

The Maharshi

JAN/FEB 2001

VOL.11, NO. 1

THE FIVE HYMNS TO ARUNACHALA

Kartikai Deepam, the annual nine day festival which concludes with the lighting of the beacon on the top of the Arunachala Mountain, is attended by a million pilgrims, broadcast on South Indian television, and this year was available for viewing around the world through the Internet. The holy mountain's growing attraction would not have surprised Sri Ramana Maharshi who never tired of praising its glories and always felt at home strolling upon its slopes. Though a Jnani of the highest order he wrote a number of inspired devotional hymns in praise of Arunachala. In these, he poetically narrates how Arunachala captured him in his youth, stilled his mind, swallowed him whole and made him one with Arunachala, which is none other than the Supreme Self. These inspired poems also provide us with precise directions on the easiest and most direct path to reach the peak of spiritual experience. Every aspirant can find something directly relevant to his or her individual needs in the Five Hymns to Arunachala.

In the following article, Prof. G. V. Subbaramayya, an intimate and respected devotee of Sri Maharshi, clearly lays before us the ground upon which we can easily walk toward a greater understanding and true veneration of these sacred hymns.

ONE EVENING Sri Ramana related to us how in his vision Arunachala appeared a citadel of Heaven full of shrines and gods. On a morning when Sri Ramana delayed to return from his constitutional and this writer with another devotee went up and met him, he said smiling. "As the weather is fine I have been strolling here. This Hill is like my own home. Whenever I am on Arunachala I forget myself." While relating the glories of Arunachala he would indeed forget himself. The story of Arunachala was his favorite theme. He often used to say that while all other sacred hills and shrines were but the abode of various gods, Arunachala is the Supreme God Himself and that going around Arunachala is the direct worship of God Almighty.

The last forty-four years of Sri Ramana's life were spent in Arunachala alone. Within the temple compound, in the outskirts of the town, up the Hill and down the Hill, he dwelt throughout his life. Never once, not even during the time when the place was declared dangerous on account of epidemics, did he stray from the environs of Arunachala. The very thought of leaving Arunachala never seems to have

occurred to him. So many people, from his mother down to a casual visitor, attempted to induce him to go elsewhere. His written reply to his mother's entreaties was typical and significant: "Whatever is destined not to happen will never happen, try how hard you may. Whatever is destined to happen must happen, do what you may to prevent it." In other words, he declared that Arunachala and he were destined to be inseparable.

Marital Garland of Letters

The *Five Hymns to Arunachala* are the magnum opus of Sri Ramana in devotional lyric poetry. Of them the first is "Aksharamanamalai" (the Marital Garland of Letters). It was composed in Tamil by young Ramana in response to the request of a devotee for a song to be sung while wandering in the town for alms. It is an acrostic of one hundred and eight couplets with the initial letters in alphabetical order and with a popular refrain "Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva." It unfolds an allegorical love story and depicts the *madhura bhava* (love-aspect) of devotion. Arunachala is the lover and the singer is the beloved.

The lover made secret love to the beloved while she was in her parental home. At the mere thought of his name, he stole her heart. He eloped with her stealthily and brought her here. While she is now harassed by so many enemies, he remains unmoved as a mountain. She remonstrates and complains of her lover's neglect and indifference. "Having entered my home and lured me to yours, why do you keep me prisoner in your cavern?... Having seduced and ravished me, if you deny me union and abandon me now, would it be chivalry? Nay, such desertion will be a memorial of shame for you.... Having called me and lured me here, it is writ large on your forehead to look after my well-being.... If you will not unite with me, I shall be melting away in tears of anguish Pray rain your mercy on me ere your fire consumes me to ashes." So runs her love-plaint. Then for her harsh words of remonstrance, she apologizes to her lover and prays for the bliss of complete union and merging. "Pray close me in, limb to limb, body to body, or I am lost.... Let us embrace, one in the Real Self on the soft flower-bed of the Mind.... Come and sport with me in the open space of the Heart where there is neither night nor day.... May I be absorbed into you as food is assimilated into the feeder." At last the prayer is fulfilled. The love is consummated in marriage, and with the bride's invocation to the bridegroom: "O Lord Arunachala, throw around me your garland and let me place on your breast this garland strung by me," the song concludes. In this poem Arunachala is described and addressed in the most fascinating terms. Arunachala is "the real meaning of OM unexcelled, unparalleled," "the magnet that attracts the iron filing of devotees and holds them fast," "the Ocean of Grace in the mould of a mountain," "the gem of fire sparkling all round," "the treasure of Divine Grace got without seeking," "the elixir of all life's ills," "the spider whose spreading webs entices into its meshes and devours all egos," "the wizard who exercises the ghost of the ego and then himself possesses the being," "the mountain drug for all madness."

The word *Arul* (Grace) occurs in nearly every stanza, so that the whole song may be called a rhapsody of Grace. This love-lyric is indeed an

allegory of Sri Ramana's own life story and so is full of autobiographical interest. While sounding the depths of philosophical wisdom, this song stirs the tenderest chords of the human heart and makes the most daring rites of love romance in the spiritual firmament. It was and is sung on all auspicious occasions in the Ashram. Though Sri Ramana always declined to be drawn into a discussion of its diverse interpretations, he would sit up in a trance of ecstasy whenever it was sung. Just before Sri Ramana's Mahanirvana this hymn was being sung in a chorus by the devotees who assembled outside his room. Sri Ramana opened his eyes, looked in the direction from where the voices came, and then as he closed his eyes, tears of ecstasy gushed from their outer edges and he breathed his last. So this song into which Sri Ramana had breathed the essence of his Divine Spirit became appropriately the background music to his life's finale, like the glow of mellow light around the setting sun.

The Garland of Nine Gems

Next in chronological order comes "Navamanimalai" (The Garland of Nine Gems). This is a collection of nine casual verses in various meters. Its underlying sentiment is also love and devotion to Arunachala. It explains at the outset the idea of *achala tandavam* (motionless dance) of the Lord. He is static and dynamic at the same time. The glorious source that absorbs and transcends both the aspects is this Arunachala. The verbal root meaning of A-Ru-Na is also set forth. It means respectively either Sat-Chit-Ananda (Being-Consciousness-Bliss) or the Supreme Self, the individual Self, and their identity or That-Thou-Art. *Achala* means the Great One. That is why the mere recollection of the name 'Arunachala' confers *mukti* instantly. The rest of the poem is a call to complete self-surrender and a moving prayer for forgiveness of faults and for deliverance. It is impossible to cross the sea of *samsara* and climb the shore unless Arunachala, out of His more-than-maternal love, stretches forth His hand of Grace. This song is also autobiographical. It relates how Sri Ramana was born of virtuous Sundaram and Alagu in sacred Tiruchuzhi and was rescued from the coils of ignorance even in early

youth and raised by Arunachala to His own seat. The poem is in short a paean of praise and thanksgiving.

Ten Verses on Arunachala

The next hymn is “Arunachala Padikam” (Ten Verses on Arunachala). It really consists of one invocatory verse and ten stanzas, all in the same meter. It observes the rule of *mukta-pada-grastam*, that is to say, the last word of each verse is repeated as the first word of the next verse so that the whole poem reads like a chain of linked sweetness long drawn out. It is also a devotional love-lyric and is full of autobiographical interest. Arunachala, the lover, steals the guileless singer’s heart in early youth for thinking of Him but once and, having drawn the beloved to His Feet, keeps her long like a frog amidst the lotus-stalks, and slowly consumes her (ego). The singer surrenders to the will of her Lord and prays He complete the process of devouring her, thereby changing the frog of her mind into a bee that tastes the honey of the lotus blossom. The song concludes with a warning and an appeal. It warns the worldly-wise, saying: “Lo, I have newly discovered a magnet mountain that attracts all beings who think of it even once, makes them still like itself and preys upon their sweet lives (egos). That magnet-mountain is Arunachala. So beware and keep off. “At the same time, the singer makes a clarion call to all kindred spirits who have renounced the worldly life in quest of the means of deliverance. The singer shouts: “Here is the panacea, the sovereign remedy, the wonder-drug for all the distractions and ills of life. If you merely think of it but once, it cures you. It kills without killing. It kills the ego without killing the Self. Many have been thus saved like me. It is none other than Arunachala. You, all afflicted beings, know this and be saved.”

The Eight Verses on Arunachala

The next and grandest hymn is “Arunachala Ashtakam” (The Eight Verses on Arunachala). Sri Ramana himself related how it was composed in the course of a walk around the sacred Hill. All of a sudden the first word of the hymn flashed into his

mind and with an irresistible urge composed itself into the first stanza. Then the last word of the stanza lingered in the mind and clamored for further expansion into the second stanza. The same process was repeated in the other stanzas, and at the end of the eighth stanza the urge for expression automatically ceased. So the stanzas are of uniform meter and observe the rule of *mukta-pada-grastam* like the previous hymn. This hymn is a masterpiece of philosophical poetry in which both thought and style reach their high water mark. For its superb symphony it is a universal favorite among music lovers. It is also autobiographical and reveals the mysterious association of Arunachala with Sri Ramana from childhood and the part played by Arunachala in his process of Self-Realization. Arunachala is the real Self that manifests Itself when the ego-mind traced back through Self-enquiry merges in its Source. This song is distinguished by the daring originality of its thought and imagery. “To search for the essential inner truth of Thyself (Arunachala) is like going around the earth to see the sky. It is like the sugar-doll diving to measure the depth of the ocean.” “To quest for God elsewhere turning away from Thyself (Arunachala) is like searching for darkness with a light.” “Those who fail to visualize the one matchless, resplendent diamond of Arunachala are like the blind that cannot see the sun before them.” “The mind that has contacted Thee (Arunachala) and is sparkling itself like a cut or polished gem will not need another light to kindle it, just as a sensitive plate exposed to the sun will not take on impressions afterwards.” “A mysterious Shakti (Power) in Thee (Arunachala), which however is not apart from Thyself, illumines with the reflection of Thy pure Light the latent, subtle dark mists which then manifest within as thoughts whirling in the vortices of *prarabdha* (past karma) and are projected without, across the lens of the mind and the outgoing senses as the passing world-picture upon the unchanging screen of Thyself (Arunachala).” “Just as the waters rising from the sea as vapor and coming down as rain must flow back into the sea in spite of all obstacles, just as a bird soaring into the sky, fatigued, must needs return to the earth for rest, so every being must finally retrace its way

to the Source and merge in Thee, Thou Ocean of Bliss, 0 Arunachala.” It will be seen that in the above passages the poet makes use of irony and of metaphors culled from nature, from the arts and science such as photography and cinema. This is all the more remarkable as Sri Ramana had never handled a camera, nor had he ever been to a cinema show.

Five Gems to Arunachala

The last and most famous hymn is the one entitled “Arunachala Pancharatnam” (Five Gems to Arunachala). While the other four hymns were Tamil compositions, this one was composed by Sri Ramana in Sanskrit at the request of Kavyakantha Ganapathi Muni to serve as an introduction to *Sri Ramana Gita*. It was later rendered into Tamil by Bhagavan himself. It has become the daily prayer of all devotees. These “Five Gems” have been praised by Kavyakantha who said that they contain the quintessence of the whole Vedanta and, though terse and brief, are all-comprehensive like *Sastras* (Scripture). As Sri Ramana never studied Sanskrit we wonder how he could have composed this Sanskrit classic, which can only be explained on the ground that he had realized “THAT by knowing which everything else is known.” As it was to the Maharshis of yore, so was it for Sri Ramana Maharshi. The usual order of thought and speech was reversed. Words flashed first, and their sense followed.

In their depiction of Arunachala as *Sarvatman* (the Universal Self) these “Five Gems” resemble the famous “Dakshinamoorti Ashtakam” of Adi Shankaracharya. The opening stanza invokes Arunachala as the “Ocean of Nectar full of Grace by whose splendor the entire Universe is engulfed” and it prays to Him the Supreme Soul “to be the sun for the full blossoming of the lotus-mind.” The second stanza expounds Arunachala as *Swarupa* (the Source) in whom “all this panorama arises, exists and dissolves.” It further explains how Arunachala manifests in the Heart as ‘I’, the Self, and so is Himself named the Heart. The third stanza describes the path of *Jnana* (Self enquiry) and how on knowing one’s Self one merges in Arunachala as the river in the ocean. The fourth stanza unfolds the

path of Yoga (meditation). “The Yogi with controlled breath and concentrated mind, meditating on Thee within, beholds in Thee, 0 Arunachala, Thy Light Transcendent.” The final stanza depicts both the paths of *Bhakti* (Devotion) and *Karma* (Action). Both the devotee, who with dedicated mind beholds Arunachala alone, or the man of action, who reverentially serves all as the form of Arunachala, shines immersed in the Bliss of Arunachala. So this hymn within a brief compass is all-comprehensive and stands out as the most glorious monument of Sri Ramana’s relationship to Arunachala.

This mysterious relationship was most impressively demonstrated by the celestial phenomenon at the time of Sri Ramana’s Mahanirvana. At that very moment a brilliant light in the shape of a huge star emanated in the southeast corner of the horizon and trailing majestically across the sky, seemed to merge in the highest peak of Arunachala. This was witnessed by many people. It was to all mortals an ocular, heavenly revelation of the Life-Light of Sri Ramana ascending and merging in the Universal Light of the Supreme Self that is Arunachala. Indeed, Sri Ramana was Arunachala’s Self incarnate in human form, and Arunachala is Sri Ramana himself in mountain-mould. In essence, both Sri Ramana and Arunachala are one and the same. That is the Supreme Self.

—From the Mountain Path, April 1980

*The 121st Jayanti
of
Sri Ramana Maharshi
will be celebrated in the New York
Arunachala Ashrama
on
Sunday, January 7, 2001
The program will begin at 11:00 A.M.*

for more information, please call
(718) 575-3215

Bhagavan Ramana and Herbal Medicine

By Dr. Manikkam

On a new 1000-page information multimedia CD, Ramana Arunachala, to be released in the spring, there will be some pages devoted to "The Maharshi and Medicine." In these pages Ayurveda and Siddha medicine will be discussed and a number of Bhagavan's herbal treatments will be given. The two recipes printed below follow a description of how they were learnt by Dr. Manikkam, a devotee-doctor living in Tiruvannamalai.

I was born at Pavalakkundru in Tiruvannamalai as the last child of my parents. My mother Alamelu and father Venu were both ardent devotees of Sri Bhagavan. When Bhagavan was staying at Pavalakkundru, the place was being managed by a *math*. The head of that *math* introduced my grandfather to Bhagavan. Later it was the same head of that *math* who introduced my father also to Bhagavan. My parents have sat at the Maharshi's feet a number of times to learn from him the secrets of herbs and herbal medicine. The Maharshi would give them detailed instructions on the preparation methods of various medicines which my parents duly and faithfully recorded. Once, during a conversation with Bhagavan, my father told him that the castor plant did not possess enough juice. It was also hard to find the plant in the environs of Tiruvannamalai. Bhagavan then asked my father to go to Athimur on the Javadhu hills, near Polur. There, he was told, was a lake on the banks of which the plant would be found and ample juice could be extracted. My father went to Athimur and found the plant at the exact location mentioned by Bhagavan.

Following in the footsteps of my parents, I am also deeply devoted to Bhagavan. I pray for his grace always and I have no doubt in my mind that it is he who is guiding me in my profession. I scrupulously follow Bhagavan's recipes and formulas of herbal medicines and use them for treatment of patients. By Bhagavan's grace, I have been able to cure patients who come to me for treatment.

It may not be superfluous to mention that Bhaga-

van's medicinal recipes are perfect and eminently curative. The credit therefore goes to the Master. I consider myself only an instrument in his hands. It is also a matter of great satisfaction for me that many of Bhagavan's devotees consult me on their health. This is what gives me soul-fulfillment. I have also made it a point to give free treatment to the poor who cannot afford the costs of treatment and medicine.

I am happy to share with the world some of the herbal medicinal recipes of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Saraswatha Churnam

Ingredients required: dry ginger, liquorice, rock salt, the long pippali, cumin seeds, turmeric, barberry, calamus root, saussurea, omum. All these should be bought in equal measure.

Preparation: All the above ingredients should be carefully ground, made into fine powder and mixed together. Take a teaspoon of ghee (clarified butter) and a half teaspoon of the powdered mixture and mix thoroughly. Consume twice a day.

Parts of herbs used in the above: roots, seeds and salt.

Body parts for which the above is used: Brain and nerves.

How does it act?: Soothes nerves, restores calmness to an agitated brain and mind, acts on tissues, restores vitality.

What are the symptoms and indications that will necessitate the use of the above medicine?: Loss of memory, sluggish brain, insomnia, weak muscles and tissues.

Precautions: None, there are no side effects.

Ashta Churnam

Bhagavan Ramana's recipe for this particular medicine is different from the traditional practice, and herein lies Bhagavan's speciality. In most traditional recipes, the physician follows a set pattern. All ingredients are taken in equal measure. Bhagavan also follows this method in some of his recipes. But mostly, he differs from the common physician in this aspect. Each ingredient is proportionately selected and mixed, depending upon the strength

and properties of the ingredient. This is the essential difference between Bhagavan's recipes and those traditionally followed by physicians. Bhagavan's formulations are more potent and effective. Another great advantage is that these recipes are the handiwork of the supreme Jnani and therefore not only the physical, but also mental and spiritual results of these recipes are manifold and invaluable.

Ingredients:

Black pepper — 9 parts,
Dry ginger — 7 parts
the bigger Cummin Seed — 5 parts
Rock Salt — 5 parts
Long Pippali — 5 parts
Cummin Seed — 3 parts
Omum — 2 parts

Clean all the above ingredients well and convert them into fine powder. Rice should be well cooked and mixed with ghee. Take a spoon of the above churnam and mix it well with the rice and then consume it. The above prescription cures indigestion, poor appetite, stomachache and is also good for rheumatism.

Removal of Misery

D.: When *duhka* (misery) overpowers me, enquiry is impossible.

M.: Because the mind is too weak. Make it strong.

D.: By what means?

M.: *Sat-sanga, Isvara Aradhana, Pranayama* (association with the wise, worship of God, breath control).

D.: What happens?

M.: Misery is removed; our aim is removal of misery. You do not acquire happiness. Your very nature is happiness. Bliss is not newly earned. All that is done is to remove unhappiness. These methods do it.

D.: Association with the wise may strengthen the mind. There must also be practice. What practice should be made?

M.: Yes. Practice is necessary too. Practice means removal of predispositions. Practice is not

for any fresh gain; it is to kill the predispositions.

D.: *Abhyasa* (practice) should give me that power.

M.: Practice is power. If thoughts are reduced to a single thought, the mind is said to have grown strong. When practice remains unshaken it becomes *sahaja* (natural).

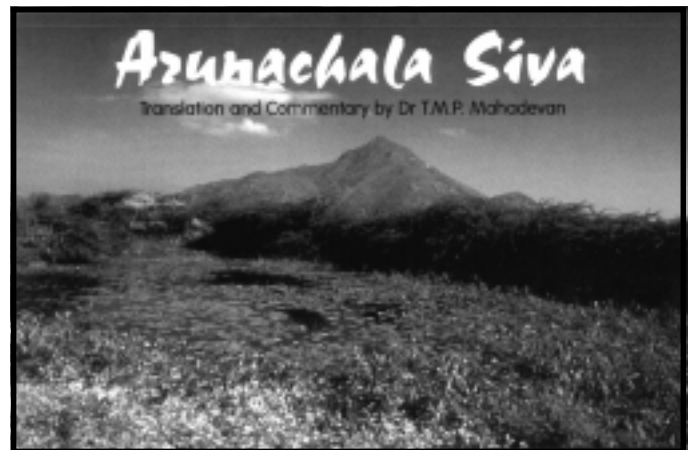
D.: What is such practice?

M.: Enquiring into the Self. That is all. *Atmanyeva vasam nayet* ... Fix the mind on the SELF.

D.: What is the aim to be kept in view? Practice requires an aim.

M.: *Atman* is the aim. What else can there be? All other aims are for those who are incapable of *atmalakshya* (having the Self for the aim). They lead you ultimately to *atma-vichara* (enquiry into the Self). One-pointedness is the fruit of all kinds of practice. One may get it quickly; another after a long time. Everything depends on the practice.

—*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, No. 290*



Arunachala Siva

By Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan

This newly reprinted book contains transliterations and translations of two of Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Five Hymns to Arunachala*: "Aksharamanamalai" (Marital Garland of Letters) and his Sanskrit "Arunachala Pancharatnam" (Five Gems on Arunachala). Each verse is followed by an English translation and further illuminated by short, insightful commentaries. This book, long out of print, is a valuable addition to the literature published by Sri Ramanasramam, India.

108 pages

Price \$5.00

Letters and Comments

Concentrating on the Heart

I found your e-mail address on both your websites, where it said that you would not consider it an imposition to be asked for advice and assistance. I have a fairly fundamental question about practice that I hope you might answer for me.

Arthur Osborne in *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* states: "The instruction, then, was to sit concentrating on the heart at the right side and ask 'Who am I?' When thoughts arise during the meditation one is not to follow them up but to watch them and ask: 'What is this thought? Where did it come from? And to whom? To me—and who am I?'"

Graham Boyd on the www.ramana-maharshi.org website states that he chose to cite certain passages from *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*:

"[B]ecause of their reference to Self-enquiry and the Heart-centre, specifically because they clarify the method of enquiry and remove the idea that the devotee is supposed to concentrate on the chest—after all, who is concentrating on the chest other than the Self?" In my reading, I have not yet come across any conclusive statement by Sri Ramana Maharshi about whether the Heart-center is to be concentrated upon or not when practicing Self-enquiry.

Is there an authoritative answer to this question? If so, I would appreciate it if you would tell me what the proper method of practicing Self-enquiry is. Also, if I should be asking some other question(s) or if there is any other information you think I should know, I would appreciate your passing it along to me.

Thank you so much for your help.

Sincerely,

USA

Your question is a good one. Sri Bhagavan has clearly explained the role of the spiritual Heart in the

method of Self-enquiry. He has said that the Heart is the center wherefrom the I-thought springs and by tracing the I-thought back to its source we experience the Heart, which is synonymous with the Self.

His method of Self-enquiry does not require that we meditate on any point, whether it be the heart, the point between the eyebrows or some chakra. Rather he has asked us to trace the I-thought to its source by questing 'Who am I?' The former would be a form of concentration which implies a subject/object relationship.

What actually happens is that the last physical awareness before the mind sinks into the Self is that of the Heart, and upon returning from that experience the first awareness is the experience of the Self in the Heart. That is only in relation to the body. The Self is actually beyond all time and space. Because we identify ourselves with the body, the Heart is mentioned. It is the seat of experience, not the object of meditation.

Read chapters four and five in the Maharshi's Gospel. There the Heart and its place in concentration is explained.

—Editor

"To enable the *sadhaka* to steer clear of possible doubt, I tell him to take up the 'thread' or the clue of 'I'-ness or 'I-am'-ness and follow it up to its source. Because, firstly it is impossible for anybody to entertain any doubt about his 'I'-notion; secondly, whatever be the *sadhana* adopted, the final goal is the realization of the source of 'I-am'-ness which is the primary datum of your experience.

If you, therefore, practise *Atma-vichara* you will reach the heart which is the Self."

—The Maharshi's Gospel

The *MAHARSHI* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil Sharma and distributed in North America by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. For those with Internet access, this issue and all back issues are available at "<http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm>".

Books, videos and audio CD and tapes on Sri Ramana Maharshi can also be found on the Internet at "<http://www.arunachala.org>".