

The Maharshi



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My First Pilgrimage to Ramanasramam

Kevin Gruenburg is a resident of the Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama. He visited Sri Ramanasramam for the first time earlier this year and was asked to write something about what he saw and experienced at the holy Arunachala Mountain. He gave us the following account and signed it “Paul Bunyan,” the mythological lumberjack of the Northeast, USA, with whom, because of Nova Scotia Ashram activities, he seems to feel considerable affinity.

IT has been nearly two months since I walked up, down and around the blessed Arunachala and I have realized this pilgrimage is all the doing of this mysterious Hill, which the *Skanda Purana* calls the “Heart of the earth.” It brought me to itself, walked me up, down and around it and took me deep within its depths. Our Bhagavan did say, “In the end, everyone must come to Arunachala.”

A taxi driver picked me up at the Chennai airport in his ambassador. I got in the car and we were off to a rocky start. Twenty minutes into the ride, we rear-ended the car in front of us. The driver of the other car came out into traffic fuming with anger; they exchanged what I interpreted to be unpleasant words and eventually examined each other’s car. The taxi driver got back into the car and we were off looking for a welder, stopping several times until one was found. Although eager to get to the Ashram, I enjoyed the delays, enabling me to observe the school children walking home from school, the unattended cows snacking in the green space of the island of the highway, and to try to decipher English phrases that just aren’t used in the United States written on the work trucks.

The closer we were to the destination, the more there was a pull inward. The I-I consciousness spontaneously took hold, I was becoming prey, just as a fly is to the spider when trapped in its web. At the first sight, the Holy Hill was radiating its silence, beauty

and grace. A subtle but tangible shift took place. It seemed as though Arunachala adjusted a lever within me, giving me a taste of a more natural life.

My days at the ashram were quite simple. They usually consisted of morning meditation, a walk up or around the mountain, attending the Veda and Tamil Parayana and of course partaking of the delicious meals.

How can one describe walking the path to Skanda Ashram? I guess one could talk about the beautiful reforested path, the black faced monkeys, the birds of prey (kites?) searching out lunch, the vendors selling their carvings, the friendly swami half way up or of the beautiful scenery on the path. However, none of those externals would seem right to share with you. Although there is one thing: the path. Can you believe that the devotee Ramaswami Pillai had laid the path with his bare hands? All those thousands of odd shaped, oversized rocks. Thinking of lifting just one would cause strain to the average person’s back. They all fit so perfectly! What a labor of love. No wonder he ate thirty plus iddies for

breakfast. Wow! And, how many times did Sri Ramana walk that path? There is the indescribable blessedness of that ground, which seems to radiate a contemplative energy and love, where one spontaneously and effortlessly rests in Arunachala, the Heart. I felt as if I was being carried up the path to Skandashramam. I often would plan to go to Skandashramam but would walk to its gate and turn around, filled with grace and not needing to go any farther.

The same inward pull happens while on pradakshina. I remember when a friend first told me about it. She said, “Without even trying, one goes into meditation. Just wait and see.” Sure enough, that captures one of the mysteries of the silent mountain.

My most memorable pradakshina was with some Tiruvannamalai residents who wanted to take me to the noteworthy places on the path and explain their significance in relation to Ramana’s life. We started very early in the morning. The villages were dormant, the sadhus were sleeping and our group was singing “Ramana Sat-Guru,” followed by “Aksharamanamalai,” alternating each verse as they do in the Samadhi Hall. Ironically, other than the singing, the rhythm of our steps and the restful nature of the walk made speaking sparse. Only a few words were exchanged during the nine miles, and that was to point out Ramana’s bridge, which was about two thirds of the way around the Hill, one of the places Ramana often stopped to view the mountain and briefly rest. About halfway around another devotee from Hyderabad joined us. He would distribute Arunachala prasad to everyone he saw. No one was forgotten! Even later that day I saw him wandering around the ashram distributing the remaining prasad; Indian or foreigner, friend or stranger it didn’t matter. As the sun started to rise, the infamous haze over Arunachala’s peak appeared. What a sight it was, seeing the breathtaking Arunachala slowly appear out of the darkness. Light or dark, waking or sleeping, Arunachala always stands firm within itself. Another of the mysteries to me is that one can walk around the nine miles of Arunachala and feel no bodily strain. How can that be?

One of the greatest blessings of my life was meeting Srimati Kanakammal, a devotee who intimately moved with Bhagavan. Although in her mid-80’s, she seemed to be in good health, smiling, laughing and making

herself available to earnest seekers. I visited her in her home a few times and would often see her frequenting the evening pujas. Four or five would squeeze into her front room, captivated by her stories of Sri Ramana, many of which are in *Cherished Memories*, so I will not repeat them here. Her words brought the physical presence of Ramana to life. She would subsequently become quite elevated and unaffected by the outer conditions. Bhagavan flowed through her gracious smile, bright radiant eyes and distinct laugh. She made it clear to us that at first sight Ramana was so normal and human, yet he possessed qualities that were not of this world. An ocean of compassion would pour out of his eyes and lips. His smile, in particular, seemed unforgettable. Although most of the conversations were in Tamil or Hindi and the translators were too captivated to remember to translate for me, I felt as though I understood everything. All that was translated was almost more than I could absorb.

There was one poem by Muruganar she spoke about and I know it is not in her book and is yet untranslated. I would like to share the gist of it, even though I may get it all wrong. It seemed as though she was very close with Muruganar, who took her under his wing soon after Sri Ramana’s Mahanirvana. The gist of the poem goes something as follows: There were two women having a discussion when one of the women started criticizing the other about having Ramana as her guru. She said Ramana only wears a kaupina, lives on such simple food, sleeps on the floor and has no possessions of his own. She looked upon Ramana as a lowly man. Then the second woman replied, Oho! You have misunderstood. The earth has done penance for thousands of years to have an avatar bless the earth by living as he did. Apparently, most avatars come on celestial flying chariots. Being at Arunachala we get a sense that Muruganar hit the nail on the head.

After writing all these words, I have to ask myself, what can I really say about my time at Arunachala? I suppose, it would be most accurate and truthful to have said nothing, but that would not have made for much of a report. Can you believe a place like this exists?

“As snow in water, let me melt as love in Thee, who art love itself, Oh Arunachala!”

—Aksharamanamalai, v. 101

The Current And Leaving Madurai

KAVYAKANTHA Ganapathi Sastri, Kapali Sastri and his wife Parvathammal, enter the hall. They all bow before the Maharshi and take their seats. Many others are present.

Kapali: In respect of the Current working within me, I find a difference in its strength according to the places in which I am in. Is that right?

Maharshi: Yes.

Kapali: I find it working in me more intensely in Tiruvannamalai than elsewhere; more strongly in this hall and in Bhagavan's presence (K. feels thrilled as he speaks).

[After a pause]

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?

Maharshi: 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.

Kapali: Is it That which drew Bhagavan from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai?

M: Yes. You see in the letter left at home at the time of leaving, I first wrote "By His command." And then added above it "In search of my Father." It is He that drew me. I wrote that and left. Also, finding funds was not due to my efforts. My brother of his own accord told me, "You had better take and pay my school fees at the school," and out of the five rupees given for that I 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 was still 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 gotten a ticket to Tindivanam," I replied. "You are a strange passenger to go to Tindivanam in route to 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: That must have been Siva. Why call him a Muslim?

[There was a pause in the conversation as Bhagavan remained silent.]

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.

Maharshi: As though Arunachala did not know of it otherwise...!

Kapali: Before Maharshi left, there was previous *pan pakkam* (process of maturity) going on in his mind, was there not?

M: Yes, for one whole month prior to my departure I had felt like I was a dead man - like a corpse. I imagined to myself, "Now I am a corpse, they will carry this away. I felt I was not the body. I was quite distinct. My ideas were quite transformed from what they were before a complete change.

Kapali: Had the chastisement, "What work is there here for a person who is like this?" been uttered to Bhagavan before the day he left Madurai?

Maharshi: Yes. But earlier it had produced no effect. On that day it was sufficient to make me leave home. The time had come for that.

Practice and Doing Business

Srinivasa Gopala Iyer, an auditor from Vellore, visited the Asramam and dined here. He sat before Bhagavan and mentioned that he had had physical ailments (asthma) for a long time and yet had continued

with Raja Yoga, including pranyama. He had read books also on the subject.

S.: The practice of concentration makes me feel weak and giddy. What am I to do?

M.: Why? Yoga should rather make a man healthier and happier.

S.: I have no trouble at the time of concentration. I do not experience the weakness then. I perceive it after dhyana is over.

M.: You may have some difficulties at the outset of practice, but gradually concentration will become easy and pleasant and you will be in that state whether attending to business or whether you sit expressly for meditation.

S.: How is it possible to attend to one's business if one is to go on attending to concentration or dhyana also?

M.: No. Business will be easier for you when your mind is steadied and strengthened by concentration.

S.: But I can have no interest in business while I attend to yoga and business will be thereby marred, will it not?

M.: No. Your viewpoint will change no doubt, as stated in *Bhagavad Gita*, chapter two. You will regard business in the light of it being a mere dream, but that will not affect your business as you will attend to it as though it was serious.

Kapali Sastri: Is there a mythical banyan tree on Arunachala as stated in the Puranas?

M.: I saw such a tree, when I got hurt by the hornets. That may be the tree.

Someone asked Maharshi: Why have you not yet become tejomayam, effulgent even after so many years of tapas?

M.: It is possible to achieve this, as described in books. In fact, that saktistana (power-seat) exists. If one concentrates on that center for seven days with a sattvic mind, this can be achieved, but I never tried to be this.

K.: Does a jnani in the body remain visible?

M.: Why not?

K.: The body is the reflection of the mind, so it ought to be modified?

M.: In whose mind should the jnani's body have a change?

K.: To the onlooker.

M.: Then a jnani ought to be invisible? All those who wrote books, mixed with others and moved around are ajnanis, is that so?

K.: (Laughs; all laugh.)

M.: Does the jnani himself feel oppressed by the body? Does he require a certificate from others, by their not seeing his body? Do you accept a magician to be a jnani?

K.: No.

M.: Who is the seer? Solve that first. What does it matter whether a body is visible or not?

K.: Is the shadadhara inside the spinal cord?

M.: Some say it is active in the glands or plexus. What does it matter?

K.: Vivekananda says that they are in the spinal cord.

M.: He says so.

— from the *B. V. Narasimhan Archive*, 14.10.1929

D.: How is the mind to dive into the Heart?

M.: The mind now sees itself diversified as the universe. If the diversity is not manifest it remains in its own essence, that is the Heart. Entering the Heart means remaining without distractions.

The Heart is the only Reality. The mind is only a transient phase. To remain as one's Self is to enter the Heart.

Because a man identifies himself with the body, he sees the world separate from him. This wrong identification arises because he has lost his moorings and has swerved from his original state. He is now advised to give up all these false ideas, to trace back his source and remain as the Self. In that state, there are no differences. No questions will arise. —*Talks*, No. 252

Namakarana (Name Giving)

MANY devotees have known and poets have sung of the grace of Sri Bhagavan as Mother or Father, but few are aware of His charming playfulness as a grandfather interested in namakarana (christening), to the satisfaction of all concerned, when new additions were made to devotees' families. This natural prerogative, which He enjoyed exercising, was brought into full play in the successive names He bestowed on T. N. Venkataraman's children. This series presents a beautiful story revealing the humour and humanity of Sri Bhagavan, who also officiated at the annaprasana (eating of first solid food) ceremonies of these children and fed them with their first mouthful of boiled rice.

Even before T. N. Venkataraman came to Tiruvannamalai and settled at the Ashram in 1938, he used to bring his new born babes to Sri Bhagavan to receive His blessings and be named by Him. When the first son was brought to Him in 1934 and placed in His hands in the Old Hall and Athai requested Him to choose a name for the child, He lifted His head and noticed one Sundara Arya, a shy inmate, unobtrusively entering the Hall, and said: "Look! There he is. Does he not say, name the child after me?" So, the child got the name, SUNDARA RAMANAN, combining Sri Bhagavan's name with that of His father.

The next son, brought to Him in 1936 for naming, gave Him, as He jokingly said, "No trouble at all, for he had come into the world with a name!" The implication was that, having been born on Vinayaka Chaturti (the birthday of Lord Ganesa), the baby had to be named GANESAN.

The third son was born in 1939, by which time the family had settled in Tiruvannamalai. When the infant was taken to Him for naming, Bhagavan smilingly said, "This fellow too gives no trouble. He is the younger brother of Ganesa and hence is also born with a name!" Thus he came to be called SUBRAMANIAM.

The next infant, a girl, was put into Bhagavan's hands in 1941, and elicited the remarks, "Though the first girl born in our family should be named Alagu or Alamelu, I would name her after my grandmother who



almost sacrificed her-self for the family." So, in grateful memory, the child was named LAKSHMI. The next baby girl (1944) was named by Sri Bhagavan, ALAGU, after His mother.

When the next baby girl (1946) was taken to Sri Bhagavan, He told the devotees in the Hall, "I had given my grandmother's name and my mother's name to two girls. Won't Venkatoo be angry with me if I fail to give this one his mother's name?" So this child was called MANGALAM. The last baby girl (1949) was taken to Sri Bhagavan by Sadhu Kumaraswami and others who wanted to name her Alamelu, after Sri Bhagavan's sister, and were almost certain that He would make this obvious choice. But when the baby was in His hands and there was a general murmur 'Alamelu', Bhagavan gave a beaming smile and said, "No, no; I have given the name of my grandmother, my mother and also Venkatoo's mother. What will poor Nagu feel if I forget her mother? Let her be called SARASWATI." Saraswati was the name of Venkatoo's mother in law!

— from *Venkatoo 60 Souviner*

Sri Ramana's Children's Ashrama

will be conducted at the Nova Scotia
Arunachala Ashrama from

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

For information call Darlene in Nova Scotia at (902)
665-2263 or Email "darlene.karamanos@gmail.com".

*Arunachala Ashrama, 1451 Clarence Rd., Bridgetown,
Nova Scotia, Canada B0S 1C0*

Sri Ramana Maharshi's 58th Mahanirvana

BHAGAVAN Sri Ramana Maharshi's 58th Mahanirvana was observed in Newark, California, on April 27th, 2008. Devotees assembled from all over the San Francisco Bay Area; some came from as far as Irvine and Los Angeles.

The program began with the enthusiastic recitation of "Aksharamanamalai" The "Marital Garland of Letters". Dennis Hartel from Arunachala Ashrama, New York then gave a moving talk, briefly explaining how he was drawn to Bhagavan. He gave a beautiful description of what it means to be a humble servant of the Master, highlighting the efficacy of adopting such an attitude. He read verse 34 from Bhagavan's "*Supplement to the Forty Verses*," encouraging devotees not to get disheartened by their lack of scriptural learning. He spoke about Self-enquiry and Self-surrender as the two methods prescribed by Bhagavan. "A sincere seeker practices Self-enquiry when the mind becomes still and pleads for the Lord's grace in helplessness when he is unable to quieten the mind," he said. He spoke of his belief that it is not we who choose Bhagavan. "Bhagavan choses us. Our samskaras (impressions from past lives) take us back to Bhagavan and his path." he said.

Poviding an example of this he told the gathering of an Australian seeker who accompanied him during Giripradakshina last year. She didn't consider herself an emotional person and knew very little about Bhagavan and Arunachala. Yet, defying all logic, she was overwhelmed by emotion after arriving at Sri Ramanasramam and was unable to understand why. Dennis also spoke of how Bhagavan said that the Biblical statement, "I am that I am" was the best description of the experience of Truth.

The talk was followed by the chanting of "Arunachala Pancharatnam," "Upadesa Saram" and "Kummi Paatu" by the children. Meera Jayaraman sang two melodious hymns of Shankaracharya. Everyone enjoyed watching the video recording of Smt. Deruben Patel's reminiscences of meeting Bhagavan at the age of 18 and the profound impact He had on her entire

family. All minds were stilled by the exquisite renditions of "Nirvana Shatakam" and "Saranagati" by Usha and Sangeetha.

Dennis then read Arthur Osborne's stirring poem "Presence" that was composed soon after Bhagavan's Nirvana in April 1950. The poet feels an "even vaster wealth of grace" bestowed by a formless Bhagavan.

The program concluded with Veda Parayanam and Arati. Everyone enjoyed the various lunch dishes that were prepared by several devotees. Bhagavan's Living Presence was experienced by all. As one devotee wrote later in her e-mail post, "To be in a room full of people who love Bhagavan is surely one of life's greatest joys".

—Sunita Parasuraman

New York City Arunachala Ashrama May 3, 2008

Tree-shaded and serene, Arunachala Ashrama on Edgerton Blvd. in Jamaica Estates, Queens was the setting for the celebration of the 58th anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Mahanirvana on Saturday, May 3rd at 11 a.m.. Surrounded by trees in blossom and leaf, it seemed that nature herself was affirming Sri Bhagavan's proclamation that he is forever and always here, with his devotees, that life must triumph over death.

The celebration began with the unison singing of Sri Bhagavan's "Marital Garland of Letters" to Sri Arunachala, the Bridegroom. This beloved ecstatic hymn of yearning for union with the Divine filled and resounded the air as the devotees joined in one voice.

Dennis Hartel welcomed one and all with a heart-felt talk which emphasized Sri Bhagavan's final message that he would not leave us, that he would "always be here". Dennis recounted the experience of Swami Viswanatha who, at the moment of Sri Bhagavan's leaving the body, experienced the atmosphere full of light. Dennis also evoked the wondrous appearance of the celestial body which traced a path across the sky at the time, understood to be a sign of Sri Bhagavan's passing. Dennis had recently met a woman who as a girl of 18 years (now 76), in Kerala, saw the star and has felt drawn to Sri Bhagavan ever since, and he told the story of an Australian photo journalist who, despite her intellectual and analytical nature, had unexplicably found herself in tears as she walked on the Hill and again be-



Devotees gathered in the New York Arunachala Ashrama for the 58th Mahanirvana Day program

side the Maha Nirvana room at Sri Ramanasramam. Dennis told her that she simply rediscovered her connection with Bhagavan, that “the switch” had again been turned on! Dennis emphasized that we all have a relationship with the Maharshi, which has brought us together as one family.

Martin Wolff and Asha Kumar intoned a beautiful hymn. Then, a most heartwarming video was shown of Srimati Dhiruben Patel of Bombay, wherein she narrated the story of how, as a guileless school girl, Sri Bhagavan’s glance imparted to her such an experience of grace and peace as to have changed her life. Srimatis

Aruna Ramanan, Ranjani Ramanan and Nitya Ramanan and their children sang praises of Bhagavan with life and vitality. Varun, Varsha and Aparna Subramaniam led a melodious Ramana Bhajan with heart-melting sincerity, as did Vashudha Viswanathan.

Inspired Vedic chanting was followed by Aarati performed to the chanting of “Na Karmanaa Na Prajayaa Dhanena”

Mrs. Savitri Ramaswami’s expertly organized army of devotee cooks served many Indian delicacies to commemorate this joyous day of remembrance and celebration.

— Evelyn K. Saphier

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 / Thirusivasamy@hotmail.com)

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

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