

The Maharshi

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Sri Ramana's Boyhood in Madurai

By N. R. Krishnamurti Aiyer

After the passing away of their father Sundaram Iyer at Tiruchuzhi, the boys Nagasami and Venkataraman (later to be known as Ramana Maharshi) were brought up by their paternal uncle Subbier, residing at Chokkappa Naickiar Street (now known as Ramana Mandiram) in Madurai. The brothers, who were robust and ardent sportsmen in their early teens, gathered around themselves a circle of sturdy young friends among whom M. S. Venkataraman, Suppiah Thevar and Narayanasami were most prominent. All these three predeceased the Maharshi. The writer of this article knew these persons in the early thirties and could get from them the following accounts of their personal relations with the boy Ramana.

THE following account was given by M.S. Venkataraman who was a clerk in the Health Department of the District Board in Madurai.

M. S. Venkataraman was then just about ten years old, too young to participate fully in the outdoor adventures of the older boys. Nevertheless he had his share in them. The members of his family were co-tenants of the house with Subbier's family. Every night, when the whole house was silent in sleep, Nagasami and Ramana, whose beds were in a remote corner of the house, would appropriately adjust their pillows and cover them up with their bed sheets so that it would create the impression that they were sleeping in their beds. It was the duty of the little M. S. Venkataraman to bolt the door of the house when the brothers went out at about 11p.m., and to admit them on their return at about 4 a.m.

Now let us turn our attention to Suppiah Thevar. At the time I saw Suppiah Thevar he was employed in a firewood depot. He also conducted during the cool hours

of the morning and evening a physical training school in which young men had training in 'silambam' in which Thevar was an adept. Silambam is a sort of quarterstaff, a very hard bamboo stick of about five feet, to be whirled about so that the wielder could knockout any opponent who dared to come near. The stick was an instrument of defence as well of attack. Physical strength was also developed by this training in the school. Suppiah Thevar was a master in this field.

The following account was obtained from Suppiah Thevar who was himself an active participant of these nightly activities.

The venue of the activities, fixed well in advance, would be either the sandy river bed of the Vaigai or the Pillaiyarpaliam Kanmoi (rain fed tank) close to Aruppukottai Road, at the outskirts of Madurai city. Every member of the group would, while passing the house of Ramana, leave a pebble at the door step. Nagasami and Ramana, as leaders of the group, would

be the last to sally forth from their house after a check of the pebbles showed that all their friends had gone to the place of the meeting. There was rarely a defaulter. Ramana and his playmates had a jolly time playing games on the sandy bed of the Vaigai River or engaging in swimming contests in the Pillaiyarpaliam Tank. They would then return sufficiently early to their beds without exciting the least suspicion of their absence from home.

The next account was obtained from Narayanasami. When the author met him he was librarian in the town hall of Madurai, known as Victoria Edward Hall.

Usually, the terrace of the house and the small room in which the boy Venkataraman made his 'Self-enquiry' were vacant and rarely used by the families on the ground floor. Here the youngsters played. One of the games they played was what they called 'throw ball'. Young Ramana would roll his body into something like

a ball and the sturdy group of youngsters would throw him from one player to another. Sometimes the human ball fell down when the player failed to catch it. The wonder of it was that for all this rough tossing and dropping, there was not the least scratch on the skin, let alone any muscular sprain or bone fracture!

Narayanasami said that before Ramana left Madurai he used to see him sitting still for long stretches of time in the small room on the first floor. Narayanasami asked Ramana whether he could also do likewise. That very moment Ramana told him to squat on the floor with his legs crossed (as in the semi-padmasana posture) and pressed a pencil point midway between his eyebrows. Narayanasami lost his sense of body and world and sat still in a trance for more than half an hour. When he came to himself he saw Ramana sitting, with his face wreathed in smiles. Narayanasami said that he failed when he tried to repeat the experience by himself.

From the Notebook of **B. V. Narasimhaswami**

14.10.1929 - Enter K. K. Ganapati Sastri, Kapali Sastri and his wife Parvathammal, who bow and seat themselves. Many others are present.

Kapali: When after a long struggle and development (by sadhana) one attains siddhi, is the attainment due to his effort or to the action of the Spirit or Power which is the object of his upasana?

M: It is the action of the Current.

Kapali: So it is not the aspirant's actions that make him get siddhi but it is the act of the Current?

M: Yes.

Then Kapali Sastriar points to the Maharshi's own case of quitting home, and being drawn to Tiruvannamalai as an instance of the above and asks: It is That which drew Bhagavan from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai?

M: Yes. You see in the letter left at home before leaving, I first wrote "By His command..." and then added above it "In search of my Father". He drew me. I wrote that down and left. Finding funds was not due to my efforts. My brother, of his own accord told me, "You had better take five rupees and pay my school fees at the school," and out of the five I only took three rupees for the train to Tindivanam. Judging the distance from an out-of-date atlas of India, Tindivanam was the nearest railway station to Tiruvannamalai.

Again, the train, which usually leaves at 11.45 a.m., was unusually late. I left home after 12 noon for the station and still reached there in time to catch it.

The correct information about my destination was given to me by an old Muslim, with a silvery white flowing beard, one or two stations after we left Madurai. "Where are you going Swami?" he queried.

"To Tiruvannamalai and so I have got a ticket to Tindivanam," I replied.

"You are a strange passenger to go to Tindivanam for Tiruvannamalai. I am also going there," he said and added, "and we should change trains at Villupuram. You should not go to Tindivanam at all." He informed me that he was going to Tirukoilur, but strangely, I did not find him when after some time I looked for him in the carriage. After that I did not think of him at all.

Kapali continued: Did Bhagavan come straight to the temple?

Maharshi: Yes. The doors were all open then and I went straight to the garbhagraham (shrine). There was no one else present.

Kapali: And Bhagavan reported his arrival to Arunachaleswara.

M: As though Arunachala did not know of it otherwise!

Take Me To Arunachala

“WE had not gone too far in the taxi when James began softly but urgently pleading with me to get the taxi to turn around so we could go back to the Ashram. He was crying quietly and seemed unable to comprehend how I could do something that ran counter to all that made sense to him. He felt we had come home at last and should stay there. I was completely overwhelmed myself by how painful it was to leave. Om at some point began crying in the same heartbroken way as James. When we were boarding the plane in Chennai James again began begging me to go back to the Ashram and this kept happening at different points all the way back to San Francisco, with that same desperately sad silent weeping. Thomas, when not too far into the journey asked, “How long till we get home?” I began calculating the hours but he interrupted me, saying, “What home are you talking about? I mean the Ashram!” He seemed less sad than the other two on the journey but as soon as we landed he felt a terrible mistake had been made and we should never have left. Today was very hard for all three.”

Thus wrote Jane Molnar, the mother of Thomas, James and William (who prefers to be called ‘Om’), from Berkely, California after returning there on March 2 of this year. They had arrived at Sri Ramanasramam on February 9th and spent three glorious weeks at the Sri Ramanasramam, their ‘home’.

About samskara, the Maharshi said: “See how a tree, whose branches are cut, grows again. So long as the life-source is not affected it will grow. Similarly the samskaras (innate tendencies) sink into the heart in death: they do not perish. They will in right time sprout forth from the heart. That is how the jivas are reborn.”

What is uppermost in the mind at the time of death during the previous janma (birth), will surely surface in this life, leading us towards what we once deeply yearned for.

This is one explanation for what appears to be remarkable in the life of a six-year-old boy, as well as his siblings and Mother, who followed his lead all the way to Arunachala. Another explanation, which is indelibly inherent in samskara, is Divine Grace.

Below, narrated in mother Jane Molnar’s own words, are the events leading up to their February trip to India:

“I would like to describe to you the remarkable story of how Bhagavan caught us in His net of Grace. Almost three years ago, my middle son James (who was six at

the time) chanced to see a picture of Bhagavan on my computer screen. James looked at Bhagavan very intently for a long time, and the next night asked to see His photograph again. Day after day, he would look at Him for hours at a time, unable to lift his eyes from Bhagavan. As James gazed at Bhagavan, I would look back and forth between Bhagavan’s face and James and it slowly became clear to me that my little son was looking directly at God. There was no other way to account for what happened to my child. Bhagavan’s presence was so strong and the force of His love so powerful that He quickly captured my other two little boys (who were three and seven then) as well, and I could not resist



Thomas, William (Om) and James at Ramanasramam

Him either. In no time at all, He became everything to us. I called Arunachala Ashram in New York, telling them what had happened and asked them to send some photos. In that way we came to know devotees of Arunachala Ashrama, as they kindly supplied us with many more photos, books and DVDs.

When the first photos of Bhagavan and Arunachala arrived, I placed them on an altar we made. James looked back and forth between them and told me that even though people might think Bhagavan and Arunachala

looked different, they were identical. He then began begging me to take him to Arunachala. He would plead until very late at night, whispering, “Just sell the house. Leave a note! Let’s leave NOW!” This longing to go to Arunachala spread to the other boys as well and they would take turns begging and pleading. The three would even team up and plead together with a great urgency that bordered at times on desperation. Though they had not been raised in a devotional house or culture, they felt an overwhelming urge to reach Bhagavan’s shrine so they could prostrate to Him there. In our house they began doing aratis and chanting. They asked to learn Sanskrit. Even their play was centered on Bhagavan, and they would endlessly act out scenes from long ago, involving Bhagavan, Muruganar, Annamalai Swami and other devotees. They firmly insisted that their true home was Arunachala, even though they have not yet set foot there. Over time their devotion spread to an intense

desire to understand and practice Self-enquiry and they began questioning me day and night on Bhagavan’s teachings and even waking me up in the middle of the night to read aloud Bhagavan’s promises from *Padamalai*.”

When Jane and her three boys finally did arrive at Sri Ramanasramam and spent three indescribable weeks at the feet of their Master, weeks that too quickly passed, the experience was far beyond all their expectations. Everyone in the Ashram was charmed by the natural devotion that only pure-hearted children of gentle ways can manifest. Needless to say, even before leaving, the boys were devising plans and intricate schemes to make their second visit to Arunachala. What the future may bring is uncertain. But what is certain is that all four of them have been tightly caught in the tiger’s jaws of the Master’s grace and they can never leave the presence of Arunachala Ramana wherever they may be.

Reflections of Ramanasramam

The following was kindly submitted by a California devotee who was given the opportunity to visit Arunachala for the first time last December.

MY stay at Ramanasramam has had a profound effect. Bhagavan’s Presence is so potent, like the air pressure in and around everything. While I was there, His Presence was so utterly natural and continuously affirmed that I just lived in it. Upon returning to California, His Presence became startling in contrast to everything here. Like the vast ocean underlying the waves and foam and splash of droplets – I can see both right now.

Bhagavan clearly elevated me beyond my actual development and I am protecting His Guiding Force as carefully as I can. I am completely happy; but I am watchful because I know this will fade without vigilance.

The most precious moments were the ones spent in the Old Hall. During that 4 a.m. hour, He showed me that humility, sincerity, and surrender open the current of communion with Him. Reflection then revealed these three to be the same thing. In spite of my awkward and ill-prepared efforts to be still and absorb everything, He gave freely and graciously.

The most surprising thing is that I miss the Mountain, I miss Arunachala. I didn’t realize it had such a

powerful effect on me until I left. Though I know, ultimately, that Bhagavan’s Presence is not located in any one place, my heart longs to be at Ramanasramam again. I am grateful to those who live there and keep it as a safe place so that a longing heart can commune with Bhagavan in peace.

There is another remarkable effect that Ramanasramam had on me. The Clear Light of Reality that permeates the atmosphere there illuminated some of my illusions – even those dearly held! The confrontation with my own sincerity revealed a naïveté in simply clinging to Bhagavan without making a real effort, along with an ironclad commitment, to see through my own illusions. For me, it takes both, devotion and inquiry, and Bhagavan showed me the weakness of both my devotion and inquiry in a single startling moment (another 4 a.m. gift!). I feel as though I am just now beginning...

In conclusion, he reached across decades and physical boundaries to capture my heart 5½ years ago. My stay at Ramanasramam gave me a constant and intense guidance from Him that has set me more truly on His Path. My aspiration soars...

ŚRĪ GĪTA SĀRĀḤ

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, at the request of his devotees, chose 42 verses from the Bhagavad Gita to aid those earnest sadhakas in their quest for enlightenment. In 1940, Sri Ramanasramam published the first English edition, followed by the second in 1946. The Maharshi, in his usual fastidious manner, perused these English translations before their publication. In deference to this fact, the new eighth pocket-size edition published by Sri Ramanasramam contains the 1946-second edition translation, made by Munagala Venkataramayya, the erudite compiler of Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi. The English text of the 1946 edition follows.

श्री गीतासारः

OR

THE SONG CELESTIAL

VERSES FROM SRI BHAGAVAD GITA

Selected & Reset by

BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

Sanjaya said:

1. To him (Arjuna) thus filled with compassion and in despair, his eyes distressed and full of tears, spoke Madhusudana these words: ii. 1

The Blessed Lord said:

2. This body, O son of Kunti, is called the kshetra (field); him who knows it, the sages call the kshetrajna (knower of the field). xiii. 1

3. Know Me also as the knower of the field in all the fields, O Bharata: knowledge of the field and of the knower of the field I deem to be true knowledge. xiii. 2

4. I am the Self, O Gudakesa, dwelling in the Heart of every being; I am the beginning and the middle, and likewise the end of all beings. x. 20¹

5. Of the born the death is certain, and certain the birth of the dead: therefore, for what none can prevent thou shouldst not grieve. ii. 27

6. Never is He born nor dead; nor having been, ceaseth He any more to be. Unborn, abiding, eternal, ancient, He is not slain when the body is slain. ii. 20

1. Pressed to point out the most important verse in all of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Maharshi selected this verse.

7. Not to be cleft is He, not to be burnt is He, not even to be wetted nor yet to be dried is He: abiding He is and all-pervading, stable, immovable and everlasting. ii. 24

8. Know That to be indestructible whereby all this is pervaded; of this Immutable none can work destruction. ii. 17

9. Of the nonexistent there is no being, and of what exists there is no non-being; the definite ascertainment of both is seen by the seers of the essence of Truth. ii. 16

10. As ether everywhere present is not polluted by virtue of its subtlety, even so the Self abiding everywhere is not polluted in the body. xiii. 33

11. Nor sun nor moon nor fire illumines It: and whither having gone men return not. That is My Abode Supreme. xv. 6

12. Unmanifested, Imperishable is this called; and this they proclaim the Supreme State, which attained they return not. That is My Abode Supreme. viii. 21

13. Without pride, without delusion, victorious over the blemish of attachment, ever abiding in the Self, their desires abandoned, released from the pairs called pleasure and pain, they go undeluded to that Abode Immutable. xv. 5

14. He who forsakes the ordinances of scriptures, and acts under the influence of desire, attains not perfection, nor happiness, nor the Supreme State. xvi.

15. Who sees the Lord Supreme dwelling alike in all beings, perishing not as they perish, he sees indeed. xiii. 27

16. By devotion alone, without the 'otherness', O Arjuna, thus can I be known and seen, and in essence entered, O Parantapa. xi. 54

17. The faith of every man, O Bharata, accords with his essential character; man is instinct with faith: as that wherein a man hath faith, verily so is he. xvii. 3

18. He that has intense faith, and to that faith being devoted, has the senses controlled, gains knowledge; and having gained knowledge he swiftly attains Supreme Peace. iv. 39

19. To those who are self-attuned and who worship Me with affectionate devotion, I give that union with understanding whereby they come unto Me. x. 10

20. Out of compassion for them and abiding in their Self I destroy with the resplendent light of knowledge their darkness born of ignorance. x. 11

21. Verily for those in whom the ignorance is destroyed by the knowledge of the Self, in them the knowledge like the sun illumines That Supreme. v. 16

22. High, they say, are the senses; higher than the senses is the mind; and higher than the mind is the understanding; but one who is higher than understanding is He. iii. 42

23. Thus knowing Him to be higher than the understanding, steadying the self by the Self, O thou strong of arm, slay the enemy in the form of desire, so hard to overcome. iii. 43

24. Just as a burning fire makes ashes of its fuel, O Arjuna, even so does the fire of knowledge make ashes of all works. iv. 37

25. Whose every enterprise is without desire or motive, whose actions are burnt up in the fire of knowledge, him the wise call a Sage. iv. 19

26. All around the austere sages, free from desire and wrath, who have subdued their mind and have realized the Self, radiate the beatific peace of Brahman. v. 26

27. Little by little should one realize tranquillity, by judgment held with a steadfast purpose; making the mind abide in the Self, he should think of nothing at all. vi. 25

28. Towards whatsoever the mind wanders, being fickle and unsteady, therefrom it should be withdrawn and brought under the sway of the Self alone. vi. 26

29. With the senses, mind and intellect subdued, the saint who devoutly seeks Liberation, without desire, fear or wrath – he is indeed ever Liberated. v. 28

30. The one steadfast in yoga and looking on every thing impartially, sees the Self abiding in all beings, and all beings in the Self. vi. 29

31. I undertake to secure and protect the welfare of those

who without ‘otherness’ meditate on Me and worship Me, and who ever abide thus attuned. ix. 22

32. Of these the jnani, who is ever attuned, whose devotion is centred in One, is the most excellent; because to the jnani am I exceedingly dear and he is dear to Me. vii. 17

33. At the end of many births the jnani finds refuge in Me, recognising that Vasudeva is all. Such a high Soul is very hard to find. vii. 19

34. When one puts away, O Partha, all the desires that are in the mind, and in the Self alone by the Self well satisfied, then is he called the man of steadfast wisdom. ii. 55

35. Having cast away all desires, that man who goes without longing, devoid of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ – he doth attain peace. ii. 71

36. He by whom the world is not disturbed, and who is not disturbed by the world, free from exultation, impatience, fright and agitation – he is dear to me. xii. 15

37. He who holds honour and dishonour equal, equal the friendly party and the foe, who has renounced all enterprise – he is said to have transcended the gunas. xiv. 25

38. The man who revels here and now in the Self alone, with the Self is satisfied, and in the Self alone is content – for him there is no work which he must do. iii. 17

39. For him there is no purpose in doing the work, nor any in leaving it here undone; nor is there for him in all the beings anything which serves a purpose. iii. 18

40. Content to take what chance may bring, having transcended the pairs, free from ill will, and even-minded in success or failure, though he works, he is not bound. iv. 22

41. The Lord, O Arjuna, dwells in the Heart of every being and by His mysterious power spins round all beings set on the machine. xviii. 61

42. Unto Him alone surrender, O Bharata, with all thy being; by His Grace shalt thou obtain Peace Supreme, the Abode Eternal. xviii. 62

Thus shines the quintessence of the *Gita* consisting of the verses selected by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

He who studies with earnestness and devotion these verses, forty-two in number, attains easily the knowledge imparted by the *Gita*.

Supplication to Sri Bhagavan

A. K. Ramachandran

Decades ago, as a student, I would gaze with admiration at the photo of a youth in a loincloth before whom my father used to prostrate. The last words of my father said before losing consciousness were about Bhagavan and about how eagerly he had been looking forward to spending some years in Sri Ramanasramam.

These words were ringing in my ears when I visited Sri Ramanasramam in 1930. I was specially blessed on this occasion as I saw the Maharshi all alone in the dining hall, in the early hours of the morning. I caught hold of his holy feet, just as Markandeya caught hold of the lingam, and told him about the last words of my father. With tender love beaming out of his eyes, he said that my father had taken leave of him before passing away! When I beseeched him to bless me, he said, "It will be all right in the end." Those words of benediction have rung in my ears and brought me hope in moments of depression. It is those blessed moments which I cherish in my heart as the most worthwhile event in my life.

— *Ramana Smrti*

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Ramana Maharshi

in New York City

Saturday 25 April 2009 at 11:00 a.m.

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

For more information call: (718) 560-3196 or write:

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Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation are conducted in a few places near or in large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please contact the individuals below for more information. If you wish to start a Satsang group in your area, please go to "www.sriramanamaharshi.org" for more information.

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Connecticut Area — Prashanth & Shobana (860-691-1862 / vprashanth@msn.com)

Dublin, Ohio — Abilash & Madhavi (614-348-1975 / mungamuru@hotmail.com)

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

San Francisco Area — Karthik & Sunita (510-656-2752 / sunita_parasuraman@yahoo.com)

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

Washington, D.C. Area — Uma and Santosh (301-528 - 5526 / uma_santosh@hotmail.com)

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

Toronto, Canada — Krishnan & Padma Sastri (905-849-6005 / psastri@hotmail.com)

Toronto, Canada — Thiru (905-686-6592 / Thirusivasamy@hotmail.com)

Vancouver, Canada — Zoya (778-863-9692 / Zoyaonline@yahoo.ca)