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The History of Arunachala Ashrama

Arunachala Ramana Mandiram

“Thou hast been building Thy own Temple in the cavity of the lotus of my heart so that I may worship Thee with the fruits and flowers of my breath.” – A. B. Bhagawat

THE year was 1879, the first year of classes in the newly-built, one-room schoolhouse, picturesquely located in the quiet rural community of Clarence in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia.

On the night of December 30th in the same year, in a quiet and remote village of South India far across the globe, a son was born to Alagamma and Sundaram Iyer. Who could ever have imagined that a rural schoolhouse in Maritime Canada and this newborn child, then linked but by time, would once again be linked in space and spirit ninety-five years later?

Soon after the 130-acre Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center was founded in 1972, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat began his regular visits from New York City. Immediately, he was attracted to the property adjoining the Ashrama's lower field, just across the Clarence Road, about 50 yards from the Ashrama house. It was the 100 by 75-foot corner lot that had been donated to the local school board in 1879 by the then owner of the property. The Ashrama did not own this lot. Someone had bought it from the school board three years earlier.

Bhagawat would almost daily visit this small plot, always commenting on its “tortoise shape,” with lower ground on all four sides. On this lot the Clarence West School had stood until 1969. It was then bought, loaded

onto a flatbed truck and moved one mile down the road. The granite slabs that served as its foundation and an old hand-powered water pump were all that remained. Bhakta Bhagawat would daily stroll the grounds, reciting the “Sri Lalita Sahasranam Stotram,” praying to the Divine Mother to bless her children by building a temple on this land for devotees to gather and immerse themselves in the direct teaching of Self-enquiry. After two years, in 1974, his dream began to materialize.

Mr. B. K. Raju, a very prominent businessman, yet humble and devoted, began to take an active interest in the prospect of buying the lot and the old schoolhouse, reuniting



The schoolhouse in 1969

them once again for yet another type of schooling, the training of the spirit. He started a trust for borrowing funds, arranged for the purchase of the school and engaged an architect, inspiring Joan and Matthew Greenblatt and Dennis Hartel, who then lived in the Ashrama, and Darlene Delisi, who lived nearby. These devotees felt charged with energy and genuine inspiration as they watched their lofty ideals of head and heart now taking shape in the form of a temple.

The logistics of returning the school house back to the Ashrama, lifting the thirty-ton structure five feet up and then sliding it onto its new, raised foundation were certainly mind-boggling for the young devotees. But every obstacle was calmly met with a deepening faith. When the temple was finally completed, that faith was so firmly established in their hearts, that it has been carrying them safely and serenely through life's troubled waters ever since.

Even more challenging than the physical obstacles were the financial hurdles. Mr. Raju's trust fund proved unproductive and was terminated. Daily wages had to be met, supplies bought, contractors paid. The young aspirants of the Ashrama were not fund-raisers, nor were they financially savvy. Their only wherewithal was the devotion and faith that filled their hearts, and on this they alone depended. Their faith and devotion were at times severely tested, but ultimately proved triumphant. The Maharshi repeatedly assured them of his all-pervasive



On the road back to its original site in 1975

presence in many ways seen and unseen. Faith remained steady and help came, especially from the courageously noble hearts of the late Alexander Hixon and Dr. Mohender Goomar, who both generously gave their support, relieving the debts and insuring that Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram would stand as a lasting tribute to the Silent Sage of the Holy Hill of the Beacon Light, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

To throw oneself wholeheartedly into a noble endeavor, trusting totally in the support of the Divine at every step, and to witness how every need is met at the right time and place, is an exalted spiritual confirmation of the Divine's omniscience and omnipotence. Such was the experience of those few young, blessed souls who dedicated their lives to raise Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram in the West.

This modest structure befits the simplicity and humility of the one to whom it is dedicated, and whose radiant presence is experienced by all sincere seekers who walk through its doors.

Sri Bhagavan Grants Our Prayer

by Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat

WITH the Infinite Grace and Mercy of Sri Arunachaleshwara Shiva Bhagavan Sri Ramana Dakshinamurty Parameshwara, the consecration and inauguration of Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram was performed on the morning of Friday, August 29th, 1975 by two South Indian Brahmins of Advaitic background, Professor J.S.S. Lakshminarayana and Dr. Subba Rao Durvasula. This day was chosen keeping in view the final



School atop of its new, raised foundation



journey of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in pursuit of His Father, Sri Arunachala. In the Annapolis Valley of Peace and Happiness in Clarence, Bridgetown (Nova Scotia), Canada, we performed the inauguration ceremonies of the Temple which lasted from Friday, 29th August till Monday, 1st September 1975. On the last day, September 1st, we concluded with a public celebration. This was the 80th anniversary of Sri Bhagavan's Advent at Sri Arunachala.

In the midst of chanting and recitations, accompanied by the taped Nadaswaram, the pictures of Sri Arunachala, Sri Bhagavan, Sri Chakra, Sri Ganesha and Sri Nataraja were carried from the shrine in the house to the newly-built temple under the canopy of a large new chaadar (cotton sheet) by the devotees of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, while Sri Madhavaji (Matthew Greenblatt) filmed and photographed the occasion. Both the Advaita Brahmins continued to chant and recite appropriate hymns, stotras and mantras. After this, the rounds of puja began,



and the Temple resounded, reverberated and vibrated with the most sacred Vedic hymns. This temple has been built by Bhagavan Himself for the sake of all those aspirants

who would like to imbibe His Most Unique and Immortal Teaching of the Direct Path of Practice of Self-Enquiry of WHO AM I? This is a three-storied Temple dedicated to Sri Ramana Sadguru.

Who could have ever dreamed that His Shrine of Grace and Mercy would rise in a far-off valley? But Sri Bhagavan makes the impossible possible and the most difficult goal easy. Thursday night, Sri Arunachala Ashrama found itself overflowing with the devotees—men, women and children—who prepared prasadam for the Friday Puja, consecration and inauguration. The Friday morning sun rose in its brilliance and bathed the entire valley with its warmth and affection. It was the first time that this foreign land had been transformed into an abode of natural devotion, dedication, love and affection for Sri Arunachaleshwara Shiva Bhagavan Sri Ramana Guru, who incarnated to peel off the sheaths of ego and ignorance from the Heart of mankind. All of us found ourselves dissolved in Sri Ramana Bhagavan.

It was about this time in 1958 that Sri Bhagavan gave me the vision of this place and He has since been slowly but surely guiding me towards the destined land where Sri Arunachala Ashrama would be located and His Temple consecrated. Who can ever comprehend His Inscrutable Ways and how He takes the work from all who have been dissolved into the Ocean of His Infinite Grace and Mercy? After a lapse of seventeen years, Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram rose and was consecrated and inaugurated on Friday, August 29, 1975. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Arunachala Parameshwara has built His Own Temple.



Oh! You Still Have Trust in Me?

This little incident, unknown to others, made a tremendous impact on one individual visiting the Master. It is, perhaps, a perfect example of what must have transpired daily to innumerable others who entered the enchanted ambience of the Sage of Arunachala.

THE late Dr. T. Sankaran of Bangalore was a devoted follower of the Maharshi. Some years ago, he sent us the following note along with his story:

Having heard excerpts read out yesterday at our weekly Satsang from the latest issue of your inspiring newsletter I am induced to offer the enclosed account of a personal episode of another devotee of Bhagavan from my family for possible inclusion in the next issue of the newsletter.

The following episode was recounted to me by an uncle of mine who was employed in Ananthapur, which was in the Madras Presidency of the former British India.

It was the mango-fruit season and he left for Tiruvannamalai for the darshan of Bhagavan Sri Ramana. He took with him a basket of mangoes to offer to Bhagavan. He changed trains in Madras and then Villupuram, arriving in Tiruvannamalai at the very moment a heavy downpour

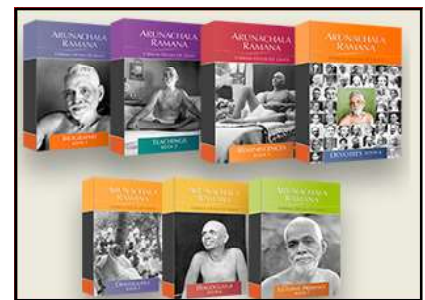
of rain started. Since the train halted only for a short period at the Tiruvannamalai station, he alighted in haste with his baggage and rushed out of the ticket barrier to hire a bullock cart. Having succeeded, he proceeded to a hotel in town, checked in, and was about to take a bath when he discovered to his dismay that he had left the basket of mangoes on the railway platform. Running out of the hotel he found the same cart that had dropped him off still waiting for another fare. Haunted by the fear of having lost the mangoes, he thought to himself, 'Oh Bhagavan! What have you done to me! Is this how you care for your devotees?' He engaged the cart again, rode to the railway station in the heavy rain, reached the spot where he had earlier alighted and found the basket still sitting on the platform, untouched. The fruit was all cleaned by the heavy rain.

Relieved, he returned to the hotel, took his bath and felt refreshed and then went straight to the Ashram with his offering. When he got up after prostrating before Bhagavan, sporting a graceful smile, the latter asked him, "Oh! You still have trust in me?"

My uncle was nonplussed by the humorous remark, but Bhagavan put him at ease by asking him to join the party going out of the hall to have lunch. Bhagavan also sat near him, and when the sliced mangoes were served on the leaf-plates, he took an extra piece and offered it to my uncle with extreme love.

Arunachala Ramana, Eternal Ocean of Grace 7-Volume Set

SRI Ramanasramam is happy to inform our readers about a great new publication on the life and teaching of our guru, Sri Ramana Maharshi. This publication is the result of tireless work by a team of scholars/devotees at Sri Ramanasramam. It has just been released as a set of seven books which combines Sri Bhagavan's biography, collected works, experiences of devotees, reminiscences and extensive portions of dialogues from books such as *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, *Letters from Ramanasramam*, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, *Guru Vachaka Kovai* and other books. It also includes a set of 108 articles by devotees selected from the *Call Divine* and the *Mountain Path*, detailing their unique personal experiences.



**For international purchases, please visit Sri Ramanasramam's online bookstore:
worldstore.gururamana.org.**

The postage-paid set costs \$99. The ebook edition can be purchased for \$8.00

My Heart's Journey

A Pilgrim's Diary

by Evelyn Kaselow

January 4, 1983

Once again Ramaswami Pillai and I enjoyed an open-hearted talk while children, one after another, came to his door to receive a few pennies from his hands.

The children called him "Tatha" or grandfather, and he said, "The first time I was called 'tatha' I was not shocked, but surprised! I looked in the mirror and saw I had no teeth and white hair. Since coming to Bhagavan I have no feeling of aging. I am the same. And on the contrary, as one meditates the mental process is reversed. Mentally, one becomes younger and stronger. [This no doubt was borne out in his case, as he lived a hundred years! - Editor]

January 5, 1983

Paul and I began our Evening Recitation at 6 P.M., and while reciting "*Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam*," Kunju Swami and Ganesan walked into the room. The chanting flowed of its own accord, and I felt merged in the light of Arunachala Siva!

After a period of silence, Kunju Swami proceeded to immerse us with his gracious and consoling words, all aimed at encouraging us. He complimented us on our recitation and said it should be taped.

"Though we moved closely with Bhagavan," he continued, "and he always acted normally, just as one of us, Bhagavan invariably had a far-off look. I believe that look was for such as you who live at a distance. You are special recipients of His Grace. Those who live near take it for granted; those far-off remain thinking of Bhagavan. We (he and Ganesan) are the frogs; you are the bees!" He said this in reference to verse 6 of "*Sri Arunachala Patikam*."

Lord of my life! I have always been at Thy Feet like a frog which clings to the stem of the lotus. Make me instead a honey bee which from the blossom of the heart sucks the sweet honey of pure Consciousness. Then shall I have deliverance.

"Bhagavan not only taught us vichara marga," Kunju Swami resumed, "He taught us how to live. He taught us

not to drink until the end of the meal; to have fruit last of all; not to mix cold water with a drink or with hot water, but to let it cool naturally. We observed all his actions and learned all these things. In so many ways, Bhagavan taught us how one can live happily anywhere in the world.

"Also, Bhagavan stressed that all devotees should know how to cook simple food, and he emphasized the importance of limiting the quantity of intake. 'Even too much sattvic food becomes tamasic,' Bhagavan would say. He wanted devotees to be self-reliant and not depend upon others for their basic needs. In Palakothu, all the sadhus cooked for themselves and Bhagavan would take a personal interest in their diets. But our purpose should not be to think of food, but to think and talk of Bhagavan.

"Bhagavan himself was a great cook! Not only was he highly skilled in preparing food, he also was a spiritual cook of souls, he baked our egos and served them to

Upcoming Events

Sri Ramana Jayanti Retreat

Tampa, Florida

December 29 - January 1

For information, please go to:

<https://arunachala.org/ashrama/events/2018/sri-ramana-retreat>

Sri Ramana Jayanti Programs

Arunachala Ashrama

Queens, New York City

Saturday January 5 at 11 a.m.

86-06 Edgerton Blvd., Jamaica Estates,

New York 11432 / Tel: 718-560-3196

In Fremont, California

Saturday 12 January at 11 a.m.

40086 Paseo Padre Pkwy

Fremont, CA 94538

Tel: 510-656-2752

Arunachala! His ‘Song of the Poppadum’ gives us some understanding in this matter.”

I expressed my desire to cook a meal for Swamiji and he declined the offer so graciously that I almost didn’t mind his not accepting it. He said that by watching me serve he could tell I was a good cook, and the very thought of my offer gave him the same satisfaction as eating whatever I would have prepared for him.

January 8, 1983 - Our Trip to Madras

The pleasant taxi ride which Paul, Ganesan and I were enjoying on the way to Madras became a nightmare when at Chingleput our driver took a drink or some narcotic. However, good fortune was the result of our misfortune for we were forced by circumstance to spend the night in the home of the President’s [Sri T. N. Venkataraman’s] daughter, Lakshmi.

Lakshmi’s sublime devotion to Sri Bhagavan made a sweet and very deep impression on me. She was elated and enraptured to be visited by Bhagavan’s devotees. The devotion with which she one-pointedly served all and the way she later kept me up during the night to talk of Bhagavan deeply inspired me. Her dedicated and devoted presence uplifted us all immensely.

I entered Lakshmi’s kitchen and saw on her shrine the two cutting knives I had brought to India. “I brought these for you,” I said.

Looking at me with her deep, dark eyes she replied, “Your presence is the greatest gift for us.” Extremely fatigued, I looked away and she caught my eyes again, “Do you understand?” she said most tenderly, pressing my arm with her hand.

Lakshmi served dinner in the traditional manner: she remained standing and waited on all, refusing to eat herself. She seemed to know the want of each. Her food was delicious and mild. It had the mark of being prepared by a devotee, for it was so light and pleasing.

At night Lakshmi and I stayed up to share some of our experiences before falling asleep. She seemed never to tire of offering little services! She placed water by my side just in case I became thirsty in the middle of the night;

she offered to rub my temples with oil, thinking I must have had a headache after our going about Madras during the day in the heat. In fact, while I thought I was drifting off to sleep I heard her voice: “Oh, how I feel like staying up with you to talk! Please, tell me something about yourself, your Ashram and Bhagavan!” I opened my eyes and found her leaning close to me in the dark!

Lakshmi was nine years old when Bhagavan left the body and is the eldest daughter of the family. “Bhagavan must have been like a father for you,” I said.

“Bhagavan was everything to us,” she exclaimed, her eyes shining in the dark, “Even though we were playful children, he was our mother, father, brother, sister, grandfather – everything!”

“I must have been an Indian in my former birth,” I mused, “because when I am here with devotees like you I feel so happy and light.”

“Where is India and where is America?” she cried out, putting her face nearer to mine, “We are all only with Bhagavan, wherever we may be!”

That night Lakshmi confided openly about the hardship she and all her sisters experienced on leaving Sri Ramanasramam after their marriages. Maybe in the end they will all return there, I thought.

The next morning, she insisted that I sit with her again in the kitchen as she prepared dosas for us. Though her cooking was so light and delightful she apologized for it, saying, “I am not at all talented.”

She served us with so much kindness and love that upon our leaving I saw her eyes rimmed in tears. In her life I could see and feel a cool, gentle breeze of devotion issuing from a heart filled with the holy presence of Bhagavan. Only by Bhagavan’s grace can we meet such pure and humble souls.

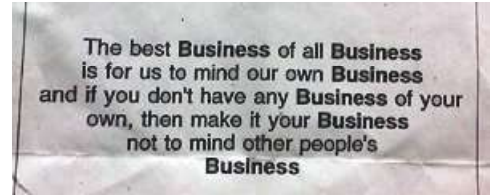
On returning to Ramanasramam and meeting Ramaswami Pillai I told him of our visit to Lakshmi’s home. “Lakshmi!” he exclaimed, “She is the ideal girl!” Then he went on to describe how Muruganar and other devotees would invariably run to Bhagavan’s Samadhi when they heard that Lakshmi was singing. (To be continued)

“Meditation only comes step by step with the gradual weakening of the vasanas and the grace of the Master.” – *Sri Ramana Maharshi*

Teachings on Display



Seen outside
The Church
of the Redeemer,
at the corner of
Bloor Street and
Avenue Road,
Downtown
Toronto, Canada



Seen taped to the office wall of a
conscientious medical imaging technician
in a hospital.

Compare it with Bhagavan's teaching in
Who Am I?: "As far as possible one should not
interfere in the affairs of others."

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)
Canada, Vancouver — Akash (778-321-4499 / eternalshiva@hotmail.com)
Canada, Victoria — Saibish (250-818-2875 /saibish@gmail.com)
Chicago Area — Jean-Luc & Rita (719-480-3530 / blueskyvalley@mac.com)
Connecticut Area — Aruna & Ram (860-284-0078 / rsankaran2000@yahoo.com)
Chapel Hill, NC — Ranjani Ramanan (919-338-2551 / ranjanil@yahoo.com)
Detroit, MI Area — Murali & Kalpana (248-210-7543 / MuraliK@hotmail.com)
Dublin, Ohio — Abilash & Madhavi (614-789-9058 / mungamuru@hotmail.com)
Florida, Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Robinson (954-600-1967 / arunahill@gmail.com)
Florida, Tampa — Rohit (813-766-0145 / rohitkvaidya@yahoo.com)
Florida, Palm Coast — Shriram & Rekha (904-347-3434 / ssmarathemd@gmail.com)
Houston, TX — Kumar Saran (832-435-3761 / saran01@earthlink.net)
Los Angeles, CA — Natarajan & Indira Venkatesan (310-473-9441 / nvenky30@yahoo.com)
New Jersey, West Windsor — Gurunath & Leena (609-273-6216 / gsnetravali@hotmail.com)
Austin, TX Area — Sriram Vaidyanathan (vsriram_prasad@hotmail.com / 512-695-4444)
Puerto Rico — Rosa & Scott Mathewson (787-531-5295 / rosilinm@hotmail.com)
San Diego Area — Manna Semby (646-342-4585 / mannamoksha@gmail.com) (NEW)
San Francisco Area — Karthik & Sunita (510-656-2752 / sunita_parasuraman@yahoo.com)
Seattle, WA Area — Sridevi & Prabha (425-605-0041 / pravish87@live.com)
Washington, D.C. Area — Uma & Santosh (301-528 -5526 / uma_santosh@hotmail.com)