

The Maharshi

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The Old Hall Rises in the New World

When Srimati Kalyanamathy Rathinasamy said that she wanted to bring Sri Bhagavan to Tampa, we understood that the Bhagavan she was intending “to bring” was already residing within her own heart. Yet, her aspiration was to have him manifest physically in the best way she saw possible by replicating the very building in which Sri Bhagavan resided for over 20 years – the blessed space now known as The Old Hall of Sri Ramanasramam.

THE devotees of the Tampa Sri Ramana Satsang and those of Arunachala Ashrama, New York offered to assist her so as to make her dream come true. Her husband, Dr. Palani Rathinasamy, shared her aspiration and spared no effort to realize her vision, supporting and encouraging her at every step. Sri Ramanasramam provided unreserved assistance with their advice, photos and measurements of all the elements that make up the Old Hall. Sri V. S. Mani even hand-carried to the USA a piece of floor stone from the original Old Hall that was recovered from the 1986 reconstruction of the Old Hall. This stone

the Inauguration function of ‘The Old Hall Replica’ today in Tampa, Thursday, the 29th December 2016. It gives us immense joy to know that the replica hall has come out very well and almost resembles the Old Hall here, one of the most sacred places to Sri Bhagavan’s devotees. Our congratulations to you and your team on behalf of the Ashram. It shows the dedication, effort and hard work of the entire team.

We wish the function all success. We are certain that the replica hall will continue to be a source of the guiding presence and inspiration of our Master Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

We seek His Blessings and Grace on the entire team of devotees.

Yours in Bhagavan,

President, V. S. Ramanan

James Hartel of New York produced designs for the contractor and oversaw all the woodwork construction; he traveled to Tampa several times to consult with the contractor and even worked on the construction himself.

When Suri Nagamma encountered many obstacles in the writing of her *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, she was told by a wise friend, “Sreyamsi bahu vighnani” (Good works encounter several obstacles). And so it was with



Mathy and Dr. Rathinasamy

was embedded into the new hall’s floor near Bhagavan’s couch so all devotees who prostrate before Him in Tampa might place their head on a floor stone that Bhagavan once consecrated with his holy feet.

The President of Sri Ramanasramam graciously wrote:

Smt. Mathy and Dr. Rathinasamy, Thank you for inviting us to

Mathy's dream of replicating the Old Hall in Tampa. Every step on her path met with countless road blocks and delays. But Mathy and Dr. Rathinasami calmly weathered them all with the faith that Bhagavan would somehow get the work done, not on their timetable, but on His. And done it was in a remarkable fashion.

Right up to the night prior to the griha pravesham and inauguration January 29th, work was in full swing. The following morning, when the 80 devotees from the Sri Ramana Jayanti Retreat in Tampa arrived, all were spellbound by the likeness to the blessed Old Hall sanctified by the presence of Sri Ramana and most particularly by the palpable presence of Bhagavan which they now experienced. It felt as if the Master had chosen to reside in His new abode in Tampa for the purpose of making our minds subside. More than one person commented that the moment they walked into the Old Hall they became totally disoriented, that their minds blanked out, their body numbed, and there they remained in total peace. Coming back to themselves they realized that, in reality, they had not been 'disoriented' but, rather, they had become 'reoriented' to their true Nature. The state they that they had previously experienced was now understood by them to be the 'disoriented' one. Sri Bhagavan's presence was felt intensely by so many on that first day as the Ganesha Puja and homa were performed. This was followed by the chanting of Aksharamanamalai and other works.

To the gathering in the new Old Hall that morning Mathy spoke a few quiet words of welcome to the devotees and expressed her heartfelt gratitude to Bhagavan for fulfilling her humble desire to bring His presence to Tampa. Dr. Venkat Ramanan, President V. S. Ramanan's son, welcomed the devotees and expressed his gratitude to the Tampa satsang, Mathy and Dr. Rathinasamy. Dennis



Hartel of Arunachala Ashrama also offered a few words of recognition to those who worked so hard to produce this living monument that will serve to transmit Sri Bhagavan's grace to seekers here in North America.

Incidentally, a model of a small white cow was used symbolically to enter the hall first, and the image of that cow reminded devotees of Bhagavan's cow Lakshmi who would brazenly enter through the south door of the Old Hall unmindful of all the devotees sitting before her as she marched straight to her Master's sofa.

The following Saturday morning, December 31st, all the retreat attendees returned to the the Old Hall and resounded it with the singing of Aksharamanamalai, Ramana Sadguru and other hymns in praise of Bhagavan and Arunachala. These were interspersed with graphic readings of incidents that had occurred in the Old Hall during Bhagavan's lifetime. The teachings and scenes described gripped the devotees as if they were actually happening before their very eyes, so much was the Divine Presence felt during those few hours.

To those who have never visited Sri Ramanasramam, or to those who may not, for any reason, be able to do so in the future, and to all devotees of Sri Ramana old and new, we unreservedly recommend a visit to this Old Hall replica, a most remarkable building from which the grace of the Master is bound to penetrate the hearts of sincere seekers for years to come.

There are no facilities there for guests but access to the first Americas' Old Hall is easily arranged by calling or emailing Mathy or Dr. Rathinasami – 813.685.8843 / mathy@rathinasamy.com.

Also, photos of the new Old Hall and the Tampa Retreat can be accessed online at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/150835993@N02/albums>



Sri Ramana Maharshi's 137th Jayanti Retreat in Tampa

THIS year the Jayanti retreat began on the morning of Thursday, 29th December. About 80 devotees from the East Coast to the West, from Canada to South America traveled to attend. It was a joyous gathering of brothers and sisters united under the gracious glance and loving presence of Bhagavan Ramana.

Each morning of the retreat began at 6 AM with Morning Veda Parayana. A half hour of readings by various devotees followed. From 7:15 to 7:45 Sri Lalita Sahasranam Stotram was recited, silent meditation then continued until 8:30. Most evenings we listened to the Evening Veda Parayana at 5 PM followed by meditation till 6:30. After meals and free time, devotees gathered again for chanting and more silent meditation.

In the afternoons there were several presentations. Dr. Venkat Ramanan captivated all with his talk on the significance of the Old Hall. There were video interviews, taped by Rohit Vaidya in November 2016 at Sri Ramanasramam, of President Sri V. S. Ramanan, Sri V. S. Mani and Michael Highberger. The computer room

staff at the Ashram did an excellent job of editing the President's interview; the other two interviews were edited by Rohit himself. On another day, Dennis Hartel gave a presentation with numerous photos to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the founding of Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center in the USA and Canada.

On Thursday morning, devotees traveled to the new Old Hall, about 10 miles from the Franciscan Center. As described in the previous article, during the morning hours all gathered for the inauguration pujas, talks and songs. Lunch was served in the Vishnu Mandir, a few minutes' walk down the street. At 3 PM the Jayanti Puja at the Hindu Temple of Florida (next to the Vishnu Temple) began. A beautiful bust photo of Bhagavan, another of Arunachala, a large stone from the Holy Mountain and a Siva Lingam were the objects of worship. Eleven devotees chanted the Rudram and other mantras, an elaborate puja was performed by the head priest and prasadam was distributed. This event on the first day of the retreat



invariably serves to open and purify the hearts of the devotees so that the Master's grace may enter their hearts unimpeded in the following days.

As our retreat neared its end, the New Year was just arriving. Most of the devotees joined together in the shrine singing Bhagavan's and Muruganar's works and other chants. The children of the retreat stood together in front of us and delightfully told us the life story of Bhagavan. At 11:30 PM Aksharamanamalai began, singing the 'Arunachala Siva' refrain after each verse. While our voices rose in harmony, firecrackers exploded in the sky from across the Hillsborough River and New Year arrived. Bells rang, prasad was distributed and 'Arunachala Siva,

Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala!' continued till well after midnight. Devotees lingered on, embraced in the glow of the New Year ushered in with the vibrant presence of Bhagavan and the warmth of friendship.

The devotees attending the last four retreats, or any one of them, continue to be amazed by the meticulous, thorough planning and execution of all the inspiring elements of these Ramana Jayanti Retreats in Tampa. Rohit Vaidya and his dedicated team of sevaks cannot be praised adequately for all they have done to create an Ashram-like home for the devotees and seekers traveling to Tampa from all parts of this hemisphere. May Sri Bhagavan himself ever abide in their hearts and in the hearts of all.

50th Anniversary of Arunachala Ashrama Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center in the USA Part II

On December 8th, 1966 in New York City, for the purpose of incorporating a Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, pursuant to Article 10 of the Religious Corporation Law, Arunachala Ashrama was incorporated in the State of New York. Article XVIII of the By-Laws reads: "The purpose of the Center shall be to provide an educational and spiritual center for the study, pursuit and practice of the spiritual heritage bequeathed to mankind by the Great Sage Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi."

IN the village of Sahuri, near Begusarai, Bihar, Bhagawat experienced a therapeutic release from the "cold, corrugated cement and concrete" of city life in America, but his career ambitions and spiritual aspirations still remained unfulfilled.

Bhagawat writes: "Back in the village we were completely destitute in the true sense of the term. It was a very trying period for all of us. But the Grace of Bhagavan kept surging inside of me and was the main sustenance of my life. The desire for the darshan of Arunachala Ramana at Sri Ramanasramam remained unquenched within me because I did not have money to travel."

Then Bhagawat's nephew got inspired to take him to Arunachala. "As soon as we caught the first glimpse of Sri Arunachala, I was swimming in the Bliss of Bhagavan. After 19 years Bhagavan had brought me to His Lotus Feet. The greatest dream of my life was fulfilled. On December 30th, 1960, Friday morning, Rambahadur [his nephew] and I were in Sri Ramanasramam."

It was then at Sri Ramanasramam that Arthur Osborne, a staunch devotee of Bhagavan, author of several profound

books who later founded the Mountain Path magazine, encouraged Bhagawat to start some regular meetings centered on the Maharshi when he returned to the USA. Bhagawat did not know at that time if he would return to America, but he did, taking up a position at the Indian Mission to the United Nations.

Bhagawat was not keen to live in New York City. He accepted the assignment only because he came to the conclusion that Bhagavan must have had some purpose in his not finding employment elsewhere. And the purpose soon did reveal itself. On November 12, 1965 Bhagawat began weekly meetings in a room at the American Buddhist Society on the West Side of Manhattan.

Once a week his wife Yogamayaji and son Bhaskar would carry the gramophone to play the Veda Parayana and bhajan records and Bhagavan's books to read out the teachings. But as Bhagavan told Suri Nagamma, "Good endeavors encounter several obstacles," Bhagawat also experienced multiple roadblocks on his march to raise high the banner of Self-Enquiry of 'Who am I?' in the West.

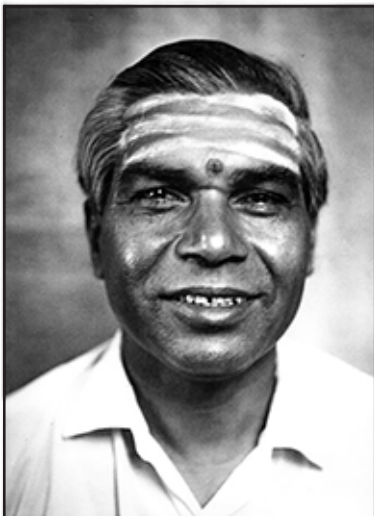
First of all, there was scant interest and the father, mother and son would often be the only attendees. Discouraged, Bhagawat consulted his wife and son about continuing their weekly routine. Fortunate he was, for both son and mother flatly refused to discontinue the meetings, which encouraged Bhagawat immensely.

Slowly a small group of seekers began to gather and Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center was legally incorporated as a religious charity on December 8th, 1966. In 1967, Bhagawat resigned his job and dedicated himself fully to the Ashram. A room was rented at 78 St. Mark's Place and Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, the name that he legally adopted, began his daily routine of traveling by subway from his Brooklyn apartment at 533 E. 2nd Street to the Manhattan Ashram.

Bhakta Bhagawat, now 55 years old, unemployed and without funds to support his family, totally threw himself prostrate before his Master, taking refuge fully in Him. About this time he wrote, "I wander about like a drunken person who does not care what the world thinks of him, as he is oblivious to the physical world in his inebriated state."

Bhagawat was a prolific writer. He sometimes said, "Unless my mind sinks into the Heart, I cannot write." And it would sink, and the writing went on and on. All his spare time would be occupied with "Worshipping at the altar of Hermes 3000 (his typewriter) with the fruits and flowers of my breath." He would often be seen sitting inwardly absorbed in front of the typewriter, or outwardly absorbed typing thousands upon thousands of pages of what he called "prayer manuscripts".

In 1970, he began writing a piece titled, "Bhagavan!



Though Art the Self". This concluded only after 3500 pages. "From the top of my voice I declare to the world that Thou art the very breath of me and day and night I find myself immersed in the surging Ganga of the Silent Sage of the Holy Hill of the Beacon Light, Sri Arunachaleshwara Shiva Bhagavan Sri

Ramana Maharshi..." Thus he writes on the last page in 1973, only to begin another piece titled, "Bhagavan! Thou Art My Breath".

He would never read what he wrote unless asked to, and he would routinely make many carbon copies. When the Xerox machines came he was the most diligent customer. Bhagawat would sometimes ask us to send copies of pages to this or that person, thus fulfilling, in his own unique way, the desire to share whatever grace and experience Ramana had bestowed upon him.

Bhagawat was uniquely qualified to bring Bhagavan's message and personality to the West. First of all, like almost all who made their way to Bhagavan's Arunachala Ashrama, he had never had the opportunity to visit Sri Maharshi in His Ashram before his Mahanirvana in 1950. In spite of this, he was fully immersed in the grace of Bhagavan and was a perfect example of a totally dedicated devotee completely surrendered to his Lord and Master. Besides this, born in a remote village of Bihar, in the land of Mithila from whence Sita, Rama's consort, hailed, Bhagawat fully embodied the ancient cultural and spiritual heritage which has run through the veins of all bhaktas in India down through the ages. He loved India, its land, people and especially its saints.

On a personal note, I (the editor) can remember in the year 1972 going with him to see a documentary on the famed musician Ravi Shankar presented at the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan. Bhagawat had not been back to India for eleven years at that time. The film began with panoramic views of Indian villages and landscapes. As soon as Bhagawat saw these he burst into irrepressible tears. Not just tears; he was sobbing uncontrollably, and this lasted nearly throughout the whole film. He could never refer to India without prefacing it with 'Mother' or 'Bharat Mata'. In his heart he was always only an Indian villager.

Another point is that Bhagawat had a perfectly clear understanding of Bhagavan's teachings. He had made them his own and experienced the truth they embodied. He would tell us "I can never say anything about Bhagavan's teachings unless I have experienced them." And he did. The exaltation of his experience is what drove him to share it with others. And this sharing with others was in fact the very basis or foundation of his inspiration to establish Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center here in the West. *(To be continued)*

137th Jayanti of Sri Ramana Maharshi

You, your family and friends are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the
137th Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's birth.

also

50th Anniversary of the Founding of Arunachala Ashrama

The programs will include parayanams, bhajans, talks and puja, followed by prasad (lunch).

In Queens, New York City
Sunday 15 January – 11:00 AM
Arunachala Ashrama
86-06 Edgerton Blvd., Jamaica Estates,
New York 11432 / Tel: 718.560.3196

In California, San Francisco Bay Area
Saturday 21 January – 11:00 AM
40086 Paseo Padre Pkwy
Fremont, CA 94538
Tel: 510-656-2752

Professor K. Swaminathan Recollects

TILL 1950, I used to visit the Asramam a couple of times every year; the frequency however increased between 1948 and 1950. I attended the Kumbhabhishekam of the Mathrubhuteswara Temple. It was an elaborate, solemn affair. After the Kumbhabhishekam was performed, in the evening arati was offered to the deity in the temple and was brought to Sri Bhagavan by Chinna Swami, Viswanatha Swami and President Venkataraman. I was sitting very close to Sri Bhagavan in the meditation hall attached to the temple. It was a moving sight when Sri Bhagavan extended his hands and touched the arati with great reverence, closing his eyes.

Soon after each operation was performed on Sri Bhagavan's cancer, I used to visit him. Sometimes I used to cry uncontrollably looking at Sri Bhagavan from a distance. As far as Sri Bhagavan was concerned, he was ever the same serene, blissful Self. He behaved as if the cancer belonged to somebody else. The last time I saw Sri Bhagavan was on 7th April, 1950, exactly one week before his nirvana. When I heard the news of Sri Bhagavan's nirvana at Kodaikanal, on 14th April, 1950, I did not break down, nor did I feel depressed. I felt a peace – a peace that was totally unexpected. Viswanatha Swami, whom I met a month later, also said that he enjoyed an indescribable peace at the time of Sri Bhagavan's nirvana.

Close Encounters with Sri Bhagavan

Sometime in 1949, when Sri Bhagavan was still in the meditation hall, I sat at the entrance looking at Sri Bhagavan from outside. His shoulder was bandaged because of cancer. I thought to myself: "I have been coming to the Asramam so often. But I have had no experience of real meditation. Sri Bhagavan has not granted me this experience." Thinking along these lines, I kept looking at Sri Bhagavan for a considerable time and then closed my eyes. I do not know how long I was in that state. When I opened my eyes I found that the meditation hall was empty. Sri Bhagavan was not there on the stone couch in the meditation hall. Sri Bhagavan and the devotees must have gone past me as I was sitting at the entrance.

When I realised that I had been sitting when Sri Bhagavan went past me, I was horrified. I felt how disrespectful I was. But suddenly, I realised that Sri Bhagavan, out of his unbounded grace, granted me an experience whereby I was completely oblivious of my surroundings. Even today, I am unhappy that I did not get up when Sri Bhagavan and his devotees went past me. Sri Bhagavan gives us rare experiences when we least expect them.

THE FOUR SEASONS

By Martin Wolff

Everything points to the Self.

Just look at the four seasons.

Why do we love Spring?

It is because freshness and newness are the hallmarks
of the Self.And it doesn't matter how many Springs we have lived
through;

every one is fresh and new.

Why do we love Summer?

It is because the beauty of the Self is always glorious
and fully elaborated.And the radiance of that glory shines from everything
and everyone.

Why do we love Autumn?

It is because the death of all doing is dear to the Self.

And that death is dramatically, startlingly colorful;
that which can die burns up as it leaves.

Why do we love Winter?

It is because emptiness and pristine stillness are the
essence of the Self.

Everything points to the Self.

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.

Albuquerque, NM — Deidra (505-266-9609 / deidrahuestis@gmail.com)

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

Ann Arbor, MI — Nirupama & Ramesh (574-514-4766 / neeru_2@hotmail.com)

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

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

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

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

Canada, Vancouver — Akash (778-321-4499 / eternalshiva@hotmail.com)

Canada, Victoria — Saibish (250-818-2875 / saibish@gmail.com)

Chicago Area — Jean-Luc & Rita (719-480-3530 / blueskyvalley@mac.com)

Connecticut Area — Aruna & Ram (860-284-0078 / rsankaran2000@yahoo.com)

Chapel, Hill, NC — Ranjani Ramanan (919-338-2551 / ranjanil@yahoo.com)

Dublin, Ohio — Abilash & Madhavi (614-789-9058 / mungamuru@hotmail.com)

Florida, Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet 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)

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New Jersey, West Windsor — Gurunath & Leena (609-273-6216 / gsnetravali@hotmail.com)

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