



The Maharshi

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The Mountains are Calling and I Must Go Answering the Call of Sri Bhagavan *by Dennis Hartel*

The history of Arunachala Ashrama in the Western Hemisphere started a new era this month as fellow devotees read the communication sent to us by our friend, inspiration and guide Sri Dennis Hartel.

Dennis, as you are all aware, has been the heart of Sri Bhagavan's Ashrama here, and all of us can say unreservedly that we have been guided to the feet of Sri Bhagavan due in large part to his devotion, dedication and friendship.

As we are also all aware, nothing in this world is permanent and the goal of life is to abide as THAT, our true nature as enunciated by Sri Ramana Maharshi. Dennis, after 48 years of selfless service in the Ashrama, now has gone forth to live a simple, secluded life relying on Sri Bhagavan for every need and surrendering totally to him.

The email entitled "Refuge" arrived early on the morning of Tuesday, December 3, 2019. As we read its contents, the profundity of its message became apparent:

My Dear Friends in Sri Bhagavan,

At the age of 18 I decided that I had to find out what the meaning and purpose of life was. I saw no solution in my home, so I wrote a note to my mother, borrowed 20 dollars, and left.

This journey lasted for about four years, during which time I traveled the world over and had many experiences which brought me to the conclusion that the only meaningful purpose and goal of life was to realize God, or Self-realization.

My latent samskaras must have played a part as I rediscovered the teachings that directly resonated with my own understanding. Then I was guided to the Sadguru who perfectly demonstrated these teachings – Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. The same year I arrived at His Ashrama in New York and dedicated my life to service and the practice of His teachings. [Dennis arrived at the Ashrama at East 6th Street in December, 1971 - Ed.]

Last summer in the Nova Scotia Ashrama a sudden, altogether contrary vision took possession of me and would not let go, even to this day. I could not resist it, nor did I feel that I should, and ultimately surrendered to it. This is what it is: After 48 years of living in His abode, serving Him through His devotees, I became possessed, so to speak, with a single aspiration. I felt Bhagavan telling me: "Now you need only to serve Me by remembering Me and abiding in Me, the Self. Henceforth, you need not continue to serve Me physically, but serve me by remembering Me and abiding in Me."

In addition to this, I experienced an intense yearning to simplify my life, to depend on Him alone for all things, to take complete refuge in Him and leave it to Him to provide me with whatever is required to fulfill this aspiration, as enunciated by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

To those (devotees) who always think of Me and

engage in exclusive devotion to Me, to them whose minds are always absorbed in Me, I provide what they lack and preserve what they already possess. – Ch. 9, v. 22.

Therefore, I am writing today -- not only to you, the officers of Arunachala Ashrama USA and Canada, but to all my friends and well-wishers – to inform you that what happened when I was 18 years old is now repeating itself. By the time you read this note I will have already left the Ashrama for a distant place to fulfill this yearning within me. Believe me, I am no less surprised than you about what you are now reading.

After this new aspiration took hold of me in Nova Scotia and I realized that I must fulfill it, I thought briefly about what direction the Ashrama would take in my absence. The next day this concern was completely erased upon rereading what Sri Kunju Swami told Evelyn concerning Bhagavan's Ashramas on January 19, 1983, recorded in her diary.¹

Not only did I have no doubts after reading that, I fully believe, though physically absent, I will now extend a greater service to the Ashrama than ever before. You may not understand this, but I believe in time you will arrive at the same conclusion.

I ask that you please not make any efforts to locate my whereabouts. I have put all my faith in Bhagavan's guiding presence and all of you should do the same and celebrate with me this new direction in my life. Does not the Lord of the Universe sustain the trees of the forest, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea. Will He ever forsake me? How is it possible. And how wonderful it is to want nothing from the world but the opportunity to abandon all hopes, all fears and desires and rest in Him.

Also, do not be too alarmed at this turn of events. Who knows, I may be back in two months, or two years, or at some point in time you may come to learn that my journey on earth has come to end. It is in His hands alone, is it not? Isn't it the same for all of us?

Lastly, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to all

my friends and well-wishers, devotees of the Master who have unstintingly provided me with their love, support and kindnesses over many decades. How fortunate I have been in this life to know all of you, to live and serve in His abode and benefit from your sincere devotion and dedication.

I am attaching a letter that I gave to two aspirants this year who had expressed a desire to live in the Ashrama. It may be useful.

Ever yours in Sri Ramana Bhagavan,
Dennis

While reading this, devotees naturally experienced tears of joy, of sadness, and even anger. How could one who has been a guiding constant in our lives, exhorting us ever to live the life as exemplified by Sri Bhagavan, entertain the wish to leave us all? As we gradually recovered from the initial shock, things became more clear. Devotees wrote to express their feelings of gratitude to Dennis. There were exhortations for him not to leave, naturally, and attempts to convince him to stay. But by the time the communication had been read, Dennis had already left for a new phase in his life.

Perhaps we may meet Dennis again, or perhaps we may not, as he has mentioned. Regardless, it is for us to follow his example: *to make the quest for Self-Realization our single purpose, and to trust in Sri Bhagavan without reservation.*

Some months before Dennis's departure, he had given a friend, Swaminathan, a shirt as a gift. Reminded of this gift, Swaminathan took out the shirt and found emblazoned on the front of it the prescient words: "The mountains are calling, and I must go."

Our hearts are overflowing with thanks to this sincere, unassuming devotee of Sri Bhagavan who has drawn us all to the Holy Hill. Yes, the Mountain is calling you, Dennis. You have, more than any among us, answered its call.

1. "We have Sri Ramanasramam. While all sorts of things may happen in the ashrama, it is not run by any individual. Sri Bhagavan's divine shakti alone runs the ashrama. Similarly, in any of Bhagavan's ashramas, no single individual runs the ashrama. Whomever may leave, Bhagavan will continue His work and the ashrama will also continue." - Sri Kunju Swami

Lessons Learned from a Life of Service in Sri Bhagavan's Ashrama

The following letter from Dennis Hartel, written in the summer of 2019, clearly demonstrates the attitude of an ideal seeker and servant of God. The counsel given here was exemplified in Dennis's daily life.

This is to provide a little insight into what it means to live in Sri Ramana Maharshi's Ashrama. It has taken me some decades to really understand it myself.

First of all, I consider it a privilege to have had the independence and freedom to pursue an ideal that requires full dedication and devotion. And finding a place and a Guru who fully embodies the ideal can only materialize by His grace.

I believe Sri Ramana Maharshi's Ashrama is best suited to those who intensely yearn to realize their true nature, the one eternal Self. And that yearning is best nourished by a disciplined life dedicated to that one ideal. That is why I consider the daily meditation and chanting in the shrine to be the prime activity of Ashrama life. It is only by the regular practice of meditation over a sustained period that the mind loses its hold on us and the ego begins to thin out, preparing us to be absorbed into the Source of our being. So, therefore, I consider it to be the main work done by the Ashrama residents, that is, the steady practice of meditation at the fixed times - at other times too - until it becomes natural. After all, this is the way taught by Bhagavan and the means to experience the perfect happiness of the Self.

The next duty of an Ashramite is to serve the devotees and guests. Many of us have had a personal awakening by the grace of Sri Ramana Maharshi and accept him as our Guru, though he is not now embodied. He always said he was not the body during his lifetime and that his influence, grace and guidance will continue with or without a physical body. And many testify that it does till this day, and that is why a greater number of seekers are finding their way to Him and taking to His teachings.

It is an ancient tradition in India to serve the Guru for

12 years. Even though the Maharshi is not presently in a body to serve, he has given us a way to fulfill this tradition: "If you serve my devotees you are serving me," he said. That is what we do here. And the best way to do this is to assume the attitude of a servant. For some months I lived in an home of a friend in India who had several servants in his house. From observing them I came to have a clearer understanding of a servant's life.

First of all, he or she knows full well that nothing in the household belongs to them; it belongs to the master of the house and his children.

(In our case, Bhagavan is the master, and the devotees and seekers are his children.)

Secondly, the servant is attentive to the needs of the master's family, even anticipates them, without in any way making them feel obliged or indebted. The servant doesn't impose rules or make requests of anyone in the master's family. Also, the servants ensure that the master's quarters are always clean and in order.

In our case, all this is done in service to Bhagavan with the sole idea or feeling that He alone is the doer and we are only His instruments. If such service is not done with the sole objective of eliminating the ego, the ego will take possession of the doership, pride will result, and all will be lost. One needs to be vigilant at all times in this respect until the feeling of doership is erased completely.

Of course, no two people are alike or can act alike. There will always be differences. But the ultimate goal is the same for us all, and that single goal should ever be in our awareness, standing before us, guiding us.

A Mother Superior of a convent once told a young nun: "My child, if you want to be holy and always happy, remember this - never let anyone know who pleases or displeases you, whom you find agreeable



Dennis Hartel

or disagreeable, what you like or dislike.”

I find that this simple instruction is most appropriate for anyone who wishes to live in the Ashrama, dedicated to the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. I believe if one wholeheartedly practices this, the feeling of “otherness” will vanish forever.

Dennis

Dennis

by Nimmi Seshadri Bharadwaj

A young lad of eighteen
War-worn, caught in between,
Seeking answers for questions umpteen
Started blazing the trail to dive within.

Years of searching seemed like a blur
The Grace of the Guru drenched him for sure.
A purpose soon found, his body, an able tool
Many scattered pieces, then, fell in place like a rule.

An oasis grew and blossomed in place
Right in the heart of a commercial maze.
Chanting, reading, singing and meditating
It's a boisterous happy family gathering.

Whispering voices, loud at times,
Kindle a silence, still and sublime.

Then one day...
A quiet quest tugged at his chest:
'Your work here is done, you have given it your best.
Get up and go, put the Master's word to test.
Don't linger around, lest your gang protest.'

Godspeed, my friend. May you fulfill your quest.
You have left a void, a little empty nest!

Those whose minds are free from attachment to riches, land, relatives, caste and the like, and who, having become pure, seek benign grace at the red lotus feet of the Lord of Compassion abiding as Arunachala, will rid themselves of their ignorance and attain the grace which shines like the rays of the shining sun. They will always abide in happiness, sunk in the ocean of Bliss. – *Necklet of Nine Gems, (Nava Mani Malai) Verse 3*

Tiger's Mouth by Suresh Natarajan
On being fortunate to come to the tiger¹ (the Sadguru) that eats up the ego

A tiger lives in a fire mountain
That's an ancient wisdom fountain.

The mountain sends down her daughter,
River of grace, sweet healing water.

The tiger – there he is, naked!
His eyes – you just can't shake it.

The tiger sits still facing south;
He eats up all with his giant mouth.

He draws his prey like a magnet.
O, it's the ultimate dragnet.

You can run but you can't hide;
He silently draws you inside.

You better give up your fight!
Ain't no chance in front of his might!

Wait, it's not what it might seem;
He just gets you out of a bad dream.

All he eats is your thought-tortured mind;
Be sure that he is one of his kind.

For he kills to make you truly live,
To swim in that river that forever gives.

A sweet death that wakes up to love;
Eternal life, the treasure trove.

To ever abide as wisdom glowing,
Beyond all learning and knowing.

And the river, she keeps on flowing.
And the tiger, he keeps on growing.

1. "He that has earned the Grace of the Guru shall undoubtedly be saved and never forsaken, just as the prey that has fallen into the tiger's jaws will never be allowed to escape." – Who Am I?

Total and Complete Self-Surrender

by Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata

Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata, the founder of Arunachala Ashrama, was swept up by Sri Bhagavan's grace and enabled to totally abide in Him. The depth and intensity of his dedication to Sri Bhagavan can be seen in the thousands of pages of prayer manuscripts that Bhagawata wrote and shared with friends. Below we give an excerpt of a manuscript written on Oct. 10th, 1990.

Forty-nine years ago today Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Arunachala Shiva Dakshinamurty Parabrahman Paramatman Sachchidananda Sarveshwarar Guru came to me through Gupta Bharata Ki Khoja (A Search In Secret India) in Himachala Hindi Bhavan, an educational and cultural organization in the City of Darjeeling in the Eastern Himalaya. Sri Bhagavan had placed me in Himachala Hindi Middle English School as a teacher and in the course of reading the Hindi Monthly Magazines I came across an advertisement for a book called Gupta Bharata Ki Khoj, the Hindi translation of Paul Brunton's famous book A Search In Secret India published sometime ago in the year 1934 in England, and in America in the year 1935. No sooner did I happen to read this book than Sri Ramana Maharshi Arunachala Shiva melted and merged me wholly and solely in His Name and Form.

As soon as I looked at his picture, my lifelong association with His Teaching of WHO AM I? SELF-INQUIRY became more clear to me than the Rising Sun of the early morning. When I was made to finish the reading of the book I felt like flying to the Holy Hill of the Holy Beacon Light, Sri Arunachala in Tiruvannamalai in South India. Were I endowed with wings to fly, I would have flown to the Lotus Feet of the Silent Sage of the Holy Arunachala Mountain, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

But Sri Arunachaleshwarar Shiva Dakshinamurty Ramana Maharshi Sadguru didn't want me to touch His Lotus Feet with my head bowed to Him simply because HE didn't want me to feel that I had seen Him tenanting the body. Shri Bhagavan Ramana

Arunachala wanted me to work out my destiny in many places in the world before HE absorbed me in His Teaching of Self-Inquiry of WHO AM I? Now forty-nine years are completed today since the Final Phase of my earthly existence was inaugurated in the Queen City, Darjeeling of the Himalayas. Right



Sri A.B. Bhagawata

from the very commencement of my life in this world Sri Bhagavan has commissioned me to devote and dedicate each and every moment of my earthly sojourn to the remembrance of His Name, "OM NAMO BHAGAVATE SRI RAMANAYA". Right now my breath is merged in the core of the Heart-Lotus and there is very little energy, initiative or desire to do anything save and except to remain absorbed in His Lotus Feet once and for all. It seems as if the Lord wished that I spend all my time in the remembrance of His Great and Blissful Name "OM NAMO BHAGAVATE SRI RAMANAYA". Undoubtedly the Mighty Maharshi is beyond word and thought and there is no strength in me to sing His praises with these words and sentences. So the best thing for me to do is to keep on swaying, swinging and swimming in the Ocean of Being, Consciousness and Bliss that Sri Sachchidananda Ramana Arunachala Bhagavan is for the fourteen spheres. I simply sit back in this chair before The Saraswati Incarnate, Hermes 3000 Typewriter, and find myself completely and totally dissolved in the Holy Arunachala Mountain.

Could there be being-consciousness existing apart from that which (eternally) is? Since that Reality exists in the Heart, free of thought, who could meditate upon that Reality called the Heart?

You should know that to remain within the Heart, as it is, is truly to meditate (upon the Heart). — First Invocation Verse, *Forty Verses on Reality*, (*Ulladu Narpadu*) by Sri Ramana Maharshi

Sri Ramana Jayanti Retreat 2019

by Evelyn Saphier

Who among us can adequately describe the joy of three full days in which, joined together as one mind and heart, we heard of Bhagavan, sang to Bhagavan, meditated on him and his words, enjoyed his silence and basked in the company of his devotees! In short, our days were spent ‘swimming, swinging and swaying’ (to quote a phrase of Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata) in the nectar of Sri Ramana Lahari—the blissful atmosphere of Sri Ramana.

On the afternoon of Sunday, January 29, 2019, the 6th Annual Sri Ramana Jayanti Retreat commenced at the Hindu Temple of South Florida in Tampa with a radiantly beautiful puja attended by close to 100 votaries. Following a beautiful feast, we adjourned to ‘the new Old Hall’ where the chanting of Aksharamanamalai, Ramana Sat Guru, bhajans and readings united us in devotion. In this blessed replica of the Old Hall of Sri Ramanasramam—where Sri Bhagavan over the course of so many years imparted his teaching of Self-knowledge in words and silence—we were immersed in his grace and confirmed in his reassurance to Suri Nagamma that where devotion is concerned distance is immaterial. Each of the three following mornings found us gathered in the early hours before dawn, listening to Vedas, hearing readings on Sri Bhagavan, chanting the sacred 1000 Names of Sri Lalitha and basking in His silence.

Set on the Hillsboro River amid majestic oaks, The Franciscan Center, where our retreats have taken place, offers a most serene setting for reflection, inspiration and rejuvenation. The overseer of Arunachala Ashram in recent years, Dennis Hartel, attended a school dedicated to the memory of St. Francis, as a boy, and like St. Francis is himself a great lover of animals and the natural world. Recently embarked upon a time of solitary renunciation, thoughts and fond informal recollections of Dennis’s friendship shared among us were definitely an integral part of our retreat!

Enriching and inspiring presentations are features that we have come to look forward to. This year, devotee-scholar Phillip Lucas’s presentations on Hindu temple architecture with special attention to the grand ancient temples of Tiruvannamalai and Adi Annamalai were illuminating in the extreme! Hari Moorthy shared his ecstatic love and deep understanding of the Tamil compositions of Bhagavan in a presentation so enthralling that its length was doubled from the scheduled one-and-a-half hours to three! The devotees were and are profoundly grateful for the labor of love dedicated to these presentations so generously shared! Our New Year’s Eve celebration began in the afternoon of the 31st in the best way possible with a

return to ‘the new Old Hall’. Here once again compositions by and on Sri Bhagavan arose from our hearts in song, and reflections on readings and deep silence filled our hearts.

A plum tree was planted by the children present to honor the memory of the blessing of Dennis Hartel’s noble friendship in our lives.

New Year’s Eve brought the young people their chance to shine, and shine they did! Rishabha Swaminathan chanted the Narayana and Durga Suktams with an unselfconscious musicality that inspired all! An elegantly simple play in which the young people in small groups personified the five Kosas, written by Geeta Bhatt and produced by Nimmi Seshadri Bharadwaja, delighted all. One and all agreed that the two traditional dances portraying incidents from the lives of Sri Krishna and Sri Subramanya presented by Haimavati Saibish were nothing short of divine! It was a special joy to see friendships forming among the younger members of the families of devotees and it is our sincere prayer that they may receive all the blessings that the grace of Bhagavan can bestow!

As the midnight hour drew near, we sat in a circle and offered warm tributes to our dear friend and inspiration, Dennis Hartel.

The robust, heartfelt chants of Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala! carried us into 2020 along with mutual wishes for a New Year of friendship and good will. On New Year’s Day, following breakfast, Swaminathan Venkataraman spoke on the topic of the future of Arunachala Ashram. Swami emphasized that with the blessings of Bhagavan and the cooperation of devotees in NY, the ashrama will continue to operate in accordance with Bhagawata and Dennis’s vision, with regular practice, and open doors extending a warm welcome of friendship to all. Our deepest thanks go out to Diana Batista, Janet and David Rubinson, Mathy and Dr. Sami Rathinasamy, Rohit Vaidya and the many devotees of the Tampa Sri Ramana satsang, whose many hours of consecrated and devoted work made our joyful gathering possible.



Sri Ramana devotees in Tampa

**Sri Bhagavan's 140th Jayanti
Programs**

Arunachala Ashrama

11 a.m. Sunday 12 January, 2020

86-06 Edgerton Blvd.

Jamaica Estates, NY 11432

Tel: 718 560-3196

Fremont Senior Center

11 a.m. Saturday 01 February, 2020

40086 Paseo Padre Pkwy

Fremont, CA 94538

Tel: 510 656-2752

Mahashivaratri at Arunchala Ashrama

86-06 Edgerton Blvd., Jamaica Estates,

New York, 11432

Friday 21 February, 2020

Program

7-10 pm: Veda Parayana, Ashvamedha Prashna,

Mahanarayana Upanishad

10:30-11:30 pm: Mahanyasa Parayana

11:30-3 am: Ekadasha Rudrabhishekam,

3-5 am: Puja with Sri Rudra Trishati, Shiva

Ashottaram, Guru Ramana Ashottaram, Arati

and Mantrapushpam, followed by Prasadam

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.

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)

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)

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

FL, Jupiter — Diana (561 768-8968 / dbatistajimenez@gmail.com)

FL, Miami — Marcelo (786 277-2982 / marcelo_addario@hotmail.com)

FL, Tampa — Mathy (813 731-3767 / mathy@rathinasamy.com)

FL, West Palm Beach — David & Janet Rubinson (954 600-0942 / arunahill@gmail.com)

GA, Atlanta area — Mangalam Kalyanam (678-546-0378 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

IL, Chicago area — Ramana Center (719-480-3530 / arunachala_elgin@yahoo.com)

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

MI, Detroit Area — Murali & Kalpana (248-210-7543 / MuraliK@hotmail.com)

NC, Chapel Hill — Ranjani Ramanan (919-338-2551 / ranjani1@yahoo.com)

NJ, West Windsor — Gurunath & Leena (609-273-6216 / gsnetravali@hotmail.com)

NY, Ogdensburg — Sri Ramanachala Mandiram (315-212-9562 / madhupaddy@rogers.com)

OH, Dublin — Abilash & Madhavi (614-789-9058 / mungamuru@hotmail.com)

TX, Austin — Sriram Vaidyanathan (vsriram_prasad@hotmail.com / 512-695-4444)

TX, Houston area — Kumar Saran (832-435-3761 / saran01@earthlink.net)

WA, Seattle area — Sridevi & Prabha (425-605-0041 / pravish87@live.com)

Washington, D.C. area — Uma & Santosh (301-528 -5526 / uma_santosh@hotmail.com)



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The state we call realization is simply being oneself, not knowing anything or becoming anything. If one has realized, he is That which alone is, and which alone has always been. — Sri Ramana Maharshi!

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