

The Maharshi



Jan/Feb 2006

Vol. 16, No. 1

Beyond “Nama-Rupa”

By Dilip Kumar Roy

AN experience Yogi Sri Krishnaprem had at the feet of Ramana Maharshi was typical and revealing. I will do my best to tell it in his own words as far as possible. He said, “How profound is my admiration and veneration for the Sage. I agree wholeheartedly with Sri Aurobindo’s verdict that his *tapasya* is a shining light of India. So I went to Ramana Ashram in Tiruvannamalai to receive his blessing.

“When, in the evening, I entered the hall where the Maharshi reclines daily on his couch, I sat down in silence along with the others, to meditate at his feet. But believe it or not, as soon as I sat down I heard a voice questioning me over and over again: ‘Who are you? Who are you? Who are you?’ I tried hard to ignore it, but it went on and on like an importunate visitor, knocking at the door, who insisted on being admitted. So, in the end, I just had to formulate an answer: ‘I am Krishna’s servant.’ At once the question changed, like a shape-changer, into: ‘Who is Krishna?’ I answered: ‘Nanda’s son.’ No use. The question was repeated relentlessly. I thought up other answers, like, ‘He’s an Avatar, the One-in-all, the Resident of every heart’ and so on, but the questioning would not cease, till at last I gave it up, left the hall and returned, deeply disturbed, to meditate. I had no peace. The voice gave me no respite, till, in the end, I had to evoke Radharani [Lord Krishna’s consort] who asked me very simply what answers I had given. I told Her but She shook Her head and then, at last, revealed it to me.

He anticipated me, holding up his hand.

“No, Dilip, don’t ask me, please! I won’t tell you, for

you will tell everybody. Don’t I know you? But listen, for there is more.

“Next morning,” he went on, “when I sat down again at his blessed feet, the Maharshi suddenly gave me a lightning glance and smiled. I knew at once beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was the author of it all and that he also knew that I had divined his part correctly.

“Then, as I closed my eyes to meditate, a deep peace descended into me and settled like a block of ice, as it were, till my every cell was numb with an exquisite bliss. Didn’t you have the same experience, as I think you wrote to me once?

“As I meditated,” he went on, “it was borne home to me through the mystic silence that this peace stemmed ultimately from the Lord Himself. Doesn’t He say in the *Gita* that He Himself is the primal source of all experience [*Gita*, IX. 18] ‘I am the goal, the upholder, the lord, the witness, the abode, the refuge and the friend. (I am) the origin and the dissolution, the ground, the resting place and the imperishable seed.’ The peace in this instance was transmitted through His beloved agent, the Maharshi.

“But isn’t that precisely why He sends to us as His depu

ties, the great saints and sages, Messiahs and Avatars?”

“Of course He does. Didn’t *Ma* [Yashoda Ma, Sri Krishnaprem’s Guru] explain to you the import of His *naralila* - that is, why He comes down to us from age to age to play hide and seek with us, humans, as a human being?” He paused for a little, then gave me a quizzical look.

“I feel tempted to tell you the sequel.”

“Only you have misgivings about confiding in me?” I finished for him, laughing.

“Well, I’ll risk it,” he laughed back. “For what happened was too wonderful. So listen.

“As I went on imbibing this delectable peace - meditating at his feet - I suddenly took it into my head to return the compliment and put a question to him in silence: ‘And who are you, may I humbly ask?’ It so happened that the next moment I had to open my eyes involuntarily when, lo, I found his couch empty!

“There was the couch where he had presided two seconds before, but in the twinkling of an eye, as it were, he had vanished - just melted into thin air! I closed my eyes once more and then looked again, and there he was tranquil and beneficent like Lord Shiva Himself! A momentary smile flickered on his lips as he gave me a meaningful glance and then looked away.

“You see the point of the miracle, don’t you?”

“That he was beyond *nama-rupa*?”

“That’s right,” he answered reflectively. “Or shall I say: the One beyond all maya, the Star beyond the phantoms, the Last Reality beyond the ephemera, the Silence beyond the songs - you may make use of any simile you fancy. Personally, I look upon it as a sign of his Grace - his giving me the answer in a way only he could have given.

I smiled. “So he met you more than halfway?”

“He is compassion itself, don’t you know?”

“I do. But what then?”

“The rest is silence,” he answered. “Don’t you know your Shakespeare?”

* * * *

Sri Krishnaprem was British by birth and only moved to India after accepting a position at Lucknow University, India. Originally he was called Professor Richard Nixon, a distinguished graduate of Cambridge University, and taught English literature at Lucknow and Benares universities. On

coming to India he became enamored of bhakti yoga and became a disciple of Sri Yashoda Mai. Sri Krishnaprem became a full fledged sannyasin in the Vaishnava tradition.

Haridas Chaudhuri said of Krishnaprem:

“By virtue of his total renunciation and pure devotion, Krishnaprem’s whole being was set on fire with the love of God. In consequence, he found in India his true spiritual home. By giving his soul to India he affirmed his abiding faith in the supremacy of spiritual values. He was quick to see India as the one country which preserved a suitable climate for the flourishing of saints and sages.”

But not everybody liked Sri Krishnaprem. He was certainly a thorn in the side of the local British officials, especially in the days before independence. They struggled to understand his wholehearted acceptance of Hindu culture and religion.

Sri Krishnaprem became a well known author. His two books were:

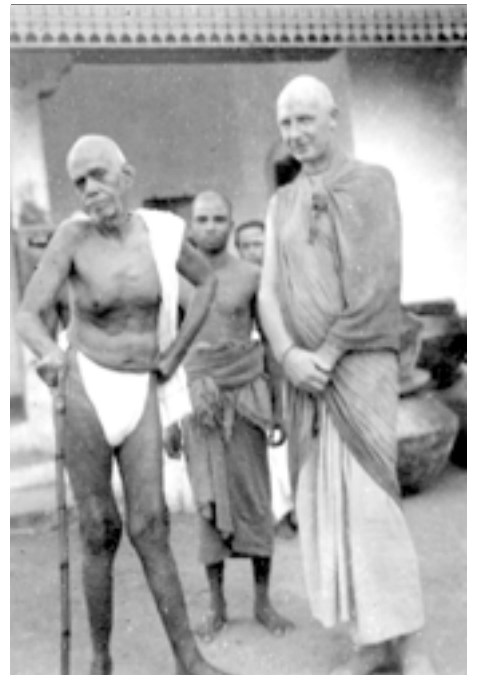
The Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita

The Yoga of the Katho-panishad

These books helped Sri Krishnaprem draw many discerning seekers, both Western and Indian. However Sri Krishnaprem never desired to be seen as a Guru. He didn’t allow any of his photos to be put up in his ashram. However, though he never advertised, he did draw many sincere seekers.

Sri Krishnaprem passed away on November 14th 1965. His last words to his beloved disciple, M. Ashish, were, “My ship is sailing.”

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi said Sri Krishnaprem was “a rare combination of a bhakti and jnana yogi.”



Bhagavan, Satyananda and Sri Krishnaprem

How I Reached Bhagavan

By Swami Satyananada

I was born in 1916, in a village named Maelikara in South Kerala. My mother was of a pious disposition. She used to adore sadhus and help them in various ways. Her piety made me to become a sadhu when I was only eighteen. But I did not leave home immediately. I ran a small school for children on the verandah of my house for four years. I then went on pilgrimage to Rameswaram in the company of some sadhus. From Rameswaram I came directly to Tiruvannamalai in 1938.

In the course of my pilgrimage, I halted at an abode of sadhus called *Paudikkan Mazhi Mattam*, situated between Madurai and Mana-madurai. This mattam was managed by one Narayanaswami who had stayed at Sri Ramanasramam in the company of a sadhu for some time. He was the first person who spoke to me about Sri Bhagavan and His greatness. He wrote out the full address of Sri Ramanasramam on a piece of paper and gave it to me.

From Rameswaram I came directly to Tiruvannamalai in 1938. I was overcome by joy when I saw Arunachala. I went up the hill and reached the Virupaksha Cave.

After spending a few days there I came down one day to Sri Ramanasramam in the company of a sadhu to see Sri Bhagavan when He had just returned from His afternoon walk and was sitting in the hall alone. He looked at us and smiled. I can never forget that smile. After sitting in His presence for some time I returned to the cave.

Thereafter I used to visit the Ashrama daily and have darshan of Sri Bhagavan even though I changed my abode from the Virupaksha Cave to the Mango Tree Cave, Skandasramam, etc. from time to time. I spent seven years in this manner begging my food in the town.

I then obtained, by Sri Bhagavan's grace, the good fortune of serving Him as His personal attendant from

1946 till His final *Nirvana* on the 14th April 1950.

One day I showed Him the slip of paper on which Narayanaswami had written the full address of the Ashrama for me in Malayalam. He at once exclaimed: "Oh! That is our Narayanaswami's handwriting." Another day Sri Bhagavan described to me how a sadhu hailing from Kerala, named Sadguru Swami, had, under the influence of intoxicating drugs, embraced Him tightly again and again saying, "You are a good boy, I am so glad to see you!" Sri Bhagavan imitated the acts and words of the sadhu while narrating the incident. I was alone with Him at the time and was overwhelmed with joy. I still remember that joy.



When the abscess on Sri Bhagavan was first operated upon in 1948 I was present. Although I cannot stand the sight of blood, I managed to control myself.

After one operation there was profuse bleeding from the body of Bhagavan. There was a big crowd outside the New Hall but no one was allowed inside. I was very moved and, shedding tears, told Bhagavan that it was painful to see such suffering. Bhagavan was absolutely unconcerned about his condition and said, "What suffering? All is Bliss."

I was blessed to be near Bhagavan during the Mahanirvana. At 6 P.M. that day we massaged Bhagavan's legs. At 6:30 Bhagavan wished to sit upright so we helped him into that posture. Then started the chanting of *Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai* (*The Marital Garland of Letters*) by the devotees outside the *Nirvana* Room. There were profuse tears gushing from Bhagavan's eyes, though there was no change in the expression on his face. It was such an immense outflow that Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami asked me to wipe the tears away. I did so, but it would not stop. This continued till 8. I was asked to give Him spoonfuls of water boiled with ginger

and I begged Him to agree to this. He consented, and with the aid of a spoon I served him. When the doctor wanted to administer oxygen, Sri Bhagavan waved it away. Bhagavan's breathing became gradually slower.

The most thrilling moment was the physical demise of Bhagavan. There was no physical movement of any kind, no visible change, not even a flutter. It was as if the human frame in which Bhagavan was, turned into a statue instantaneously. It was 8:45 p.m., and at that very moment, as is well known, devotees who were outside saw a large, bright meteor in the sky.

I observed silence from 1950 to 1963. I then broke my silence. I have all these years been feeding the peacocks and monkeys, an assigned work which was always pleasing to Sri Bhagavan. I also look after the room in which Sri Bhagavan attained *Nirvana*, and look after the articles used by Sri Bhagavan which constitute the sacred relics so precious to our heart. I wish to end my life doing this service to Sri Bhagavan.

Sri Swami Satyananda was absorbed in the Feet of his Master on November 27, 1989.

The Better Nature of Others

Often I sat at the feet of Bhagavan Sri Ramana and heard his talks. I learnt from Bhagavan that we should not indulge in disparaging talk but rather we should talk of the better nature of others.

Prof. S. stated to Bhagavan that one Swamiji told him that we may prolong life by proper diet and enquired of Bhagavan whether that view is true. The Swamiji died some time ago and Bhagavan replied by a counter question, "Is that Swami alive?" Another devotee in the hall narrated some incident, and said that the Swami boasted about his *siddhis* and powers, etc. Bhagavan cut short the trend of the talk and narrated another incident: "Once I and some others were ascending the hill to proceed to Skandashram. On the way we met that Swamiji carrying on his head a big pot of water. I enquired why he carried that pot and he replied, 'Perhaps Bhagavan may need drinking water on the hill.' " While narrating it Bhagavan was so moved that his voice choked and tears trickled down from his eyes. I learnt a lesson that we should only talk about the better nature of a person.

—*T. Krishnaji, The Call Divine, 1966*

God and Destiny

By A. Devaraja Mudaliar

*The moving finger writes and, having writ,
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.*

In my opinion, Omar, the poet, was not a scoffer when he wrote this but an earnest seeker brought up against the impenetrable wall of predestination. The majority of Hindus also believe that destiny cannot be overcome. They speak of God having written their fate in life on their foreheads, so that all events, pleasant and painful, will come to them as ordained. Those who have studied the question of *karma* declare, however, that destiny is not anything imposed on them by an arbitrary God but is a result of the law of cause and effect, each man having to go through such experiences as his past actions have provoked. Each action of a man is followed by its consequences, whether pleasurable or painful, and no man can escape them. If it is not possible to exhaust all the consequences of one's actions in one lifetime, one may have to pass through successive lives to exhaust one's *karma*.

Serious thinkers have welcomed this doctrine because it gives some rational explanation for the great differences between man and man that we find in the world. How could one explain otherwise the vast differences in a world created and governed by a just, impartial and loving God? The doctrine of *karma* is so basic to Hinduism that we cannot conceive of Hinduism without it.

Karma is classified into three categories: *prarabdha*, *agami* and *sanchita*. When a man is born, the amount of his accumulated *karma*, which is to be worked off in this lifetime, is called his *prarabdha karma*, and the residue is *sanchita*. That which he accumulates in this life is called *agami*. It is generally held that *prarabdha* at least, must be gone through by every one and that there is no escape from it. I will give here Bhagavan's teaching on the matter.

Referring to Sri Krishna's telling Arjuna: "Deluded by *Maya* you refuse to fight, but your own nature will force you to fight;" a devotee asked Bhagavan whether we have no free will at all.

Bhagavan replied: "You always have freedom not to identify yourself with the body and the pleasures and pains that come to it as its *prarabdha*."

One summer afternoon I was sitting opposite Sri Bhagavan in the Old Hall with a fan in my hand and said to him: "I can understand that the outstanding events in a man's life, such as his country, nationality, family, career or profession, marriage, death, etc., are all predestined by his karma, but can it be that all the details of his life, down to the minutest, have already been determined? Now, for instance, I put this fan that is in my hand down on the floor here. Can it be that it was already decided that on such and such a day, at such and such an hour, I would move the fan like this and put it down here?"

Bhagavan replied: "Certainly." He continued: "Whatever this body is to do and whatever experiences it is to pass through was already decided when it came into existence."

Thereupon I naturally exclaimed: "What becomes then of man's freedom and responsibility for his actions?"

Bhagavan explained: "The only freedom one has is to strive for and acquire the Jnana which will enable him not to identify himself with the body. The body will go through the actions rendered inevitable by *prarabdha* (destiny) based on the balance sheet of past lives, and a man is free either to identify himself with the body and be attached to the fruits of its actions or to be detached from it and be a mere witness of its activities."

From various other talks that I had with him, I am convinced that this was Bhagavan's teaching. I will only refer here to the classic reply he gave to his mother when, as a young Sage, he rejected her tearful request to go back home with her. "The Ordainer controls the fate of man according to his *prarabdha*. What is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. What is destined to happen will happen, try as one may to prevent it. This is certain. So the best course is to remain silent."

However, if the law of *karma* as pure cause and effect is so supreme as to be absolutely inviolable and inexorable, one may ask of what use is religion, God or prayer. There seems to have been no time when man did not turn to an all-powerful and all-loving God who could save him from his sins and suffering and give him peace and bliss. Starting from the *Vedic* times and passing through the period of the great *bhaktas*, both Saivite and Vaishnavite, and down to comparatively recent times, there

is a great mass of religious literature which states quite clearly that whatever sins a man may have committed, God in His mercy can save him. They have also stated that all *karma*, including *prarabdha*, can be destroyed by the Grace of God, like cotton by fire. Western saints and mystics have said the same thing and have ridiculed the idea that because God is just, impartial and righteous He cannot save the sinner but must punish him first for his transgressions. For if that were so, what would become of the other attributes of God such as Mercy, Love, Fatherhood and Motherhood? The Vaishnavites stress the quality of *Vatsalya* or loving-kindness in God and illustrate it by the *vatsalya* of a cow which, as soon as its calf is born, begins to lick it all over, oblivious to the fact that it is unclean. They say God does not wait for the sinner to become pure before He can save him, but saves him just as He finds him if only the man desires, cries out for and supplicates salvation. If a man who is suffering turns to God for help and relief in full faith that God can save him he is sure to be saved. That is what the scriptures say and what countless saints have declared. Christ said: "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Fear not." Lord Krishna said almost the same thing. When Arjuna, after hearing what Krishna had to say about all the different kinds of *yoga* which could secure Liberation, complained that he was confused by all these instructions and felt that he could not follow them, Krishna said: "Then give up all *dharma*s and take refuge only in Me. Grieve not. I will save you from all your sins."

What is demanded here is total surrender to God by throwing oneself completely on God's Mercy and not desiring anything for oneself. Leaving everything to God the all-loving and all-knowing is not so easy as it may sound. However, the point I want to make here is that Grace is all-powerful and that even the law of *karma* by which, they say, a man must reap what he has sown, with no exception whatsoever, can be overcome. I am strongly inclined by temperament to believe this, and I believe that Bhagavan has confirmed it for me. I will quote here what I wrote on the subject on pages 100 and 101 of my little book *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*:

"Another point on which I more than once argued with Bhagavan is the extent to which Grace can override *prarabdha* or destiny. My main line of argument throughout was (and my conviction now as ever is) that God is all-powerful and that nothing is impossible for Him, and

that if one got and could get only what one had worked for and merited, there would be no place at all for Grace. Most often Bhagavan remained silent when I indulged in such arguments either by myself or with others, some of whom took my side and others the opposite side; but from various remarks and observations that he made on different occasions I have come to the conclusion that the following is his attitude in the matter: 'Of course, nothing is impossible to God, but everything happens according to the order established by God's will or plan and exceptions are very few. How many Markandeyas, are there in our Puranas?'

"On the other hand, many authoritative books have clearly said (and Bhagavan has quoted them with approval) that one look from a *Jnani* can save us from the effects of all our *karmas*, past or present, *prarabdha* included. And Sri Janaki Matha has published in her Tamil journal that when she discussed this question once with Bhagavan, maintaining that His Grace can help one even to overcome *prarabdha*, he told her: 'If you have such faith it will be so.'"

I find that I cannot usefully add anything to this quotation, but I should perhaps explain the reference to Markandeya. It is said in the *Puranas* that Markandeya was destined to live for only sixteen years and that he prayed to Siva and received the boon that he would be perpetually sixteen. Bhagavan mentioned it to stress his point that the obvious and spectacular intervention of Divine Grace is very exceptional.

It is said in the *Upanishads* that one cannot say when or why or to whom Grace will come. It is said that it will fall only on him whom it chooses. A hundred might make the effort and yet only one or two of them might be chosen. No one can predict anything about Grace except that it is unpredictable.

It will be interesting here to turn to the following quotations from Paul Brunton given in my book *Day by Day with Bhagavan*.

"Divine Grace is a manifestation of the cosmic free will in operation. It can alter the course of events in a mysterious manner through its own unknown laws, which are superior to all natural laws, and can modify the latter by interaction. It is the most powerful force in the universe.

"It descends and acts only when it is invoked by total self-surrender. It acts from within, because God resides

in the heart of all beings. Its whisper can be heard only in a mind purified by self-surrender and prayer."

The above two quotations were contained in a book called *Divine Grace Through Total Self-Surrender* by one D. C. Desai, and Bhagavan himself, on going through the book, read them out to us.

My saying that God's Grace is unpredictable and has power to remit sins and erase *karma* should not be taken to mean that this Grace can be obtained without effort. On the contrary, great effort is necessary. A man, recognising that he cannot raise himself by himself, must fall at the feet of God and cry: "Lord, I am weak and powerless. You alone can save me. I take refuge in You. Do what You will with me." This is the effort that must be made: an effort towards attainment of effortlessness after realizing the uselessness of our own puny efforts.

Bhagavan has strongly commended the path of total self-surrender as a sure way to salvation and has called devotion the 'Mother of Jnana'. That well-known early devotee of Bhagavan, Sivaprakasam Pillai, for whom *Who am I?* was written, says in one of his poems: "To everyone you give only this instruction: 'Find out who you are.' If, after that, they humbly ask for more guidance, you tell them as your final word: 'There is a power which moves you and me and all others. Lay your ego at the feet of that Mother.'"

From various actions and remarks of Bhagavan I have not the slightest doubt that he regards the path of surrender as the best way for me. It is true that he maintained quite definitely that final Liberation is only possible through Knowledge of the Self, which is being the Self, because Knowing is Being; but that comes inevitably to one who has completely surrendered.

—*The Mountain Path*, 1967, Vol. 4, No. 2

An Invitation

You, your family and friends are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the 126th

Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi
in New York City

Saturday 31 December 2005

11:00 a.m.

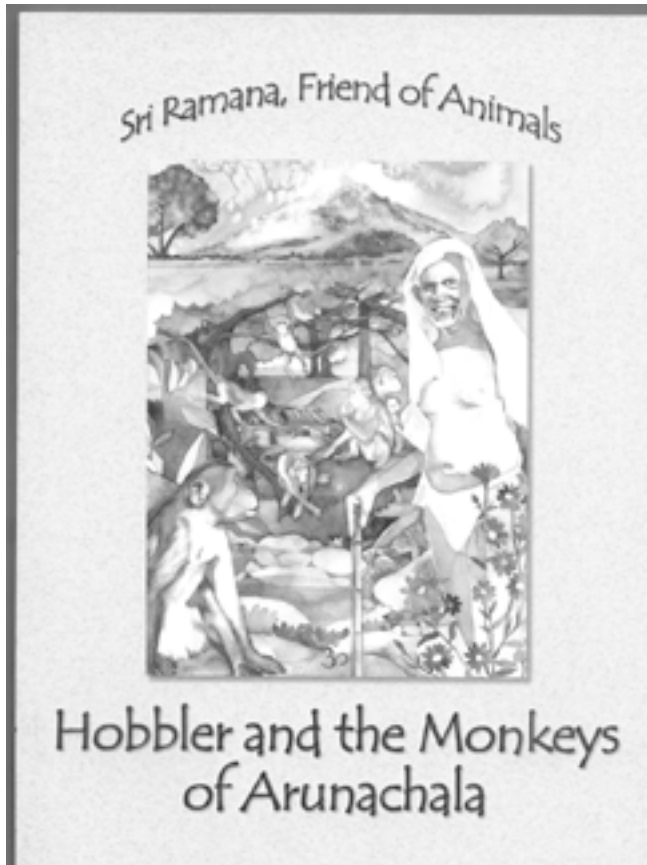
at

ARUNACHALA ASHRAMA

86-06 EDGERTON BOULEVARD

JAMAICA ESTATES, QUEENS, NEW YORK 11432

(718) 560-3196 / ashrama@arunachala.org



Hobbler and the Monkeys of Arunachala

Sri Ramana's intimate association with the monkey tribes on and around Arunachala spanned from the early days of his arrival in Tiruvannamalai to the final days of his bodily existence. He was their friend, protector, arbitrator, guide and gracious benefactor.

This wonderfully illustrated, 108-page volume weaves together all the fascinating stories handed down to us by devotees and Bhagavan's own narrations.

It is a book for children of all ages who are ever charmed by the awe-inspiring episodes in the life of this divine personality, embodied in human form for the welfare of all creatures.

The color illustrations sparkle with life and complement the many black and white restored photos of Bhagavan, Skandasramam and Sri Ramanasramam. The text is delicately woven throughout the charming images.

108 pages, profusely illustrated

Price \$10, plus \$2 shipping

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 (678-423-7324 / 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@earthlink.net)

San Francisco Area — Swaminathan & Sangeeta (510-979-1679 / nachiketas@hotmail.com)

Washington, D.C. Area — Prakash & Mamtha Adishesan (703-257-5589 / adishesan@worldnet.att.net)

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

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

Vancouver, Canada — Zoya Malek (604-921-9692 / zoyaonline@yahoo.ca)

THE MAHARSHI is a free bimonthly newsletter distributed in North America by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. The newsletters are also delivered attached to an e-mail as a PDF. Send your request to "ashrama@arunachala.org". This issue and all back issues are available at "http://www.arunachala.org". Books, videos and audio CDs on Sri Ramana Maharshi can also be found on this website.