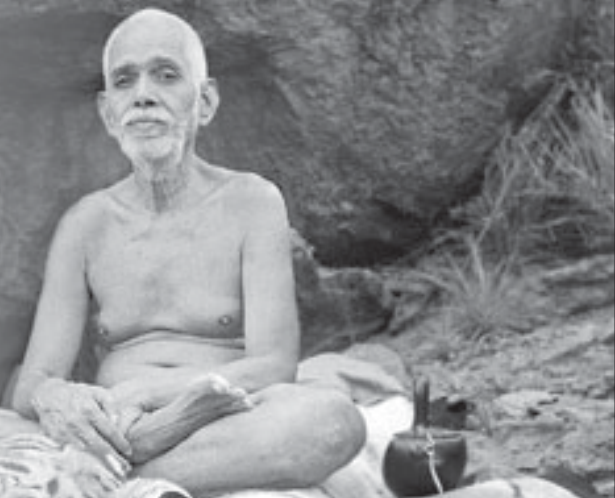


THE MAHARSHI



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Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat Birth Centenary (1912 – 2012)

One hundred years ago, on November 8, 1912, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat was born into a pious family which had, for countless generations, farmed their land and labored hard in a remote village of Bihar, India. This is the land of Mithila, the birthplace of Sita, the consort of Sri Rama. That connection to the glorious life of Sri Rama, sung in the Ramacharitamanasa by the enlightened poet-saint Tulsidas, bound Bhagawat from his childhood to the spiritual lore of India and the realization of its ultimate truths.

Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha movement was the first spark to ignite the fire of devotion, dedication and dispassion in Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat. Even as a boy of eight, he was too serious about Gandhiji's mission to engage in play or to dissipate his time in anything other than study and service. His mother and older brothers noticed Bhagawat's keen interest in learning and decided that the family's resources should be channeled towards his formal education. No one had ever left his village for higher learning. At the age of eleven Bhagawat stepped out of his village on a life journey that crossed continents and ultimately dissolved him in the Lotus Feet of his master, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

In brief, this is the story of an inspired villager from India. The twelve years since his passing on April 10th, 2000 have given us ample time to reflect on his legacy, what he has contributed to the welfare of mankind, and what we, the few who knew him personally, have gained by his friendship and guidance. His inner spiritual wealth wasn't destined to be recognized, nor was he to draw thousands of seekers to his master. Yet the seed of Arunachala Ramana that he planted in the West and his untiring devotion, dedication and tapas have not been in vain. To inject hope and inspiration into future generations, he poured out the experiences from the depths

of his heart in thousands of pages of prayer manuscripts that provide an unfailing testimony to the ever-present grace of his Guru and God, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi:

"Every atom and proton of my life is pulsating, heaving, bubbling, bursting and dancing with Self-Awareness, and how I would like to resound and reverberate the land with the chanting and recitation of Thy Name. No sooner I close my eyes than I find myself absorbed in the Holy Hill of the Beacon Light, and there is not the least desire in me for anything but Thee. Like an inebriated, intoxicated and drunken person, I find myself sunk in the Ocean of Sri Sachchidananda Ramana Bhagavan..."

His life was a living example to the few earnest devotees who joined him in his mission and who longed to immerse themselves in the experience of their essential nature, their true self. He was an embodiment of devotion, catapulted across the continents to plant a life-giving seed of liberation for future generations of seekers who long to experience the ultimate reality in their lives.

On this, the hundredth anniversary of his birth, we plan to remember and honor the gift that Bhagavan Ramana gave to us in the form of Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, our friend and guide on the path to freedom, the founder of Arunachala Ashram in America and Canada.

A report from Sri Ramanasramam

By Guruprasad Madhavan

I AM very happy. The last three days have offered me substantial bliss.

On Saturday, around 8:00 A.M., Mani Mama welcomed me at Sri Ramanasramam with his wonderfully warm smile. “What a pleasant surprise,” he said. My dad and uncle also accompanied me during this trip to Tiruvannamalai. I stayed with my uncle near the Ashram. His family’s copious love and affection left me with no other alternative. Mani Mama and I caught up briefly, visited the shrine, and started planning for our giripradakshina.

I wanted to do the inner route again after a decade. My dad and uncle had never done that before, and they appeared to be looking forward to it with some degree of eagerness and anxiety. The Forest Department officials have restricted use of the inner path for pradakshina after the severe fire that occurred a couple weeks ago. There had been one or two fires, I am not sure. Mani Mama perhaps forgot to inform us about this new restriction but was relieved, after the fact, that we returned safely without getting into any trouble.

The last inner route pradakshina I did was with Arthur a decade ago when it was dark and we were barefoot. That was an experience I won’t forget. On that occasion we left early in the morning around 3:30 A.M.

Mani Mama’s friend and an Ashram resident, Chandramouli, explained to me the route and they were wonderfully helpful with their guidance and wisdom. I took mental notes as best I could.

After listening to the morning Vedas, we left around 9:15 A.M. for the pradakshina. My father, my uncle and I were the only three people on the path throughout. The sun was mercifully soft, slow, and not as extreme as it has been lately. Arunachala in its glory and majesty was our supreme company. Our only other accompaniments were a bottle of water, my camera, and the occasional utterance of words among us in their most benign form, not quite animated like The Lord of the Rings, but you get the gist. We took a number of breaks, sitting down on

ancient rocks that completely demolished in me the concept of age or what it means to be old. I enjoyed the power of the mountain that uproots and dissolves one’s ego. Or relating to my recent wisdom tooth extraction in India, Arunachala compassionately and instantly removes the tooth without anesthesia and pain.

Speaking of which, I was quite nervous about the “hows” of eating the prasada at Sri Ramanasramam since I was still on my liquid diet. The healing from the wisdom tooth surgery had been slow, but everything was fine to my own surprise. When they served the food, I just ate it to the best of my ability. It was soft and delicious. (Thank you, Bhagavan, for re-initiating my solid diet!)

I was relating to Mani Mama my idea that entering Sri Ramanasramam (or for that matter, our own Ashram in New York) is like going into an MRI scanner. In the scanner, hydrogen in one’s body is aligned in a spectacular sequence thanks to magnetic energy; similarly, Bhagavan’s radio frequency field streamlines everything and all in silence. The output? An outstanding three-dimensional rendering of inner harmony, peace and joy.

That afternoon, after some rest, I went back to the Ashram for some silence in the Old Hall. The clanging of the bells and the youthful tenor of the Vedic recitation silenced the monkeys in my head – it was as simple as if someone had pressed the mute button on the remote control of my mind. The incense sticks were my next best friend in that setting. In the evening, I enjoyed the Tamil parayana. I then bumped into Chris Quilkey in the New Hall who was recovering from his jet lag [he had just returned from NYC]; Chris but imparted positive energy with his trademark calmness and tranquility. I also then greeted President Mama who kindly enquired about my welfare. Dinner next.

After that, Dad and I took off to visit the Arunachala Temple. Not much of a crowd – the benefit of going at a time when the temple was about to close, at the heels of Lord Shiva’s last abhisheka of the day. I loved touching the temple elephant that has now grown up to become a strikingly handsome teenager.

Sunday. Wanted to get an early start to listen to morning recitations. En route we encountered a procession with tens of thousands of people celebrating the famed Saivaite Manikavachagar, the author of *Thiruvachagam*! The lethal convergence of



the high octane percussionist, the flaring dust and the impatient vehicular traffic made for an unusual scene. Everyone competing for attention. Everyone competing for space. Not surprisingly, this all seemed so normal here.

After the Vedas, we hiked up to Skandasramam. My dad and uncle made it up there with me in a single nonstop trek. Then down to Virupaksha Cave. My dad was particularly absorbed by the Virupaksha. He repeatedly mentioned how strong Bhagavan's tapas must have been to have permitted his stay up there. I received an infusion of inspiration here for an obvious reason – here the exchange between the ever-inquisitive Nayana and the ever-graceful Bhagavan, resulted in the *Sri Ramana Gita*.

After getting back to the Ashram, I went to the book store to find a framed photograph of Bhagavan for our new home in Chennai and bought a Tamil version of Bhagavan's *Collected Works* for Mom. Then I continued my conversation with Mani Mama – updates, reflections and more. Next, Mani Mama introduced me to J. Jayaraman – wow, what an impressive intellect! I had spoken with him for a few minutes a few years ago but this time a real connection occurred. We had lunch prasada together along with my dad. J. J. offered me a preview of his forthcoming

sounds, which easily transcend blues, rock, jazz and lounge. We are now Facebook friends.

Then another conversation with Chris Quilkey who kindly inquired about my recent book and offered to give me feedback for my first draft. I thanked him. I received a souvenir from him for Barbara back in Virginia. She lives four miles from Washington, D. C. where I live, and I just need to cross the Potomac to see her; yet meeting her at the New York Ashram seems far easier. Didn't see Vaidyanathan. He was in Chennai. Couldn't spot Kothari or my mentor KVN either.

After all was done, my dad referred to this special visit to Arunachala, repeatedly recapitulating, in effect, how much he had enjoyed this trip to Sri Ramanasramam, free from worry about his daily obligations and routine stresses. I agreed. He was joyously positive and I suggested that he consider drawing himself inward for his own peace and well being. Let's see.

Dr. Guruprasad Madhavan went to primary school in Tiruvannamalai. He is now an author and director at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D. C. He also serves as the Secretary of Arunachala Ashrama, New York.

Advent at Arunachala

You, your friends and family are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the 116th Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala.

The program will include parayanams, bhajans, talks and puja, followed by prasada (lunch).

In Nova Scotia, Canada

Sunday 2 September — 11:00 AM

Arunachala Ashrama, 1451 Clarence Road, Bridgetown, Nova Scotia B0S 1C0 / Tel: 902.665.2090

In Queens, New York City

Saturday 8 September — 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 8 September — 11:00 AM

Milpitas Jain Temple

722 South Main Street

Milpitas, CA 95035 / Tel: 510.656.2752

If Only It Were Chadwick

By Louis Buss

The scrutiny of the handwritten inscriptions found in a 1935 edition of the book Self-Realization bought on Ebay takes the author on a journey of inspiration and expectation. He concludes this narrative at the Sri Ramanasramam Archive Building where the archivist gives his final pronouncement on the book.

Part VII

Conjurings For Our Salvation

WHEN the tour of the Ashram Archive was over, I produced my own mysterious little book and handed it over to Sri Ramani. He accepted it with a sort of professional reverence, like a man well used to handling ancient artifacts which might at any moment crumble into dust. Having looked at the opening inscription, he led the way back to his office, where he opened the book on his desk and bent down to pore over it.

‘This looks like Chadwick.’

My heart leapt, but, not daring to hope, I immediately blurted out all the evidence against it being Chadwick: the fact that he had never mentioned parents, but only his sisters, and the fact that the Mystery Devotee had made that howler about Seshadri. Sri Ramani shook his head, apparently not in the least impressed, and left the room. A couple of minutes later, he returned with scans of a diary written in Chadwick’s own hand, and the process of comparison began. A young archive helper who’d been sitting at another desk soon found himself drawn in, so that there were five of us standing round peering down, pointing out similarities between ‘r’s, ‘y’s and ‘t’s. There was a certain moment when my sister spotted an ‘m’ in the diary which was so perfectly the same as one in the book that only an expert forger could have pulled it off. We already knew that there had only been a tiny number of Westerners in the Ashram when those inscriptions were written. The more we compared, the more absurd it seemed to imagine that one of those few had had writing so uncannily close to Chadwick’s.

After some ten minutes of this, Sri Ramani made his final pronouncement. ‘This is Chadwick’s handwriting.’

That set the seal on it for me. If the evidence of my own eyes hadn’t been enough, I should never dare to doubt the

man Bhagavan has put in charge of His archives. From that moment on, it was official – this second edition of Self-Realisation had been sent home to England in 1936 by Major Chadwick. Already, it was starting to seem strange and slightly absurd to me that I could ever have believed it might be anyone else. Who could it really have been but good old Chadwick? I should have known from the start that the dear chap wouldn’t let me down.

I remain at a loss to explain the little anomalies that threw us off the scent. The fact that Chadwick makes no mention of his parents and Russell elsewhere could, I suppose, be explained by all sorts of family circumstances that we shall never know. The Seshadri howler is more difficult to fathom, especially as Bhagavan had specifically commanded Chadwick to read the book. Perhaps he decided to send a copy home before reading it himself. Perhaps he had read it, and knew full well that Seshadri had been dead for years, but just somehow got in a muddle when he came to write that particular caption, confusing him with some other swami who really was living in a cave on the Hill. Or perhaps, just for a bit of fun, Bhagavan Himself gave Chadwick’s writing arm a jog at that moment, wishing to add a bit of extra spice to the mystery that would absorb us seventy-five years later.

Before we left the archive, there was one last question in my mind that needed to be settled, and it was that of the book’s final resting place. While we were all poring over it, I had told Sri Ramani that I was of course ready to present it to the archive, if he thought it interesting enough. He had not seemed to hear me at the time. But now, having made his final pronouncement on the handwriting, he said:

‘An inscribed book like this is really of little value to us, and we have plenty of copies of this edition. So you take it home and keep it in your library.’

And there it now stands, beneath the big coloured picture of Bhagavan with His legs crossed, the old warrior at the end of its campaign, staring triumphantly across the room from its perspex podium. Twice it has made the journey from India to England, but I doubt it will be doing so again. As Chadwick intended when he first sealed it in its packet, England was its final destination. Whether or not his little inscriptions had the desired effect on his parents and Russell, they have had a great effect on me. Just as he intended, they paint a vivid picture of the life he lived in the Ashram, all the more poignant now for being so far away

not only in space, but also in time. Now I find that the few phrases he wrote by those photographs keep coming back to me, haunting me like fragments of some half-remembered poem.

Meditation at the shrine of Krishna ... I walk along here each evening ... This is the room where the Maharishis sit ... I sit here too ...

What a blessed life dear old Chadwick led – a charmed life in every way. ‘Chadwick was with us before. He was one of us. He had some desire to be reborn in the West, and that he has now fulfilled.’ No wonder he had worked out Self-enquiry before even hearing of Bhagavan. It seems that through effort and devotion in previous lives, Chadwick had fully earned the various privileges he enjoyed in the Ashram. But he also blazed a trail for all we less illustrious foreigners who can’t cross our legs or eat from a leaf. Thanks to Chadwick, all of us will feel welcome whenever we pass beneath that magic archway.

The Great Soul in whose presence I sit ...

Looking up at the book standing beneath the picture, it is impossible not to feel that he is sitting there again, the loyal disciple symbolically reunited with his Master. I hope the book will always stay there now, as if sunk in meditation at Bhagavan’s feet, as he stares out into the room with that unworldly look in His eyes. I feel enormously privileged to have that unique volume in my home and to be able to look at it each day. All I can promise in return is that I will do my best to obey Chadwick’s heartfelt plea:

This book is very precious; please keep it carefully.

As for its presence here proving some sort of mysterious link between myself and Chadwick, I know I can’t really claim such a thing, much as I would love to. But on my first visit to Arunachala a couple of years ago, I was lucky enough to be shown round Chadwick’s cottage by Dennis Hartel, who was staying there at the time. Of course, since this was where ‘my’ Chadwick had lived, I felt absurdly proud to find how close it was to the Old Hall – closer, I think, than any other dwelling from those days, when most devotees had to go and live outside the Ashram in Palakottu. I was intrigued to see the photograph Dennis had put up of Bhagavan attending the opening ceremony of the cottage, and touched by the little stone at the side of the building where – in a typically boyish yet earnest gesture – Chadwick had sought to ‘bury his ego’.

So I have seen the room where (if we believe his version of the dates, and not Annamalai Swami’s) Chadwick was

living at the time he sent the book home to his parents. This is also the room where Bhagavan would sometimes stop by for a chat on His way for a walk in Palakottu, the room where He would make Himself at home and start going through the contents of Chadwick’s wallet. Is it too fanciful to imagine that He might have dropped in at the very moment Chadwick was writing those inscriptions? As usual, Chadwick would have remained seated and carried on with his work. Bhagavan might have asked what he was up to, and he would have explained that he was sending a book home to his parents in the hope that it would help them understand his move to India, and that they might even derive some spiritual benefit from it themselves. Then he might have said:

‘Bhagavan ... Would you bless it for me?’

Such requests were by no means uncommon, and as far as I know Bhagavan never refused them. He would take the proffered object in His hands and stare intently at it, often for minutes on end, subjecting it to a concentrated blast of His mysterious radiation. Given Chadwick’s enormous faith in Bhagavan, and given his clear desire to communicate something of this to his family back in England, it doesn’t seem at all implausible that he might have asked Bhagavan to bless the book in person before he sent it on its way. Who knows for how many years afterwards it might hold that radioactive charge, and what unknown benefits it might have scattered on the assortment of people who handled it – Chadwick’s family, various unknown book dealers and collectors – and, ultimately, me. Perhaps if Bhagavan hadn’t given it that initial burst of power, it would never have survived all its adventures to arrive, tattered and woebegone, but marvelously intact, back at His holy feet.

Has this book of mine really been touched by Ramana Maharshi? Only Bhagavan Himself will ever know. But as He stares down at me now, that expression of His seems somehow more enigmatic than ever, more knowing, more gentle and benign. I suppose that I shall once again have to admit defeat and call it a smile. Writing in Tamil verse, the mighty Muruganar may have found some satisfactory way of describing it – sadly, I shall never be able to judge – but I don’t think it will be done in English until Shakespeare himself returns to this island and takes up his pen once more.

As I search for the words with which to end this account, I find myself reminded of Chadwick’s own last

words, and I am suddenly struck by a symmetry in his life. I'm sure Chadwick wouldn't mind my saying that the day of his real birth was the day he first blundered eagerly into the hall of the 'Maharishis' and sat down by the famous sofa on that slightly offensive chair. Whatever life he'd had till then must soon have come to seem shadowy and faint, as all our former lives do once Bhagavan has exposed us to His radiance.

Whenever his body might have been born, that was the day when the real Chadwick, our own dear Chadwick, first appeared. And if that was the day of his birth, then the first words he ever spoke in his life were to ask Bhagavan that question about why Christ cried out on the cross. Years later, as he lay suffering his own mortal agony, Chadwick, like Christ before him, seems to have felt momentarily abandoned by his God. He was in the Christian Mission Hospital in Vellore and, though delirious, could still recognise people around him. When asked if he could feel Bhagavan's presence, he said, 'Yes.' But when asked if Bhagavan was helping him, he replied, just as clearly, 'No.'

Was that Chadwick's moment of final despair? Did he feel, as the crucified Christ seems to have done, that God was still there, but had momentarily forsaken him? What he went on to say just before the end implies that the crucifixion may very well have been in his mind. Perhaps, on some deep level, he may even have been back in the Old Hall on that first day, once more asking Bhagavan that momentous first question and listening to His reply. For now he said:

'It's Easter!'

When reminded that Easter had not yet come, he spoke, with a beaming expression, what turned out to be his final words. They are surely a confirmation that, in the end, Chadwick's adored Guru didn't let him down:

'I know it's still five days away; but it is *my* Easter.'

Bhagavan died near Easter too, having been born so close to Christmas. Anyone who thinks this a coincidence has perhaps failed to understand the profound religious and mythical significance of spring equinox and winter solstice. Given what He was, Bhagavan simply couldn't have been born and died at any other time - any more than Christ could. If a star appeared to mark His death in 1950, just as one had appeared to mark His birth two thousand years before, we needn't be surprised by the symmetry. For Jesus Christ and Ramana Maharshi were merely conjured forms, assumed for our salvation by the enchanter of the isle.

Letters and Comments

I am reading the back issues of The Maharshi newsletters. In the Mar/Apr 2010 issue, under the heading "Being Still", it was mentioned 'If we cease to identify with the actions, doing what appears to be right spontaneously, without thought of gain or loss and not allowing any residue of attachment to the action to stick, those activities will be a source of freedom.' I have two questions for which I would like to seek your advice/clarification, especially around 'what appears to be right spontaneously without thought of gain or loss'.

Question 1: Trained to think analytically and logically in every aspect of life, getting rid of such a mind poses more problems. Even going to a place, booking a ticket, planning the activities – every aspect requires some kind of 'thinking' or 'planning'. How do I act spontaneously and without thinking about 'gain or loss' (not necessarily materialistically)?

Question 2: Are we supposed to follow the same advice even in professional work life where nothing happens without planning (at least that is how I was conditioned).

Kindly bear with my ignorance and advise me on this.
—Devotee from California

There is nothing wrong with the sadhaka applying his mind to the work at hand. For example, you have a vacation to plan, you need to purchase tickets and plan an itinerary for you and your family. Perhaps to take advantage of ticket savings and secure your travel arrangements you will have to do this long before the journey. So, do it. Focus on this work and do it to the best of your ability. There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, you would be considered negligent to do otherwise.

Now how this activity can benefit you spiritually is the question. It all depends upon the attitude applied to the work. First of all, the work should be done without attachment to the outcome. You do it as a required duty, understanding all along that success or failure in the endeavor is already predestined. Your happiness should not depend upon the success or failure of the job at hand, whether at work or at home. Your real happiness should emerge from within, from the source of peace that you

connect with by following the path taught and lived by Bhagavan Ramana.

The actions you perform in life that come to you spontaneously should not be shunned as obstacles towards peace or spiritual fulfillment. Give your full attention to them at the required moment, but know in your heart, that God alone is the doer of all action. He prompts us into action and enables us to act through His inscrutable power, or shakti. We are only instruments, puppets, tools in His hands. To understand these truths, meditation is required. The more we are connected to the current of awareness experienced during meditation, the greater will be our understanding that we, in truth,

are not the doers. With continued practice that current of pure awareness will be experienced even during physical and mental activity.

At some point, by grace, the ego dissolves and we experience everything as pure awareness alone. Actions then go on by themselves without any individual volition. There is action, there is planning and analyzing, but the individual doer has bowed out and the Self alone permeates all existence. That will be the crown of your efforts. And that is why the practice of stilling the mind, enquiring into the source of our being, is the most important work for all true seekers. From this simple practice, immortal beatitude unfolds and all doubts are resolved. —Editor

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, FL Area — David & Janet Robinson (954-755-4758 / arunahill@gmail.com)

Houston, TX — Kumar Saran (832-435-3761 / saran01@earthlink.net)

Los Angeles, CA — Natarajan and Indira Venkatesan (310-473-9441 / nvenky30@yahoo.com)

Pennington, NJ — Nandini (609-730-8447 / nandinikapadia@yahoo.com)

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