

# THE MAHARSHI



MAR/APR 2008

VOL. 18, NO. 2

## My Pilgrimage to Ramanasramam

by Sri Atmakuri Govindacharyulu

ONE day in 1945, as I was dwelling on the name of Rama, I heard, “Ramana, Ramana.” The sound was pleasant to the ear. I don’t know why. It gave joy to the heart and the mind leapt in its course. But the reins of activity pulled me out of it. Yet the yearning to see him grew day by day. Two months slipped by.

### Arrival

The darkness is dispersing. It is dawn. The town of Tiruvannamalai, taking refuge at the feet of Arunachala, is astir with activity. It seems as though the hill itself is going to fill its hands with golden petals to offer to the Sun. This holy hill is eight miles in circumference and of ancient fame. It is believed that here Siva once caused the flames of a great fire to burst forth. It is also possible that it was once a volcano.

Ramanasramam stands at the foot of Arunachala. The Sage’s Ashram, infused with the natural beauty of Arunachala to its north, is indeed charming to the eye. As in the hermitages of ancient days, there are here leaf huts, mountain caves, water pools and flower beds. This hermit’s settlement, beautiful with trees, plants and creepers, is not lacking in the amenities and comforts of modern civilization. There is a neat, well constructed kitchen and dining hall, adjoined by a bore well. Next to the well there is on one side an office, on another the Sage’s hall, and on a third a hospital with two beds. Beyond the hospital there are three rooms for guests. There are separate bathrooms for men and women, and a special bathroom for the Maharshi. There is a separate building to accommodate the chanters of the Vedas. Close

to it, in the same direction, is a cowshed, and there the Post Office is housed. In every building there are electric lights. There is a well-laid path with buildings on each side, and here and there in front of them are beautiful crotons. There are learned sadhus living in leaf-huts in a pleasant little garden adjoining the ashram. Here also is a tank. Facing the Ashram, to the south, there are some other buildings where dwell the devotees of the hermit Ramana. A Bengali has built some houses at this place, which are rented to the rich and the educated who visit the Maharshi. Attempts to construct some new buildings here are to be seen. It is said that this stony land sells for as much as Rs. 2,000 per acre, and that before the creation of the Ashram here, land had been valueless. It is right to call the place Ramananagar today, now that the Ashram is spreading out like a town. The whole extent of the Ashram proper is six acres, with forty-five inmates and accommodation for fifteen guests. There are about thirty head of cattle. The greatest wealth of the Ashram is the zeal and devotion of the devotees. The maintenance of the inmates generally rests on the generosity of donors. Niranjanananda Swami, Ramana Maharshi’s brother, is the Sarvadhikari of the Ashram. He is also known as Chinna Swami.

### Entering the Ashram

As I entered the precincts of the Ashram I saw an incompleting temple on the left. It is not an ordinary one but fairly high. It has already cost half a lakh, and will need another half a lakh to complete. This is the resting place of Ramana Maharshi's mother. This elderly lady who had lost her eldest son, upon whom the performance of her last rites would have devolved, took refuge with her second son who had renounced all karma. This venerable mother of the Sage, Alagamma, passed away in 1922. The Maharshi himself consecrated the linga over her resting place.

No sooner had I passed this than the office stood before me. As I entered, it was Niranjanananda himself whom I first saw. He wore the ochre robe and was an imposing person. He was otherwise absorbed and it took some time before he answered my question: "Where is Ramana Maharshi's hall?"

Perhaps there are ten yards of open space between the office and the Sage's hall. Here lies the well. Passing it, I mounted to the veranda of the hall and stood there. Here the doubt: "Is this the hall! There seems to be no one here?" can hardly fail to strike one. Two steps more and I was before the first doorway, the first entrance to the hall. Turning towards the doorway I saw a long high sofa, nicely covered over neatly printed sheets, very pleasing to the eye. On the North side of it, within easy reach, is an electric light arranged within a crystalline glass globe, while close to it there was a fine bookcase with roomy tiers. The hall is silent – only the sweet fragrance of incense sticks pervade it. It would only be natural to begin thinking how luxuriously the sage lives who sits upon the couch, yet when I entered I saw one whose only garment is a loincloth.

### In the Sage's presence

A veranda surrounded by a beautiful flower garden; within it the Sage's hall. Inside, to the northeast, the couch; upon it, reclining against a pillow, impassive, an aged human form. Filling the whole western side of the hall, disciples, men and women, evidently taking refuge at the feet of that form. On the southern side of the hall, to the east and west, there are bookshelves. Close to the couch, on the south, a tall bookcase; beside it a kamandalu, with a stick as its companion. Entering the hall I looked this way and that, and this is what I observed.

This is my first visit to Ramanasramam. I have not come here as a devotee, nor have I heard or read anything of the Maharshi's life; but I have a thirst to know what is here. I have not given up my critical sense. What is the daily routine here, what is the teaching, what is the method of practice, what is the goal attained? To have an answer to these questions is the purpose of my visit. I had come to gain direct knowledge on the subject.

### The Old Hall

I went into the hall. I saw the Sage. He did not look at me. No one there looked at me. A moment passed as I stood. But the next moment a kind of giddiness came over me. I joined my hands and prostrated. Was it by myself that I had arisen from my prostration? It seemed as though someone had raised me up. There came a thought into my mind: "How is it that this head which has bent itself only at the lotus feet of Mahatma Gandhi has sunk to the ground here also? That mind which says, 'I am thy servant' only at the lotus-feet of Sri Rama, has here said, 'I am killed!!' Why? It is inexplicable!" The only answer that springs up at once is, "Unwilled". And now the mind again began to settle into peace. I sat down on the floor near the Sage's feet.

I began to gaze unwinking at the Sage's countenance, directed upon whom I could not grasp. His head was shaking as his face turned this way and that. Five minutes passed. Suddenly for a moment his gaze met mine. I felt, "Enough! Enough!" The hair stood on end throughout my body. The outward vision turned inwards, and an unknown force began to rise throughout my frame. I said to this power that so subtly possessed me, "Thou alone art my refuge!" The mind lost itself somewhere, and I had a strange feeling of void. I had entered the hall at eight: it was eleven. I opened my eyes. The three hours had passed like a moment.

Seekers having some experience will be acquainted with this supreme peace. Nevertheless, argumentation has entered into the mind, which has become more and more tumultuous. I came out into the verandah.

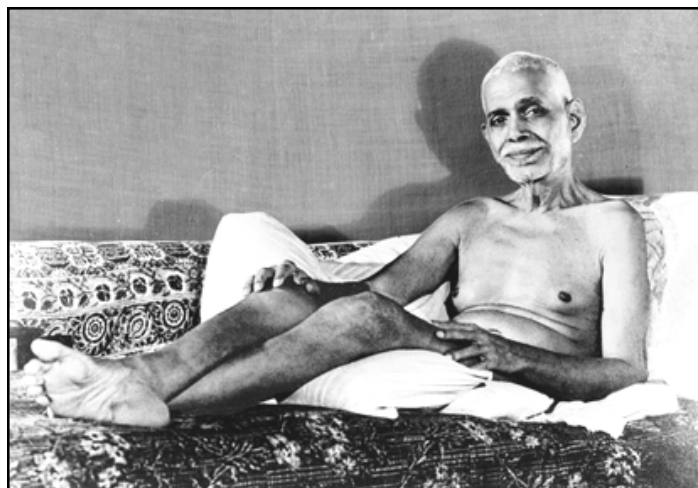
A well-placed person stood before me and with a smile enquired very eagerly whence I came. "Have you seen all the Ashram?" he asked me. "Does the great sage know that you are here?" When I told him, "Up till now I am in his presence. He does not know me," he took me back to the Sage. He introduced me to him. Slowly from the depths of that motionless, placid human

statue a smile emerged to play on his face, a smile that seemed to say, “Do I not know him?” Just for a moment, that best of Sages regarded me from head to toe, as though to infuse me with the nectar of His grace. That smile, mingled with that look of grace, stirred me to the depths, and made me tremble like one who has passed through blazing fire. I could not bear to look at that face, radiant as the sun. From the countenance of him who is revered by brahmin sages, and has discarded tuft and thread, my gaze ran back to his feet. It tarried for a trice at his loincloth – a piece of coarse pure-white khaddar. He asked me affectionately in Telugu, “Will you be here for a few days?” I felt great joy that the beloved Telugu tongue had a share in the sweet speech of this transcendent person. Again I happily seated myself in silence before the Sage.

### **Wedded To Silence**

All there are wedded to silence, absorbed in the perception of the Self. The Sage’s hall is not a small one, it measures some twelve yards lengthwise by about four yards in breadth, and it is high. I came to know that it was the disciples who had raised him up on the sofa so that everybody in the hall without impediment could see him. This is the transcendent yogi who, living in mountains, forests, caves, hills, without food, has subdued his body, offering it up to sun and rain, unswerving from his purpose. He is an impressive, personable figure, of golden colour, but bent with age. He is indifferent to the needs of the body. Although he is not far advanced in years – no more than sixty-five – and though he is naturally well built, he seems to have lost his bodily address. He cannot walk steadily; he needs the help of a stick. I realised that old age alone was the reason for his having been seated on a soft couch.

The clock strikes twelve. All rise and go to the dining hall. Mr T. S. Rajagopalan, who had introduced me to the Maharshi, took me too. The dining hall is very spacious. It runs in length from north to south, and is divided from east to west by wooden screens. The brahmins take their food on the north side, and on the south the non-brahmins. The Maharshi takes his food by the eastern wall, opposite the screens, so placed that he is visible to both sections. Whatever he eats is served to the disciples, and the food is in accordance with the householder’s rule.



An old lady serves food to the Maharshi. She has been serving him in this way devotedly for the past forty years. There are none in the Ashram who do not bow to this old lady. Daily in the morning she prostrates to the Sage after thrice circumambulating the hall clockwise. Similarly, there is an old man here who has known the Sage from boyhood and has shared with him many difficulties. I left the dining hall while acquainting myself with the inmates of the Ashram.

From twelve to three is the Sage’s time of rest. During this interval I shifted my residence to the Ashram itself. I stretched myself in the guest house and mused on my experiences. Vague doubts began to swarm in my mind. Answers too began to form themselves. Deep sleep that for so long had not been mine came over me that day. At peace I made my way to the Sages hall at five.

### **Back in the Hall**

Cool, tender breezes are at play in the Maharshi’s hall, which has windows on the four sides, and two wide doorways to the south. Wedded to silence, the disciples are sunk in meditation. Devotees come in, prostrate and offer flowers and fruits. Some sit for a while, others at once leave on receiving Bhagavan’s prasada – the fruits offered or some of the sugar candy. They take it reverently to their eyes and go. Not a word from any; all is peace.

The Upanishadic line: “Mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberation of men,” rises from my heart and dances in the pathway of the mind. The method of practice here is only to let go of that oppressive spirit. Here we can for once at least experience the truth of Patanjali’s aphorism: “Yoga is control of the modifications of the mind.”

The Maharshi is a sea of peace. In this sea there is a movement, the movement of perceiving the Self. Whoever sets eyes upon this sea or sits near it for an instant, cannot fail to breathe peace-laden breezes, cannot fail to taste supreme peace, their mental movement held, be it only for a while. Such is the undissembling grace of this transcendent yogi, such his desireless activity.

Whoever may be gathered at his feet, he will not fail to shed on them at least a drop from his unfathomable ocean of tranquillity. He will not fail to scatter on them the transcendent seed that ends the ego and yields peace. He waters the fields of their hearts with the elixir of devotion that passes unperceived from his heart. In good soil those seeds will germinate and bear fruit for the good of society. In barren soil they die as they are sown. From that unspoken speech, unseeing look, unworking activity, from that, unthinking thought springs up and somehow pierces the heart-caverns of those there; some wonderful great power, able at a stroke to bring the mental sheath to nothing. Like news upon the ether, so messages will certainly be pouring forth from this generating-station of the Supreme Power, to benefit doubt-ridden sadhakas. And as the light of the heart shines forth, suddenly like an electric lamp, the path before them will certainly become as clear as an apple in one's hand. It should not be thought that all this would come to pass only in the presence of the great Sage. According to his capacity, the sadhaka, though hundreds of miles away, will be receiving messages of guidance, like a receiving station, from this transmitter of a world-encompassing miraculous Power, and radiations of light and peace. By himself he gives strength to the devotees who come under the empire of his transparent love, however far they be. He brings into existence between them and himself a strange formless silent innocent attachment. Between himself and them there flows unobstructed a very wonderful river of attraction. Before this seer, the yogas of bhakti, jnana and karma all have their respective places. In his *Five Hymns to Sri Arunachala*, he has sung of the devotee's rapture in these words: "He dedicates his mind to Thee, and seeing Thee, always beholds the universe as Thy figure, he at all times glorifies Thee and loves Thee as none other than the Self."

Before this embodiment of peace sit brahmin and non-brahmin sadhakas, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Tamils, Andhras, and Indians of many provinces, as well

as non-Indians, men and women, pure and impure, brahmacharins, grihasthas, vanaprasthas and sannyasins. All these call this tapaswin of Arunachala, Bhagavan.

### His Routine

Even at the first crow of the cock, the Sage leaves his bed and goes to the hill to answer the calls of nature. At four o'clock he is engaged in the routine of the day. The first thing the Sage does every day is to chop vegetables. Sometimes he himself prepares the morning meal. There is no conflict between jnana and daily work. Bodily labour is not degrading. To teach this truth about work is the Sage's motive.

When the first bell rings at five, the Sage is seated at ease upon the sofa. The disciples now begin to enter the hall, and as the cool morning breeze, charged with the light of dawn is lightly stirring, the Vedic recitation begins. The students of the Ashram school raise their voices with so much feeling and chant with such devotion that there is no one who will not be overcome by it. And for a time it is as though the Divine Mother of India's eternal spirituality dances before us. The ladies who had left the Ashram the previous night, now return. The Maharshi goes for his bath, and at half-past seven the bell rings. Together with the guests and inmates the Sage takes two rice-cakes and half a cup of coffee. After this he comes to the hall. The sadhakas engage in their sadhana before him. Some go about the work of the Ashram. The Vedic students attend to the work and worship of the temple, as the devotees come and receive the silent blessings and are satisfied.

Towards ten o'clock a man clad in a loincloth hands over the day's mail to the Sage. He is of radiant form, middle-aged, has let his beard grow and his matted locks spread and intertwine. He is an Andhra. It might look as though he were a private secretary to the Sage. He is immersed in the correspondence that comes to the Sage from every land. The typewriter is always before him. He is said to be familiar with many languages. He used to be an advocate in Madras. He is a patriot who worked in the Congress till 1930. Now he is a sadhaka who begs his food at night in the town, and has been here ever since he lost his wife. He does not merely wear the loincloth, he is an aspirant for Self-realisation. When we have prostrated to the Maharshi and see him, unfailingly we feel impelled to join our hands in reverence before him. He was previously B. V. Srinivasa Rao.

Lunch will be over by noon, afternoon coffee by three. The Sage will be present in the hall from three till supper time at eight P.M. He goes out once towards the cowshed in the morning and once by the adjoining sadhus' garden in the afternoon to ease himself. So few are his movements. At five in the afternoon music begins from the radio in the hall. The songs of Tyagaraja, the poet, singer-bhakta, siddha, can be heard with enjoyment. The Sage is a lover of the fine arts. He is an aesthete who can appreciate the sweetness of music. What can be distasteful to the All-knower who only sees, "the Good, the True, the Beautiful"? For all that, even when he listens to a song full of devotion, his lotus face will not exhibit any of the signs that his heart is touched. But this does not mean that the Sage is a lifeless statue without a responsive heart.

The grandson of a devotee begins to crawl on the floor. For a moment the Sage is delighted with the lively movements of the child and he laughs with pleasure. Daily by the northern window a charming squirrel visits the Sage's couch. As he feeds it, a kind of unearthly joy lights up his face.

In the evening of the first day I offered him my composition, titled *Govinda Ramayana*. For a while he read it to himself here and there. Reading the prose colophon he remarked, "He too is of Parashara gotra." It seemed as though this Sage who has sprung from Parashara gotra was a little pleased at this. When I mentioned that my maternal gotra was also Bharadwaja, the same as his, a little further pleasure was visible. When I told him that I was putting the entire *Ramayana*

in verse, I felt that the Sage blessed me.

Towards the evening there is the Vedic recitation once again. After this the devotees sing the praises of the Sage and his verses. For a while after supper the Sage is immersed in samadhi, his devotees with him. Such is the daily routine.

### He Rules by Silence

I stayed for three days and only once or twice a day was his sweet voice heard. He rules all through silence only. I drew near that sea of love and prostrating said, "I take leave. Bless me." The Sage nodded his head in assent and blessing. He looked on me for once to my heart's content with his gracious countenance. Somehow my foot was unable to move back, arrested by the power of that stupefying arrow. I again prostrated. I felt he told me, 'Now you may depart.' I came out from the Sage's hall with peace in my heart. I said to myself, 'I am blessed.' I left the Ashram pondering the words of Bhavatrihari:

"When I knew a little I was blinded by pride as an elephant by rut, and my mind was covered over by the thought, 'I know everything'. But when through the company of the enlightened I learned little by little, then I found that I was a fool and the fever of my pride departed."

It seemed as though my heart had been graven with Bhavatrihari's lines:

"Some inner cause brings things together. Attachments are by no means grounded in external causes." The hairs of my body stood on end. With the silent words, 'I am thy servant,' I offered the great Sage my heartfelt adorations.

## Was It a Dream?

I WOULD like to share with you a recent dream that I had. I was in Sri Ramanasramam visiting all the places in the Ashram. I then entered the Old Hall. In the dream, there were no walls to the right or front of the couch where Bhagavan sat (right, if you were facing Bhagavan). I walked in and there was no Bhagavan on the couch. Some women were seated around the empty spot. I thought to myself, 'People believe He is still here and sit around this spot as a mark of piety. Maybe I should also just sit here for a while.' And I sat down. Almost as soon as I did, a large, giant sized Bhagavan, smiling, in seated posture (not reclining) appeared before me on the couch. He said to me in Tamil, "Naan epodum inga daane irukken" (Am I not always here?). He wasn't frail or thin as He is seen in some of his later pictures. He was quite big and hefty. I was very happy and thought to myself that I had never had a vision of Bhagavan or Arunachala in the waking state, and here He was sitting before me, in the waking state.

But of course, it was a dream!

— Devotee from California

## Sri Krishnaprem Writes to a Friend About Spiritual Progress

**Y**OU say you find it hard to go on. That is a good sign. This path is the hardest path in the world and as long as we find it easy we may be sure we are not getting very far but just free-wheeling easily along a level road.

Oh yes, we may be happy and peaceful for a time but that happiness or peace is illusory: anything can disturb it and we achieve nothing. His peace is something quite different, something that has its beginning at the very heart of tremendous winds, winds which would shatter us to atoms. It is only when the strain begins to tell on us, when the breath comes short, that we can know that we are really climbing. Till then all that we have done at most is to go over rapidly the ground we covered in a previous life.

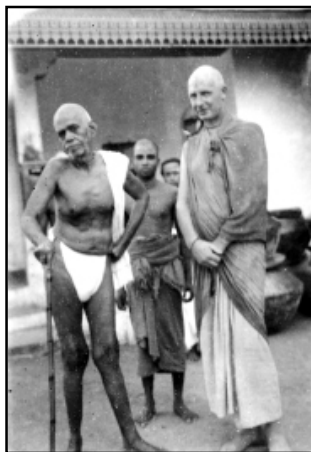
This life begins when the strain comes on - scarcely before. There is no attainment of Him, until the egg shell of self is broken. Why then should we complain when the breaking-strain begins to come on? With pain we are born both physically and spiritually, but it is the inner life that we seek and not the self-enwrapped bliss of uterine existence.

### More religious than teachings

*My mother lives in Tiruvannamalai and recommended that I contact you. I have no knowledge of the Maharshi and would like to learn more. Do you offer a satsang or other learning experience? I got the impression that your sittings are more religious than teaching.... Is there an event in which I could come and learn?*

—Seeker from New York

We do have meetings or satsangs in several places across the country. And it is true that some of them may seem more of the religious type. But the term 'religious' in this sense is also synonymous with the word 'practice'. Practice means stilling the mind, turning it inwards, and experiencing our essential nature. So practice is a



Sri Krishnaprem with Bhagavan in 1949

method to subdue the restless thoughts and effect one-pointedness of mind, which is essential for success on the spiritual path.

—Editor

## Sri Ramana's Childrens Ashrama

will be conducted at the Nova Scotia

Arunachala Ashrama

from

**July 28th to August 1st  
(Monday - Friday)**

Those who wish to participate, or would like more information regarding the program, should call Darlene in Nova Scotia at (902) 665-2263 or email "darlene.karamanos@gmail.com".

Accommodation is available within the Ashrama for all participants, and longer visits can be arranged.

Arunachala Ashrama

1451 Clarence Rd., Bridgetown

Nova Scotia, Canada B0S 1C0

(902) 665-2090

## An Invitation

You your family and friends are cordially invited to join us in observing

**The 58th Mahanirvana Day  
of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi**

in

New York City

**Saturday 3 May 2008**

11:00 a.m.

at

ARUNACHALA ASHRAMA

86-06 EDGERTON BOULEVARD

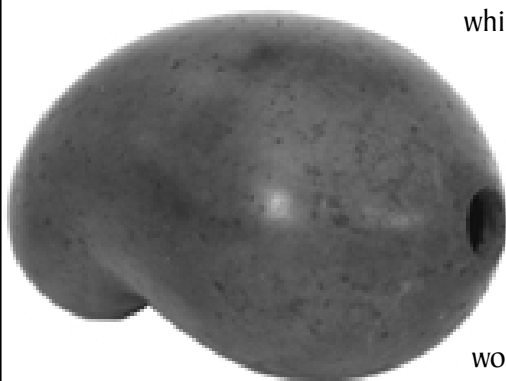
JAMAICA ESTATES, QUEENS, NEW YORK 11432

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

For more information call: (718) 560-3196

## She Won the Prize

**I** MUST share with you an incident, possibly not recorded in any of Sri Ramanasramam's publications. I am not sure whether my father (K. V. Mama) told you about this incident, which happened around the year 1912.



At that time, my 12-year-old grandmother Chellamma (adopted daughter of Echammal) would often play up on the Hill with other girls. One day Bhagavan called them and said, "Okay girls, lets have a running race and see who wins." Guess who won? It was Chellamma, my grandmother. Instantly Bhagavan said, "Having won, in all fairness, I must give you some prize." So he picked up a bilva seed, polished it smooth, drilled a fine hole in it — amazingly so perfect as if a machine had done it with a drill bit — and handed it over to my grandmother. This priceless prize to my grandmother is cherished by my family and has found a prominent place in my puja room. I am sending this photo of it for you to see.

— V. Kumar, Bangalore

## Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation have been going on 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.

**Atlanta Area** — Mangalam Kalyanam (678-546-0378 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

**Ann Arbor, MI** — Mohan & Gayatri (734-623-7199 / cedararbor@yahoo.com)

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

**Dublin, Ohio** — Abilash & Madhavi (614-789-9058 / 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 / Thirusivaswamy@hotmail.com)

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