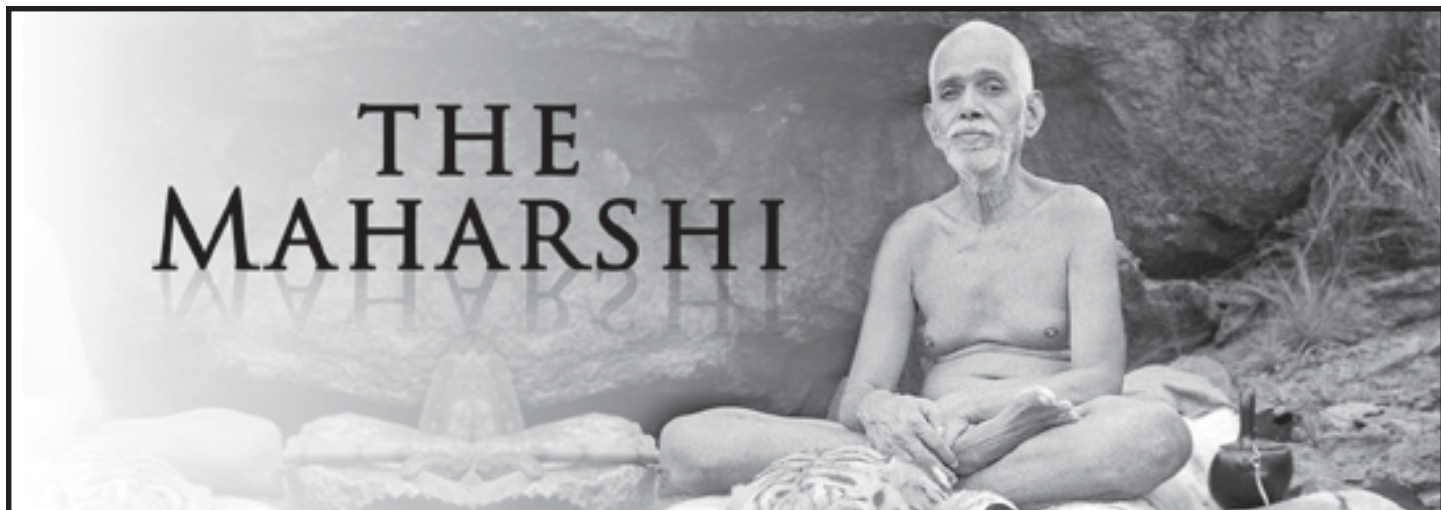


THE MAHARSHI



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Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat

Birth Centenary (1912 – 2012)

One hundred years ago, on November 8, 1912, Bhagawat Prasad Singh was born in a remote village of Bihar, India. His aspirations for learning, for India's independence from the British, for spiritual attainment and for complete surrender and dedication to his Master and Lord, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, were the catalysts that propelled his idealistic life forward in India and America where—his work ended—his lifeless body lay prostrate before the shrine of his guru Sri Ramana in New York City on the morning of April 10th, 2000. Bhagawat was the founder of Arunachala Ashrama in the West and the indelible memories of his life and his friendship continue to inspire all who knew him.

THROUGHOUT his long life, Bhagawat Prasad Singh was firmly rooted in his village, in the land of Mythila where Sita, the consort of Rama, was born. He wrote: “My mother Srimati Pancha Devi and father Sriman Girivar Roy, although illiterate, were a very religious and God-fearing couple. I was their youngest child and was brought up in the hope of being given a formal education so that I might be able to read and recite the religious epic poem *Ramayana* of Goswami Tulsidas, the immortal poet-saint of the Hindi language. Thus, my Lord, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, inspired my parents to name me ‘Bhagawat’ (a devotee of the Lord) and to put me under the care of the village teacher so that I might read and learn about the world.

“From my earliest childhood I remember being given to contemplation and very serious and deep conversation. That is why the villagers often called me ‘an old man in the body of a child’, and I can picture myself as I used to go about the village with a serious countenance and deep purpose.

“My village was in the backwoods, devoid of even a place of worship. India is a land of God-intoxicated people, and it is very strange that this village could not even build a temple for its residents. To reach my village one had to make a great effort. No road led to it and all of us had to walk through fields, farms, floodwaters and sun-baked lands, and there was every likelihood of losing one’s way in the night.”

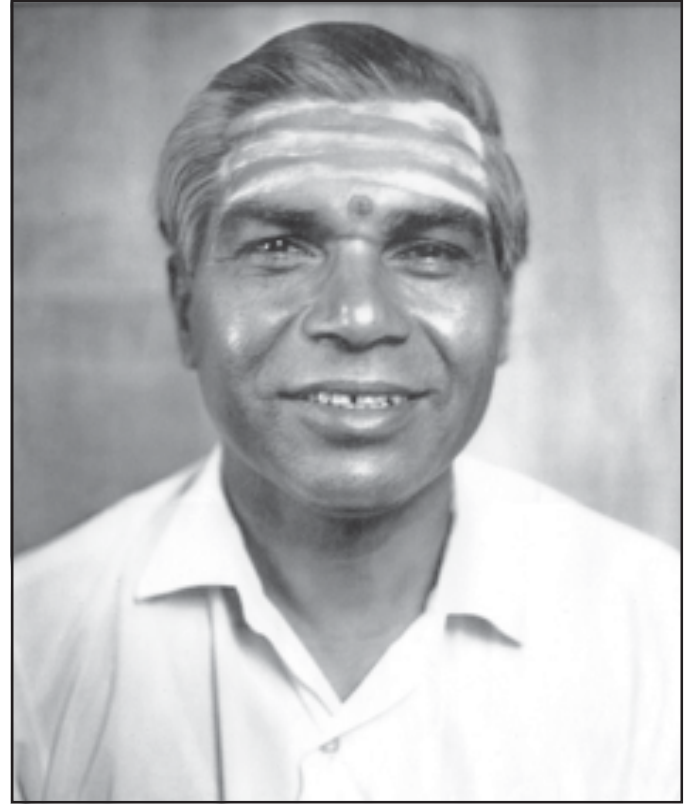
Even before reaching the age of ten Bhagawat became active in the Non-Cooperation Movement of Mahatma Gandhi. This may have disconcerted his elders, but Bhagawat was an incorrigible idealist right from his youth. Any high ideal outside the normal pursuits of life invariably attracted him, captivated his heart and mind, and he would throw his whole being into it with the utmost sincerity and intensity. It happened again when he read the life of Gautama Buddha in upper primary school. As a teenager his motto became “*National liberation and Self-realization*”. And his zeal for India’s independence landed him in prison when he was only seventeen years old.

Though his education had been interrupted and in spite of financial difficulties, Bhagawat's family was determined to send him for higher studies. After his release from jail he completed his high school in Calcutta, then attended the Varanasi Hindu University and finally completed his B.A. at Patna University in Bihar. He then took employment as a teacher in a Hindi school in Darjeeling, a Himalayan hill station. It was here, about a month before his 29th birthday, that he first read the Hindi version of *A Search in Secret India*. The moment his eyes fell on the photo of Sri Maharshi he wanted to "fly through the air" to his abode at Arunachala.

He writes: "Near around the 10th of October, 1941, I received the book *Gupt Bharat Ki Khoj*, a Hindi translation of Paul Brunton's book, *A Search In Secret India*. I did not know about the book, but had simply come across an advertisement of it in a Hindi magazine. I must have been drawn towards it because it contained the stories of the seers and sages of India. From the moment the book landed in my hands I was glued to it, and on finishing it, decided to go down to South India to have darshan of Bhagavan Ramana. I was also at that time instinctively drawn towards astrology and was very much impressed with the description in the chapter "Written In The Stars". As it turned out, I went to Ujjain to learn astrology, instead of going to Arunachala for Bhagavan's darshan.

"Although I spent some time in Ujjain and applied myself to astrology, I never wavered in my devotion to Bhagavan Ramana and tried my best to draw the attention of my teacher to the wonderful Sage who was radiating His Grace from Arunachala. With my mind's eye I saw Bhagavan sitting in Arunachala and looking at me. He was pouring His Grace on me, but He did not make it possible for me to go to Him. Instead, I pursued the study of astrology."

Because the British considered Darjeeling a security-sensitive area, Bhagawat was not permitted to return there to teach. The authorities had discovered his record of political activity and imprisonment. He then channeled his energy into Gandhi's 'Quit India' Movement, but being hard-pressed for income he took several jobs as a journalist with newspapers in Ujjain and Calcutta.



As an idealist, the American Independence movement of the 18th Century and the purest forms of American democratic ideology always inspired Bhagawat. A longing in his heart arose to travel to the "New World," even though he had no contacts in the West or financial means to make the journey. He somehow intuitively felt his future was linked to America and no one could dissuade him from this apparently impracticable dream. Only his sister encouraged him by saying, "I do not know where you will find the money to go to America or how you will do it, but you are so intent on going, so sincere in your desire, I believe God will make it possible for you to go." And he did go in 1947, the very year India attained independence. He received a fellowship from the University of Iowa and a sympathetic friend arranged to lend him the money to make the ocean journey.

After two years in Iowa he received a Masters Degree in journalism and began a job as the Information Officer at the Indian Embassy in Washington, D.C.

In accordance with the prevailing custom in India at that time, Bhagawat had been betrothed to marry

Yoga Maya Devi when he was just a boy of seventeen. She was only eight at the time. Because of his constant moving about for education and to earn an income during his early years, he was unable to stay with her for any appreciable length of time. She joined him in the U. S. only in 1952. They gave birth to their first child in 1953. It was the following year that Bhagawat experienced a dramatic surge in his inner life.

He writes: "On Wednesday, October 13th, 1954, I was in the guest cottage of a Quaker couple, Helen and Albert Bailey, Jr., located on their farm in West Chester, Pennsylvania. The cottage was situated in a valley near their residence. On the second floor of the cottage my wife, Yogamaya, our 15-month-old boy, and I were occupying the large wooden-framed bed that night. In the second half of the night I saw Bhagavan Ramana sitting on the bed near my head. Although this was a dream, I saw it as clearly as I see the sun during the day, and remember it vividly. His famous figure was near my head and His legs were dangling. Arunachala Shiva Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi stayed near my head for quite a while so that I could drink deep in Him. Bhagavan simply kept on looking at me and I was filled with joy and happiness and could not turn my eyes away from Him. I do not know how long this lasted. But once I woke up I could not return to sleep and sat on the bed meditating on Him. All morning and day I kept on thinking of the darshan Bhagavan had given me in my dream.... That dream enabled the sugar doll to be dissolved into the Divine Ocean of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Since then I have not been the same Bhagawat I used to be."

The following night he had another stirring dream wherein he saw the Sanskrit word "Upanishad" written on a loose leaf. The leaves of Sanskrit text began to turn one by one until he woke.

These experiences rekindled the fire of devotion to Bhagavan Ramana that had first been lit in 1941. Though the Maharshi had left his body four years earlier, on April 14th, 1950, Bhagawat began writing letters to him at Sri Ramanasramam as he was beginning to experience Him as a living Presence.

On an invitation to teach in Iowa, Bhagawat resigned from the Indian Embassy in 1957. Ultimately, the teaching position did not materialize and

he was forced to look elsewhere for employment. He thought he might teach somewhere in a U.S. college, write books and travel. But no promising offers came. Inwardly, he felt that his Master, Sri Ramana, was removing all worldly ambitions from his mind and was steadily pulling him deeper into his spiritual center for sustenance.

In 1959 Bhagawat, with his family, returned to India. Now He was able to fulfill his long-cherished dream of visiting Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai.

"We returned to India in February, 1959. We lived in my village and the world of cold, corrugated cement and concrete was replaced by the village life. 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 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 had no money to travel. At about this time, Rambahadur, my nephew, was inspired to visit Arunachala and he invited me to accompany him to Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai, South India.

"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 and I were in Sri Ramanasramam."

It was here at Sri Ramanasramam that Arthur Osborne, a staunch devotee, author of several profound books on Bhagavan and founder of the Mountain Path magazine, encouraged Bhagawat to start some regular meetings in the U.S. centered on Sri Maharshi when he returned. Bhagawat did not know for sure at that time he would return, but he did, taking up a position at the Indian Mission to the United Nations in New York City in 1962.

In 1965, Bhagawat, reflecting on the recent events of his life, wrote: "Bhagavan made it possible for me to find employment once again in the United States. But New York was the last place where we wanted to live. In spite of my best efforts to get away from New York, Bhagavan held me here. He must have had some purpose in not helping me find employment elsewhere."

The purpose would soon reveal itself. On November 12th, 1965 Bhagawat began weekly meetings in a room at the American Buddhist Society on the West Side of Manhattan. He wanted it to be a meeting place for sincere aspirants who wished to deepen their spiritual lives in the light of the Maharshi's guidance and grace. In 1966, Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center was incorporated and registered as a religious charity with the State and Federal governments. With the renting of a meeting room at 78 St. Marks Place in 1967, the weekly meetings became daily. In 1969 the Ashrama moved to a rented storefront at 342 East 6th Street, near First Avenue, and remained there for the next eighteen years.

Bhagawat's dream of a country residential ashrama was realized in 1972 when the Nova Scotia, Canada, Arunachala Ashrama was founded at the foot of the rolling hills of the Annapolis Valley.

All along Bhakta Bhagawat would emphasize to all visitors the need for spiritual practice. He would say, "This is Arunachala Abhyasa Ashrama. Abhyasa means spiritual practice." Pointing to Sri Bhagavan's photo, we would often hear him repeat to new visitors, "He teaches and we practice. He has made me His servant and servitor, His doorman and doormat."

He was now consumed day and night, dedicating all his time and energy to the Ashrama and to the constant remembrance or "Self-abidance" as he would call it. He behaved like a man possessed, living from moment to moment, acting on whatever inspiration entered his heart. Intuition and inspiration were the only forces now at work in his life. The intellect and self-will lost their hold and his life began to take its commands from that inner voice spoken by the Lord of his Heart. "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..." he wrote in 1966.

Bhagawat was a prolific writer. He would say, "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 [typewriter] with the fruits and flowers of my breath." He would be seen either sitting inwardly-absorbed

in front of the typewriter or outwardly-absorbed typing thousands of pages of what he called "Prayer Manuscripts".

In 1970, he began writing a piece titled, *Bhagavan! Thou Art the Self*. This went on for 3,500 pages. "From the top of my voice I declare to the world that Thou art the very breath for 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. He would make many carbon copies, and when the Xerox machine hit the market he was the most diligent of customers. He would ask us to send copies to this or that person, thus fulfilling, in his own sincere way, the desire to share whatever grace and experience Sri Ramana had blessed him with.

"Openness of Heart" was a favorite expression of his. "Guilelessness, humility," he would often say, "these are the essential qualities of an aspirant." He longed for the pure company of those rare souls who embodied these qualities. He would travel any distance at any time of day or night to benefit from serving and associating with such friends. "I need your company more than you need mine," he would tell us. And he believed it, though we, his friends, certainly thought otherwise. In him we found a devotee on whom Sri Ramana Maharshi had showered his grace in full measure. He experienced His living Presence both within and without, although, like us, he had never seen Sri Bhagavan in the body. Bhagawat provided us with a living example of how to gain the Master's grace and attain the purpose of human existence in light of the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Bhagawat was a man who could inspire and mold seekers into genuine devotees. "In Sri Bhagavan's Ashrama, I have never been able to say anything unless I have realized it first in my own life." Those few who could see into his pure heart had little trouble benefiting from his guidance and love. He was a married man with a son—he would never say 'my' son but 'our' son. Because of his

sometimes-impractical idealistic way of life he regretted that his family had to suffer. When his wife became blind from diabetes Bhagawat served her with tender kindness and love. During this period someone once asked him what he was doing with his life. He replied with deep feeling, "I serve Mother." She predeceased him by three years.

Few who had met him during the last ten years of his life could realize his inner state. He would keep silent most of the time, inwardly absorbed. The Heart was everything for him. He would often tell us, "Watch wherefrom the breath rises; it is the Heart. Watch wherefrom the sound rises; it is the Heart. Watch wherefrom the 'I' rises; it is the Heart."

Bhagawat loved books that were divinely inspired, but often had much difficulty reading them. "Words from these books are like the keys that open the door to the Heart, but once the door of the Heart is open, where is the need of a key?" he once asked. Sometimes he would pick up one of the Maharshi's

books or the Tulsidas *Ramayana*, read a few passages, put down the book and resume his absorption in the Heart.

Occasionally he would call us at odd hours of the night while in an ecstatic mood. His desire was to somehow convey his state and share it with us, but unable to pull out any words from a mind totally immersed in the ocean of peace and joy, he would remain silent and weep. Only after several minutes of cajoling could we get him to utter a single word. We do not get calls like this anymore. We no longer see "the man from the village" whose inner luster was hidden from the world by an uncommon simplicity and humility. Bhagawat's intense, unwavering devotion carried him to the heights of inner freedom and joy. We will not see him again, but what he has given his few friends will not be lost either. From his life we still have much to learn and emulate, as we strive to live the life and continue the work he inspired.

Sayings of Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat¹

Since my boyhood I have been on the road. Like a stone that fell into the Narmada River in North India and is washed from shore to shore down the river, rolling and tossing, made smooth and eventually picked up by a storekeeper who sells it to a temple as a lingam or shaligram, so have I been tossed through this world, rolling, tumbling and drifting until finally Sri Bhagavan picked me up and made me his very own. People may see the perfectly smooth and finely shaped lingam and say, 'Oh, look how nice it is,' but they do not realize how that stone has been ruthlessly buffeted by the current for many long years before taking the present form.

You cannot take a child and pull his legs and arms, stretch them and make the child an adult. Similarly, you cannot make one spiritually mature all of sudden. One has to grow naturally. Also, you cannot teach children in first grade higher mathematics or university subjects, just as you cannot instruct immature people in the highest truth. It

simply won't sink in. But you cannot look down on a first grader if you happen to be in ninth grade. All grades are necessary and equally good.

When I am quiet, no matter how hard I try, I cannot bring myself to speak. But when I start talking, the river of words flow and I cannot stop.

Whatever Sri Bhagavan is giving me I am giving to you all, in silence. Even if you are 500 miles away, it is reaching you, you are receiving it.

Many times I want to tell you this or that, but I can't sit you down and tell you to listen to what I have to say. I become frozen. Without a plan the opportunity arrives, and then the words flow. And if I have not experienced it and truly made it my own, I cannot speak of it.

The teacher may not know the answer to a particular question but by the sheer force of the aspirant's sincerity the correct answer will come out of the teacher automatically. In other words, the teacher's heart opens and it is no less than God speaking.

1. These quotes were recorded in the year 1976.

All the spiritual practices, observances, rituals are simply for making the mind one-pointed.

If I do not love your mother more than you, my life has no meaning.

Words read are like the keys that open the door of the heart, but once the door is open what need is there for the key.

Sometimes if I simply look at a book, it inspires me and the heart melts and merges. So if the purpose of reading the book is already achieved, why need I open it.

When something is bothering me, a sympathetic friend is the best cure.

I have many faults and may do many things wrong. But you should remember the good things. Don't let them all be washed away.

For a devotee of God, the positions of the planets [astrology] have no meaning.

Faith is the main thing. Sri Bhagavan's teachings are very simple and telegraphic. He says, "No efforts ever go in vain." One must believe this and have faith that whatever one does is not in vain, you will get credit for it. When you deposit money in the bank, the money is put into your account and remains there. Similarly with spiritual practices. If you do not have this faith, you have nothing. "Japa even uttered once has its own effect," says Bhagavan.

Sri Bhagavan says, "The greater the intensity when something is done, the sooner the results will be felt."

You are all Sri Bhagavan for me. May I be blessed to serve and worship you all for the rest of my life.

If you go to a holy place or holy man with reservations and a closed heart, you will get nothing. For example, you see the window there? It is closed. Can you blame the cool air for not coming in? No, you can't. Open the window and the cool air flows in. So we must open our heart to the saint and only then can he give. People do not understand this.

When I plan or turn to the world for assistance, it never works. Only when I turn to Bhagavan is there hope. He is the sole Doer. We must have this faith.

In all situations, it is not by reasoning or intellectualizing do I understand. Only when the truth flashes in my heart I come to know.

Holy company is a very rare thing in this world. One has it only after great tapas through many lifetimes.

As a lotus blossoms with the rising of the sun, so does the holy man's heart blossom on the arrival of a pure and sincere soul.

When one becomes more immersed in the Self there is very little left for him in the world. So, as Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna says, "When the mind comes down from samadhi, where will it rest? In the company of pure and noble souls it must rest." In the same way I say that with just one true friend around, I have the whole world. Nothing more is needed.

Sound is God. Just watch whence the sound arises and abide there. Sound, breath and ego, or 'I', rise up from the heart and merge into the heart.

These songs that I sing are like arrows shot out, piercing into my heart. But now when I sing it spreads out like the vast ocean and I become immersed.

If you tear open my chest, you will see that you are all enshrined within my heart.

When any of you has difficulties, it flashes on my heart right away. If you are well and happy, I feel it also.

Whatever visions you may have or whatever siddhis (powers) you may develop mean very little. But the extent (to which) the person is humble—there is his greatness.

To find a true friend in the world is a very rare thing and the greatest wealth. Either we sink or swim together. All of you, my friends, are the fruits of all the struggles and trials in my life.

133rd Jayanti of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi

You, your family and friends are invited to join us in celebrating the 133rd anniversary of the birth of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

11 A. M., Saturday 29 December 2012

Arunachala Ashrama
8606 Edgerton Blvd., Jamaica Estates, NY 11432
ashrama@arunachala.org / 718.560.3196

Ramana Satsangs

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)
Connecticut Area — Prashanth & Shobana (860-691-1862 / vprashanth@msn.com)
Dublin, Ohio — Abilash & Madhavi (614-789-9058 / mungamuru@hotmail.com)
Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Robinson (954-755-4758 / arunahill@gmail.com)
Houston, TX — Kumar Saran (832-435-3761 / saran01@earthlink.net)
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