

The Maharshi



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Remembering Sri Bhagavan by Dr. K. B. Pispati

I think it was in 1943 that I had the good fortune to visit Ramanasramam along with His Highness the Maharaja of Dharampur. While in the Ashram, I paid my respects to Sri Bhagavan morning and evening and read a few books about Him, but I could not understand why people would come there morning and evening, sit quietly in the Hall, and go away after a day or two.

MOST of the time there was hardly any talk. I heard the early morning Veda Parayana hoping that it would throw some light. So, I finally got fed-up and approached Sri Narayana Iyer, who spoke good English and attended on Sri Bhagavan.

Sri Narayana Iyer was surprised to learn that I had understood nothing after a week or so. So, he advised me: "Please look at Sri Bhagavan as much as you can. He will look at you, sometimes. When He looks at you, look into His eyes and don't direct your eyes elsewhere during this moment. Then pray for whatever you want silently, and you will most probably get the answer." This talk took place in the morning at about 8:30. Then I went and sat in the Hall in a rear line of devotees, as I could not get a seat up front. And after some time Bhagavan did look at me continuously, with a fixed gaze, for nearly a minute. During this time, I felt that He saw me through His left eye which looked just then a bit more protruding than the right. He did not wink or close His eyes at all, nor during this time did He look at anything else, but looked at me with a fixed eye. I had the feeling that He searched me through and through. I also looked at Him with a fixed gaze during this minute. At the end of this minute, He closed His eyes for a second, took up a napkin to wipe away a drop of perspiration, and then directed His look – it was His usual way – to bhaktas coming and

going. His looking steadily at me started me thinking about what He could have seen in me. The same evening Mrs. Feroza Taleyarkhan, the Maharaj and about twenty other persons walked to the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple to have a look at the artistic, wonderful features of the tank, the walls, the gopuram, etc. While we were moving about in the temple compound, the arati of Sri Arunachala Shiva started with all the fanfare of temple bells, drums and priests chanting. As usual, crowds of devotees had assembled in the temple, as the arati time was the best time for darshan. As suggested, we all went inside the temple to attend the arati and have darshan. We were all there together. During the time of the arati, a big light, white like moonlight, was seen around the linga of Sri Arunachaleswara. The glow was immense and covered the whole area behind the linga. It was extremely pleasing to behold – a rare, delightful sight. It lasted for some time and continued even after the arati was over. By then I



had sat down and could not think of taking my eyes away from that wonderful sight. While I was thus engrossed, friends called me, saying, "Come on, we are leaving." To that, I nodded, "Please wait." But when they again disturbed me, and I looked at them, and again I looked back for the glow behind the linga, it was gone. The inner part of the temple had no electricity and only some small oil-lamps served to light up the place in the olden days. So, I realised that this mysterious glow was something unusual.

Well, it was dark and we all walked back to the Ashram and were standing just outside the hall where Sri Bhagavan used to sit. And usually no one used to go into the hall after dark except his personal attendants. I was also standing outside along with others exchanging pleasantries when Sri Bhagavan's attendant came out calling loudly, "Eh, Doctor, Bhagavan is asking about you. Come in." I was thunderstruck to be called by Sri Bhagavan. I entered, and while I was just on the threshold of the Hall, Sri Bhagavan said "Hmm," with a movement of the hand and asked me, "what did you see?" This question stunned me. I then knew that my vision of seeing the glow in the Arunachalam Temple was the divine magic of Sri Bhagavan. Otherwise, how could have He called me to ask this question? I requested permission to bow down and touch His feet (usually nobody was permitted to go very close or touch the feet), to which He said, "Hmm." I had the greatest Brahmanandam when my head touched His feet and He put His right hand on my back. And I not only thought, but felt that Sri Bhagavan had given me Ishwara Darshan, the highest bliss in the world. When I got up and stood in front of Him, He was in a very happy mood and was all smiles. He asked me to join Him at breakfast the following morning.

Like a hungry owl, I was at the Dining Hall much earlier than the usual time. The breakfast was served there and most of the inmates attended. Sri Bhagavan came in at the usual time. He was always very punctual, and signaled to me to sit very near him. When food was served, particularly a preparation of ground-nut, He asked the server to put some more on my plate, saying, "This contains vitamins, and you must eat."

After the breakfast, as usual, He walked up on the mountain. I followed at some distance and asked if I could take His picture. He readily agreed. This photo



Photo taken by Dr. Pispati at Sri Ramanasramam or its negative is in my collection. After coming down He asked if I had more films and said, "A peacock comes here every morning at nine. Take its picture." The next day I was there ready with the camera. The peacock came exactly at nine, spread its feathers and moved about. I took the picture and this negative is saved along with other negatives. I requested Sri Bhagavan to come and stand by the peacock and He readily did so.

One evening somebody brought the temple elephant to the Ashram. I requested Sri Bhagavan to come and stand near the elephant. Sri Bhagavan immediately came out, fed the elephant, and stood by the elephant while I took a photo – this negative is also included.

One day there came a businessman who requested Sri Bhagavan to solve a problem of his. The man said that his family deity was Ganesh, but he now found that worship of another deity brought him better business and greater profits. So, what should he do? Should he discard the old deity and adopt the new one? Bhagavan's answer was: "Do you think the deity is like some old piece of furniture that can serve a purpose and then be discarded? Go on with whatever you have been doing." A squirrel was a regular visitor to Bhagavan's Hall. So was a white cow which came daily. Therefore, every living thing possesses some latent ability which is awakened by some incident. Such a transformation took place within me in Sri Bhagavan's presence.

I pray to Sri Bhagavan daily. May He Bless all.

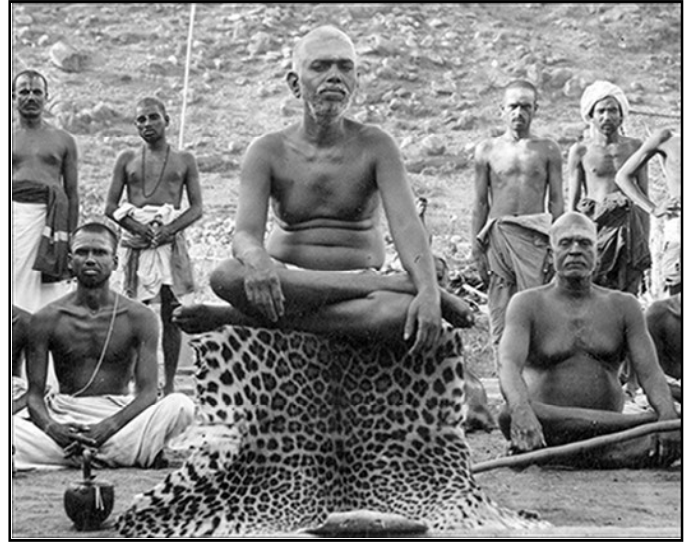
– Mountain Path, April, 1982

Srimathi Meenakshi Muruganar on Herself

I WAS born the sixth daughter of Sri Periyakulam Krishna Iyer and Kanakammal on the fourth day of Panguni month, Saleevagna Sahabdha, 1823 (17-3-1902). My parents and elders called me Meenakshi. I was happy with my parents.

When I was eleven years old, somebody told my father that there was a good boy named Subramanian in Ramanathapuram who was available for marriage. His parents were Sri Krishnamurthy Iyer and Srimathi Subbalakshmi Ammal. My father went there and talked with them about giving me in marriage to their son, and this was accepted. My marriage took place in the Melmangalam village near Periyakulam and was celebrated for five days on a grand scale.

My husband was a tutor to the third Rani's mother in Ramanathapuram palace. After my marriage, he served as Tamil vidvan in Thirumalai Nayakkar Mahal, Madurai. Then we left that place, came to Rayapuram and settled in Kollava Agraharam. My husband became Tamil pandit in Northwick School, Rayapuram. In the meantime, my father took sannyasa and became one of the leading devotees of Sri Ramana Bhagavan. [The father's name was Dandapani Swami]. Later, my father went to Palani with Bhagavan's permission, constructed an ashram in South Giri Street, and lived there for some time. While he was there he came to our house in Rayapuram. During his visit, he gave a copy of Aksharamanamalai (The Marital Garland of Letters) to my husband. My husband went through them and after four days informed me that he was going to Thirukkazhi Kunram. However, instead, he went straight to Tiruvannamalai. When he saw Bhagavan, he felt that his whole body was burning. He wept and cried out complaining of a burning sensation without knowing what it was. The attendants around Bhagavan thought that he was mad. One attendant, Sri Ramakrishna Swami rubbed lemon juice on his head and poured pots of water over him. He stayed there for several days doing tapas and having Bhagavan's darshan. Then he returned to Madras and his job, but he had little interest in his work. Then he began to go to Tiruvannamalai on all Saturdays and Sundays for one year.



Muruganar is to Bhagavan's right; Dandapani to his left

After my mother-in-law's first annual ceremony, and without informing me, he resigned his job and went to Ramanathapuram. My neighbors sent a telegram to my brother about my problem and he came to see me. Both of us went to the school and met the headmistress who was an English lady. She said that he had resigned his job and left. I began to weep, and she consoled me by saying that God would help me. Then I went to Ramanathapuram with my brother, and Muruganar came to visit us the night we arrived. I held his feet and wept. I requested him to point out my faults, if any, that made him leave me alone. He gave me no reply. Then I went to Raghava Iyengar, a great Tamil scholar in the town, and told him about my troubles. Raghava talked to my husband but his words had no effect.

Then Sri Muruganar left for Tiruvannamalai, and after ten days I also went there. Santhammal also came to the Ashram. I told all my sufferings to Bhagavan and wept and Bhagavan consoled me. I stayed in the Ashram for six months. At that time the Ashram was very small: Chinna Swami, Bhagavan, Palani Swami, Ramakrishna Swami, and Dandapani Swami used to cook. I helped them in the kitchen and it was a very happy time for me. Daily Bhagavan used to give me ten verses from Muruganar's works and instructed me to recite them to him the following day. I did it regularly. Sometimes I helped Bhagavan in grinding iddies, etc. Once a week Bhagavan used to go around the hill with Kunju Swami, Dandapani Swami, Ramakrishna Swami, Santhammal and others. I also

used to accompany them. We used to recite “Aksharamanimalai” during our pradakshina.

Bhagavan never allowed anyone to be idle. All disciples used to sit in meditation with closed eyes in the hall. I did not know how to meditate, and when I mentioned this to Bhagavan, he taught me how to do it.

One day I came to the hall with my hair full of flowers and bowed before Bhagavan. Santhammal saw my decorations and said, “Your husband has become a sannyasi, why do you dress up like this?”¹ After hearing this, I removed the flowers and I went up to Bhagavan weeping and bowed down before him. He looked at me and asked, “Why did you remove all your decorations?” I said that it was on the advice of Santhammal. Immediately, Bhagavan called Santhammal and asked, “Why, has she no husband? Why should she not decorate herself if she wants to? When anyone comes to the Ashram and takes a ladle in their hand, they immediately think that they are wonderful. While I was trying to pacify her, you have hurt her heart.”²

On one occasion, while others were meditating, I was more interested in some coffee which was due to be served. Bhagavan noticed me, laughed and said: “Everyone is doing meditation on the Self but Meenakshi is doing coffee meditation.” At that moment Saranagathi Ramaswami Iyer who came in a bullock cart entered the hall with coffee and iddies and Bhagavan asked him to serve me first.

Muruganar stayed near the temple in town with Eswaraswamigal and Gopal Rao. They used to go begging for their food at noon. Muruganar used to sit alone in Subramanya Temple in the evening. One evening, acting on Santhammal’s advice, I caught hold of his feet and asked, “What mistake have I done? Why did you leave? What will be my future?” In response he opened neither his mouth nor his eyes. Soon after this incident, someone brought a piece of verse to the hall and put it before Bhagavan. Bhagavan wanted Muruganar to read it and said, “Muruganar has been absent for the last two days. What is the reason?” In response to this I went to Bhagavan and told him what

I had done at the temple on Santhammal’s advice. Bhagavan got angry with me and said, “Why did you act like that on that woman’s advice. You see, while he was here, you could see your husband. But now he has disappeared, what will you do? Hereafter, don’t take other’s advice and don’t give trouble to Muruganar.” Then he asked Viswanatha Swami and Ramakrishna Swami to search for Muruganar and bring him back. They found him in Skandashram and brought him back to the Ashram, telling him that Meenakshi had gone to her village. He came and sat by the side of Bhagavan and I went before Bhagavan and did namaskaram. Then Bhagavan asked Muruganar why he had run away instead of advising her to do some meditation. Muruganar remained silent. Then Bhagavan picked up a book. I was sitting in a corner and he called to me to come near him: “Meenakshi, come here. There is a story in this book; I shall read it to you. Listen. ‘Once a husband and wife lived happily for some time. One day her husband disappeared without telling anybody. Many years passed but she could not find him. Eventually she joined a hospital as a nurse. In the same hospital, her husband was also working as the head compounder, but they did not recognize each other. After some time, they became close friends and the nurse became pregnant. When her mother came to help her, he saw her and realized that his present wife was the same one whom he had earlier deserted’.” After finishing the story Bhagavan asked, “Why don’t you act like her?” and everyone in the hall laughed, including me.

One day all the devotees were sitting in the hall. I was in tears again. Bhagavan asked me, “Why are you crying again? Did somebody tease you?” I said, “No one talked against me. but I thought of my miserable life and the tears just came.” Bhagavan said, “Why don’t you take my advice? What is there in the family life. See, your father has ten children, but they are not helping him. What is the use? I am always here with you. Nothing will happen, don’t worry.” Thus, Bhagavan consoled me. He said, “Go only to the homes of those who call you affectionately ‘Meenakshi’. The Ashram will take care of you.” Another day he called me and gave me ten verses by Muruganar to memorize. In these verses, he describes

1. It is traditional for widows and wives of sannyasis not to dress themselves up in any way.

2. Santhammal was the Ashram cook.

Bhagavan as his bridegroom with Muruganar being his bride. He complains that Ramana has left the bride in the streets after marriage without proper care. The verses are “Nayaki Nayakabava”. The verses say, “You were once with me, my wedded Lord, but now for a long time you have abandoned me. And if I complain, you call our old friendship a dream that I had dreamt.” In the version given to me, Bhagavan changed the last line, changing ‘Ramana mayavane’ to ‘Muruga mayavane’. He then asked me to recite these verses in the hall in the evening while Muruganar was there. I sang

these ten verses in the hall while Muruganar was sitting by the side of Bhagavan, Bhagavan then told Muruganar that he has not left him in the streets, but Muruganar has left Meenakshi in the streets. Muruganar got up laughing, but Bhagavan asked him to give a reply before getting up. But he went away without saying anything. Then Bhagavan said, “I tried in so many ways. It is of no use. God alone will look after you.”

Bhagavan was very kind to me. His grace must be with me forever.... – *Mountain Path*, April 1981

A Talk with Sadhu Natanananda

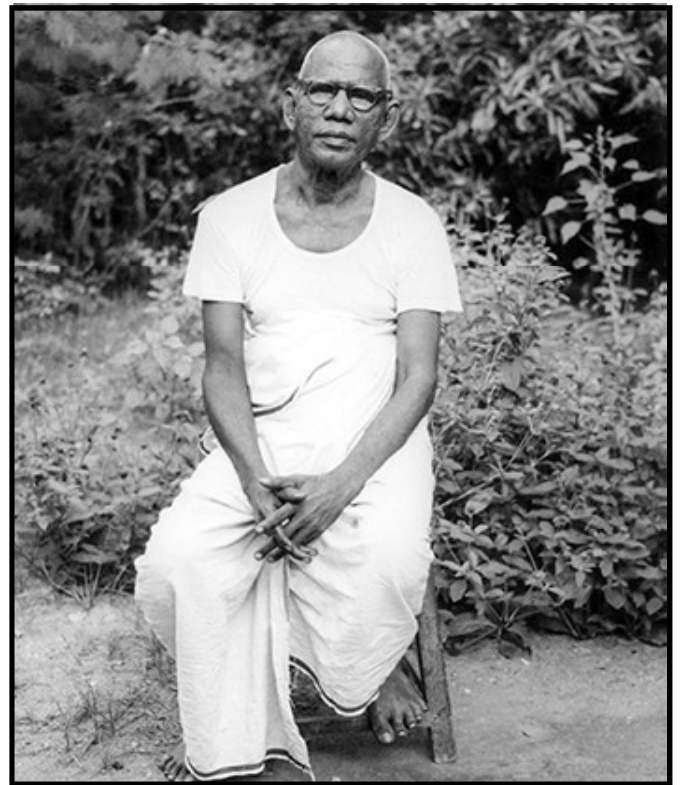
Sri Sadhu Natanananda was totally dedicated to Sri Bhagavan and a great scholar in Tamil. All his writings, in verse and prose, are on Sri Bhagavan's life and teachings. Sadhu Natanananda's guidance to sincere aspirants was inestimable. In 1978, a group of earnest seekers met with him and the following is a record of what he said on that day.

(1) There are three things that a seeker has to think of: (i) to have a lakshya (aim in life); (ii) to strive towards attaining it; and (iii) actually attain it. The third is very difficult, except for sages like Sri Bhagavan. It is not possible for all. But the first is possible for all — everyone can have a lakshya. Unfortunately, most seekers stop there. A seeker should know that the second is the most important. One must strive (towards the chosen lakshya) all the time, relentlessly.

(2) Till one has attained and is firmly established in IT, continuous and strenuous effort is necessary. Guidance will come automatically for one who sincerely strives.

(3) Of all the paths, Jnana Marga (Path of Knowledge) appears the most difficult. But, for one following this path the greatest advantage is that effort made in this path, however limited it may be, will definitely prove fruitful.

(4) The spiritual aspirant flies with the two wings of viveka and vairagya. With one wing alone, one cannot fly. To be aware of one's vasanas (predispositions) is viveka and to get rid of them by constant enquiry ‘To whom are the vasanas,’ is vairagya. Thus, viveka re-enforced by vairagya alone can lead one on to the Truth. Watchful effort, with total dedication (attention) is essential.



(5) With other sadhanas, like the devotional approach, one can progress steadily and take another birth to a better life. But why postpone the realization? When one knows fully that even this body is not one's own, and that in fact one has not taken a body at all, where is the question of a next birth. To whom?

(6) Having come to Sri Bhagavan one must make sure that this is the last birth, so long as one identifies oneself with the body.

(7) The Path of Vichara is not for all. It is definitely the most difficult one, since there is no room for any sort of compromise in it. One must strive hard and constantly too. To deserve to be a follower of Ramana's path one should have the fundamental discrimination that one is not the body.

(8) If one swerves from atma vichara, one gets

engrossed in loka vichara (world enquiry). Atma vichara needs strenuous effort and the moment one swerves from it one gets drowned in loka vichara. It is like this: to have light alone one has to make the effort of lighting a lamp; to have darkness, no effort is necessary! The absence of light is darkness.

(9) To have come to Sri Bhagavan is proof enough that one is positively going to end the cycle of births and deaths in this life itself.

– *Mountain Path*, Oct. 1981

The Unity of Surrender and Self-Enquiry

by Prof. K. Swaminathan

ONE of Ramana Maharshi's most frequent comments was that there were only two reliable methods for attaining Self-Realization; one could either pursue Self-enquiry or one could surrender. An almost equally common statement was that Jnana and Bhakti are ultimately the same. This second statement is usually interpreted to mean that whichever of the two paths one chooses to follow, the ultimate goal and the culminating experience will be the same. It is generally assumed that the two paths do not converge until the moment of Realisation is reached. However, if Ramana Maharshi's teachings are correctly interpreted, then it will be seen that the paths of surrender and Self-enquiry merge before Realisation, and that in the higher levels of practice, if one follows the path of surrender, then one's sadhana will be the same as that of someone who has chosen the path of Self-enquiry. This may seem very radical at first sight, but this is only because of the general misconceptions that many people have about Ramana's teachings on the true nature, meaning and practice of surrender. In order to eliminate these misconceptions, and to clarify Ramana's attitude and approach to surrender, it will be helpful to examine some of these commonly held ideas in the light of Ramana's statements on the subject, firstly to show how unfounded most of these ideas are, and secondly, by eliminating them, to illustrate the profundity of Ramana's real teachings. The most convenient starting point for this enquiry is the relationship that exists between Ramana Maharshi, the Guru, and the thousands of people who call

themselves his devotees. There is a long tradition in this country of people accepting certain teachers as their gurus, and then proclaiming immediately that they have surrendered to them. In most cases, this surrender is only a statement of intent, or at best, there is a partial surrendering to this new authority figure in the hope of acquiring some material or spiritual reward. Ramana's opposition to this type of religious bribery was quite clear, and it is best summed up in the following statement: "Surrender to Him and abide by His will whether he appears or vanishes; await His pleasure. If you ask Him to do as you please, it is not surrender but command to Him. You cannot have Him obey you and yet think that you have surrendered. He knows what is best and when and how to do it. Leave everything to Him; His is the burden, you no longer have any cares. All your cares are His. Such is surrender. This is Bhakti". (*Talks*, p.425). This statement, typical of many that he made is a categorical refutation of the idea that one can surrender to one's God or Guru, and yet demand that the God or Guru fulfills one's desire, or solves one's problems. Despite this often-repeated refutation, it is probably true to say that the majority of Ramana's devotees both believe that they have surrendered to Ramana, yet at the same time, would not hesitate to approach him with their personal and material problems, especially if the perceived need required an urgent solution. In Ramana's teachings on surrender, there is no room for stray desires, and no room for expectations of miracles, no matter how desperate the situation might

appear to be. Ramana says: “If you have surrendered, you must be able to abide by the will of God and not make a grievance out of what may not please you.” (*Talks*, p.115)

Under Ramana’s strict interpretation of absolute surrender, the only appeals which might qualify for approval are those where the devotee approaches the God or Guru with the attitude “This is your problem and not mine; please attend to it in any way you see fit.” This attitude bears the marks of partial surrender, for it fulfills the bare minimum requirements of Ramana’s definition of true surrender. On this level of surrender, there is no longer any expectation of a particular solution; there is simply a willingness to

accept whatever happens. It is interesting to note in this connection that although Ramana clearly stated that devotees who wanted their problems solved were not practicing true surrender, he did admit that surrendering one’s problems to God or to the Guru was a legitimate course of action for those who felt that they could not stick to His absolute teaching of complete surrender. He was once asked, “Is it proper that one prays to God when one is afflicted by worldly ills?” and his answer was “Undoubtedly.” (*Talks*, p.501). This admission that the Guru may be approached with personal problems should be seen as an extension of, and not a contradiction of his teachings on absolute and unconditional surrender. *(to be continued)*

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)
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Birmingham, AL — Sai Kand (205-441-6859 / kandsai@yahoo.com)
Boston, MA — David & Anna (617-928-1487 / annaklegon@gmail.com)
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