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The History of Arunachala Ashrama in the West Its Gradual Growth

A modest storefront rental property at 342 East 6th Street in Manhattan served as the home for Arunachala Ashrama for nearly 20 years. It might have continued there longer if the rent had not been raised from \$400 a month to \$2,000 overnight! The property manager was sympathetic to the Ashram and, despite the continued retail demand, waited a couple of years before he raised the price to reflect the demand. Business properties in New York City are not rent-controlled. However, this turned out to be fortuitous because it precipitated a move in 1987 to the residential borough of Queens where a house could be rented for much less than \$2000. Now there were rooms for residents and a better place for Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat and his wife Yogamayaji to live in.

THE living room was made into a shrine where the morning and evening Vedas, chanting and meditation were conducted. All the bedrooms were on the second floor and the basement became the Ashrama office. Devotees were now welcomed into a home-like atmosphere, as family members in an ever-widening circle connected by the thread of the Master's inscrutable ways.

Meanwhile in the Nova Scotia Ashrama, a stream of visitors and long-term residents engaged in the daily meditation and work. Joan and Matthew Greenblatt decided to move back to the New York City area in 1977. About a year later they were sent to Ramanasramam to fulfill a long-cherished dream of Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat – to publish a high-quality pictorial biography of Bhagavan. The Greenblatts worked on this for more than a year and it was released in commemoration of Bhagavan Ramana's 100th birth anniversary. This pictorial biography was immensely popular before the explosion of digital media which has since been broadcasting the life and teachings of Sri Ramana

Maharshi around the globe. A newer edition with restored photographs continues to find an appreciative audience.

After nine years of renting a town house in Forest Hills, Queens, the Ashrama was finally able to purchase a building in 1996. This house, also a townhouse, was only a few blocks from the rented house and was in a quieter location with similar but improved facilities.

Our Founder Merges in Arunachala-Ramana

In the New York Arunachala Ashrama, on Monday morning, April 10th, 2000, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat looked as if he were asleep. On closer examination it was found that his life breath had left the body. From all appearances on the previous day no one could have guessed that he was about to depart. In the night he had been quietly absorbed in listening to both the morning and evening Veda Parayanam, one after the other. He then had a meal, smiled and conversed with the Ashrama friends who had gathered, but showed no signs that this was his final night.



Bhagawat at the
River Ganga in 1977

Since suffering a stroke eighteen months earlier, he had been unable to walk and, of course, was weak. Residing in the Ashrama, he would routinely sit in a wheelchair for five hours every day and, although functioning in a limited way, he was hardly conscious of his frailty, occasionally even forgetting that he was unable to walk. Nevertheless, he remained ever cheerful and grateful, rarely asking for anything other than a warm blanket and to be helped into bed when he was tired.

“It is now fifty years since Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana,” were the last words he heard before he fell asleep and the lights were dimmed. He nodded his head and closed his eyes. In the morning he was gone, absorbed in the feet of Bhagavan Ramana. It was Rama’s Birthday. On April 14, 2000, exactly fifty years to the day of Sri Ramana Maharshi’s Mahanirvana, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat’s body was cremated.

Continued Service

After just a few years in the Clyde Street Ashrama, purchased in 1996, it became apparent that its space was inadequate to accommodate the growing number of devotees attending the regular programs. A hall in the Flushing, Queens, Ganesa Temple had to be rented on special occasions. And, as unsolicited donations gradually increased, the Ashrama devotees were on the lookout for more spacious accommodations.

In 2005 a much larger building on Edgerton Blvd., in Jamaica Estates, in the same New York City borough of Queens, was bought, and in 2011 a large meditation hall and shrine was added. This spacious new Ashrama and its meditation hall and shrine regularly attract numerous visitors and guests who have unmistakably felt within its precincts the deep silent presence of Bhagavan Ramana pulsating.

Quietly spreading the life and message of the Maharshi, Arunachala Ashrama publishes a bimonthly



newsletter, produces videos on the Maharshi, distributes all the English publications



“...in 2011 a large meditation hall and shrine was added.”

of Sri Ramanasramam and serves devotees and seekers throughout the Western Hemisphere. To this day all these activities have been carried out enthusiastically by a small, dedicated handful of devotees.

During the last 20 years two dozen Ramana Satsang groups have sprung up in Canada and the USA. Arunachala Ashrama has always offered its resources and encouragement to the ever-growing number of sincere seekers who have experienced the directness of the teachings and the gracious Presence of the Master. In these family-like gatherings, devotees support and strengthen their faith and practice as they experience firsthand the way Bhagavan reaches out to embrace and protect all those who turn to him for grace and guidance.

In 2016, during the celebration of Sri Ramana’s 137th Jayanti in Tampa, Florida, eighty devotees gathered for the griha pravesham of a newly-constructed replica of Bhagavan’s Old Hall, which served as his abode in South India for over 20 years. The inauguration of the Old Hall



replica took place during the fourth Annual Sri Ramana Jayanti Retreat in Tampa. All devotees are welcome to visit this new holy site of pilgrimage at 5919 Lynn Road, Tampa, FL. A call to Mathy or Dr. Rathinasamy prior to visiting for the first time will insure the Hall will be open when you arrive (813.685.8843).

In 2013, a devoted couple in Elgin, Illinois, near Chicago, opened a beautiful Ramana Center where they have daily meditation and monthly satsangs. Also, a devotee from Ottawa, Canada has built a new Sri Ramanachala Mandiram, overlooking the St. Lawrence River, on the border between Canada and the USA in the town of Ogdensburg, New York. And of late, a few other devotees in the USA have expressed interest to open Ramana Centers in their towns.

Throughout the history of Arunachala Ashrama, we have observed how the Maharshi's life and teachings, like a gentle shower of rain, has steadily seeped into the awareness of sincere seekers, not only in North America but the world over. The resident devotees of Arunachala Ashrama feel blessed to have witnessed, as his instruments, this gradual unfoldment of his grace.

At some point in a sincere seeker's life, he or she comes to realize that the reason that they are born, that they die and are reborn again and again, is to experience the one essential Truth of their existence. That Truth is ever-present, both within and without. It is the Universal Awareness of our eternal Divine Nature as the Self of all selves. The Maharshi was born to guide sincere seekers, not just for those of his own generation, but for our generation and generations to come.

We humbly invite all those who wish to dedicate their lives to the experience of the one Self of all, embodied in the life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, to join us on our march to the Holy Hill of the Beacon Light, to a life of service and sadhana, and to thus make our lives blessed.

The Sign of Progress

The degree of freedom from unwanted thoughts and the degree of concentration on a single thought are the measure to gauge the progress.

— Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 427

I Am Seeing Myself Through His Eyes

TWO nights ago, about fifteen volunteers had come together to chop vegetables for tonight. In our opening circle, one of them shared how she had received my invite to serve and got goosebumps and started tearing up. She didn't know why but it had reminded her of Ramana Ashram.

Later, she sent me this tender experience of 20 years ago, that I thought you would particularly enjoy:

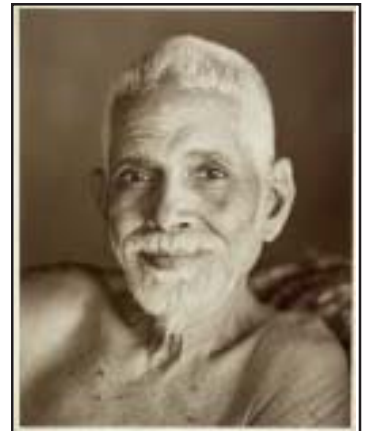
I stop in the Gratitude Hut during my walking meditation. Upon entering, my eyes immediately become fixed on a large photo of Ramana Maharshi which hangs on the wall. I cannot take my eyes off of him. I am magnetized. It seems he, too, is looking directly at me.

As I gaze into his eyes, his image takes on a form that seems lifelike, multidimensional; it's as if he is right here, now. His face becomes luminous and his expression softens, as if to say, "Yes, I am looking at you." A couple of more crow's feet appear at the outer edges of his twinkling eyes and his lips turn up ever so gently as he smiles warmly at me. His kind look is penetrating; truly, it's as if he is looking into me and through me. I feel a profound sense of intimacy, into-me-see, of being seen so completely and fully in this moment.

Something shifts ever so slightly, and his eyes take the form of luminous white fire. I feel a burning sensation. No longer am I the object of his gaze; I experience myself gazing into myself — subject and object at once. I am seeing myself through his eyes. He is showing me my own True Nature! It is as if Sri Ramana is lending me his eyes so that I can see what he sees — the Self that I Am.

Tears stream down my face and I am filled with a profound sense of wonder, and awe, and connection. I sense that I am not separate, or alone; in this moment all are one — the wooden hut and the photo and Sri Bhagavan and I, and the trees and the sunlight, and then, in this new moment, I am Formlessness, Timelessness, Consciousness.

—Anonymous



My Heart's Journey

A Pilgrim's Diary

by Evelyn Kaselow

January 19, 1983 - Sri Ramanasramam

Today I met again with Ramaswami Pillai and we talked for two hours.

"Do you think it is important that we live with few possessions?" I asked him.

"You must not make an effort to live with or without possessions. You must live with the conditions that prevail. The mental state alone is important. However, you must not have or be a slave to any want. Really, you only should have what is necessary for keeping body and soul together, and in good health. Also, you should not associate with all kinds of people."

Then he again spoke of the path of Self-Inquiry: "In the path of surrender, the ego can very easily remain. However, Bhagavan has said that real surrender can come only when we know 'Who am I?'"

"You have convinced me that I must try to do Self-enquiry in a serious way," I replied.

"I shall miss Paul and you," he said. "As a boy, I would beg our guests, 'Take me with you!' I would run down the road after them, crying, until I felt satisfied. During Bhagavan's time I would have to accompany devotees to the train. I especially loved those devotees."

This afternoon at 5 p.m. Kunju Swami, Natesan and I climbed the hill. Rather than follow the path to Skandasramam, we took the path to the left and sat together on a rock. Kunju Swami told me, as if a deep voice from within me spoke, "When a person follows the path of devotion, obstacles will arise." In his own life, the moment he saw Bhagavan's picture he had a great desire to come to Bhagavan. At that time, his teacher, a man with whom he was studying *Kaivalya Navaneeta* and other works, vehemently opposed his going to Bhagavan. He even threatened that some ill would befall him if he went to Bhagavan. In course of time the teacher had to go away and Kunju Swami, without his knowing, came to Bhagavan. Ultimately, the teacher also came, realized Sri Bhagavan's greatness and entrusted Kunju Swami lovingly to Bhagavan's care.

"If your lakshya (aim or goal) is Bhagavan alone, everything else will fall into place," Kunju Swami emphasized, "but there will be obstacles. If your lakshya is something small or trivial, it may be missed, but if your aim is the Mountain – which is so great – you cannot miss it. Be like the Mountain – calm, immovable!"

"Now, a worldly example: We have Sri Ramanasramam. While all sorts of things may happen in the Ashram, it is not run by any individual. Sri Bhagavan's Divine Shakti alone runs the Ashram. Similarly, in any of Bhagavan's Ashrams, no single individual runs the Ashram. Regardless of whoever may leave, Sri Bhagavan will continue His work and the Ashram will also continue.

"In this context, your attitude toward all humanity should be one of brotherhood and of natural and spontaneous friendliness. You should not hate or harbor a single bad thought for anyone, nor should you allow a single thought about whether or not someone likes you. It is completely immaterial.

"Whoever comes or goes, an Ashram established in the name of Sri Bhagavan and Sri Arunachala must grow! There is not the least doubt about it!"

"I have admired Bhagawat," he continued, "I wondered what tapasya he must have done to attract such people as you. And to send you all here! (It is remarkable!) Yet, whatever happens, you must remember your lakshya of Sri Arunachala and be calm with your mind at the feet of Bhagavan."

January 20, 1983

Ramaswami shared with me a few details about his personal life. He came to Bhagavan at the age of 25. At the age of 31 or 32 he was living in a temple in a village when he became mad with ecstasy. He said, "It was evening about 6 o'clock when I had that first experience. I was surprised, not shocked. There was Consciousness – as though I was being told, 'This is what you sought.' It lasted only a few minutes at first. Later, the experience would return. 'What is the meaning of this coming and going of this experience,' I thought, 'I want it when I want it!' Then, I got it. I was in that state for three months. I was like a mad fellow wearing a dirty loin cloth and I didn't bathe. I wouldn't enter into any houses. If I got some hunger I would beg for food.... 'Happy' is not the word to express that state; 'Ecstatic' is also inadequate. That experience is still there with me, like an undercurrent. Some devotees came and took to Bhagavan. At that time

I got the confirmation that it is 'That'. I came with only one loincloth and ate in His presence. When I arrived he was sitting on the sofa, and it somehow appeared to me as if he was sitting there waiting for me."

"...if I am Bhagavan's devotee, to deal with me is more dangerous than to deal with Bhagavan! I may forgive, but Bhagavan will not...."

"Your business is with the thinker, not with thoughts. Whenever your attention is given to thoughts, you must return it to the thinker."

Ramaswami turned his attention to my picture of Bhagavan and said, "You may become calm and peaceful by looking into Bhagavan's eyes. In the Hall we would sit and gaze on his eyes; he would not blink. It is something like a child sucking from the mother's breast. The child is not exactly awake – it is blissful. It ingests the milk without swallowing. The mother's love is so great; the milk flows in a current to the child. In this same manner, we receive the current (of grace) from Bhagavan's eyes. Bhagavan's grace is so great, you cannot escape it!" (*to be continued*)

Letters and Comments

The Divine Plan

The question sometimes rises within. I would like to share this thinking and get answers: God is All Powerful. We call it Atman. God is said to never correct any disorders, never correct any wrongs. God is LOVE.

If so, then why does God not correct the wrongs done by persons and their wrong deeds? Is it not possible for the all-powerful loving God to set all things in order?

Is He simply watching things happen?

– A Devotee from India

The truth is "All things are in order." Everything happens according to the Divine Plan. We, with our limited intellect, which has come forth from the Creator, are hardly in a position to judge the overall scheme of the Creator. If we attune ourselves with the source from which all springs forth, the whole scheme of creation will appear to be in order.

You wrote, "God never corrects any disorders... wrongs". Since we consider ourselves and others as individuals who perform actions, those actions have a result. It is called Karma. "As we sow, we reap." It is part of the scheme. The reaping part may not be apparent in this life, but it will be administered ultimately. That is the way evil-doers are punished.

The fact is, what appears to be a wrong done to you by another, is not really the act of the other upon you. The 'other' is only the agent of the Divine delivering to you the results of your past deeds. He is only the agent of the Divine administering loss or gain so that you may ultimately learn to rise above the seeming dualities and realize your true, perfect state.

Recorded in *Talks*, No. 107, The Maharshi was asked:

D.: Why does God permit suffering in the world? Should He not with His omnipotence do away with it at one stroke and ordain the universal realization of God?

M.: Suffering is the way for Realization of God.

D.: Should He not ordain differently?

M.: It is the way.

D.: Are Yoga, religion, etc., antidotes to suffering?

M.: They help you to overcome suffering.

D.: Why should there be suffering?

M.: Who suffers? What is suffering?

– Editor

Learn the Technique

I am very interested in the teachings of Ramana Maharishi. I have been meditating for a while and have completed two vipassana courses. However, as my spiritual practice progresses, I am getting more intrigued by the method of- Ramana Maharishi and Self-enquiry. I was wondering if you teach this technique at your Ashram? If yes, what is the best option for me to attend and learn about this technique from a teacher with experience in this method? Any advice / help would be great!

– American Seeker

You have read Sri Ramana Maharshi's teachings on the method of Self-enquiry and, obviously, realized its simplicity and directness. The best way to develop a deeper understanding and experience of the Self is simply to practice those teachings, prayerfully and steadily. If that is done in all earnestness, the instruction required at the stage it is needed, will come to you automatically. If you knock, the

door will open. Continued, intense practice with the light given is the best way to ensure proper guidance.

We have Ashrams in New York and Nova Scotia, Canada where the daily practice of these teachings is carried on. You are welcome to come and join us for some days in New York, or for a longer period in Nova Scotia. These Ashrams are for those who sincerely strive to realize the truth taught and lived by Sri Ramana Maharshi.

– Editor

Liberation Assured?

I need your valuable advice on the following:

Yoga Vasistha talks of Self-enquiry as the beginning of the end of repeated transmigration. Now, Bhagavan has himself said that he is none other than the consciousness that dwells in all of us. This seems to suggest two things:

By coming into the Ramana Path, we have naturally entered on the Self-enquiry path that will culminate in liberation or the end of transmigration.

Bhagavan Ramana, being the supreme consciousness itself, we need have no fear (though we may still have our fears or be anxious – this is immaterial) whether we are practicing Self-enquiry rightly or adequately or whether we have surrendered the ego partially or wholly.

While the above practices rightly done will hasten the process, can we not be comforted that we are now in the safe hands of consciousness?

In fact, can we not go to the extent of saying that by coming to the Ramana Path, he has in fact taken us into his fold and his perfect guidance (which will yield suitable results) along the path is assured and a foregone conclusion?

–USA Devotee

There is no doubt, as the *Yoga Vasistha* declares, that those who have abandoned the world appearance and have taken to the path of Self-enquiry will end the cycle of repeated transmigration.

And, naturally, those who have surrendered to Bhagavan Ramana and have taken to the path of Self-enquiry of ‘Who am I?’ will attain liberation.

Bhagavan has said, “Just as the prey which has fallen into the jaws of a tiger has no escape, so those who have come within the ambit of the Guru’s gracious look will be saved by the Guru and will not get lost; yet, each one should by his own effort pursue the path shown by God or Guru and gain release.”

The last sentence is important because the grace is vouchsafed to all, no doubt, but that grace is said to be given equal to the intensity and sincerity of the devotee. “Those who have succeeded, owe their success to their perseverance,” said Bhagavan.

Yet, there were discussions with Bhagavan on the same line of thought as your question. One such was put by a relentless seeker of truth, Devaraja Mudaliar and recorded in his book, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*:

“I told Bhagavan, ‘It has come down as a sort of tradition, and I have also heard it said, that Bhagavan once told some disciples that those who are here (*i.e.*, with Bhagavan) need not worry about their salvation, even as upper class passengers, having informed the Guard, may quietly go to sleep in their berths and will be awakened and detrained at their destination by the Guard. I have not been able to find out when, where and to whom Bhagavan said words to the above effect.’ Bhagavan said nothing in reply. But so far as I am concerned, the fact that he did not deny it in words or by facial expression is enough to convince me that Bhagavan must have, in some unguarded moment, uttered these words (of great hope to lazy men like me).”

This may be so, but how long do you wish to remain asleep? That is up to you.

– Editor

The 139th Jayanti Retreat With Gratitude

After living through those memorable days at the retreat, which was certainly realized in my case because of the Grace of Bhagavan, I was able to perceive how his Divine Presence transported everyone into their Hearts.

I witnessed the incredible work and coordination of the devoted group who planned and made this event possible and marveled at how they worked with such friendly and cheerful dispositions. I congratulate them all.

I am thankful to Mathy for accepting this challenge, to her husband, Dr. Rathinasamy, who silently assisted her in every endeavor. Together with Janet and Diana, in coordination with Dennis, each detail, from the invitation that we received a few months ago all the way to the last moments of the retreat, was seamlessly executed.

My thanks to Dennis, who always encourages us with his example, harmoniously providing opportunity and space to everyone, as well as collaborating and supporting all the aspects of the event on behalf of Arunachala Ashrama.

My gratitude to Mathy, Diana and Janet, the three women devotees from Florida who planned all the details in leasing the Franciscan Center, coordinating with the Hindu Temple of Tampa for the Jayanti Puja, priests, meals, registrations, payments, the retreat program, the beautiful card, the bag and medal gifted to us as a keepsake.

I must give thanks to those who made such great presentations of such relevant and exemplary themes; to those who directed the children's activities, and to the kids themselves for the exemplary talents they shared with us, and for creating a family environment.

My thanks to Mangalam for gracing us with her company and for sharing with us the interesting details of her family lineage.

Thanks to those who fed us and setup and cleaned up after each meal. Thanks to our new friend Hyuna who kept everything in order and distributed the food in the kitchen and cafeteria.

My thanks to all the devotees for their service, their smiles and for making each day the best day for all, which demonstrated more than words Bhagavan's grace showered on us all.

I can truly say that each activity and experience at the retreat was like a fresh flower sewn into a garland, like the one Mathy taught me to make. And the whole retreat itself was like one enormous garland of flowers whose colors and fragrance I will always keep in my heart.

To each and every one, thank you.

Patricia Zárraga, Santiago, Chile

Ramana Satsangs in the USA and Canada

Regular satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation are conducted in or near large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please contact the individuals below for more information.

AL, Birmingham — Sai Kand (205-441-6859 / kandsai@yahoo.com)

CA, Los Angeles — Natarajan & Indira Venkatesan (310-473-9441 / nvenky30@yahoo.com)

CA, San Diego — Manna Semby (646-342-4585 / mannamoksha@gmail.com)

CA, San Francisco Area — Karthik & Sunita (510-656-2752 / sunita_parasuraman@yahoo.com)

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

Canada, Toronto — Thiru (416-876-1942 / thirusivasamy@hotmail.com)

Canada, Vancouver — Akash (778-321-4499 / eternalshiva@hotmail.com)

Canada, Victoria — Saibish (250-818-2875 / saibish@gmail.com)

CT, Hartford Area — Aruna & Ram (860-284-0078 / rsankaran2000@yahoo.com)

FL, Ft. Lauderdale — David & Janet Robinson (954-600-1967 / arunahill@gmail.com)

FL, Palm Coast — Shriram & Rekha (904-347-3434 / ssmarathemd@gmail.com)

FL, Tampa — Rohit (813-766-0145 / rohitkvaidya@yahoo.com)

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MA, Boston Area — David & Anna (617-928-1487 / annaklegon@gmail.com)

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