



SEPT/OCT 2020

VOL. 30, NO. 5

Sri Venkataraman Sundara Ramanan May 29th 1934 – July 21st 2020

In this issue of 'The Maharshi', we pay tribute to Sri V.S. Ramanan, the third President of Sri Ramanasramam. Throughout his 26 years as Ashram President, he lived his life in service to the Ashram and its devotees, surrendered entirely at the feet of his guide and guru, Sri Ramana Maharshi. His kind and unassuming manner made all feel at ease, and his welcoming smile, as we entered Sri Ramanasramam, will remain etched in our hearts. We are fortunate to share the following reminiscences from family members who relate their experiences of the kindness and guidance received from Sri Sundaram, whose life was centered on Sri Bhagavan alone.

Appa, the Silent, Humble Servant of Bhagavan by Dr. Venkat Ramanan

Appa merged gently into Arunachala on July 21st, 2020 at 9:21 a.m. It was a quiet moment with my mother and me whispering “Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya” in his ears, after he had listened to *Aksharamanamalai* and *Ramana Sat Guru* a few minutes before. One deep last breath and then no more. No struggle, no signs of agony. He had been comfortable the night before and only developed respiratory distress a couple of hours before his demise. The cremation took place that afternoon. As the priest remarked, “Even in his death, he gave no trouble to anyone. Nobody’s sleep was disturbed, people came late morning to pay respects to his body and by afternoon the cremation was over.” How typical of Appa! He took care to trouble no one even in his death.

Appa was fond of quoting a former devotee: “Our Bhagavan is great. Forget the highest teachings. Can any mortal live such a perfect life? Just that is enough to convince me that HE is Bhagavan.” The saint’s life is HIS message. Appa tried to follow the quality of *samatva*, equality, exemplified by Bhagavan all his life. He was hard-working, dogged, disciplined in his daily life, and that extended to his spiritual practice. I cannot

remember a single day that he was not up before 4 a.m. and, after enjoying his cup of coffee, sat down for his prayers. He was very fond of Sanskrit and would start the morning by reciting *Ramana Gita*, *Ramana Chatvarimsat* and *Sat Darshanam*. After coming to the Ashram, the evenings were spent in the parayanam. He enjoyed doing *Giri Pradakshina*, leaving the Ashram by 4 a.m. and coming back for the morning milk pooja.

I have received several emails of condolence from his devotee-friends, the common theme being what a quiet and humble man he was. As he used to say, “The job of the President of Ramanasramam is to clean the shoes of the devotees.” He exemplified many aspects of servant leadership. As our own Dennis used to say, “True leaders are great followers.” Dennis and Mohan show us every day how leaders lead and inspire.

He would emphasize to us *the importance of surrender to the guru*, quoting Sri Bhagavan that if complete surrender were not possible in the beginning, partial surrender was. Over time, partial surrender will become complete. Another quote of Sri Bhagavan that I remember him advising me with was: “If the intentions are sincere, the method of spiritual progress will find its own way. Everything will come right in the end.”

Yes, Appa, you have shown me that everything does come right in the end.

Appa

by Nitya Ramanan

I never thought of Appa as a father-in-law because he never behaved like one. I first met him when he came straight from the airport to meet me (without notice) on the morning of my formal engagement. It was quite startling to open the door to see a man with a lovely smile who introduced himself: “I am Sundaram.” He later told me that he had been too impatient to wait till evening to meet Anand’s fiancé.

Appa was always kind, accommodating, funny and totally natural. His ways were very comforting for me as I had lost my father at a young age and thus never felt the need to be formal around him.

He loved helping with the grandchildren in any way he could. He would watch football with Advait just to enjoy Advait’s commentary and excitement. He used to attend Advait’s football practices regularly even though he confessed that he did not know which helmeted kid was his grandson! He loved letting Advait or Akshara sleep with him though both used to move around a lot and Appa never had a restful sleep on those occasions. Apparently, to Appa, Advait’s kicks were akin to kisses, so he never complained!

Advait travelled to India alone and spent 6 weeks with his grandparents twice, when he was 7 and 9 years of age. He had such a great time at Tiruvannamalai and was pampered so much that he never accepted that his Thatha could have ever been a strict father!

Appa loved going for long walks in our neighborhood twice a day. Though he was not very interested in gardening, he would diligently water the plants I had planted and was very excited when they bloomed.

Amma and he loved sightseeing and they always enjoyed the local history, the gardens, etc. of the places we visited, and Appa was in charge of keeping us on time!

He would say that the only thing he could do in the kitchen was eat the food but that he was “a very good vessel washer”. It was a joke in the family as he would vigorously wash a single vessel for 30 minutes; this, of course, assured that he was never asked to help with the dishes and he would humorously ask for this chore regularly!

His love for coffee is well known. He loved roasting the beans, grinding them fresh daily, and experimenting with different types of coffee beans. It

was wonderful to wake up to the smell of fresh coffee, and we would have a withdrawal reaction after he left for Tiruvannamalai.

He loved writing Bhagavan’s works with their meanings in notebooks. He used to do his daily Parayanam with Amma and it was always around where I was doing something with the children so that I could also hear it.

Appa would patiently accompany me to stores – a very different experience for me as no other male in the family liked shopping! Whenever we purchased new clothes for a festival or function, he would end up wearing them a couple of days later. This was exactly what my father had done and I could never get over this coincidence.

We bonded over our mutual love for books, history, politics, and cricket. He was very happy that I loved sports and would wake me up to watch early morning games. I would frequently ask him to pray to Bhagavan for India to win a game (also when the Seahawks were in the Super Bowl!) He would call me back and say that he had gone to the Shrine and thought about the team and that Bhagavan would do the rest and that I should accept the result.

He loved to call to share a joke he had read in the *Reader’s Digest* or an article from “Know your English”.

His love and admiration for my grandfather (Prof. K. Swaminathan) is well known. After my wedding, he started calling my aunt “Maggie akka” which thrilled her no end, as no one else called her that despite her being the oldest among her cousins. He would talk to and regularly gift, lend and mail books to my mother and my aunt in Delhi – books on Bhagavan, history, and culture.

He loved spending time with the D.C. Satsang group, recounting the experiences of Bhagavan’s devotees and discussing Bhagavan’s words.

Apart from all this, what I loved most about Appa was his unalloyed devotion to Bhagavan. He exemplified a deep Guru bhakti. He always maintained that all Ramana devotees are Bhagavan’s family and that Ramanasramam is their home. Appa was unpretentious; he did his work not as a “president” but as a humble servant of Bhagavan’s devotees with total happiness and complete integrity.

I miss him.

My Father

by Aruna Ramanan

My father, Sri V.S. Ramanan, passed away to rest under the holy feet of Sri Bhagavan on July 21st, 2020. The last moments of his passing were peaceful, surrounded by Amma, Anand, Mani Chitappa, and Sarasa Athai, hearing the mantra “Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya”. As he was being cremated *Aksharamanamalai* was being chanted in devotees’ homes across the globe. This is all Appa would have wanted.

Yet, in worldly life we need to write, read, and speak about Appa’s life in order to inspire ourselves and share in our sense of loss. A wise woman once told me happiness increases when shared while sorrow when shared, decreases.

Growing up in Bhagavan’s family there has always been a blurring of lines between family and the devotees of Bhagavan. What I mean is, devotees considered us family and my grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts, saw devotees as family.

This has been reaffirmed by several messages I have received from devotee brothers and sisters stating that Appa had always greeted them naturally, as if they were coming to their own home when entering Sri Ramanasramam, and his message during their goodbyes: “Come back soon.”

Appa would recollect beautiful moments he had shared with devotees during family gatherings and outings. He would recall a long walk he had taken with Dennis Hartel in Nova Scotia, along open fields with grazing cows. Apparently, several cows quietly going about their life decided to run towards the fence and line up in single file to look at these two men walking briskly, and reward them with their quiet curiosity for several minutes! He had a wonderful stay that time in both the Nova Scotia and New York Ashramas and was overwhelmed with the warmth and natural affection bestowed on him then.

We had once taken Appa to a Thai restaurant in Connecticut and were instructing the waitress that we were vegetarians and that there should be no egg nor fish sauce in our ordered food. Appa had a slightly concerned look on his face as I was reiterating my instructions once over. When I asked him the reason



Smt. Susila and Sri Sundaram visiting Arunachala Ashrama, Nova Scotia, Canada in 2005

for his concern, he said, “Ram Mohan is in Thailand now, and I hope he finds decent vegetarian food!” Such was Appa’s connection with devotees of Bhagavan.

Appa loved children and they him. He had a ready choice of the best chocolates and candies to reward them for their spontaneous, innocent love and shy smiles.

And then there is the story of our dog, Leela, who was picky about the room she slept in. She had to be in our bedroom or alone by herself. But when Appa and Amma visited, she constantly kept them company even though neither were professed dog lovers!

Appa’s zest for life was very contagious. He loved gourmet chocolates, coffee, and new clothes. Get him a shirt and he would proudly sport it the same day and tell almost everyone in the Ashram that “Aruna got this for me.”

His love for a good joke is well known too. He would often call me in America to quickly narrate a joke and hang up after a hearty laugh.

Another trait of Appa’s that I would like to emulate is his graciousness to one and all. What is graciousness when analyzed? It has to be equanimous, spontaneous and natural. For Appa, every devotee who entered the hallowed arch of the Ashram had been beckoned by Bhagavan and so was treated with the same warmth and smile. As long as he could walk unaided he would be the first to receive the prasada/bhiksha from Narayana Seva, ensuring that it was worthy of the sadhus, devotees and the poor.

While Appa was totally consumed by love for Bhagavan over the last decade of his life, he would also talk about Mahatma Gandhi and his commitment to a life of truth. Appa was impatient with dishonesty and lack of transparency. He would often quote Gandhiji's statement: "Truth is God and God is truth." These are some cherished memories of my father, Sri V.S. Ramanan, who lived the life of a devotee of the devotees of Bhagavan.

Memories of our Grandfather by Swaroopa and Siddharth Ramkumar

From Swaroopa:

Having grown up in Connecticut, I was only lucky enough to be graced by my grandfather's presence every other year or so, for a stretch of a week or two at a time. Although we did not get to see one another as much as I wish we had, he has always been one of my favorite people. Such was the intensity of his love for family that I could feel it unquestionably, always. Even now, while I am missing his presence in my life, I can access those feelings of warmth and love just by thinking of my favorite memories of him. I think the best way I can demonstrate our relationship is by sharing one of these memories.

When I was around eight years old, Thatha and Patti came to visit us in Connecticut. It was a warm summer day, and I remember sitting outside with our family. All of a sudden, my best friend's mother called our house concerned because I had missed their birthday party. I was extremely upset with my mother who must have just forgotten that the party was scheduled on that day. Seeing how angry I was at my mother, Thatha came over to me and said gently, "Don't blame your mother, it's my fault... I forgot to remind you about the party!" Of course, there was no way he could have known that this party existed, but he wanted to console me and simultaneously shield my mother from my tantrum! Thatha would always say, "You are your mother's baby, but she is still my baby."

Although I always admired Thatha for his intellect and discipline, he was also always such a doting father and grandfather. He lived his life expressing his unconditional care for others, and this is the quality that I cherish most about him.

அன்பொடுன் னாமங்கே ளன்பர்த மன்பருக்
கன்பனா யிடவரு ளருணாசலா

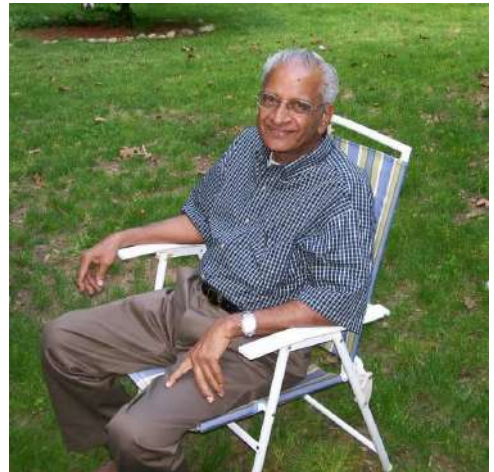
Anboḍun nāmaṅkēl anbar-dam anbaruk
Kan-banā yīḍa-varu! Aruṇāchalā

Let me be the votary of the votaries of those who hear
Thy name with love, Oh Arunachala!

– Verse 104, Aksharamanamalai

From Siddharth:

I have been blessed to have spent so much time with Sundaram Thatha over the course of nearly three decades. If there was one story that Thatha would keep bringing up when I saw him, it was the one about my sister and me when I was in pre-school (3 years of age). One specific day when Thatha picked me up from school, I had a determined look on my face and appeared really focused. It was unusual of me to not greet him with my full attention. When we arrived at home, I immediately ran into the house and found my way to the top floor. All of a sudden, everyone heard my sister (a baby at the time) crying loudly. Everyone, in alarm, ran upstairs to see what had happened. They found my sister covered in saliva from my kisses. Thatha told me that the teacher had made everyone promise that they would kiss their sibling(s) after coming back from school. He was very shocked at how seriously I had taken that requirement from the teacher. Every time Thatha recounted this story I could see the glow in his eyes and the happiness he felt when I kissed my sister. This will forever be etched in my mind as a story that Thatha and I shared together.



Punya and Pavana by Ranjani Ramanan

An online satsang was held by Arunachala Ashrama on July 23th in honor of Sri Sundaram. During the satsang, his daughter-in-law, Ranjani Ramanan, gave the following moving tribute, reading from the story of Punya and Pavana, which had been given to her by her father-in-law. Sri Bhagavan had often referred to this story to assuage the grief of devotees who had lost dear ones. Highlights of Ranjani's reading are given below.

Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

As many of you know my late husband, Ravi Ramanan, was Sri Sundara Ramanan and Smt. Susila Ramanan's youngest son. Ravi merged with Arunachala in 2010 after a two-year battle with brain cancer. In 2011, one year after Ravi's passing, my father-in-law Sundara mama and Susila mami came to visit my children and me in North Carolina and stayed with us for a few weeks. During that time Sundara mama gave me a printout of the story of Punya and Pavana from *Yoga Vāsishtha* and asked me to read it as he thought that it would give me some solace. Since then, I have gone back to this story often and drawn tremendous strength from it each time. The story of Punya and Pavana was published in the September/October, 2004 issue of *The Maharshi*.

Punya and Pavana

A group of Bengalis have come. One of them has recently lost a child. He put the question to Bhagavan: "Why did that child die so young? Is it his karma or our karma that we should have this grief?" Bhagavan: "The prarabdha which the child had to work out in this life was over and so it passed away. So we may call it the child's karma. So far as you are concerned, it is open to you not to grieve over it, but to remain calm and unaffected by it, being convinced that the child was not yours but always only God's, that God gave and God took away." And in this connection Bhagavan took out the *Yoga Vāsishtha* in English to refer to the story of Punya and Pavana. Strange to say, when he casually opened the book, it

actually opened at the story he had in mind. And from the book he asked me to read out the portion where Punya advises his brother Pavana not to grieve foolishly over the death of their parents, pointing out that Pavana had had innumerable births in the past, in each one of which he had a number of relations and that exactly as he is not mourning for the death of all those relations now, he should not now mourn for the death of their father either."

– Day by Day with Bhagavan, 18-9-45, Afternoon

The full story, found in Swami Venkatesananda's *Vāsishtha's Yoga*, not only delightfully delineates the transitoriness of bodily existence, but also describes the way to extricate ourselves from its hold.

VASISTHA continued:

O Rama, in this connection there is an ancient legend which I shall narrate to you.

In the continent known as Jambudvipa there is a great mountain known as Mahendra. In the forests on the slopes of that mountain many holy men and sages lived. They had in fact brought down onto that mountain the river Vyoma Ganga (or Akasha Ganga) for their bath, drinking, etc. On the bank of this river there lived a holy man named Dirghatapa who was, as his name implies, the very embodiment of ceaseless austerity.

This ascetic had two sons named Punya and Pavana. Of these, Punya had reached full enlightenment, but Pavana, though he had overcome ignorance, had not yet reached full enlightenment and hence he had semi-wisdom.

With the inexorable passage of invisible and intangible time, the sage Dirghatapa (who had freed himself from every form of attachment and craving) had grown in age and, even as a bird flies away from its cage, abandoned the body and reached the state of utter purity. Using the yogic method she had learned from him, his wife, too, followed him.

At this sudden departure of the parents, Pavana was sunk in grief and he wailed aloud inconsolably. Punya, on the other hand, performed the funeral ceremonies but remained unmoved by the bereavement. He approached his grieving brother, Pavana.

PUNYA said:

Brother, why do you bring this dreadful sorrow upon yourself? The blindness of ignorance alone is the

cause of this torrential downpour of tears from your eyes. Our father has departed from here along with our mother to that state of liberation or the highest state, which is natural to all beings and is the very being of those who have overcome the self. Why do you grieve when they have returned to their own nature? You have ignorantly bound yourself to the notions of 'father' and 'mother'; and yet you grieve for those who are liberated from such ignorance! He was not your father, nor was she your mother, nor were you their son. You have had countless fathers and mothers. They have had countless children. Countless have been your incarnations! And, if you wish to grieve over the death of parents, why do you not grieve for all those countless beings unceasingly? Noble one, what you see as the world is only an illusory appearance. In truth, there are neither friends nor relatives. Hence, there is neither death nor separation. All these wonderful signs of prosperity that you see around you are tricks, some of which last for three days and others for five days! With your keen intelligence enquire into the truth; abandon notions of 'I', 'you', etc., and of 'He is dead', 'He is gone'. All these are your own notions, not truth.

PUNYA continued:

These false notions of father, mother, friend, relative, etc., are swept aside by wisdom as dust is swept away by wind. These relatives are not based on truth, they are but words! If one is thought of as a friend, he is a friend; if he is thought of as the other, he is the other! When all this is seen as the one omnipresent being, where is the distinction between the friend and the other?

Brother, enquire within yourself: this body is inert and it is composed of blood, flesh, bones, etc.; what is the 'I' in it? If you thus enquire into the truth, you will realize that there is nothing which is 'you', nor anything which is 'I'. What is called Punya or Pavana is but a false notion.

However, if you still think 'I am', then in the incarnations past you have had very many relatives. Why do you not grieve for their death? [Here, Punya describes the many births as many different life forms that both he and Pavana have previously had.]

In all these embodiments there were countless relatives. Whom shall I mourn? Considering this, I do

not grieve.

All along this path of life relatives are strewn like dry leaves on a forest path. What can be the proper cause for grief or joy in this world, brother? Let us therefore abandon all these ignorant notions and remain at peace. Abandon the notion of the world which arises in your mind as the 'I' and, be still, neither going up nor falling down! You have no unhappiness, no birth, no father, no mother; you are the Self and naught else. The sages perceive the middle path, they see what is at the moment, they are at peace, they are established in witness consciousness, they shine like a lamp in darkness, in whose light events happen (without the lamp being involved).

VASISTHA:

Thus instructed by his brother, Pavana was awakened. Both of them remained as enlightened beings, endowed with wisdom and direct realization. They roamed the forest doing what they pleased but without blemish. In course of time, they abandoned their embodiment and attained final liberation, as a lamp without fuel.



Our Childhood with Sundaram Thatha

by Rasika and Raksha Ramanan

Our Sundaram Thatha balanced two roles exceedingly well, the caretaker of the Ashram and the caretaker of our family. With unconditional love, Thatha navigated both of these roles while embodying Bhagavan's teaching that all should be treated equally. Passing along these values, he once told us the story of a dog who approached Bhagavan, gravely ill and foaming at the mouth. In response, Bhagavan gingerly wiped the dog's mouth with his own towel. While describing how kindly Bhagavan treated the animal, tears streamed down Thatha's face. We saw him epitomize these values himself one Mother's Day, when our mother called to tell him about the gift we had given her. Later that day, Sundaram Thatha called again and specifically asked to speak with us, which was rather unusual. Without any pleasantries, he asked if we had done anything special for our grandmother who lived with us at the time. After we told him that we had given both of them gifts, he happily hung up. He simply wanted to confirm that we had shown our grandmother the same love we had shown our own mother.

As the two of us grew up, so too did our relationship with Sundaram Thatha. Once, when Thatha was

visiting us and Raksha was around 9 years old, he would insist on walking her to the school bus stop each morning despite her slight embarrassment at her Thatha's *veshti* (a traditional Indian garment worn by men). Years later, as teenagers on a trip to India in 2013, when Thatha and Patti slowed down and needed more help themselves, we held their hands to help them navigate the crowded, uneven ground approaching the Azhagar Temple in Madurai.

In a similar vein, as young children, Thatha would bring us each a pack of his favorite Little Hearts biscuits every time he went to the grocery store. During our last trip to see him before his passing, we brought him Little Hearts, and although he could no longer verbally communicate, the look in his eyes and his cheeky smile were more than enough to tell us that he was thrilled. Although our relationship evolved throughout our childhood, his affection, often expressed through a packet of Little Hearts biscuits, remained a constant.



உருப்பற்றி யுண்டா முருப்பற்றி நிற்கு
முருப்பற்றி யுண்டுமிக வோங்கு – முருவிட்
டுருப்பற்றுந் தேடினா லோட்டம் பிடிக்கு
முருவற்ற பேயகந்தை யோர்வாய் – கருவாம்

Urup-paṭṭri uṇḍām urup-paṭṭri niṟ-kum
Urup-paṭṭri uṇḍu-miga vōṅgum – uru viṭṭu
Urup-paṭṭrum tēḍi-nāl ōṭṭam piḍik-kum
Uru-vaṭṭra pēi ahandai ōrvāi – karuvām

25. Holding a form, it arises; holding a form, it stays; holding and feeding on a form, it thrives. Leaving one form, it takes hold of another. When sought, it takes to flight. Such is the ego ghost with no form of its own.

– Ulladu Narpadu, v. 25

At the Feet of Sri Bhagavan

That Sri Bhagavan's grace guided Sri Sundaram throughout his life is an indisputable fact. From an early age, as evinced by the photos below, the divine presence of Sri Arunachala Ramana has been immutable.



Top Left: Sri Bhagavan leading with Sri Sundaram behind, followed by Madhava Swami.

Top Right: Sri Bhagavan followed by Sri Sundaram and Madhava Swami.

Bottom Left: Sri Bhagavan with Sri Sundaram standing beside him (left).

Bottom Right: Sri Bhagavan with Sri Sundaram standing in front of Subbaier.

Sri Venkataraman Sundara Ramanan May 29th 1934 – July 21st 2020

Sri V.S. Ramanan, the third President of Sri Ramanasramam, affectionately known as Sundaranna, merged at the feet of his Lord and guru Sri Ramana Maharshi on the morning of July 21st, 2020, at 9:21 a.m.

Devotees the world over will miss his gentle, unassuming manner, his steady and supportive friendship, and his inspirational one-pointed devotion to Sri Bhagavan.

Sri Sundaram retired from his work as a chemical engineer in 1992, at which time he returned to Tiruvannamalai to assist his father, Sri T. N. Venkataraman, in the Ashram management. Two years later, when his father retired from the position of Ashram President and took *sannyasa*, Sri Sundaram accepted the position of President, and gracefully and wholeheartedly served the devotees in this capacity until June 17th of this year.

His tenure of 26 years as President was marked by a notable expansion of Ashram activities, and the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi were made available to an ever-increasing number of devotees worldwide. This was due to Sri Sundaram's strong support of the translation and publication of Sri Bhagavan's works in numerous languages, as well as to the restoration, preservation and sharing of Sri Bhagavan's photographs, stored in the specially-constructed Ashram Archives building.

New residences to accommodate an increasing amount of visitors to the Ashram were built, as well as an extension to the dining room.

Restoration of the Morvi compound, as well as the addition of a new library and auditorium were completed also. The new dispensary of the Ashram, which serves locals and visitors alike, was inaugurated under his supervision.

Other preservation and renovation projects included work on Sri Bhagavan's birthplace in Tiruchuzhi, as well as the temples in Tirukoilur and Tiruchuzhi.

Another remarkable development was seen in the way the Ashram was ushered into the digital age; devotees unable to be physically present in the Ashram now attend, via the internet, events such as Jayanti, Mahapuja, Aradhana and Kartigai Deepam.



Of course, underlying all these activities was Sri Sundaram's deep abidance in the teachings and guidance of Sri Bhagavan as seen in his selfless service to devotees as they visited Sri Bhagavan's abode. No devotee was exempt from his beaming smile and warm welcome.

Sri Sundaram is survived by his loving wife, Susila; his son Anand, the current President of the Ashram; his daughter, Aruna, and son-in-law, Ramkumar; daughters-in-law, Nitya and Ranjani, and six grandchildren; along with his two brothers, Sri V.S. Mani and Sri Ganesan, who offered him great support in serving the Ashram.

Sri Sundaram passed away peacefully surrounded by loved ones chanting "Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya" in his final moments. At the time of his cremation, devotees the world over chanted his beloved *Aksharamanamalai*, *The Marital Garland of Letters to Sri Arunachala*.

Advent at Arunachala Celebration

The 124th Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala was celebrated on Sunday, August 30th in a historic manner. The online gathering, organized by Arunachala Ashrama, brought together Sri Bhagavan's devotees from various satsang groups all over North America as well as from Sri Ramanasramam, India. Devotees offered bhajans, readings, recitations, plays and dance to commemorate the auspicious day, that marks the 16-year-old sage's arrival at Arunachala. The day-long celebration began at 8 a.m. EST from Arunachala Ashrama in New York City, and started with participants from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts. The function began with the recitation of *Aksharamanamalai* by Smt. Aruna Ramanan. Following this, the President of Arunachala Ashrama, Sri Mohan Ramaswami, whose initiative spearheaded this event, gave a welcoming address. He recalled how Dennis Hartel had been inspired to recreate, in 1996, the journey undertaken by Sri Bhagavan from Madurai to Arunachala. This journey now continues as a yearly event in India, culminating in the arrival of the participating pilgrims at Arunachala.

Musical presentations were streamed by artists who joined the proceedings from Ramanasramam, much to the delight of the devotees.

Sri Ram Mohan, Editor of *Ramanodayam*, gave an illuminating talk on the significance of Advent Day. Following his presentation, the function continued from centers in Washington, D.C., Maryland and Ottawa. Smt. Darlene Karamanos from Arunachala Ashrama in Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, Canada read from the prayer manuscripts of the founder of Arunachala Ashrama, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat.

Inspiring offerings were given by all the centers, including Toronto, Michigan, Ohio, Houston, Austin, Tampa, North Carolina, Georgia, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle and Vancouver. Sri Bhagavan's compositions, such as *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* and *Ulladu Narpadu*, were shared, as well as *Chatvarimsat, 40 Verses in Praise of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, and *Sat Darshanam* by Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni.

The shining presentations given by the children during the function were a wonder to behold! Their

recitations, songs, dance and plays brought smiles to our faces and joy to our hearts.

The commemoration returned to Arunachala Ashrama, New York at approximately 7 p.m. EST. The President of Sri Ramanasramam, Dr. Venkat Ramanan, addressed the satsang during the evening. He wished all the participants a happy Advent day, the day which commemorates the journey undertaken by Sri Bhagavan 124 years ago. Sri Bhagavan's death-experience, which took place about 6 weeks before he left Madurai, brought about the re-emergence of the sadhana of self-enquiry, well known to the devotees of Sri Bhagavan. The further significance of September 1st, as Dr. Venkat explained, is that it underscores the importance of self-surrender or *saranagati*. This is seen in the life of the young boy who at 16 years of age surrendered his life to Sri Arunachala. These two pillars of spiritual practice, self-enquiry and self-surrender, are thus revealed as one, leading to the culmination of divine grace, Self-realization.

"Let us wake up from the dream of worldly pursuits to the reality of the purpose of human birth, to realize the Self, the only reality in this unreal world," he exhorted. The greatness of satsang, he emphasized, is that it reminds us of this supreme purpose.

Dr. Venkat concluded by saying, "Let us re-energize our spiritual practices to pursue this noble path! Thank you for the opportunity to bask in this event with all of you, especially the small children. *Om Namoh Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya.*"

The address was followed by Vedic chanting and *Na Karmana*. Smt. Susila Ramanan sang the concluding offering, *Vazhga Swayamprakasam*.

This twelve-hour event was streamed live and can be seen in its entirety on the Arunachala Ashrama's YouTube Channel.

Our thanks to everyone for their organizational efforts which enabled this joyous celebration. The solid support of the technical team (comprised of Baskar, Anantha, Badri and Nanda) allowed the function to continue seamlessly. The devotees were given the opportunity to sit together at the feet of Sri Bhagavan, united as one family, and openheartedly share their devotion and dedication to their guru during this wonderful event. Sri Bhagavan's abundant grace was indeed experienced by all on this memorable day of Advent.



Advent Day Celebration: The young devotees' recitations, plays and dance inspired us all! Above are some photos of Sri Bhagavan's grace being shared by his children. The complete performances of all the devotees can be seen on Arunachala Ashrama's YouTube channel.

Smt. Raksha Vaidyanathan

Smt. Raksha Vaidyanathan, wife of Sri Thinium Vaidyanathan, merged with Sri Arunachala Ramana on Wednesday, August 26th, 2020. Devotees of Arunachala Ashrama were fortunate to experience her kindness, compassion and devotion over the years. Her friendship with our devotees continued after the couple moved to settle in Tiruvannamalai in 2000. Our prayers are with Sri Vaidyanathan, and the family and friends of Smt. Raksha, a sincere, ardent devotee of Sri Bhagavan Ramana.



Sri Vaidyanathan and Smt. Raksha performing puja at Arunachala Ashrama.

Updates

Due to continuing health restrictions, Arunachala Ashrama, New York remains closed to visitors until further notice. Please visit our [web page](#) for the latest information. The Ashrama has been having regular satsangs online which can be found on our [virtual events](#) page. Devotees' digital offerings are shared on the Ashrama's [Peace Portal](#).

The Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama will remain open to daytime visitors but will not have any overnight guests for the remainder of the year. We all wish to help keep everyone safe in this time of COVID.

For a listing of other centers that are offering virtual satsangs at this time, please see our [online satsangs](#).

For Ramana Satsang locations in the USA and Canada, please see [this listing](#).