

The Maharshi



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Ranganathan, A Classmate of Bhagavan

More reminiscences from Bhagavan's boyhood friend who later became his ardent devotee.

One day Bhagavan told me "It was your mother that came and saw me here first. Even my mother came only afterwards. Your mother came to me in 1898 when I was at Pavalakunru. She was shocked to find the state in which my body was and cried and exclaimed, 'Has your father's great hospitality and feeding of the poor brought about this and turned you into a Saint?' " She could not bear to see Bhagavan unwashed and practically naked, sitting on the rocks. So while returning home, she took the train and got down to join us at Villupuram and told us of the pitiable sight she saw.

REFERRING to this incident, Bhagavan later asked me "You all stayed away at Villupuram and sent only your mother. You thought, 'Why go and see this mendicant fellow?' Is it not so?" I replied "Bhagavan apparently felt that we couldn't bear to see him in such a state and so did not give us the conviction then that he was God, an Avatar and a Jnani. So we couldn't come."

My mother asked Palaniswami, who was standing near Bhagavan, if Bhagavan would take fruits. Bhagavan at once stretched out his hand and my mother peeled off the skin from a banana and placed it in Bhagavan's hand. Bhagavan graciously ate it. When next she asked Palaniswami if Bhagavan would walk, Bhagavan got up and walked a few paces. Many years afterwards Bhagavan referred to this incident and with a smile told me, "I even thought of speaking to your mother then, but was afraid that if I did so, she might be emboldened to drag me away by force to Madura. I used to speak a word or two in those days to Palaniswami."

Bhagavan related the following to me: "A man once did great tapas to attain jnana. God Siva appeared before

him and asked him what boon he wanted. He replied, 'Let me always have poverty and troubles.' Siva replied, 'What is this. There are all sorts of good things in the world which you might ask for. You might ask for becoming a millionaire or an Emperor, and you ask for this.' The bhakta replied, "If I am a millionaire my eyes will not see nor my ears hear (the things that really matter). I would be caught up entirely in the affairs of the world and will be involved interminably in a succession of births and deaths. That is why I want poverty and troubles, which alone will enable me to think of You always and lead me on to jnana'." Then I asked Bhagavan, "Is it not possible to attain jnana being such (wealthy)," Bhagavan replied, "One can attain jnana only as the result of 'sath karma', i.e. good acts. If one is rich, one will yield to its attractions and it will be very difficult to turn to jnana."

One evening Bhagavan took me to the top of the Hill and showed me all the places of interest there, including the spot where the beacon light is lit up annually. After sunset we climbed down and slept for the night at the Seven Springs. I laid myself down at Bhagavan's feet. In a little

while I saw Bhagavan everywhere in that place. After a while it ceased. I told Bhagavan what I saw. He remained silent. I imagined this was like Krishna giving (Viswarupa) darshan to Arjuna.

I used to pester Bhagavan frequently with my questions. So, one day Bhagavan said, "You are always asking questions. Some devotees come, sit before me and realise what alone has to be known and go away." I replied, "What is to be done? If you have a dunce for your son, you will have to again and again shout into his ears and teach him." Bhagavan laughed and remained silent. I realised that many people had become jivanmuktas by having Bhagavan's darshan. Who can describe Bhagavan's greatness?

One day Bhagavan told me he was where speech was not. Thereupon I asked him, "Why then do you speak?" "Out of compassion, I have to speak," he replied. I realised then that Bhagavan was Dakshinamoorthy and speaks only out of compassion for us.

Once a friend had come with us from Madura to Bhagavan. He was a great observer of all external forms of achara (orthodoxy). Bhagavan told us that a dog used to remain always before him in nirvikalpa Samadhi, and that when she was pregnant the Ashram people would not allow her to deliver its litter at the Ashram, but drove her away. Thereupon she went up the Hill and brought forth her pups. She stayed a while there, but except when suckling her little ones, she used to come as before to Bhagavan and stay in his presence. When I and the above friend sat for our food along with others in the Ashram, and the food

had been served, one of the pups came along and sniffed my friend's leaf plate. Bhagavan laughed and related the following story. "Once Dattatreya took one of his disciples with him and went to meet his Guru. On the way he told his disciple that his Guru may come in any guise. The Guru came in the guise of a fakir [an ascetic who live solely on alms]. After mutual greetings, all three sat for meals. The Guru took out a piece of bread from his leather bag, soaked it in a bitch's milk, freshly drawn just then, took a portion of it himself and gave the rest to Dattatreya. Dattatreya in turn took a portion and gave the rest to his disciple. The disciple was disgusted and could not take the bread. So he had it with him for a while and then threw it away. After a while Dattatreya asked the disciple whether he took the bread. The disciple confessed the truth. Thereupon, Dattatreya took a little of the bread out of his Guru's mouth and asked him to eat the same." After narrating this story, Bhagavan asked my friend to eat the food on the leaf plate before him, and my friend ate accordingly.

Once Bhagavan's mother told me the following: "One day while we were at Skandasramam I went out. When I left, Bhagavan was inside, lying down. When I returned, I saw him sitting on the cot outside. But when I entered inside, I saw him there too, lying as when I left. I told Bhagavan what I saw, and he laughed and said, "Why didn't you tell me at once. I would have caught the thief." This is one of the visions vouchsafed to his mother by Bhagavan.

One day I asked Bhagavan, "How many more lives would I have to pass through before I could attain



Alagammal's Journey – A Sadhana Katha

Once again, one hundred years ago, Alagammal climbed the sacred Arunachal Hill, in order to stay near her son. What had begun as an ageing parent's wish to live with her child, gradually became the surrender of a sadhika to her sadguru, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

In this book, the story of Alagammal's spiritual journey has been told for the first time in the form of a narrative, a katha. The facts and dates are historical. The portrayal of her life's journey is the humble attempt of the author to depict the pain and struggle of a young mother and widow whose destiny it was to lose much on the human level and yet to gain the ultimate release from the cycle of birth and death. This is the story of the journey of a soul from individual to universal motherhood.

Sri Ramanasramam is very happy to commemorate this historical event with the publication of *Alagammal's Journey, A Sadhana Katha*.

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Postage in USA \$3: For Canada \$4

jnana?” Bhagavan replied, “There is no such thing as Time or Space. In the course of an hour during sleep, we have dreams in which we feel we have passed through many days and even years. On the cinema screen, you see pictures of a film one half inch broad transformed into big mountains, vast oceans and huge buildings. The world is not outside. As we see the tiny pictures on the film reflected on the screen through the lens, so (in the same manner), we see the small world that is in the mind as a big world outside through the lens of our sight.

Once I observed a Muslim talking to Bhagavan. I imagined he was having a talk on religious and philosophical matters. After he left, Bhagavan told me, “You are all so troubled. You have debts. I have,” he added laughing, “a debt of Rs. 500 because I had bought combs, soaps, mirrors, groceries and other provisions in town!” I learnt that the previous manager of the Ashram had incurred all these debts. I was greatly distressed to hear this. So I went to Madras and told a rich bhakta of this state of affairs. He came to Tiruvannamalai, scolded the shopkeeper for having sold on credit things to men who purported to act for the Ashram and settled their claims by paying Rs. 250.

One day at 4 a.m. Bhagavan woke me up to go to Pandava Theertham to swim. After this, a Dikshitar of Iyankullam who was sleeping nearby began scratching the floor. Bhagavan asked me to see if he was doing this with a spindle. Thereupon the Dikshitar woke and explained that Bhagavan was referring to the dream which he just had. It seems he was dreaming that he was in his own village, that Avani Avittam was approaching, and that to spin yarn for making sacred threads (Poonool) he was searching for his spindle. The previous day I had told Bhagavan, “Jnanis know the past, present and future.” Bhagavan replied, “That is a very small matter. They know what occurs in the waking, the dream and other worlds. But all worlds are only as real as this world. God has given all knowledge to men, withholding from them only knowledge of the future, even of the next minute.”

One day, a devotee told another, “If you have Bhagavan’s darshan often, he will make you a mendicant.” The latter, who was a great Bhakta and who knew everything, pretended to be frightened and came to Bhagavan and complained, “It seems if I come to you

frequently you will make me a pauper, I am getting a salary of Rs.1000 per month. What is to come of my wife and children if I lose this appointment?” Bhagavan replied, “Whatever one wishes for, that gets fulfilled.”

One day Bhagavan told me that a man should get rid of the ego-sense, the sense of I and mine, in whatever work he might be doing in the world and by that way alone the ego will vanish and the Self emerge. Then he narrated to me the following story: “There was a powerful King. The neighbouring King tried to conquer him many times, but always failed. The king who was thus victorious and who for many years prided himself on his strength and ability one day suddenly renounced his kingdom, went to the neighbouring king and handed over his estate and Kingdom to him. He then retired to the forest to do penance. After many years of penance, it occurred to the retired king to go and beg in cities and live there. He did so accordingly. Later, he went and begged in his own city. Though he was recognized there, he would not allow anyone to show any respect and only to treat him as a mendicant. Then he went and begged in his own palace and there again, in spite of entreaties from all, he persisted in being treated only as a mendicant. While he was living thus, begging in cities and eliminating the ego-sense, the king of a neighbouring state died without heirs and the people of the state in accordance with ancient custom sent round their Royal elephant with water and garland in its trunk, intending to choose for their King whomsoever the elephant picks up and garlands after bathing him with the water it was carrying. It so happened that the elephant chose the ex-king, the mendicant. He on his part did not decline, but took up the kingship. While he was thus reigning over that kingdom, the successor of his original kingdom died and his subjects came to their old king and requested him to reign over them as before. He consented. He ruled over two States now. But there was this difference between his old rule and his present rule. Formerly, he used to do everything with the notion that he was doing it. But now, he did everything with the conviction that God alone was working and that he was a mere instrument in His hands. And there was greater prosperity and happiness amongst his subjects than before.”

Once when I was visiting Bhagavan a bhakta of

his was copying out slokas from a note-book sitting a distance of about 100 feet from Bhagavan. Coming to a sloka which he could not make out, he paused. Then Bhagavan gave out the sloka in question and the bhakta asked Bhagavan how he came to know which sloka he was trying to decipher. A workman engaged in putting up a pandal remarked, "Bhagavan saw your pen stop and so guessed." Bhagavan said, "Yes." What is there that Bhagavan does not know?

One day a bhakta asked Bhagavan if one jnani can recognise another. Bhagavan replied, "What is there for a jnani to recognise, as he sees all as only the Self." In answer to my question whether jnanis have dreams, Bhagavan said, "In the same way in which they have the waking world, they have the dream world. Thereupon I asked Bhagavan what sort of dreams he gets. He said, 'I dream about temples, sacred waters, etc!'"

On another occasion, at Skandasramam, a party of bhaktas who had just returned from a pilgrimage to Pandharpur came to Bhagavan and gave him biksha. After food they sang bhajana and at the end embraced Bhagavan and left. After they left, I also embraced Bhagavan and then observed his body had become red and bloodied. Thereupon I asked Bhagavan about it and he remarked, "They embraced me as they embraced the God at Pandharpur. But that God is made of stone. This is a body and this is its dharma," and laughed.

While Bhagavan was at Skandasramam, Bhagavan's mother told me that one bhakta used to grind green ganja leaves and give a ball of it frequently to Bhagavan. Another bhakta one day gave the same stuff in such large quantity that it might have proven fatal. It seems that day

Bhagavan's eyes grew very red and he sat like that the whole day. Telling me this, Mother asked me to request Bhagavan not to take whatever is offered from bhaktas. I then asked that bhakta not to give anymore ganja to Bhagavan. I also requested Bhagavan not to take it thereafter. For that Bhagavan replied, "What to do? I have to take whatever is offered."

One day I noticed Bhagavan's gums had receded. I asked him, "You are younger than me. How is it your gums are already like this?" He replied, "One person, to test me, gave me poison. I took it. It did not take away my life, but it ate up my gums." "There was a Goddess to prevent the poison getting below the neck in Siva's case, but there was none here," I replied.

My son has composed a work in Tamil describing the marriage of Bhagavan, the bride being jnana, just as the marriage of Rama or Krishna is elaborately sung in our books. When people of my family sang the above songs before Bhagavan, the bhaktas assembled there remarked, "What is this, they sing of Bhagavan's marriage!, Bhagavan left his home and became an ascetic when he was sixteen," and laughed. Then Bhagavan said, "When I was at Skandasramam, a married Brahmin woman used to visit me now and then. Whenever she was present, if we sat for food, she used to place a leaf-plate next to mine and serve on it all the several dishes served to us all. When asked for whom is that plate? She would reply, 'It is for Moksha Lakshmi', the idea being that in the case of jnanis, Moksha Lakshmi is always by their side" When asked who that lady was, Bhagavan replied, "I don't know who she is. Nor does mother know."

Jayanti

**You, your family and friends are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the
136th Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's birth.
The programs will include parayanams, bhajans, talks and puja, followed by prasad (lunch).**

In Queens, New York City
Sunday 27 December – 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 9 January – 11:00 AM
40086 Paseo Padre Pkwy,
Fremont, CA 94538
Tel: 510-656-2752

Grant Duff

1866 – 1948

“I saw many Western visitors come to the Ashram after reading or hearing about the Maharshi. Of all of these foreigners, none impressed me as much as Grant Duff.

“On his first visit [January, 1935], I remember him asking if he could hear the Vedas recited. A chair was placed opposite Bhagavan’s couch for him while the priests chanted. At the conclusion of the chanting he looked at Bhagavan and said with deep feeling, ‘Magnificent!’ Bhagavan also openly spoke of his virtues. Rarely did I hear Bhagavan speak about anyone like that.”

– *My Reminiscences*, by Balarama Reddy

GRANT Duff was a distinguished Scottish diplomat, poet, a world traveller, philosopher and above all, a sincere seeker of Truth. He studied life and literature intensely for decades before he discovered in Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi the ultimate aim and purpose of life personified.

His actual given name was Douglas Ainslie. Where he was born and the peculiar circumstances under which he was given this name is explained in his 1922 autobiography, titled, *Adventures Social and Literary*:

“I was born on the 16th of December, 1866 at 127 Rue La Perouse. My father had come to Paris from St. Petersburg to be secretary of Embassy to Lord Cowley, who was then British Ambassador.

“This Mr. Douglas Ainslie was my father’s maternal uncle, and had just left him the whole of his property, Delgaty Castle in Aberdeenshire and Blervie in Moray, on condition of his adopting the surname of Ainslie in place of Grant Duff, and calling his eldest son Douglas.

“But I have more than once regretted the surname of Grant Duff, borne by my father and father’s father, Grant Duff of Eden, an historian and Governor of the Mahrattas from Sattara for more than twelve years, under the East India Company.

“My late uncle, my father’s brother, Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Dutt, G.C.I.E., G.C.S.I., to whom I shall refer later, also distinguished himself in India as Governor of Madras, and I myself

have always felt a strong inclination to study that country, an inclination which did not find favour with my parents, who refused, for too much love, to allow me to visit India at the age of seventeen at my uncle’s invitation from Madras. I have often wished that I had made earlier acquaintance with the great country, which my own blood has done something to consolidate with the British Empire.”

In this same autobiography he recounts how as the son of privileged aristocrats he lived an idyllic childhood life at Delgaty Castle in Scotland (<http://www.delgatiecastle.com/>). He takes us through his education, travels to distant lands, diplomatic appointments, associations with distinguished personalities, etc.

At one place he even appears to respond to an inner call from the Orient, revealed when he writes: “I am convinced that in India is knowledge obtained by concentration of thought and possibly other means of psycho-physical character which transcends anything of which we in Europe are aware.”

He seems to have been a lifelong bachelor who sought truth through philosophy and poetry. He lectured on Hegel and was so taken up with the philosophy of the Italian Benedetto Croce that he, uninvited, one fine day walked up to his door in Italy and knocked. Duff and Croce immediately

connected intellectually and spiritually, from which a literary collaboration ensued, resulting in Duff translating twelve of Croce’s volumes from Italian into English.



Douglas Ainslie as Diplomatic Attache

When at the beginning of 1935 Grant Duff finally travelled to Madras, Prof. K. Swaminathan was appointed to take him around his college and other places. The professor was much enamoured of the philosophy of Benedetto Croce and was delighted to have the company of the esteemed translator of his work. But when Duff out of the blue asked him whether he had met the Maharshi, the professor was surprised and taken aback. "Here was a man that was the English translator of the Italian philosopher I so greatly admired, and he is asking me if I have seen the Maharshi. I was much ashamed, for I had not gone to see him."

Grant Duff must have spent at least a year in India on this visit, which he could never repeat in spite of writing in the 1940s that he was hoping to fly to India soon.

While in India, besides visiting the Maharshi at least three times, he studied Sanskrit in Ootacamund for six months. Known as a diplomat born into a distinguished family intimately connected with India, invitations and opportunities to visit places throughout the country must have been numerous. But from the start it was clear that his primary reason to visit India was to seek spiritual illumination, which he ultimately experienced at Ramanasramam.

He is first mentioned in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No. 16, on 19th January, 1935:

"Mr. Douglas Ainslie (Mr. Grant Duff), an

aristocratic English gentleman, 70 years old, [actually he was 68] nephew of a former Governor of Madras, an author and poet formerly attached to the British Legation in Athens, Paris and The Hague, had come to Madras as a guest of Government House. He came to see Maharshi with a letter of introduction from Paul Brunton. Next day he returned and remained a little less than an hour in the hall. On both days practically no words were exchanged, only gaze meeting gaze. His habits are abstemious; he remains without food of any kind till 1 p.m. and then lunches; he is said to have coffee and biscuits in the evening and retires without any further food. He has been a bachelor all along, walks a few miles a day on an empty stomach, speaks little and is very graceful in his movements. His voice is low and soft and his words appear to come from the heart. He has friends among whom might be counted the late Sir John Woodroffe, Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Prof. Thomas, Sanskrit Professor in Oxford University. He expressed a desire to hear the Vedas. On Monday a letter arrived from Riga and the questions therein happened to coincide with the questions the European visitor had asked relating to the existence of departed souls and how best to serve them.

"The reply sent to Riga was read out to him. Tamil songs from Maharshi's "Truth Revealed" and the Vedas were repeated in his presence. He considered the

Sri Ramana Jayanti Retreat in Tampa

Thursday, December 31st – Sunday, January 3rd

This year's four-day retreat will have periods of meditation, chanting, readings, presentations, satsang and quiet time for reflection and relaxation, and will once again be held at the Franciscan Center of Tampa, Florida.

If you would like a registration form emailed to you, please write to: rohitrkaidya@yahoo.com

Or call: 813-766-0145

The retreat center's capacity is 65 attendees, which will soon be met. We therefore recommend all genuinely interested individuals to request a registration form and immediately, send it. The final registration date is November 30th. The cost for lodging and food will be provided along with the registration form.

For more information, please contact:

rohitrkaidya@yahoo.com / (813) 766-0145 or dennis@arunachala.org / (718) 560-3196

The program will be held at:

The Franciscan Center, 3010 N. Perry Avenue, Tampa, Florida 33603

Website: <http://www.franciscancentertampa.org/>

recitations magnificent. He came the next afternoon and to the wonder of others, had an experience on the previous night which he repeated to Maharshi. It was that he had seen something like an electric light within himself in the heart centre on the right side. And he added further that he had seen the sun shining within. Maharshi smiled a little and then had a translation of “Atmavidya” (Self-Knowledge) read out to him wherein there is the cryptic saying that realisation consists in reaching the Atman (Self) which is the expanse of consciousness (chidvyoman) as distinguished from the mind, which is the expansion of chittavyoman. This explanation appealed to him.

“Speaking of him later, Maharshi remarked, ‘Just

think of an old man of seventy not choosing to live peacefully in his own house on the income he had earned! How intense has been his earnestness that he has left his native land, dared a sea voyage of 6,000 miles, and faced the hardships of long railway journeys in a foreign land, ignorant of the language, undergoing the vicissitudes of a lonely life, submitting to the inclemency of a hot climate, in surroundings uncongenial and unaccustomed to him. He could have been happy in his own house. It is his longing for internal peace that has brought him here.’ Quite so! The intensity of his earnestness is revealed by his illuminating experiences here within four days of his arrival, people say. *(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)
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)
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)
Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Robinson (954-600-1967 / arunahill@gmail.com)
Houston, TX — Kumar Saran (832-435-3761 / saran01@earthlink.net)
Los Angeles, CA — Natarajan & Indira Venkatesan (310-473-9441 / nvenky30@yahoo.com)
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