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Meetings with Suri Nagamma

In May of 1977, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat and Dennis Hartel of Arunachala Ashram were on a visit to Bombay. Sri P. V. Somasundaram along with Sri R. Venkataraman, Controller of Defence Accounts, Bombay, took them to visit Suri Nagamma who was then staying with her niece where she could be treated for cancer. On a second visit to her a tape recorder was brought and she was requested to be recorded for the benefit of devotees in the West. Although Suri Nagamma was suffering severely from pain associated with the cancer, she graciously consented. She read from her books, recited poems, one of which she had just written appealing to Bhagavan to give her his strength and his calm to withstand her physical suffering.

SOME of these conversations were translated into English then and there. Her recent poem and other parts of the recording were later translated by Dr. Lingeswara Rao of Bhimavaram in Andhra Pradesh.

To better understand what Nagamma said in context of her situation at the time, we reproduce below Chapter 28 from her 2014 English edition of *Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam*. In this chapter these visits are mentioned and also the circumstances which made her believe that her end on earth was near.

28. Endurance

In the beginning of this book I mentioned that in February 1976, I had had a surgical operation for cancer in Madras and thereafter I went to Bangalore and Bombay for rest and recuperation. It then looked as if I had recovered normal health. However, in February 1977, pain in back of the left arm developed and gradually extended up to the neck. People said that it might only be some rheumatic pain. I had, however, my own doubts.

My sister's son, Dr. G.R.N. Sastri, who was then working as a senior executive in the Indian Petro-Chemical Corporation, Baroda, invited me to his place for a change and so I went there. After about a month, the pain increased greatly and a lump appeared in the place of the original operation. The local doctors declared that it was due to the cobalt treatment I had had after surgery and it might disappear after a while; instead, it went on increasing and along with it the pain also. I had therefore no alternative but to return to Bombay for expert treatment.

In Bombay, cancer specialists were consulted. After elaborate tests, they declared that the lump was cancerous in nature, that further surgery could not be thought of and that the only hope lay in cobalt treatment though success was doubtful. Cobalt treatment was immediately given and as that too was found of little use, it was stopped. The case was given up by all allopathic doctors as hopeless and beyond any cure. In the meantime, there was excruciating pain despite the use of sedatives. That was during the month of May 1977.

As there was no hope of cure by means of medication, I prayed to Bhagavan day and night to give me the strength to bear the pain stoically. I also appealed to him in written verses. Prayer and meditation were my only refuge. My strength gradually decreased and I became almost bedridden. As suitable arrangements for nursing me at Bombay could not be made, my nephew, G. R. Sarma, decided to take me to Bangalore by air and actually bought the ticket for me.

It was at that juncture that the Ashram President, Sri T.N. Venkataraman and his wife happened to come to Bombay to see their son who was working there. They called on me along with Sri R. Venkataraman and his wife at about 3 p.m. on 14th May, 1977. Sri R. Venkataraman is the Controller of Defence Accounts in Bombay and a great devotee of Bhagavan. He practices homeopathy as a hobby. They were all very much aggrieved at the great suffering and agony I was experiencing. I formally handed over to the President the paper containing my prayers to Bhagavan for relief from my pain. Seeing the sad situation, Sri R. Venkataraman took my son-in-law, Sri S. R. Avadhani, aside and enquired whether he could try homeopathic treatment. As allopathic doctors had already given up on the case as hopeless, we were ourselves thinking of trying homeopathy and so the offer appeared to us providential. We readily consented to it. It appeared to us as if Bhagavan himself had sent Venkataraman, one of his devotees, specially for the purpose of treating me. Venkataraman prepared the medicine that night itself and, as his house was very near mine, came to us the next morning and started his treatment. That was on Sunday, the 15th May 1977.

From that day onwards, he came once or twice a day and tried one medicine after another. The pain increased considerably in the initial stages and the lump burst open. Taking it as a favorable indication, he continued his treatment until, with Bhagavan's grace, the pain began to gradually decrease. Meanwhile a Parsi devotee came to me and told me incidentally that his wife had died of cancer but that there was a Tibetan doctor whose medicine was reported to be particularly effective in cancer cases. That medicine could not however be used in his wife's case as her ailment was by then too far advanced. He said that there was a special representative of that Tibetan doctor in Bombay and that he would bring him to my place. Two days later, P.V. Somasundaram, Arunachala

Bhakta Bhagawat from New York and another devotee from Canada came to see me. At the same time, the representative of the Tibetan doctor also came. The latter examined me and said that his master did not treat patients without seeing them personally, that he was at the time in Tibet and that I should go there or arrange for his coming to Bombay. I exclaimed, "Oh! Going to Tibet! I am getting ready to go on a Kailasa yatra and am waiting for the final call of Iswara. I am satisfied with the present treatment by a devotee of Bhagavan."

Two or three days later, the devotee from Canada, Somasundaram and some other devotees came and, though I was suffering acute pain, insisted on my reading something which they recorded for their use in Canada. By the 10th of June there was such relief from pain that I gained enough strength to go out for a walk. When I told Venkataraman that I had been getting ready for a Kailasa yatra and he had upset all my plans, he coolly said that, as his medicine had worked, he was sending me instead on an Arunachala yatra. I do not know whether it was due to his great devotion to Bhagavan or it was Bhagavan's grace working through him, but the lump became smaller and smaller and the pain gradually decreased. I gained strength from day to day and began to move about freely as of old. Devotees in Bombay who had seen me earlier were emphatically of the opinion that the cure was nothing short of a miracle; and the eminent doctors of Bombay who had examined me earlier could hardly believe it.

I remained in Bombay till September 1977 when in the company of my relatives I went to Vijayawada, stayed there for about two months, vacated my house "Ramana Sadanam" and came away to Madras. It so happened that Sri R. Venkataraman had by then been transferred to Madras and so I took all the required medicines from



him, showed the manuscripts of these *Smrutulu* to my brother, D.S. Sastri, and reached Arunachalam on the night of 27th November, 1977. Early next morning, I went to the Ashram and prostrated before Bhagavan's samadhi. It was indeed miraculous that one who had been getting ready for a Kailasa yatra was now on Arunachala yatra and could once again prostrate before Bhagavan's samadhi. Destiny appears to have played a great part, as I am having the good fortune of staying in the Ashram once again and writing my reminiscences at the bidding of the Ashram authorities.

The manuscript I had written has been fair-copied by one of the devotees and made ready for printing. On the auspicious day of Makara Sankranti I placed the manuscripts at the lotus feet of Sri Ramana Bhagavan, as my humble offering.

* * * * *

Thus Suri Nagamma concluded her last writings on 14th January 1978. She lived another two years and two months, often residing in Sri Ramanasramam.

About the recording made in Bombay in May of 1977, Dr. Lingeswara Rao, after listening to it, mentioned that it was hard to believe she was on that day enduring immense suffering because her voice sounded so full of strength and happiness. She first read from her Telugu book titled *Reminiscences* where Bhagavan answers questions about certain verses in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Then Suri Nagamma went on to answer our questions regarding her first visit to Bhagavan. She said, "On the very day I saw Bhagavan for the first time an immense load was permanently lifted from my head. The very moment I first saw him, I knew that I no longer needed to go anywhere else, see any other sadhu, visit any other holy place than Sri Ramanasramam. Bhagavan was thereafter my only refuge."

She went on to talk about Bhagavan's Maha Samadhi: "When Bhagavan passed away I felt as if I had lost everything. A great vacuum overcame me but gradually, by itself, left me. Immediately after Bhagavan's passing there was some instability in the Ashram, so I decided to go on a pilgrimage with the hopes that it would serve to soothe my bereaved heart. I visited Kasi, Rameshwaram and other holy places, but I longed to return to the Ashram. I had heard that things there had settled down and so I returned."

She had just written some verses in Telugu and

continued to talk explaining her reason for composing this poem: "A devotee by the name of Krishna Murty wrote to me during Bhagavan's illness that if someone took Bhagavan's pain upon oneself, Bhagavan might have some relief.

"The next day I went to Bhagavan and read out Krishna Murty's letter to him, adding that just as he always shared all the sweet things that were given to him with us, he must now equally share his pain. Bhagavan simply replied, 'Um, Um'." [Note: This could mean almost anything. Somewhere between 'all right' or 'we shall see' or even 'I see'. It is difficult to give a definite meaning to his remark.]

Suri Nagamma continued, "Now, about twenty-five years after Bhagavan's Nirvana, I also have cancer on my left shoulder. He has finally granted my prayer after twenty-five years; however, the pain is intense. So now I pray to Bhagavan to grant me his strength and peace to bear the pain and the consequences."

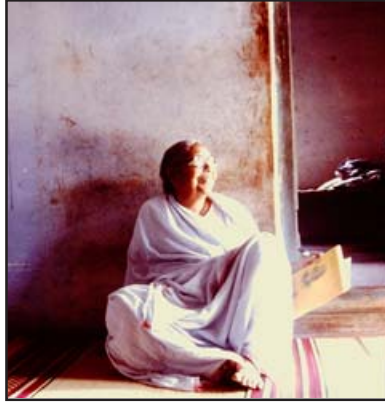
With deep feeling Suri Nagamma read out her poem to us:

Arunachala Ramana!
 Ever since at your feet I myself laid
 My mind sought not another abode.
 Never had I prayed for any physical gain.
 'Bestower of Boons' I do so now in pain.
 Cancer forged in me a dwelling,
 Killing me without killing.
 I crave not that it disappear
 But that I bravely forebear and surrender.
 Grant me the calm with which you bore a tumor,
 Make me your daughter, fit to have forever.
 Loath to see thee suffer, asked I for a share.
 And now that it is given, my strength has left me.
 Besides the pain, a share of thy peace
 Grant me, O Lord, 'The Slayer of Disease'.

Needless to say, Suri Nagamma's prayer was again answered, and more. She was given the calm and her 'Slayer of Disease' did his part too. A remarkable cure ensued, she was enabled to reside in Ramanasramam several months after she had regained her strength. Then, when on a visit to Bangalore, she left her mortal frame on March 31st, 1980, after a short illness.

Suri Nagamma's *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*

will always remain a classic of spiritual literature. No other book has captured the total personality of Bhagavan, not only as a master of masters but also as a most lovable father, mother and friend to prince and pauper alike.



During Nagamma's last stay in Sri Ramanasramam in 1980 when she attended the 100th birth anniversary of her Master and Lord, Arunachala Ramana, Joan and Matthew Greenblatt took full advantage of her presence by visiting her often. In a short piece written in memory of Suri Nagamma in the July, 1980 *Mountain Path*, Joan wrote:

"We asked her how she remembered in such detail all that took place in Sri Bhagavan's presence. She told us

she would leave the Hall and write little notes when Sri Bhagavan went on his daily walks. At night she would sleep till midnight and, upon waking, begin her letters, elaborating on these little notes. She always felt as if Sri Bhagavan was sitting by her side.

"All at the Ashram will miss her presence, her walk through the Ashram grounds with head bent in utter humility and simplicity. Her doors were always open to devotees, and at all hours people would be coming and going, eager to listen to her stories and reminiscences. She said, 'It has been a habit with me that I cannot keep anything to myself; whatever I hear I want to tell others'.

"Kunju Swami, radiant with the most beautiful smile, exclaimed to us after hearing of her physical passing: 'She has not gone away; she has only come to Tiruvannamalai.' Devotees all around the world have been and shall continue to be enriched by the treasure she left for us. In those late-night vigils, while all slept in peaceful repose, one lady was awake writing from the depths of her heart. To her, Suri Nagamma, we shall be ever grateful."

Comments on His Verses

by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi

THE stanza (verse 5 of the "Arunachala Pancharatna") 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 realize 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 realize 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.

—from *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 18-4-1946

Offering up the mind to you, always seeing all things as your form, worshipping only you, that one triumphs,
O Arunachala! becoming absorbed in your bliss!

— *Arunachala Pancharatnam*, v. 5

If Self has form, the world and God likewise have form. If Self is without form, by whom and how can form (of world and God) be seen? Without the eye, can there be sight or spectacle? The Self, the real Eye, is infinite.

—*Reality in Forty Verses*, v. 4

Lakshman Joo Visits Sri Ramanasramam

Sri Lakshman Joo was the most prominent saint of Kashmir Shaivism in the 20th Century. Swami Ramji, a famous saint was said to have danced in ecstasy when he heard of the birth of this boy to Smt. Arimali and Pandit Narayan Das Raina. Swamiji. Although aged and unable to walk, remarkably stood up and danced, declaring, "My name is Ram and this boy shall be called Lakshman!" That was on the 9th May 1907. The boy showed exceptional signs of spirituality and scriptural knowledge right from his youth.

Sri Lakshman Joo ultimately set up his ashram in Nishat, Srinagar, and his reputation attracted students, leaders, yogis and foreigners from all over India and abroad. His writings on Kashmir Shaivism are considered the most authoritative works of our age. He traveled to the USA in 1991 to propagate Kashmir Shaivism and, after returning, attained Mahasamadhi on September 27th of the same year.

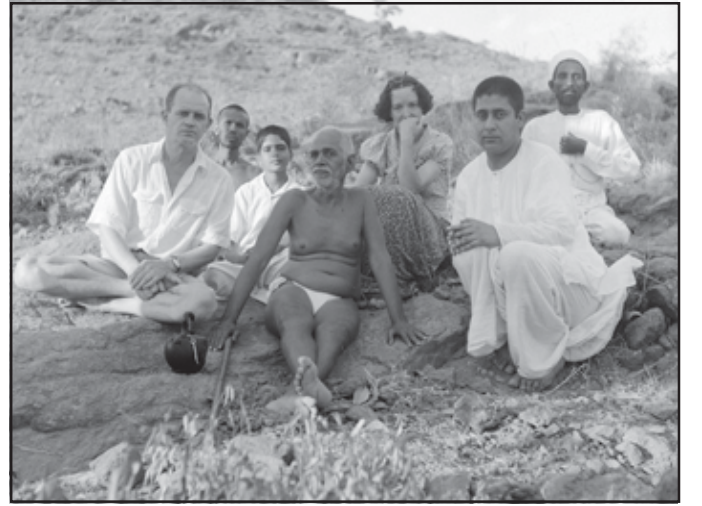
When I was in my twenties, someone told me of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Then and there I left Kashmir and went to South India. From Madras I took another train for Tiruvannamalai. There I took a cart and reached the blessed Sri Ramanasramam.

As I entered the Hall I saw Bhagavan seated on a sofa with his legs stretched out. I was thrilled with joy on having darshan of Bhagavan, who asked me to sit in front of him. I sat and gazed on the Feet of Bhagavan and entered the blissful state of samadhi.

I felt those golden days were indeed divine. I used to walk on Arunachala Hill with Bhagavan. Bhagavan used to sit on a rock and I would be seated at his Feet. One day I was overjoyed by the nearness of Bhagavan and composed these slokas to offer them to Bhagavan:

स्थूलं सूक्ष्मं कारणञ्च तथा शून्यं शरीरकम् ।
एतद्देहं चतुष्कं स्यादचलानां चतुष्ककम् ॥
उपरिष्ठाच्चतुष्केभ्योऽरुण नामा महाचलः ।
परप्रमानृहोऽसौ गीयतेऽनुत्तरात्मकम् ॥
सर्वोत्तमोत्तम तमेयोऽरुणाचल संज्ञके ।
स्वरूपेऽन्तो रमति तं रमन्तं रमणं नुमः ॥

“There are four kinds of body: the gross (sthula), the subtle (sukshma), the causal (karna) and the void (sunya). For Sages (achalanam, lit. those who are motionless) as well (there are four kinds of body). Transcending these (four kinds of body) is the great Hill Arunachala, which is praised as the form of the all-knowing Supreme (lit. the form of the supreme Knower). We worship Sri Ramana, who blissfully abides in His own true nature (swarupa), which is named Arunachala, the foremost among the foremost of hills.”



When these slokas were placed before Bhagavan, He was so pleased that he explained them to the devotees who were seated in the Hall. Some of his devotees took a camera to take a picture of Bhagavan on Arunachala Hill. At that time Bhagavan addressed me: “Lakshman Joo! Lakshman Joo! Sit here by my side. This man is going to take a picture of us.” I cannot express how Divine were those days of my stay at Sri Ramanasramam and how kind was Bhagavan to me! I have received the copies of the *Mountain Path* and also the issue of April, 1983 (p.105), in which I am seated at the Divine Feet of Bhagavan Ramana.

Eleanor Pauline Noye, who is seen in the picture of Bhagavan’s group, shed tears of joy when I was seated in front of Bhagavan. Those were golden days for me when I was near Bhagavan, my Divine Lord!

Yours as ever, In the name of Bhagavan Ramana,
Swami Lakshman Joo
(The above letter was printed in the April, 1985 Mountain Path.)

My Heart's Journey

A Pilgrim Diary

by Evelyn Kaselow

On arriving at Sri Ramanasramam on December 5, 1982, I was given room number 16 in the guest compound across from the Ashrama. Beside me was the room of Ramaswami Pillai, who had come to Bhagavan in the 1920s. Throughout my first night at the Ashrama I often heard Ramaswami burst into songs of devotional fervor.

December 6, 1982: Ramaswami Pillai was leaving his room after yet another outburst of song. I accosted him saying, "Swamiji, I enjoy your bhajan any hour of the day or night! 1 a.m. or 1 p.m.!" He laughed and gave a humble pranam, moving his head from side to side. He began to walk away. I asked him to wait and brought him the portrait of Sri Bhagavan done by my friend back in New York, Madeline Iorio. To me Madeline's drawing was especially beautiful, capturing the feeling of Bhagavan's overflowing love. From the way the Swami scrutinized it, I could tell he had some trouble seeing. "What is this....," he asked, "a drawing of a person?" I explained it was a picture done by a devotee in New York City but, also hard of hearing, he had trouble following me. He seemed to think it needed some work and said, "It's all right. If a person thinks of even a stone as God, he realizes Him – from Form to the Formless. But stick to the Formless - the forms will change, go away." The Swami's words went straight to my heart. Did he know that during this visit to Sri Ramanasramam I was feeling the absence of Viswanatha Swami and other friends so keenly? He handed back the picture and I placed it on my head. Yet I wondered about this man who, with sight and hearing limited, spoke so appropriately to my need.

December 9, 1982: Following pradakshina, on my way to lunch, I dropped into Ramaswami's small room. I had been moved out of room 16 and put in the German Cottage at the end of the guest compound. "I miss hearing you sing," I told him.

"Can you hear me where you are?" he asked.

"No, but before I could hear every word!"

Then he said, "I don't sing always. Inspiration must come. One may do stotra daily. Also, if you ask me to sing I can, but it will not be so sweet." He explained he had been feeling weak.

Ramaswami asked me whether I had received some initiation, and practice some mantra. "Yes, from Sri Bhagavan, in a dream."

"Oh, did He tell you to keep it a secret?" he asked with interest. "Was it to take His Name, or (that of) Arunachala...?"

"No, it was to practice Self-enquiry."

"And, can you do it?"

"Not very well."

"No matter. You must persevere...."

Taking note of my photo of Sri Bhagavan, Ramaswami remarked, "I see you keep this with you. In samadhi the eyes may be closed and there is no thought. However, samadhi is also experienced with eyes open. Sri Bhagavan was always in samadhi. One may look into his open eyes and experience, with eyes open, the same state. In that state, all the senses are alert yet are not travelling outward. The mind is calm and one is aware. One may engage in some activity in that state. A child may be about to fall and you could catch the child. Still, with a calm mind, activity is no hindrance."

About pradakshina he said, "Now, because of problems with my legs, I must take a rickshaw, but to walk is better. The moment I think of it I go, sometimes in the middle of the night!"

December 9, 1982, afternoon: Kunju Swami and I sat for a talk on the porch of a new guest house on the west side of the Ashrama. He asked me what practice I do and I described our routine in the New York City Ashrama and my present employment. He then said, "Keep your mind calm at the feet of Bhagavan. Take no thought about the Ashrama (i.e. Arunachala Ashrama) and have no concern for its growth. If Sri Bhagavan wills, it will grow. You need not worry about it. The body is itself an ashrama - for that ashrama only a small hut is necessary." So saying, he took my leave. *(to be continued)*

Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram in Nova Scotia, Canada

BHAGAVAN Ramana has established His Abode for the sake of all those devotees and disciples who are eager and earnest to profit from His Most Direct and Simple Teaching of ‘Who Am I?’. Sri Bhagavan is ever kind and compassionate to me and He gives us the friendship of such persons who are ever ready to sacrifice their life for the sake of keeping His Banner fluttering in the open air. **Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram** is standing on

the southern side of the field and adding grandeur and luster to the world. Each and every single second of my sojourn in this land is the firmest reminder to me that I must cling to His Lotus Feet. My Heart is unceasingly repeating His most blissful and potent Name “Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya” and this is the be all and end all for me, Sri Arunachala Ramana Dakshinamurty Sadguru.

—Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat (1912-2000)

Ramana Satsangs in the USA and Canada

Regular satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation are conducted in or near large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please contact the individuals below for more information.

Atlanta Area — Mangalam Kalyanam (678-546-0378 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

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

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

Canada, Ottawa — Anantha Padmanabhan (613-733-8250 / madhupaddy@rogers.com)

Canada, Toronto — Thiru (416-876-1942 / thirusivasamy@hotmail.com)

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