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# The Maharshi

## Treatment of Sri Bhagavan: An Account

Dr. Shankar Rao

*Dr. Shankar Rao, a retired District Medical Officer, who was attending on Sri Maharshi from the start of his last illness, provides us with an intimate and vivid picture of the Maharshi's ailment and his total indifference to it.*

To have served Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi as a doctor for over a year is no ordinary privilege and no ordinary experience. It was an education of the highest type, a training of a unique character. It provided me with vivid glimpses into the human as well as the super-human and godlike personality of Sri Maharshi.

For one whole year I watched the ailment sapping the strength and vitality of the physical frame of Sri Maharshi with cruel success. It failed to affect his detachment and composure and I found for the first time that this disease with its brood of pain and suffering had somehow met with an ignominious defeat. This will be borne out in the following account of the history of the ailment which culminated in the Maharshi's shaking off the mortal sheath.

I first came to Sri Ramanasramam in the second week of December, 1948. At that time Sri Bhagavan had a small nodule under the skin behind the elbow about the size of a split pea. When I asked him about it, he said that it might have been due to a fall he had some three months back. On pressing, it used to be painful. Within a month it grew to the size of a small marble. Sri Bhagavan used to feel pain whenever he put his elbow on any hard surface and so I suggested its removal. It was removed

on 9th February 1949. The wound completely healed up during the course of a week.

In the first week of March, it was again noticed to be growing. About the middle of March, Dr. Raghavachari of Madras came with his assistants and removed it completely, together with a good deal of surrounding tissues and also the skin over it. A microscopic examination revealed that it was a sarcoma.

Sarcoma is a malignant tumour of the flesh which occurs generally in young people, while older ones get cancers which are growths from the skin or mucous membranes. These malignant tumours are not enclosed in sheaths or capsules like simple tumours. Even small microscopic cells anywhere in the tissues surrounding the tumour could start to grow into another tumour. Some cells may be carried through the blood vessels to other parts of the body and produce similar secondary tumours.

The wound, after the second operation, did not heal and after a few days, a new growth appeared and this started bleeding profusely. Doctors and radiologists came from Madras and applied radium to afford temporary relief. They advised that amputation of the limb, a couple of inches above the tumour, alone could cure the disease. The consensus of opinion amongst the devotees

of Sri Bhagavan was against amputation. Sri Bhagavan also said that it was not necessary. The idea of amputation was given up.

The tumour growth subsided a little as a result of radium treatment, but in July 1949 it again began to grow. Some of the devotees wished that ayurvedic treatment should be tried and a local ayurvedic physician started treatment. Sri Bhagavan's health deteriorated, sepsis set in and the tumour continued to grow very rapidly.

Surgeons from Madras were again requested to come. They advised an operation as the only remedy and the tumour together with the white area of tissues all around were removed with a diathermic knife. Radium was then applied. This was on 14th August.

The result appeared to be very favourable in as much as no tumour growth appeared for three months and even scrapings taken from the raw surface of the wound were reported to be negative. Early in December 1949 however, there was a suspicion of a small nodule appearing in the middle of the arm, several inches away from the site of the original tumour growth. Then again doctors from Madras came and, having diagnosed it as a secondary growth and that too a very small one, they expected to remove it easily.

On 19th December the growth was operated on but when the deeper tissues were cut into, for removing the tumour, it was found that the growth had spread deep into the muscles. A much larger operation became necessary and in spite of this, the surgeons felt that the chances of recurrence could not be ruled out.

As the surgeons had given up hope of a cure, homeopathy was tried. By about the middle of February, the tumour again started growing on the upper end of the operation wound and as the homeopath who was treating Sri Bhagavan was unable to prevent recurrence, an ayurvedic physician from Malabar was sent for and he started treatment. This too having been unsuccessful, Kaviraj Jogendranath Sastry from Calcutta was invited by one of the devotees to treat Sri Bhagavan. During all this period the general health of Sri Bhagavan continued to deteriorate and the tumour growth increased rapidly.

By about the 2nd of April I felt that the end was near. On the night of Sunday the 9th of April the pulse became very feeble and gradual deterioration of the functions of

the heart brought about exhaustion. Sri Bhagavan who, until that day, had been able to walk to the adjoining bathroom could not do so and was confined to bed.

Since February the blood pressure of Sri Bhagavan had started dropping. A fortnight before the end it was 88/48, the lowest point reached being 66/36. The expected end came at 8.47 p.m. on 14th April.

Sri Bhagavan's attitude towards his body was one of complete detachment. Disease and pain left no impression on his mind. If he allowed himself to be treated for the ailment, it was more because his devotees wanted it than because he desired relief. His attitude was always supreme indifference to bodily ailments.

So he was an ideal patient, implicitly undergoing any treatment that was decided upon by his devotees. Whenever he allowed any change in treatment his only concern was that there should be an agreement amongst his devotees about which particular type of treatment should be given a trial. As far as he personally was concerned, he did not care.

To everyone who was by his side, the way in which he bore with pain, which was at times of an extremely excruciating nature, without even showing the signs of suffering on his face, was a wonder. On one occasion during the later stages of the ailment when he was having shooting pains down his limb, a gentleman who had come for his *darshan* bowed down and said that he was leaving Tiruvannamalai. Sri Bhagavan gave him his usual gracious look and smile as if there was nothing wrong with him at the time. And it was only after the gentleman left that Sri Bhagavan admitted that the pain was severe and allowed himself to be treated for it.

The tumour in the later stages of his illness grew to such proportions that even medical men who were used to those sights were shocked when they saw it. When it was being dressed, Sri Bhagavan used to look at it and often make jokes about it. He even helped the doctors to adjust the bandage.

On one occasion when the skin around the tumour was being cleaned with rectified spirit, some of it bathed the rest of the arm and fell on the body also. Sri Bhagavan jokingly said that he was having a spirit bath and quoted the last stanza of "Atma Bodha" by Sri Shankaracharya. It was not only a joke but also carried with it a profound spiritual teaching.

One night when there was heavy bleeding from the tumour as it was being dressed, two or three *bhaktas* couldn't conceal their emotion. He looked at them and said, "Where will I go? And where can I go?" And whenever he said 'I', with emphasis, he always meant the *Atman*.

Once when treating the tumour it was suggested that Sri Bhagavan should have a sun bath and the tumour was exposed to the sun for a few minutes. To prevent flies, some incense was put in an oven and placed just below the chair upon which he sat. Sri Bhagavan jokingly said that we were offering worship to the tumour to go away by burning incense and waving lights (*dhoopam* and *deepam*) before it.

One of my friends took photographs of Sri Bhagavan one afternoon. During the night when we both went together and I was dressing the wound, Sri Bhagavan referred to the photos and gave a profound spiritual discourse using the science of photography as an illustration. Said Sri Bhagavan: "When taking a picture the silver salts are coated over a film in the dark and when the film is exposed in the camera, you get an impression caused by light outside. If the film is exposed to light before you put it in the camera there can be no impression on it. So is it also with our *jiva*. When it is still in darkness, impression can be made on it by the little light that leaks in. But when the light of knowledge has already flooded it, there is no impression of external objects to be obtained." In a similar fashion, he used to entertain his medical attendants with jokes interspersed with profound spiritual education.

Throughout the period of illness, his desire not to embarrass his medical attendants in whatever system of medicine they belonged, resulted in a perfect code of medical etiquette that could not be excelled. When he was having treatment of a particular system of medicine such as ayurveda or homeopathy, if any one suggested a remedy for the intense pain he was having, he would always refer him to the doctor that was in attendance and ask him to get his consent. On one occasion when the surgeons who operated on him had confessed that nothing short of an amputation could cure Sri Bhagavan, a devotee of many years' standing, brought an eminent physician of another system of medicine. This gentleman saw Sri Bhagavan and had a talk with him. Sri Bhagavan received him with his usual gracious smile and the new phy-



the last photo taken, two weeks before His Mahanirvana. The physician believed that Sri Bhagavan wished him to treat him.

It was characteristic of Sri Bhagavan — and this was observed by many of his devotees — that when each individual went to him, he returned with a feeling that the Master had poured his grace on him alone and that he was the most loved amongst his devotees! I knew this and therefore took this physician to Sri Bhagavan and asked him to obtain his consent for the treatment. Sri Bhagavan smiled at this and said, "Do you know doctor so and so who is now treating me? Have you had a talk with him and what did he say?" The gentleman was non-plussed and had to go.

To watch Sri Bhagavan and listen even to his day-to-day talk was an education to those who were near him. There was no need to read books on religion or philosophy. His whole philosophy and the philosophy of ages were in Sri Bhagavan's life. For his life was an exposition of the highest philosophy. He did not lecture. He did not write books for the edification of learned scholars outside, but by living the life of perfection, he gave to those that came in contact with him a greater education than any books could provide. With the passing of the greatest spiritual personality of modern times, the world has lost a living teacher, a Guru in its highest sense.

— *The Call Divine*

# The Mahanirvana Day

— 11:00 A.M., Saturday 29th April —

at

Arunachala Ashrama  
Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center

All are invited to observe the 56th Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Mahanirvana Day.  
The program will include recitations, bhajans, talks and puja, followed by prasada (lunch).

86-06 Edgerton Blvd.

Jamaica Estates, Queens, New York City

For more information, call or write: Tel: (718) 560-3196 / Email: ashrama@arunachala.org

## Path to Perfection

By T. M. P. Mahadevan

The choices offered to human life are either to go after the pleasure and get debased, or to pursue the path to perfection and get exalted. Those humans who choose the former are fools, as the *Katha Upanisad* teaches, and those who prefer the latter are cast in the heroic mould.

One falsely imagines that sense pleasures augment life; the truth, on the contrary, is that they serve to depress life. The value of life is not to be measured by the degree of prosperity or the amount of possessions; life's worth consists precisely in its progress towards the final goal, which is release. If life is tied up with the goods that perish, under their dead weight it has to descend; but if it stretches its arms towards perfection, it will be elevated and will be saved.

Although the betterment of the material conditions of life has its place and value in common weal, that itself does not constitute a better life. Good living should not be confused with 'having a good time'. Life is good to the extent it succeeds in moving towards the supreme Good. The road to prosperity is easy and inviting, while the ascent to perfection is difficult and forbidding. Yet, it is the duty of man to extricate himself from the former and strive to register success in the latter.

Of the three requisites for the fulfillment of this effort: humanness, longing for release, and resorting to the great teachers; one has the first by right of birth, but must cultivate the other two.

Realising the futility of finite ends, he must fix his unswerving attention to the final end which is *moksha*. Rejecting the company of those who are low and of little heart, one must seek the guidance of those who are great and wise. Reminding us of a similar teaching of Sri Sankara's, our Bhagavan Sri Ramana says in the "Supplement to Forty Verses":

*By association with the good, attachment to the world will go; when attachment goes, the modifications of the mind (with its cause) will be destroyed; those who are free from mental modifications are those who are one with the changeless Reality; they are those who have attained release while living in the body. Cherish their company!*

Clearly, this is the way to a Better Life.

— The Call Divine, 1966

# Mahasivaratri at Arunachala Ashrama

## New York City

ON Sunday night, 26<sup>th</sup> February, Venkatachalapathi Sarmagaru led a group of devotees through a night of inspired Vedic chanting, pujas and prayers that began at 7 P.M. and concluded with the distribution of prasada at 4:30 A.M., Monday morning.

The program was as follows:

**7:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M.**

Veda Parayana including the chanting of  
Ashvamedha Prashna from the Taittiriya Brahmana

**10:00 P.M. to 11:00 P.M.**

Mahanyasa Parayanam

**11:30 P.M. to 3:00 A.M.**

Pancamrta Rudrabhishekam with  
Ekadasha Rudra Parayanam

The first of the eleven recitations of the Rudram was at Lingodbhavakalam (midnight) and was chanted in the special format of Pranava Sahita Rudra Pada Patha Japa Abhishekam (recitation of “Om” prior to each “pada” of the Rudram).

**3 A.M. to 4:30 A.M.**

Puja with Arati and Mantrapushpam was followed by prasadam and also included recitations, bhajans and puja followed by the serving of prasada.

All the participants, whether chanting or sitting quietly absorbed in the Divine atmosphere, experienced the full potency of Bhagavan’s grace on this holy night of Siva.

\* \* \* \*

## Vasishtha Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni Collected Works, Volume Four

ON December 31, 2005, before the sacred shrine of Bhagavan in Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai, Sri K. Natesan released Volume IV of Ganapati Muni’s *Collected Works*. Volume V of this twelve volume

collection has already been sent to the press and should be released in the not-too-distant future, according to Sri Natesan.

This recently released volume is titled *Tattva Agrantha-mala* (*The Book on Principles of Existence*). It is 450 pages and contains “Sri Ramana Gita” and “Sad Darshanam”, besides other major works of the Muni, in both Sanskrit and



Sri K. Natesan and Sri V. S. Ramanan at book release

Roman transliteration.

For purchase information, please contact the New York Arunachala Ashrama.

## Talking and Silence

And then a scholar said, “Speak of Talking.”

And he answered saying:

“You talk when you cease to be at peace with your thoughts;

And when you can no longer dwell in the solitude of your heart you live in your lips and sound, in a diversion and a pastime. And in much of your talking, thinking is half murdered.

For thought is a bird of space, that in a cage of words may indeed unfold its wings but cannot fly.

There are those among you who seek the talkative through fear of being alone. The silence of aloneness reveals to their eyes their naked selves and they would escape.

And there are those who talk, and without knowledge or forethought reveal a truth which they themselves do not understand.

And there are those who have the truth within them,

but they tell it not in words.

In the bosom of such as these the spirit dwells in rhythmic silence.”

The Prophet (an excerpt)  
Kahlil Gibran

# Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat

*Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat was merged in the Lotus Feet of his Master and Lord on April 10th, 2000. He breathed his last breath in the New York Arunachala Ashrama and at his request his lifeless body was laid out before the shrine of Sri Bhagavan and Sri Mahatripurasundari (Sri Chakra).*

*Below is an excerpt from his "Prayer Manuscript," wherein he mentions where his breath has merged.*

**J**UST to abide in the cavity of the lotus of my Heart is the greatest gift from Sri Ramana Bhagavan to me and how I pray He keep me glued to His Lotus Feet once and for all. I must declare to the world that His Sri Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Centre and this Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram would not have been brought into existence without His Infinite Grace and Mercy. So I shall have to remember day and night that Sri Ramana Arunachala Dakshinamurty Sachchidananda Parabrahman is looking after all of His loving sons and dear daughters and we have to move on, march on, press on and push on towards the goal that must be reached without any further delay. In this far-off land Sri Bhagavan Ramana has established His Abode for the sake of all those devotees and disciples who are eager and earnest to profit from His most Direct and Simple Teaching of "Who Am I?".

The unceasing inherence in the Self in the cavity of the

lotus of my Heart must remain the focal point of my remaining days. When I close my eyes, I find myself transformed into the one who knows nothing else in this world but His Lotus Feet. No amount of my efforts and endeavours can be of any avail in this world without His Infinite Grace and Mercy. I am standing on this sacred soil of Sri Arunachala Ashrama in this valley at the southern foot of the North Mountain and am calling on Bhagavan Sri Ramana to remove the densest darkness of desires and delusions from my life and give me the ceaseless inherence in the Self, once and for all. My breath is merged in my Heart and I feel like doing nothing but remaining calm and quiet all the time. I walk around in this Ashram farm like one possessed and I can now do nothing but abide in the Self, nothing but the Self, within my Heart Cavity. I am prostrate at the Lotus Feet of Sri Ramana Arunachala Dakshinamurty Guru.

— Nova Scotia, Canada, 1979

## 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 Adiseshan (703-257-5589 / adiseshan@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 (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. To subscribe, 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 Web site.

# Letters and Comments

## Heart Center

When I start the practice of asking 'Who am I?' and mindfully try to get deeper in the heart, I feel much discomfort in the center of the bosom (level of heart - line of heart), something pressing and constricting. It is at times cold and at times warm in this place. What is this? Is it normal, or I am doing something wrong.

Seeker from Russia

*We must keep in mind that the spiritual Heart which the Maharshi speaks of is not different from the Self. All is in the Self and all, including the body and mind, exist in the Heart alone.*

*In relation to the body, seekers feel this Heart Center to be in the chest. This experience can be known spontaneously by seeking the source of the 'I-thought' through the enquiry of 'Who am I?'.*

*We cannot force our individual 'I-consciousness' into this Center. We must still the mind and consciously, and gently, slip into Self-awareness. We must relax, concentrate on our Source and await the Divine Grace to spring forth from within.*

*To make the full spiritual transition to Divinity, total dedication to the ideal is required. This does not mean running away to a cave, performing severe austerities or meditating continuously.*

*It is the ego and its attractions and aversions (raaga and dvesha) that keep us bound to the 'I-am-the-body' idea. By selflessness and dedication, by regular practice of prayer and meditation, our center of awareness gradually slips from the body and mind into the Heart. When this is completed, the purpose of human life is achieved and all existence is benefited.*

Editor

## Misuse of Self-Enquiry

What does one do if one "loses" the "I"-feeling through misuse of Self-enquiry? I have been trying for over six months now to get back the subjective 'I-feeling'. I have some "reaction" when doing Self-enquiry but the "I" does not go back down to the heart, and there is very, very little "silence" anymore. I am very disturbed over this, so have been trying "attention attending to attention" instead.

I was told to keep on trying Self-enquiry. What is one to do?

Seeker from USA

*One cannot lose the 'I-feeling'. The 'I' is always present. Who is asking this question if not the 'I'. This is the subject 'I'. If you identify this 'I' with the body, mind and thoughts you will suffer. If you hold on to this 'I' alone, to the exclusion of all else, there is peace and fulfillment.*

*If you find that you are unable to hold onto the 'I' only, in spite of concerted effort, and you feel frustrated and incapable of progressing further, you must pray to the Guru to help and guide you. You must surrender to Him unreservedly and await his Grace. "He knows what is best and when and how to do it," says the Maharshi. In this way you will find peace and continued progress.*

*Either enquire or surrender. These are two sides of the same coin. In either case you must have faith in the existence of the Reality or the Guru. "The few who succeed owe their success to perseverance," says Sri Ramana. Dispassion and strength of mind is required. We must pursue the path taught by the Guru and await His grace.*

Editor

## Sri Ramana's Children's Ashrama

will be conducted at the Nova Scotia Ashrama from  
**July 10th to July 14th (Monday - Friday)**

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

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

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