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Krishnaswami Hall Sarvadhikari

Krishnaswami first came to Sri Bhagavan in 1936 and served him continuously as a devoted attendant until Sri Bhagavan's Mahanirvana in 1950. An interview with Krishnaswami was recorded by Dennis and Jim Hartel in 1989 at Sri Ramanasramam, with J. Jayaraman asking him about his life with Sri Bhagavan. This interview was translated by devotees of Arunachala Ashrama upon Dennis and Jim's return to America. We present below excerpts from Krishnaswami's inspiring insights, describing the daily routine at the ashram, instructions for aspirants and Sri Bhagavan's glance of grace .

I am from Srirangam, near Tiruchi, and it is my *purva punya* (past good deeds) that have brought me to the lotus feet of Sri Bhagavan. Only after me did many others come to serve Bhagavan. I served Bhagavan from 1936 up to 1950. I was popularly known as 'Hall Sarvadhikari'. I appointed seven people to do my job after me. Everyone listened to me and I was all in all. The current President [at that time Sri T.N. Venkataraman] came to Bhagavan only after I did. Sundaram and Ganesan were born after I came here.

We used to get up at 3 a.m. and go out for our ablutions. We did this by the side of the stream since there were no bathrooms then. After having a bath, kitchen work would begin with the cutting of vegetables. Once the vegetables were done, we used to help with other preparations. Subramanian Swami, Kumaraswami and I would help in the kitchen till 6 a.m. Bhagavan would then go to the goshala (cowshed) and return at 7 a.m. for his bath. The breakfast bell would be rung only after I was ready. After breakfast, Bhagavan would take a walk on the hill between 7:30 and 8. This would be followed by Veda parayana in the hall. Bhagavan was very punctual in this daily routine. At 9 o'clock he would again go out either to answer nature's call or just for a

stroll. Between 9:30 and 10 a.m., Bhagavan would be at the goshala where he would peruse the day's mail. Lunch used to be at 11 a.m. in those days and would be over in about an hour. Bhagavan never failed to take a walk after lunch, even in summer when the sun would be blazing hot. We used to roam around Palakothu till 12 o'clock. Bhagavan would rest between 12:30 and 2:30 when the hall would be out of bounds for visitors, although the doors remained open. During this time, I would feed cashews to the large number of squirrels that used to assemble in the hall.

Coffee would be served at 2:30. Devotees coming from the town sometimes brought coffee and snacks which would be distributed too. I used to assemble the devotees in the hall and handle the distribution of the eatables brought by them. I used to manage this single-handedly before Madhavaswami came, but he went away after sometime. I then successively appointed Salem Rajgopal Iyer, Sivanadaswami, Anjaneyulu, Vaikuntavasa and Venkataratnam to help me in the hall. Even Satyananda Swami was engaged in service by me. Because I appointed seven people in the hall, I was called Hall Sarvadhikari. We were very punctual and clean in our daily routine.

Bhagavan used to say with a laugh, "A person

performs namaskaram to the Swami or an idol, and expects all his prayers fulfilled and boons granted. Who wants this namaskaram? Even before they prostrate physically, I prostrate to them mentally.” Bhagavan would add, “Who wants all this namaskaram? Try to know who you are. That is the import of namaskaram. I would not be taken in by all these gymnastics.”

One day, he told me, “One could produce God through alchemy. But even if that God tells you something, don’t believe it. If I come in front of you [in a vision], don’t believe it. The seer is most important. YOU ARE! That’s most important. Concentrate on the seer, not the seen. All that you see is false and the seer alone is true. All that you read, all knowledge that you gather, is useless, until you hold on to your Self. YOU ARE THE TRUTH, not what’s being told to you, not what you see. What you read in books may be knowledge, but it is not truth.”

Bhagavan once told me, “You are not born to the mother. What have you to do with the body? All books and shastras say that nobody is born. So their teaching is valid for all.”

One devotee used to decorate the deity in the Mother’s shrine during the Navaratri festival. He was an expert in decoration, and the festival would be celebrated in a grand manner. Chinnaswami wanted Sri Bhagavan to come and see the deities, grandly decorated as they were. After observing the deities, Bhagavan remarked, “Does God want all these clothes? Can one conceive of a god bedecked with jewelry? It is all falsehood and untruth.” (Suri Nagamma has given a similar account in *Letters from Ramanasramam*. – Ed.)

However, no one, including myself, follows Bhagavan. We do not adhere to anything that he has said. If one surrenders to Bhagavan completely and follows all that he has said, he will definitely lift us up even today.

Bhagavan once told me something very significant. He said that he could never differentiate between the male and female sex. He used to add, “I am in everything.” As the Gita says, that which is inside everybody is the same. Only the bodies differ. This was Bhagavan’s experience during every minute of the day. Such was the state in which he lived. He is all-pervading, and that is just not so many words. I saw Bhagavan live in that state of all-pervasiveness.

There was a small puppy in the ashram that was lame. It would eat anything that was offered.

Ananthanarayan Rao, a devotee and a veterinarian, was asked by Bhagavan to take care of the animals. In the morning this puppy would be given idlis for breakfast. It would then relieve itself in front of the ashram office and create nuisance for people there.

When I was informed of this, I was angry at the dog and instructed kitchen staff not to give him idlis. The dog ran to complain to Sri Bhagavan. When I told Bhagavan that the dog was denied idlis in accordance with my instructions, Bhagavan was annoyed and said, “Oho! Oho! You are using your power. So many people have used power and have become power mad, now it’s your turn.” The next morning when Sri Bhagavan sat for breakfast, he refused to take idlis and relented only when all of us prostrated before him, begging him to have his breakfast and promising that the puppy would be fed every day. Chinnaswami came at last, prostrated before Bhagavan and asked for forgiveness too. Bhagavan said, “What can you do? This fellow (pointing to me) has done this. He has demonstrated his power.”

The puppy used to go out and eat everything including human waste and then come to Bhagavan. He would take his towel and wipe the puppy’s face, and keep the towel under his armpit. The towel would not be cleaned until the next morning. When we showed our displeasure, Bhagavan used to retort, “Yes, yes, you all pretend to be clean. Only the outside is clean. Is the inside clean?” When he said that, we all felt very ashamed. It is impossible to describe Bhagavan’s state. He is the only *jnani* in the Kaliyuga. Though there have been many great men throughout the ages, no one can compare to Sri Bhagavan. He is absolutely unique, and above everyone else.

Bhagavan’s Glimpse of Grace

Bhagavan’s look used to be like that of a lion, so majestic and powerful. Many people used to come with lots of questions, but one look from Bhagavan and they would be silenced. Silence would prevail all over. It is impossible to describe that state and the greatness of Bhagavan’s glimpse of grace, but it was so very palpable.

A man came into the hall with a friend, boasting about how many questions he would put to Bhagavan. After a few days, the friend asked him why he hadn’t asked any questions. The reply was that it was impossible to do so, as there was no mind to raise questions in Bhagavan’s presence. “One look from Bhagavan and everything was silenced,” he said.

Bhagavan's silence and also his look (*drishti*) were so powerful. I have been a witness to many situations like this.

How many great people and politicians came to see Bhagavan! In early 1938 or so, Rajendra Prasad and Jammalal Bajaj came from Gandhiji with specific instructions to ask Bhagavan when India would get its independence. M.S. Kamnath, the Editor of The Sunday Times, a weekly paper from Madras, accompanied them. He used to write articles in his paper. The Sunday Times, a popular newspaper, was circulated all over India, and thus had a far reaching effect. M.S. Kamnath used to come here with his staff to celebrate Bhagavan's Jayanti and Mother's Mahapuja. It was Rajendra Prasad who had come with specific questions, but throughout their stay of seven days, he stayed quiet while Jammalal Bajaj asked many questions. Before they left, Rajendra Prasad, with great hesitation asked Bhagavan, "I am going back to Babuji (Gandhiji). What message can I take to him?" Bhagavan then graciously told him, "The same power is working here and there, and at the appropriate time everything will be fulfilled."

Bhagavan's Last Days

Bhagavan was in the Nirvana Hall, afflicted with cancer. A very popular Ayurvedic doctor from Calcutta was asked to assess Sri Bhagavan. The doctor, with great devotion, prescribed an ayurvedic medicine. Bhagavan hesitated and even said that since the body had to be dropped anyhow, what would it matter how? So there were all indications that he was not prepared to take any medications, but somehow it was administered. With this medication, an unfortunate side effect (intestinal pain) occurred. This is what I inferred from a later statement of Bhagavan. The doctor was to go to Rameshwaram after treating Bhagavan, but sent a telegraph from Tiruchi that he was coming back. Bhagavan said to me, "The Yama who had gone away is coming back." Bhagavan gave several indications that he wanted no treatment. One day, he threatened to drop his body by not eating anything. For two days, no one was allowed to enter the hall. I pleaded with Bhagavan that I would take care of all his bodily needs, and that he should eat and stay inside that room. One day Bhagavan refused to drink water but the next day he drank large amounts of water. Many such things happened during those last days.

Devotees, of course, wanted to have darshan of their guru which could not be denied. I told them, "Do not



Sri Krishnaswami

curse me, but please come in a queue and do not ask any questions or expect any answers from Bhagavan." From 5 p.m. onwards (on the last day), devotees came in large numbers, and although the police turned them away, they went back and stood in line again and again, weeping and crying. It was a sight that moved me deeply.

The devotees were requested to sing *Aksharamanamalai*, *Arunachala Siva*. Bhagavan had told me that a *jnani* did not mind how his body is dropped, for the body-idea has already died. It was only to the naked eye that Bhagavan was suffering.

In reality there was no suffering since Bhagavan had no *dehatma buddhi* (I-am-the-body identification). Suddenly, Bhagavan asked me to seat him in padmasana pose, and in that pose, the last breath was taken, and he became still.

None is comparable to Bhagavan. Bhagavan's teachings are unique. We have many scriptural writings, but Bhagavan lived in front of us and showed us that he was not the body. He was the perfect being. This I have been blessed to witness during every minute of my stay with Bhagavan, who is my guru, my everything. I can repeatedly assure you that there is no being comparable to Bhagavan; he is the one who had total control of the mind. There is no mind, there is no body, he is the supreme being.

Krishnaswami was absorbed in Arunachala-Ramana on March 6th, 1996 at the age of 96 years.

The full interview in Tamil is available on [YouTube](#).

Vasiṣṭha's Yoga

Translated by Swami Venkatesananda

The sage Vasiṣṭha describes how the vagaries of the mind are subdued by the practice of meditation, culminating in the realization of the supreme.

VASIṢṬHA continued:

The tree of meditation casts a cool shade in which all desires and cravings come to an end and all burning distress ceases. Meditation expands the shade of self-control which promotes steadiness of mind.

A deer known as the mind, wandering in the wilderness of countless concepts, notions and prejudices, somehow finds the right path and takes shelter under this tree. This deer is pursued by its many enemies who covet its hide. It hides itself in the thorny bushes known as the body in an attempt to save itself. All this effort wears out its energies. Running hither and thither in the forest of saṃsāra, harassed by the winds known as vāsanās or latent tendencies, and scorched by the heat of ego-sense, the deer is afflicted by interminable stress.

The deer is not easily satisfied with what it gets. Its cravings multiply and it continues to go far out in search of satisfaction of those cravings. It gets attached to the many pleasure-centers known as wife, children, etc., and it wears itself out looking after them. It is caught in the net of wealth, etc., and it struggles to free itself. In this struggle it falls down again and again and injures itself. Borne down by the current of craving, it is carried far away. It is haunted and hunted by innumerable ailments. It is also trapped by the different sense-experiences. It is bewildered by its alternate rise to the heavenly regions and its fall into hell. It is crushed and wounded by the stones and rocks known as mental modifications and evil qualities. To remedy all these, it conjures up by its own intellect various codes of conduct, which prove ineffectual. It has no knowledge of the self or the infinite consciousness.

This deer known as the mind is made insensible by the poisonous exhalation of the snake known as worldly pleasure and craving for such pleasure. It is burnt by the fire of anger. It is dried up by worries

and anxieties. It is pursued by the tiger known as poverty. It falls into the pit of attachment. Its heart is broken by the frustration of its own pride. At some stage, the deer turns away from all this and seeks the refuge of the tree already described (the tree of meditation) and there it shines brightly. Supreme peace or bliss is not attained in any other condition but the unconditioned state of consciousness, and this is attained only in the shade of the tree known as samādhi or meditation.

VASIṢṬHA continued:

Thus having obtained rest, the deer (mind) delights itself there and does not seek to go elsewhere. After some time, the tree known as meditation or samādhi begins to yield its fruit, the revelation of the supreme self. The mind-deer beholds that fruit above itself on the tree of meditation. Thereupon, it abandons all other pursuits and climbs that tree to taste its fruits. Having ascended that tree, the mind-deer abandons the worldly thought-patterns and does not return to contemplate the baser life. Even as the snake abandons its slough, this mind-deer abandons its previous habits so that it might ascend the tree of meditation. Whenever memory of its own past arises, it laughs aloud, "How was it that I remained such a fool till now!" Having discarded greed, etc., it rests on that tree like an emperor.

Day by day, its cravings decrease. It does not avoid what it gets unsought nor does it long for what it does not obtain effortlessly. It surrounds itself with the knowledge of the scriptures that deal with the infinite consciousness or the unconditioned being. It perceives inwardly its own past states of ignorance and laughs. It sees its own wife and children, etc., and laughs at them, as if they were either relatives in a previous life-span or people seen in a dream. All the activities that are based on attachment and aversion, fear and vanity, pride and delusion, appear to it as if they were all play-acting. Looking at the momentary experiences in this world, it laughs derisively, knowing that they are like the experiences of a madman.

Being established in that extraordinary state, it (the mind-deer) does not entertain any worries or anxieties concerning wife, children, etc. It beholds with an enlightened vision that which alone is (the

reality) in that which alone is (the infinite). With its vision fully concentrated, it ascends the tree of samādhi. It rejoices even in what it previously considered misfortunes. It engages itself in necessary activities as if it had just been awakened to do that work alone, after which it returns to the state of meditation. But naturally it seeks to be in the state of samādhi all the time. It is totally free from ego-sense though, because it is also breathing like others, it appears to be alive to the ego-sense. Even in the case of such pleasures that seek it unsought, it entertains no zest; its heart naturally turns away from all pleasure. It is full. It is asleep to worldly activities and pursuits. Who knows in what state it exists! It draws closer and closer to the supreme fruit of mokṣa

or liberation. Lastly, it abandons even the buddhi or intellect and enters into the unconditioned consciousnesses.

VASIṢṬHA continued:

That is known as the attainment of the highest when one abandons the notions of the existence of objects and one rests in one's own pure self. When all divisions are given up, the indivisible remains. It is pure, one, beginningless and endless. This is known as Brahman. One who has given up desires for wealth, wife and worldly objects rests in the supreme self. When even the division between the mind and the infinite consciousness drops away, then all division melts into nothingness.

Realisation Through Music?

From *Cherished Memories*

by T. R. Kanakammal

Sri Bhagavan was like the mythical *kalpa vriksha* (wish-fulfilling tree). The devotee's slightest wish, even unspoken, would be fulfilled by merely coming into Bhagavan's presence.

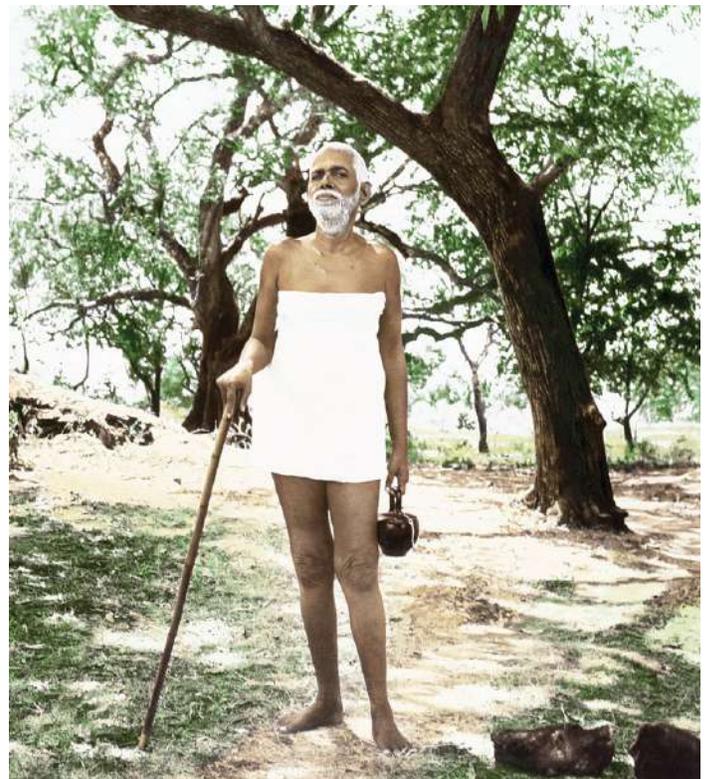
Once a lady from Andhra Pradesh had come to the Ashram. She was well-versed in music, and played the veena very well. She often visited the Ashram and would sometimes render a few songs, either vocally or on the veena.

The lady had a doubt and she was waiting for the right opportunity to speak to Bhagavan about it. One morning, when there was not much of a crowd in the hall, the lady approached Bhagavan and asked, "Bhagavan, is it possible to attain mokṣa (liberation) through music alone or would other spiritual practices be required?"

Bhagavan did not say anything at all. Unable to interpret Bhagavan's silence, the lady pursued the matter saying, "Did not Saint Thyagaraja and others gain mokṣa though singing the praises of the Lord?"

Bhagavan smiled and said, "Saint Thyagaraja and others did not attain realisation through the songs they sang. Rather, their songs are the expression of the ecstasy within, the result of their realisation of the ultimate. And that is the reason why they have survived the test of time." This is what is called Nadopanishad.

The lady was astonished by the simple yet unambiguous way in which Bhagavan had elucidated this great truth. She prostrated to Bhagavan and said, "Your words have cleared all my doubts, Bhagavan! I now realise that I have been fooling myself all these days with my half-baked ideas and mistaken beliefs. Bhagavan's grace has opened my eyes and shown me the truth. Now my mind is clear and free."



Celebrating Dennis Hartel's Retreat into Solitude

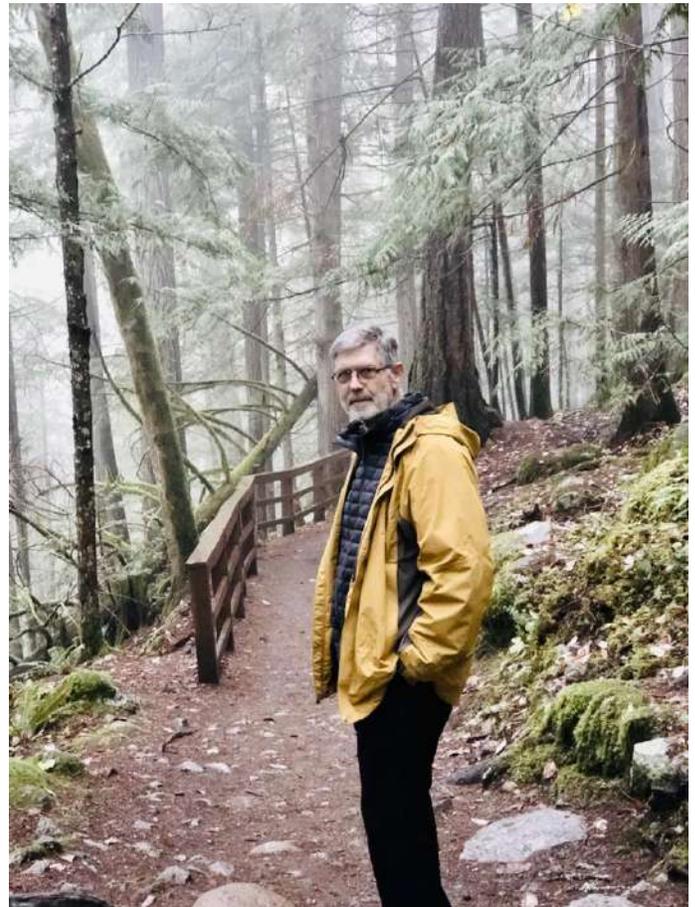
On December 6th, devotees joined together to attend a virtual satsang hosted by Mohan Ramaswami, President of Arunachala Ashrama. The satsang commemorated the one-year anniversary of Dennis Hartel's retreat into solitude. The program consisted of recitation of Aksharamanamalai and other works of Sri Bhagavan, a recorded reading by Dennis from Day by Day, chanting, and speeches by devotees highlighting our collective great fortune to have Dennis's friendship and inspiring guidance.

These devotees' reminiscences can be listened to [here](#). Below we give the recollections of Sunita Parasuraman.

I am fully convinced that it is Bhagavan who sent Dennis Hartel into my life. I met Dennis for the first time in 2005, when Swami Venkataraman invited him to Bhagavan's Jayanti celebration in California. We exchanged a few words and, as we parted, he said, "The only thing that keeps me going is meeting young people like you who aspire sincerely for the higher life." For 15 years since that first meeting, I have benefited so much from Dennis's friendship, guidance and, above all, his silent presence.

I was inspired to memorize *Aksharamanamalai* after listening to him chant the 108 verses with such deep devotion. He encouraged me to visit Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai and requested me to send him a detailed report of my visit. I did that in August 2005.

I feel fortunate to have been part of his morning schedule whenever he visited California: rising early, listening to the Vedas, followed by coffee, reading, chanting *Lalita Sahasranamam* and ending with silent meditation. He needs very little sleep and would be awake even at night, sitting on a chair, meditating. When I asked him about it, he quoted Bhagavan, saying, when the mind merges in the heart, there is no need for sleep. He often said it's our *purva janma samskaras* (latent impressions) and *pakva* (spiritual maturity) that determine how well we grasp Bhagavan's teachings. For householders like myself, he recommended the practice of



Dennis Hartel

atma vichara when the mind is strong. At other times when the mind is preoccupied and hard to control, he recommended chanting and praying for a strong mind. When I once asked him about how we could recognize that it was time to give up karma, he said the answer has to come from within. Just like a ripe fruit falls off the tree automatically, when the time is right, karma would drop off naturally. As we all know, he speaks little, but every time I asked him a question, he had the perfect quote from Bhagavan as his response – he had internalized the teaching completely and spoke from experience of the Self. He never asked us for anything and like our rishis of yore, effectively led the life of a *parivrajaka* (wandering mendicant) even when amidst all of us. Over the years, Dennis has been a great guide, gently bringing me back to Bhagavan's path of self-enquiry every time I wandered away.

As an example, I once shared with him a method that I had learned at a Vedanta class. The method was to strip an object into its basic elements and thus

overcome attraction to the object itself. I thought it was a cool tool to keep the mind in check. Dennis listened to me patiently and then gently but very firmly said, “Bhagavan has taught us to ask – Who is it that is getting attracted? That is all. How can it be easier than that? And you of all people should know better”. I will never forget his voice when he said that, stern by Dennis’s standards. And to this day, it serves as a reminder to never swerve from Bhagavan’s direct path of self-enquiry. Dennis always said that *shraddha* (faith), *vairagya* (dispassion) and *abhyasa* (intensity of practice) are the main requirements for success on the path. He encouraged me to not be content with a theoretical understanding of the knowledge but to strive to reach the inner recesses of the heart center, the seat of Arunachala Ramana. I treasure his *Maharshi* newsletters that have nourished my soul throughout. I am also very grateful to Dennis for never letting me lean on him. While he encouraged and inspired me in numerous ways, he always cautioned me to repose

my faith in Bhagavan and in no one else, including himself. “Only Bhagavan looks after us”, he would often say.

Dennis’s is a life consumed by Bhagavan and his teachings. I have only met Kanakammal once. When I shared with her that I knew Dennis, she said, “Antha Dennis ku Bhagavan, Arunachala va thavira, vera onnum theriyaadu” – that Dennis knows nothing other than Bhagavan and Arunachala. In Chapter 7 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna says: “Amongst thousands of persons, hardly one strives for perfection; and amongst those who have achieved perfection, hardly one knows me in truth.” Dennis is one of those rare few who actually knows the truth. I have never seen him get angry about anything or with anyone. He said anger was a *vasana* he never had, even as a child. His purity, gentleness, tranquility and complete surrender are permanently imprinted in my inner mind. Knowing him has been one of the greatest blessings of my life.

Global Online Celebration of Sri Ramana’s 141st Jayanti

by Ranjani Ramanan

The 141st anniversary of Bhagavan's birth was celebrated with an exhilarating 29-hour live-streamed program. The event commenced at Sri Ramanasramam on December 30th at 7:30 p.m. EST followed by presentations from Satsang groups in India, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, the Middle East, Kenya, United Kingdom, USA, Canada, and France. After traversing the globe, the program returned to Sri Ramanasramam, concluding with Aarti at Bhagavan's shrine on January 1st, 2021 at 00:15 a.m. EST.

This historic worldwide celebration of Bhagavan's Jayanti which started with live telecast of the special puja at Sri Ramanasramam included talks, readings, chanting, songs, dances, and skits by the different centers. Presentations were made in English, Spanish, French, and several Indian languages. Inspiring and enriching talks by Sri Nochur Venkataraman, Swami Sarvapriyananda, V. Ganesan, Dr. Sarada Natarajan, David Godman, Kitty Osborne, Michael James, and Dr. Anand Ramanan were some of the highlights of the program.



*The grace of Sri Bhagavan was experienced by all.
(Arunachala Ashrama, New York)*

There were several presentations by children of devotees, which were universally enjoyed. Their enthusiastic chanting and singing, elegant classical dance recitals, and creative plays delighted everyone. Each center's carefully chosen items, offered with utmost devotion to Bhagavan, left our hearts full.

Devotees were blessed to have darshan of the Shrines at Arunachala Ashrama in NY and Nova Scotia, the Tampa Old Hall, Sri Ramanachala Mandiram in Ogdensburg NY, Ramanalayam, Chennai, Ramana Shrine in Bangalore and Ramana Ashram, Jamnagar, and several others during the telecast.

The online celebration necessitated by pandemic restrictions transformed what could have been an isolating time into a shared experience of ecstatic devotion to the Master. As the President of Arunachala Ashrama, Sri Mohan Ramaswami said in his concluding remarks: “Devotees were soaked in the thought of Bhagavan and nothing but Bhagavan hour after hour.” Across the globe, devotees were joined together heart and mind in the remembrance of our Master Ramana on this holy occasion.

Mohan Ramaswami also thanked the exceptional technical team of devotees in the US and India, whose dedicated and tireless efforts behind the scenes were instrumental in the event's success. He expressed gratitude to the President of Sri

Ramanasramam, Anand Ramanan, for his vision to organize this first-of-its-kind global celebration and to Aruna Ramanan for all her efforts in bringing this dream to fruition.

The Jayanti celebration will be available on Arunachala Ashrama's [YouTube](#) channel as well as on Sri Ramanasramam's [YouTube](#) channel.



Flowers being offered at the feet of Sri Bhagavan at the New Old Hall in Tampa, Florida.

When scriptures speak of ‘seeing the Self’ and ‘seeing God’, what is their import? How to see the Self? As the Self is one without a second, it is impossible to see it. How to see God? To see Him is to be consumed by Him.

Without turning inwards and merging in the Lord, in His light that shines within the mind and lends it all its light, how can we know the Light of lights with the borrowed light of the mind?

– *Ulladu Narpadu, v.21,22*

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 [upcoming 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 until further notice. 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](#).

THE MAHARSHI is a free bimonthly newsletter published by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, New York. To subscribe online or access all back issues, please visit “www.arunachala.org/newsletters/”. Books, DVDs and audio CDs on Sri Ramana Maharshi are also available at “www.arunachala.org/bookstore/”.

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