undesirable consequences. The proper way to get rid of a desire is to find out "Who gets the desire? What is its source?" When this is found, the desire is rooted out and it will never again emerge or grow. Small desires such as the desire to eat, drink and sleep and attend to calls of nature, though these may also be classed among desires, you can safely satisfy. They will not implant *vasanas* in your mind, necessitating further birth. Those activities are just necessary to carry on life and are not likely to develop or leave behind *vasanas* or tendencies. As a general rule, therefore, there is no harm in satisfying a desire where the satisfaction will not lead to further desires by creating *vasanas* in the mind.

3. 1-6-46

In the afternoon Bhagavan explained in answer to Mr. H. C. Khanna of Kanpur :

Why should your occupation or duties in life interfere with your spiritual effort? For instance, there is a difference between your activities at home and in the office. In your office activities you are detached and so long as you do your duty you do not care what happens or whether it results in gain or loss to the employer. But your duties at home are performed with attachment and you are all the time anxious as to whether they will bring advantage or disadvantage to you and your family. But it is possible to perform all the activities of life with detachment and regard only the Self as real. It is wrong to suppose that if one is fixed in the Self one's duties in life will not be properly performed. It is like an actor. He dresses and acts and even feels the part he is playing, but he knows really that he is not that character but someone else in real life. In the same way, why should the body-consciousness or the feeling 'I-am-the-body' disturb you, once you know for certain that you are not the body but the Self? Nothing that the body does should shake you from abidance in the Self. Such abidance will never interfere with the proper and effective discharge of whatever duties the body has, any more than the actor's being aware of his real status in life interferes with his acting a part on the stage.

You ask whether you can tell yourself : "I am not the body but the Self". Of course, whenever you feel tempted to identify yourself with the body (as you may often have to, owing to old *vasanas*) it may be a help to remind yourself that you are not the body but the Self. But you should not make such repetition a *mantram*, constantly saying : "I am not the body but the Self". By proper enquiry into the Self, the notion 'I am this body' will gradually vanish and in time the faith that you are the Self will become unshakeable.

K M. Jivrajani: In the early stages would it not be a help to man to seek solitude and give up his outer duties in life?

Bhagavan: Renunciation is always in the mind, not in going to forests or solitary places or giving up one's duties. The main thing is to see that the mind does not turn outward but inward. It does not really rest with a man whether he goes to this place or that or whether he gives up his duties or not. All that happens according to destiny. All the activities that the body is to go through are determined when it first comes into existence. It does not rest with you to accept or reject them. The only freedom you have is to turn your mind inward and renounce activities there

K M. Jivrajani: But is it not possible for something to be a help, especially to a beginner? Like a fence round a young tree. For instance, don't our books say that it is helpful to go on pilgrimage to sacred shrines or to get *sat sang*.

Bhagavan: Who said they are not helpful? Only such things do not rest with you, as turning your mind inward does. Many people desire the pilgrimage or *sat sang* that you mention, but do they all get it?

K. M. Jivrajani: Why is it that turning inward alone is left to us and not any outer things?

I answered: Nobody can answer that. That is the Divine scheme.

Bhagavan: If you want to go to fundamentals, you must enquire who you are and find out who it is who has freedom or destiny. Who are you and why did you get this body that has these limitations?

4. 29-12-45 Night

Mr. P. C. Desai introduced Mr. P. C. Dewanji (Retd. Sub-Judge) who was returning from Trivandrum, where he had presided over a section of the Philosophical Conference.

Mr. Dewanji asked Bhagavan, “What is the easiest way to attain one-pointedness of mind?” Bhagavan said, “The best way is to see the source of the mind. See if there is such a thing as the mind. It is only if there is a mind that the question of making it one-pointed will arise. When you investigate by turning inwards, you find there is no such thing as the mind.”

Then Mr. P. C. Desai quoted Bhagavan’s “Upadesa Saram” in Sanskrit to the effect, “When you investigate the nature of mind continuously or without break, you find there is no such thing as the mind. This is the straight path for all.”

The visitor again asked, “It is said in our scriptures that God it is that creates, sustains and destroys all and that He is immanent in all. If so and if God does everything and if all that we do is according to God’s *niyati* (law), and had already been planned in the Cosmic Consciousness, is there individual personality and any responsibility for it?”

Bhagavan: “Of course, there is. The same scriptures have laid down rules as to what men should or should not do. If man is not responsible, then why should those rules have been laid down? You talk of God’s *niyati* and things happening according to it. If you ask God why this creation and all, He would tell you it is according to your karma again. If you believe in God and His *niyati* working out everything, completely surrender yourself to Him and there will be no responsibility for you. Otherwise find out your real nature and thus attain freedom.”

5. 21-1-46

Mr. P. C. Desai asked Bhagavan, “In verse 14, they have translated the second line of the Sanskrit verse as ‘If the mind is continuously fixed on meditation of the Self, etc.’ Is that all right, seeing that neither ‘continuously’ nor ‘Self’ is found in the original?”

Bhagavan: *Eka chintana* involves continuous thought. If no other thought is to come, the one thought has to be continuous. What is meant by the verse is as follows. The previous verses have said that for controlling the mind breath-control or *pranayama* may be helpful. This verse says that the mind so brought under control or to the state of *laya* should not be allowed to be in mere *laya* or a state like sleep, but that it should be directed towards *eka chintana* or one thought, whether that one thought is of the Self, the *ishta devata* or a *mantram*. What the one thought may be will depend on each man’s *pakva* or fitness. The verse leaves it as one thought.

6. 29-4-46 Afternoon

Mr Nanavati asked Bhagavan, “What is the heart referred to in the verse in “Upadesa Saram” where it is said 'Abiding in the heart is the best *karma*, *yoga*, *bhakti* and *jnana*'?”

Bhagavan: That which is the source of all, that in which all live, and that into which all finally merge, is the heart referred to.

Nanavati: How can we conceive of such a heart?

Bhagavan: Why should you conceive of anything? You have only to see wherefrom the 'I' springs.

Nanavati: I suppose mere *mauna* in speech is no good; but we must have *mauna* of the mind.

Bhagavan: Of course. If we have real *mauna*, that state in which the mind is merged into its source and has no more separate existence, then all other kinds of *mauna* will come of their own accord, *i.e.*, the *mauna* of words, of action and of the mind or *chitta*.

Bhagavan also quoted in this connection, the following from Thayumanavar.

“சித்த மவுனஞ் செயல்வாக் கெலாமவுனஞ்
சுத்த மவுனமென்பால் தோன்றிற் பராபரமே”

[If I get pure *mauna* (quiescence), I shall have *mauna* of *chitta*, mind, word and deed].

Bhagavan added, "Such *mauna* is not inertness but great activity. It is the most powerful speech."

7. 18-6-46

G. V. S. translated the *Pancharatna* (the last of the *Five Hymns*) of Bhagavan in English verse and showed it to Bhagavan.

Bhagavan said : “The third stanza deals with the *sat* aspect, the fourth with the *chit* and the fifth with the *ananda*. The *jnani* becomes one with the *sat* or Reality, like the river merging in the ocean; the Yogi sees the light of *chit*; the *bhakta* or *karma-yogin* is immersed in the ocean of *ananda*."

8. 18-4-46 Afternoon

Mr. Nanavati of Bombay asked Bhagavan, "In the fifth stanza of “Arunachala Pancharatnam” reference is made to seeing 'Your form in everything'. What is the form referred to?"

Bhagavan said, "The stanza says that one should completely surrender one's mind, turn it inwards and see 'you' the Self within and then see the Self in 'you' in everything. It is only after seeing the Self within that one will be able to see the Self in everything. One must first realise there is nothing but the Self and that he is that Self, and then only he can see everything as the form of the Self. That is the meaning of saying, 'See the Self in everything and everything in the Self', as is stated

in the Gita and other books. It is the same truth that is taught in Stanza 4 of the "Reality in Forty Verses". If you have the idea that you are something with form, that you are limited by this body, and that being within this body you have to see through these eyes, God and the world also will appear to you as form. If you realise you are without form, that you are unlimited, that you alone exist, that you are the eye, the infinite eye, what is there to be seen apart from the infinite eye? Apart from the eye, there is nothing to be seen. There must be a seer for an object to be seen, and there must be space, time, etc. But if the Self alone exists, it is both seer and seen, and above seeing or being seen."

IV. EXCERPTS FROM BHAGAVAN IN THE KITCHEN¹

By Sampurnamma, 23rd May, 1949

1. In the Kitchen - I

In 1932 I went to Tiruvannamalai with my sister and her husband Narayanan. We found Bhagavan in a palm leaf hut built over his mother's Samadhi. Dandapani Swami introduced me to Bhagavan saying, "This is Dr. Narayanan's wife's sister". The days that followed were days of deep and calm happiness. My devotion to Bhagavan took firm roots and never left me. I was able to sit for long hours in Bhagavan's presence without any mental activity and I would not notice the passing of time. I was not taught to meditate and surely did not know how to stop the mind from thinking, It would happen quite by itself, by his grace. I stayed for twenty days. When I was leaving, Bhagavan took a copy of Who am I? and gave it to me with his own hands.

In 1932 I went to Tiruvannamalai with my sister and her husband Narayanan. We found Bhagavan in a palm leaf hut built over his mother's Samadhi. I came back to Ramanasramam after a period of absence and I was asked to help in the kitchen. Bhagavan helped us in the kitchen, I soon learnt with his guidance the Ashram way of cooking. Bhagavan's firm principle was that health depended on food and could be set right and kept well by proper diet. He also believed that fine grinding and careful cooking would make any food easily digestible. So we used to spend hours in grinding and stewing.

He paid very close attention to proper cooking. He was always willing to leave the hall to give advice in the kitchen. He would teach us numberless ways of cooking grains, pulses and vegetables. He would tell us stories from his childhood, or about his mother, her ways and how she cooked sampurnam (sweet filling).

He was very strict with us in the kitchen. His orders were to be obeyed to the last detail. No choice was left to us to guess or try on our own. We had to do blindly as he taught us and by doing so, we were convinced that he was always right and that we would never fail if we put our trust in him. When I think of it now, I can see clearly that he used the work in the kitchen as a background for spiritual training. He taught us that work is love for others, that we never can work for ourselves. By his very presence he taught us that we are always in the presence of God and that all work is His. He used cooking to teach us religion and philosophy.

In the kitchen he was the master cook aiming at perfection in taste and appearance. One would think that he liked good food and enjoyed a hearty meal. Not at all. At dinner time he would mix up the little food he would allow to be put on his leaf — the sweet, the sour, and the savoury—everything together, and gulp it down carelessly as if he had no taste in his mouth. When we told him that it was not right to mix such nicely made up dishes, he would say, "Enough of multiplicity, Let us have some unity".

It was obvious that all the extraordinary care he gave to cooking was for our sake. He wanted us to keep good health and to those who worked in the kitchen, cooking became a deep spiritual experience. "You must cover your vegetables when you cook them," he used to say, "Then only will they keep their flavor and be fit for food. It is the same with the mind. You must put a lid over it and let it simmer quietly. Then only does a man become food fit for God to eat".

¹ Ramana Smriti Souvenir, Sri Ramana Maharshi Birth Centenary Offering 1980

One day he gave me a copy of Ribhu Gita and asked me to study it. I was not at all anxious to pore over a difficult text good only for learned pandits, and asked to be excused, saying that I did not understand a single word of it. "It does not matter that you do not understand," he said, "Still it will be of great benefit to you".

2. In the Kitchen - II

He would allow nothing to go to waste. Even a grain of rice or a mustard seed lying on the ground would be picked up, dusted carefully, taken to the kitchen and put in its proper tin. I asked him why he gave himself so much trouble for a grain of rice. He said, "Yes, this is my way. I let nothing go to waste. In these matters I am quite strict. Were I married no woman could get on with me. She would run away". On some other day he said, "This is the property of my Father Arunachala. I have to preserve it and pass it on to His children". He would use for food things we would not even dream of as edible. Wild plants, bitter roots and pungent leaves were turned under his guidance into delicious dishes.

Once someone sent a huge load of brinjals on the occasion of his birthday feast. We ate brinjals day after day. The stalks alone made a big heap which was lying in a corner. I was stunned when Bhagavan asked us to cook the stalks as a curry. Bhagavan insisted that the stalks were edible and so we put them in a pot to boil along with dry peas. After six hours of boiling they were as hard as ever. We wondered what to do and yet we did not dare to disturb Bhagavan. But heal ways knew when he was needed and he would leave the hall even in the middle of a discussion. As usual he did not fail us, and appeared in the kitchen. He asked, "How is the curry getting on"? "Is it a curry we are cooking? We are boiling steel nails", I exclaimed laughing. He stirred the stalks with the ladle and went away without saying anything. Soon after we found them quite tender. The dish was simply delicious and everybody was asking for a second helping. Everybody except Bhagavan praised the curry and the cook. He swallowed one mouthful like medicine and refused a second helping. I was very disappointed, for I had taken so much trouble to cook his stalks and he did not even taste them properly. The next day he told somebody, "Sampurnam was distressed that I did not eat her wonderful curry. Can she not see that everyone who eats is myself? And what does it matter who eats the food? It is the cooking that matters, not the cook or the eater. A thing done well, with love and devotion, is its own reward. What happens to it later matters little, for it is out of our hands".

In the evening before I left the Ashram for the town to sleep, he would ask me what was available for cooking the next day. Then, arriving at daybreak the next morning, I would find every- thing ready — vegetables peeled and cut, lentils soaked, spices ground, coconuts scraped. As soon as he saw me he would give detailed instructions as to what should be cooked and how. He would then sit in the hall awhile and return to the kitchen. He would taste the various dishes to see if they were cooked properly and go back to the hall. It was strange to see him so eager to cook and so unwilling to eat.

As a cook, Bhagavan was perfect. He would never put in too much or too little salt or spices. As long as we followed his instructions, everything would go well with our cooking. But the moment we acted on our own we would be in trouble. Even then, if we sought his help, he would taste our brew and tell us what to do to make the food fit for serving. Every little incident in our kitchen had a spiritual lesson for us. We thus learnt the art of implicit obedience while perfecting our culinary skills under Bhagavan's guidance.

3. Bhagavan's Protection

On my way from the town to the Ashram and back, I had to walk in the dark along a jungle path skirting the hill and I would feel afraid. Bhagavan knew this and once said to me, "Why are you afraid, am I not with you"? Chinnaswami, Bhagavan's brother and the manager of the Ashram once asked me whether I was not afraid to travel alone in the dark. Bhagavan rebuked him saying, "Why are you surprised? Was she alone? Was I not with her all the time"?

Once Subbalakshmiamma and myself were going round the hill early in the morning chatting about our homes and relatives. We noticed a man following us at a distance. We had to pass through a stretch of forest, so we stopped to let him pass and go ahead. He too stopped. When we walked he also walked. We were quite alarmed and started praying, "Oh Lord! Oh Arunachala! Only you can save us"! The man said suddenly, "Yes, Arunachala is our only refuge. Keep your mind on him constantly. It is His light that fills all space". We wondered who he was. Was he sent by Bhagavan to remind us that it was not proper to talk of worldly matters when going round the hill? Or was it Arunachala Himself in human disguise? We looked back but there was nobody on the path. In so many ways Bhagavan made us feel that he was always with us, until the conviction grew and became part of our nature.

Those were the days when we lived on the threshold of a new world — a world of ecstasy and joy. We were not conscious of what we were eating, of what we were doing. Time just rolled on noiselessly, unfelt and unperceived. The heaviest task seemed a trifle. We knew no fatigue. Commenting on our early completion of work in the kitchen on one occasion, Bhagavan pointed out, "The greatest spirit, Arunachala is here, towering over you. It is He who works not you".

V. EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS FROM SRI RAMANASRAMAM

23rd May 1949

1. (245) Kindness to Animals

One afternoon in 1946, at 2 p.m. some savouries prepared in the Ashram were distributed amongst the devotees. A few of them were given to Bhagavan also. Bhagavan ate them, drank some water, went out and came back, when some monkeys came to the window near his sofa. Seeing them, Bhagavan asked his attendants to go and bring some of the savoury preparations, saying, that the monkeys would relish them very much. The attendants returned saying that the people in the kitchen refused, saying that they had not prepared enough savouries to feed the monkeys also. "Oho! How did we get them then?" said Bhagavan. "This is ration time," said a devotee. "What if it is ration time? When we have rations, why should they (monkeys) not have rations as well? The problem will be solved if a ration card is obtained for the monkeys as well. They will eat these things with greater relish than we. If they do not have it, why should we have it either? When we are eating, see how those children (i.e., the monkeys) are looking at us," said Bhagavan. Thereupon, they also got their share.

From that time onwards, Bhagavan used to accept things only after the monkeys' share were given to them. It seems there was an earlier practice of taking out their share first before anything was distributed. The change that had come about in the interim period disappeared with this reprimand from Bhagavan. In the past, on festive occasions like *Jayanti* and *Mahapuja*, Bhagavan used to see that some food was taken out separately, made into balls, placed in a basket and then taken into Palakothu where he used to sit and personally hand over the balls one by one with great joy to the monkeys. A photo was taken of this event at the time of Bhagavan's *Shashthipurthi* festivities in 1939. The radiance on Bhagavan's face at that time can be seen and appreciated if that photo is looked at.

You know what happened one morning in 1946? Squirrels came on to Bhagavan's sofa for cashew nuts. The nuts, which used to be in the tin near Bhagavan, were exhausted. Groundnuts were given instead. The squirrels would not eat them and began to express their discontent in all possible ways. "We don't have them, my dears. What to do?" said Bhagavan, as he tried to cajole them. No. They would not be appeased. They were crawling over the legs and hands of Bhagavan continuously as a sign of their displeasure. So Bhagavan asked Krishnaswami to go and find out if there was any stock of cashew nuts in the storeroom. Krishnaswami went and brought a few nuts. "Is that all?" asked Bhagavan. Krishnaswami said that they were preparing *payasam* that night and so they could spare only that much. Bhagavan felt annoyed and said, "I see. *Payasam* will not be less tasteful if the cashew nuts are a little less in quantity than usual. What a pity. These squirrels do not like anything less and they are worrying me. The storekeepers have declined to give cashew nuts saying that they will have to put them into the *payasam*. Who will be worried if there are no cashew nuts in the *payasam*? See how these children are worrying themselves for want of cashew nuts!" With that, the cashew nuts which should have gone into *payasam*, went into the stomachs of the squirrels and also into the tin by his side (for future feeding of the squirrels).

The same evening, Dr. Anantanarayana Rao brought from Madras two visa (about 4.5 kilograms) of cashew nuts, saying that he had brought them for the squirrels. With a smile, Bhagavan said addressing Krishnaswami, "Look at this. They are earning whatever they want. There is no need to beg of you. These cashew nuts are their property. Keep them carefully. Note that they should not be given to the storeroom. Take care."

One morning in January 1947, at about 9 a.m., Lakshmi the cow entered the hall hurriedly with her legs, body and tail full of mud, with blood oozing out of her nose and with a half-severed rope round her neck. She went straight to the sofa where Bhagavan sat. The attendants began saying with some disgust that she had come in with mud on her body. Bhagavan, however, said with affection, "Let her come. Let her come. What does it matter how she comes?" Addressing the cow, he said. "Come, my dear. Please come near." So saying he passed his hand over the body lightly, patted her on the neck and looking at the face and said, "What is this? Some blood is oozing!" One of the attendants said, "Recently they had put a rope through her nose."

"Oho! Is that the reason? That is why she has come here to complain to me about it. Is it not very painful for her? Unable to bear the pain, she has come here running to complain to me without even washing her body. What to do? Give her some iddli or something," said Bhagavan, evincing great solicitude for her welfare. The attendants gave her some plantains and thus managed to send her out. I went to the kitchen, brought some iddlies and gave them to her. She was satisfied and went away to her usual place.

After all of us returned to the hall and sat down, Bhagavan remarked, looking at the attendants, "Do not all of you come to me to relate your troubles? She too has done the same thing. Why then are you vexed with her for coming here with mud on her? When we have troubles, do we consider whether our clothes are all right or our hair is properly brushed?"

There are ever so many incidents to show that Bhagavan's abode is a place of safe resort not only for the weaker sex and the poor but also for dumb animals at all times. I shall write to you in another letter some more incidents of this nature.

24th February 1947

2. (97) Birth

Yesterday a lady devotee showed Bhagavan her notebook in which she had copied out the five verses of "Ekatma Panchakam". Bhagavan saw in that notebook two verses composed by him for his devotees when they first started celebrating his birthday, and told us the following incident:

"On one of my birthdays while I was in Virupaksha Cave, probably in 1912, those around me insisted on cooking food and eating it there as a celebration of the occasion. I tried to dissuade them, but they rebelled saying, 'What harm does it do to Swamiji if we cook our food and eat it here?' I therefore left it at that. Immediately after that they purchased some vessels. Those vessels are still here. What began as a small function has resulted in all this paraphernalia and pomp. Everything must take its own course and will not stop at our request. I told them at great length, but they did not listen. When the cooking and eating were over, Iswaraswamy who used to be with me in those days, said, 'Swamiji! this is your birthday. Please compose two verses and I too will compose two.' It was then that I composed these two verses which I find in the notebook here. They run as follows:

1. You who intend to celebrate the birthday, first ascertain as to whence you were born. The day that we attain a place in that everlasting life which is beyond the reach of births and deaths is our real birthday.
2. Even on these birthdays that occur once a year, we ought to lament that we have got this body and fallen into this world. Instead we celebrate the event with a feast. To rejoice over it is like decorating a corpse. Wisdom consists in realising the Self and in getting absorbed therein.

“This is the purport of those verses. It appears that it is a custom amongst a certain section of people in Malabar to weep when a child is born in the house and celebrate a death with pomp. Really one should lament having left one’s real state, and taken birth again in this world, and not celebrate it as a festive occasion.”

18th August 1946

3. (62) Ekam Aksharam (The One Letter and The One Imperishable)

A few days ago some Gujaratis who had come from Bombay purchased some Ashram books and showing them to Bhagavan, requested him to write his name on the books. “What name should I write?” asked Bhagavan. “Your name,” said they. “What name have I?” said Bhagavan. When they said, “Your name is Ramana Maharshi, is it not?” Bhagavan said smilingly, “Somebody said so. Really what is a name or a native place for me? I could write only if I had a name.” The Gujaratis went away quietly without saying anything further.

In January 1945, you remember that you sent your book on Banking with a request that Bhagavan might be pleased to write in it the word ‘OM’ or ‘SRI’ and return it to you, and Bhagavan declined to do so. Instead, he gave me a piece of paper, on which he wrote a Telugu translation of a verse that he had written long back in Tamil when Somasundaraswami made a similar request. When I sent that slip of paper to you, you took it as an *upadesa*, a precept from Bhagavan, and were overjoyed. Subsequently, he made some slight alterations therein. Later on Bhagavan translated it into Sanskrit as a *sloka* at the request of Muruganar as follows:

एकमक्षरं हृदि निरंतरम् ।
भासते स्वयं लिख्यते कथम् ॥

It means: “The one imperishable which is in the Heart at all times is self-luminous. How to write it?”

I was reminded of all this when the Gujaratis made a similar request today and got a refusal.

About ten months ago, Pantu Lakshminarayana Sastri, Telugu Pandit, Maharajah’s College, Vizianagaram, came here. After praising Bhagavan with verses composed extempore, he appealed to Bhagavan thus: “Please let me have something to commemorate this event and bless this poor soul.” “What shall I give?” asked Bhagavan. “Anything you please; just an aksharam (letter) by way of upadesa,” he said. Bhagavan said, “How can I give that which is ‘akshara’?” and so saying he looked at me. I said, “It will perhaps do if you tell him about the sloka Ekamaksharam.” Sastri asked, “What is that sloka?” I read out that sloka. “Where is that dwipada?” asked Bhagavan. I read out that too. Sastri was overjoyed as if he had got a great treasure, and copied both the sloka and the dwipada. When I told him about the circumstances under which those two were written, he felt very happy and went away after bowing before Bhagavan. I remembered all this when Bhagavan was saying to the Gujaratis, “What is a name or a native place for me?” Not only this. I was reminded of a song which mother used to sing while engaged in her domestic work, the meaning of which is somewhat as follows:

“Ramanamam is the wide universe which has no name or body or work. It has a lustre surpassing the moon, the sun and the fire.”

Ramana’s name also is just like that!

4. (160) The Holy Beacon

When the Holy Beacon is lit on Arunachala, it is a sight well worth seeing. In the Ashram, in Bhagavan's presence, a big light is also simultaneously lit, sacramental offerings (*prasadam*) are distributed and "Akshara Mana Malai" and other hymns are sung.

This year in particular, as there was no rain, the function went off very well. In the afternoon, from 3 o'clock onwards, the devotees started making preparations for the festival at the Ashram. In the Jubilee Hall, the floor was decorated with lime and rice powder floral designs, while hanging from the roof all round, were mango leaf festoons. On such occasions, the crowds which come to town for this Dipotsavam (Festival of Lights) usually visit the Ashram in the morning as they go round the hill; whereas in the evenings, it is mostly the Asramites who are present at the Ashram celebrations, and there is no crowd.

On this evening, when Bhagavan went out to the cowshed, the attendants placed his couch in the open space facing the summit of the hill, spread the bedding on it and put a stool with all the things on it that Bhagavan usually has by him. Opposite the couch a large shallow iron pan was placed on a high stool, ghee poured into it and a wick placed in the centre; flowers and garlands were strewn around it. Just as these preparations were nearing completion, Bhagavan came from the cowshed with his attendants, and it was as though it were actually Lord Siva Himself arriving on the scene. Spontaneously those gathered there rose; Bhagavan seated himself on the couch and all prostrated before him. We then sat in rows, the men on Bhagavan's right, the women on his left, along the steps leading to the Hill. The space in front of Bhagavan was filled, not only with baskets of fruits brought by the devotees, but also with vessels of all sorts full of sweetmeats and other preparations. When the ghee brought by devotees was poured into the pan for kindling the light, the pan was overflowing. Camphor was then placed on the wick. The fragrance from the lighted incense sticks spread on all sides and created a holy atmosphere.

Bhagavan sat lovingly looking at all the devotees and related to those near him the significance of the Festival of Lights. He also pointed out the exact place where the light was to be kindled on the hilltop. After that, *Veda Parayana* began.

By the time the *parayana* was over, the sun had set. Soon, little lights in earthenware saucers were lit all round the hall and garlands of electric lights of many colours were switched on. Everyone was eagerly awaiting the lighting of the sacred beacon on the hilltop and the attendants had handed to Bhagavan a binocular with which he, too, was eagerly scanning the hill. While his gaze was concentrated on the summit of the hill, ours was concentrated on his Divine face, for it was just a reflection of Arunachala.

With the firing of crackers at the Temple, the light on the hilltop appeared. Immediately, the '*akhanda jyoti*' (uninterrupted) light, opposite Bhagavan was lighted. The *Brahmins* rose and chanted the mantra, '*na karmana naprajaya dhanena*', and lit the camphor; *kumkum* and *vibhuti* were distributed and then all the devotees sat down. After Bhagavan had partaken of a little fruit and some sweetmeats, the rest were distributed amongst the devotees. Immediately after that, the devotees divided themselves into two parties, one singing the hymns in the "Akshara Mana Malai", and the other taking up the refrain '*Arunachala Siva*'. After that, the five stanzas beginning with '*Karunapurnasudhabhde*' in Sanskrit and its equivalent in Tamil were recited.

Bhagavan sat resting his cheek on his hand, slightly reclining on the pillow — his characteristic pose. His face appeared as though mirroring his Self-illumination, with his silence and his profound thought reflected on it. The moon rose in the east and cast its light on him as though seeking its light from him. I

sat there, facing east, with my back against the almond tree. If I looked west, I had the light of the Arunachala Hill; if I looked ahead I had the brilliant light of the moon; and if I looked to the right, I had the glowing light emanating from Bhagavan's face. What a sight it was, and how lucky I felt that I had the three-faced Light around me that night! I felt an inexplicable bliss and involuntarily closed my eyes.

On hearing the sound of the dinner bell, I opened my eyes. Bhagavan was looking steadily at me, and that look was more than I could stand; involuntarily my head hung down. Bhagavan smiled and entered the dining room, the devotees following him.

After the meal, with Bhagavan's permission, we, the devotees, started for the walk round the hill. I shall write to you about it some time later.