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### My Boyhood Friend and Classmate by Yogi Ranganathan

MY FATHER who was an Inspector of Police, was transferred to Tiruchuzhi in 1885. Bhagavan's father Sundaram Iyer was then practicing there as a vakil. The two became close and intimate friends. I was a classmate of Bhagavan; and my elder brother that of Bhagavan's elder brother in the local school. Our two families moved on the friendliest terms, almost as close relations. About the middle of 1888 my father was transferred to another place and we left Tiruchuzhi.



Sitting on tiger-skin on the Skandasaram wall

Bhagavan and his brother went to Dindigul for education and from there came to Madurai to continue their education. By that time we had also come to Madurai for our education. Bhagavan was first studying in the Mission School, and I in the Native College. But both the institutions were adjacent to each other. If my school closed earlier I would wait for Bhagavan; and if his school closed earlier he would wait for me. I and my brother, Bhagavan and His brother and a few other boys would go to the Vaigai river, play on the sands and return home. I was just one year older than Bhagavan. Bhagavan left Madurai in August 1896.

After that, I visited Bhagavan for the first time only after a long interval, along with my wife, mother and daughter. I asked whether he recognised me. He replied as if speaking from the back of his throat "Rangan". (In those days Bhagavan spoke rarely and he had almost lost speech during disuse) and turning to Palaniswami pointed out my mother to him and asked him, "Do you recognise this lady?" He replied, "Yes. She came when Bhagavan was at *Pavala Kurru*." I spoke to Bhagavan about my mother and then while taking leave of him said, "You have attained a great stage." He replied "Distance lends enchantment to the view." By this he meant, as I later learned from many of his teachings directly and indirectly to me, that a householder's life was as good as that of an ascetic, and could equally lead one to *Jnana*.

On my next visit, when I was still ten or fifteen steps from Skandasaram, Bhagavan who was then cleaning his teeth near the parapet wall, observed my coming and told his mother, "Mother, Rangan is coming." She said, "Let him come. Let him come." When I went and got up after prostrating before Bhagavan He said, "It is a rare privilege to get the *darshan* of saints. It is good to go and visit them frequently. They will weave the cloth and give it to you." From this I gathered that if one had Bhagavan's Grace one could gain *Jnana* even without any effort on one's own part.

During my next visit, when Bhagavan, his mother and I alone were present, I told Bhagavan's mother, "I have also a right to a share in all that Bhagavan has gained." Mother asked Bhagavan, "Did you hear what Rangan said?" Bhagavan laughed and said, "Is he not also one of us? He has also a share."

Another time, I came to Bhagavan on my way to Madras where I wanted to try for a job. When I got up after prostrating, Bhagavan asked me, "Males can go anywhere and eke out a livelihood, but what arrangements have you made for your wife and children?" I replied, "I have provided for them." I stayed for a few days with Bhagavan and then went away to Madras. A few days later my elder brother visited Bhagavan and Bhagavan made kind enquiries of him whether my wife and children were getting on well, without any hardship. My brother told him, "He left some money when he started for Madras. All that has been exhausted now and they are suffering great kind hardship," and went away to Madurai.

When, after making some efforts for a job at Madras, I returned to Bhagavan he said, "You told me you had provided for your wife and children. Your elder brother told me they are undergoing hardship." I did not reply, for Bhagavan knows all and is also all powerful. I again went to Madras, and finding my efforts for a job there were in vain, returned to Bhagavan and stayed with him for some time. During that time, one night, when I was sleeping outside on a double cot that was lying there, Bhagavan suddenly came and sat near my feet. Seeing this I got up. Bhagavan asked me, "What is the matter with you? Are you restless and not getting sleep because of your family troubles? Would it be enough for you if you get rupees 10,000?" I kept silent. Once when Bhagavan and I were going round the hill he said, "There are herbs on this hill which could transmute base metals into gold." Then also I kept silent. Bhagavan used often to joke with me and laugh asking "Oh! Are you suffering very much?" He then told me, "When a man sleeps he dreams he is being beaten and that he is suffering terribly. All that would be quite real at that time. But when he wakes up he knows it was only a dream. Similarly when *Jnana* dawns, all the miseries of this world would appear to be merely a dream." In a few days, I returned to Madurai and through a friend got a manager's job in a motor company. Later, I was also appointed as an agent for the sale of buses in Ramnad and Madurai by another company, with a commission of 5 percent on all sales effected by me. From this and in other ways I got rupees 10,000, and I spent them on the marriages of two of my daughters and for clearing off debts. I never used to mention my family troubles to Bhagavan, nor ask Him for anything. He was himself looking after me and my family, so why should I make any requests for this or that in particular? I left everything to him. I used to tell Bhagavan frequently, "I have entrusted my body, possessions, soul, all to Bhagavan. The entire burden of my family is hereafter yours, I am hereafter only your servant, doing only your behests. I am a puppet moved by your strings." Bhagavan used to laugh and say "Oh, Oh." It never occurred to me to ask him for any wealth.

Once, at Skandasaram, when Bhagavan was standing, I felt his legs from his knees downwards, running my hands over them and remarked to him, "When in the old days we frolicked, romped and played together, I used to feel as if I was pricked with thorns whenever your legs came in contact with my body, your skin then having been so rough and scaly. But now I find they are very soft, like velvet." Bhagavan replied, "My body has completely changed. This is not the old body."

One day Bhagavan told me, "Let us go to Pandava Tirtham and swim in it. Can you swim now?" I replied I had not forgotten swimming and would go with him. The next morning at 3 a.m. we both went accordingly, swam there, and played in the water as of old and returned before people could come there for their daily bath. Bhagavan told me, "Let us go like this from tomorrow. But we must go early and return before people come there for their baths." I said "Yes." We swam like this for a few days.

One day, before dawn, when I was restless in my bed, rolling from one side to another, Bhagavan came to me and asked, "Are you not getting sleep? What are you worried about?" I told him, "I am thinking of taking up *Sanyasa*. If I do it here my people would discover it. So, I want to go away to a distant place like Varanasi and become a *Sanyasi* there." He at once went and brought *Bhakta Vijayan*, read out from it the portion dealing with *Vitoba's* determination to remain a *Sanyasi* in a forest and the advice of his *Jnana* Dev, that the same mind goes with a man whether he stays at home or retires into a forest, and told me I could attain *Jnana* continuing to be a householder. Thereupon I asked Bhagavan, "Why did you become a *Sanyasi*?" He replied, "That was my destiny," and added, "Though it is irksome to remain a householder, it is easy to attain *Jnana* that way."

Once at Skandasaram, after Bhagavan and I had a bath and he was drying his body with a towel, I noticed that down from his knee to his ankle the skin had peeled off and blood was oozing. I asked him what the matter was with his leg. He said he did not know. I asked, "Is it not from your legs that blood is oozing? You seem to know nothing about it!" He replied very casually, "When I was sitting down, the fire from the charcoal brazier in which incense powder was being burnt might have burnt my skin and caused this sore." I at once sent for some ointment and applied it to his legs. From this I learned how, completely detached from his body, Bhagavan lived only in the Self.

One day, Bhagavan and I went round the Hill by the forest footpath close to the foot of the hill. After I had gone a little distance on that path full of thorns and sharp stones, I ran a thorn into my foot. When I lagged behind Bhagavan observed me, came to me, removed the thorn, and said, "Now there, come on." Then I proceeded with him. After a few yards, he ran a thorn into his foot. Noticing this, I ran up to him, lifted up his foot and saw marks of several thorns there. Then I examined his other foot and found several marks there too. Thereupon he said, "Are you going to remove the new thorn or the old thorns?" So saying, with the greatest indifference, he pressed his foot on the ground and drew it forward, and the thorn broke. He then proceeded on the hill round, asking me to accompany him. I was convinced that he was living completely detached from the body. I further imagined that both these incidents were designed by Bhagavan to impress upon me that Bhagavan was not his body.

On another occasion Bhagavan said to me, "You think you are undergoing great troubles. Hear some of mine. I was once climbing the hill up a precipitous track and when I caught hold of a rock above, the rock slipped down, and I fell on my back. The rock that slipped down and other rocks which it brought down fell over me. I managed to remove the rocks that were covering me, and to come out. Then I found my left thumb was missing from its place and was hanging near the little finger. I forcibly brought it back to its place and fixed it there." At that stage in the narration Bhagavan's mother came out with the remark "Don't ask for that horrid story. He came with blood all over the body. It was too heart-rending a spectacle." I cannot understand who came and removed the rock, treated his wounds and fixed up the thumb. Who was the Doctor?

An Invitation  
Jaynti Celebration in New York  
The 117th birthday of Sri Ramana Maharshi will be celebrated at the New York City Arunachala Ashrama  
Sunday 05 January 1997  
The program will be from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Prasad (dinner) will be served  
Arunachala Ashrama  
Sri Ramana Maharshi Center  
66-12 Clyde Street, Forest Hills, Queens, New York 11374  
Tel. 718 575-3215  
We ask friends and devotees from the New York City area to kindly attend

One day Bhagavan's mother told me in his presence that once when he was standing she saw various kinds of snakes all over his body, round his neck, chest, waist and legs and got terribly frightened; and that after a while the snakes went back to their places. I believe that was one of the visions vouchsafed by Bhagavan to his mother to wean her from the belief that Bhagavan was her son and to impress on her that he was God Himself.

Once at Skandasaram when Bhagavan, his mother and I alone were present, my mother said as follows: "About ten days ago, at about this time (i.e., 10 a.m) as I was looking at Bhagavan, his body disappeared gradually into a *Lingam* like the one in Tiruchuzhi temple. The *Lingam* was lustrous. First, I could not believe my eyes. I rubbed my eyes, and looked again. It was the same sight still. I became frightened that he was leaving us. But again gradually his body appeared in place of the *Lingam*." On hearing this I looked at Bhagavan. He smiled at me. From this I gathered he was confirming mother's account. When I returned home I mentioned this to the members of my family. My eldest son was writing an account, as he termed it, of Bhagavan's marriage with his bride *Jnana*, and he included the above incident in it. Later when that work was being read before Bhagavan by my son, when the portion relating to this incident was read, Bhagavan asked my son, "Who told you this?" And my son replied, "My father." Thereupon Bhagavan said, "Oh! That fellow came and told you all, is it?" Some of the *bhakts* who were listening to this asked what exactly was the incident referred to. Bhagavan passed it over, saying it was nothing. I gathered from the above vision of Bhagavan's mother that Bhagavan was God himself and that the vision was vouchsafed to mother to impress on her that she was no longer to think of him as her son, but as God Supreme.

One day, when Bhagavan and I were climbing the hill, I told him that because I have had the good fortune to have Bhagavan's *darshan*, all my *Sanchita* and *Agami Karma* has burnt away like a bale of cotton by a spark of fire, and that only my *Prarabdha Karma* was left. He replied, "Even *Prarabdha* will remain only so long as the mind remains. If the mind is destroyed, to whom is *Prarabdha*? Think over that deeply." From that I understood that once the mind is killed and *Jnana* is attained, there is no such thing as *Prarabdha*.

Once a *Bhakta* having done some *apachara*, i.e. something improper or irreverent towards Bhagavan, he came and asked me what he might do for expiating his offence. I advised him to do *Pradakshina* round Bhagavan three times. He came round Bhagavan three times accordingly, prostrated before him, and said, "Bhagavan should not keep in mind the *apachara* I have committed. Bhagavan replied, "Where have I mind? It is only if there is a mind I can keep anything there." It is clear from this Bhagavan has attained *Mano Nasa* (extinction of the mind).

When Bhagavan was in Skandasaram, a gentleman from Malabar, greatly learned and expert in yoga sastra, came and lectured for four hours on yoga. After he had finished, Bhagavan said, "Now, you have finished, I hope, all that you had to say. The end of all your yoga is seeing lights and hearing sounds. The mind will be in *Iaya*, i.e., there will be suspension of mental activity, whilst the sound or light is there. When they disappear, the mind will again emerge. The real thing is to achieve *Mano Nasa* or extinction of the mind. That is what is called *Jnana*. The other man thereupon said, "What you say is the truth," and took leave of Bhagavan.

— The Call Divine, January 1, 1955

On the Internet  
Newsletters, Books Photos and Videos  
Our book catalog and ordering information, along with this issue and all back issues of "The Maharshi" area available at North American and European web sites:  
In Europe  
www.ccaayber.com/bd/direct/ramana/books.htm  
In North America  
www.semicent.org/amber/maharshigraham/books.htm  
Contact us for more information ashrama@aol.com/arunachala.org

### A Pilgrimage in India

For months I was feeling that there must be something that I could do; I just couldn't let the 100th anniversary of Bhagavan's arrival at Arunachala pass without attempting to acknowledge it in some way. In the spring, Dennis Hartel had e-mailed to us his inspired idea to take the journey that Bhagavan had made from 16 from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai, but at that time, the idea of my travelling to India seemed quite far-fetched. However, then and there, the seed was planted, and in spite of the resistance that the mind threw up, all obstacles fell away. On August 15th I found myself on a plane headed for India in the company of a sincere and committed group of American devotees.

Stepping out of the car at Sri Ramanasaram I felt His Presence; on the roof of the office a peacock stood utterly still and inside my mind the words formed "This is Siva's abode". I took off my sandals and walked up the steps, aware in my heart that every pebble, every grain of sand that I walked on and everything that I saw was Siva and Siva alone. The sacred hill, rising majestically above the trees, drew my mind with greater and greater intensity; then and there I decided to give myself over to it; the feeling of devotion and the desire to be totally absorbed by it was irresistible.

The days spent in the lap of Arunachala gave me an increasing awareness of the beauty and sweetness of the people whose traditions and culture are the fertile soil in which the Sage Ramana chose to take birth and to grow. On one of my first nights there, I had the privilege of doing *giripradakshina* with a group of Indian devotees. Getting to know them a little gave me a chance to acquire some feeling for the depth of their *sadhana*. I was also deeply moved by hearing the Tamil *parayanas* that are sung six evenings a week before Bhagavan's Samadhi Shrine. It seems no mere coincidence that it was to these people the Maharshi had come; that this field of *Shakti*, has rising from it, Siva Maheshwara in the form of the Hill.

As the day of Bhagavan's advent at Arunachala centenary celebration drew nearer more people began arriving at the ashram, including some devotees from Canada affiliated with the Nova Scotia ashram. Soon, we were all preparing to depart for Madurai. On the evening of August 27th we boarded the second class sleeper car of the train that would travel all night and into the next morning before reaching its destination. Prior to leaving we were all aware that we would be staying at the Ramana Mandiram in Madurai, which is the very house in which the boy Venkataraman had the experience that established him permanently in the Self. Another revelation was that the house is in such close proximity to the southern gopuram of the Meenakshi temple (emblazoned with *Dakshinamurti Gurus*).

Visiting the Meenakshi Temple was the first of many such opportunities during the trip to receive the *darshan* of the residing deities. The next morning we went to the Maharshi's birthplace and to the Bhuminnatha Temple, where resides the Siva Nataraja image that was carried through the town on the eve of Sri Bhagavan's birth. Also on our tour we visited the Arayaninallur Temple where both the Maharshi and, one thousand years before, Jnanasambandar, had their first glimpse of Arunachala. At the Kilur Varateswara Temple *abhishokans* were offered to the *lingam* amidst the exquisite sounds of the temple drums and *ragaswaram*. At these temples, which were in remote areas and not crowded with pilgrims as are the more popular shrines, I experienced the true legacy of *Satanata Dharma*; being in touch with That which is beyond time, beyond creation.

The 17 kilometer walk undertaken on the morning of August 30th at about 5 a.m., left us all quite willing to bed down that night on straw mats without the least concern as to whether sleep would be possible. The next day in Kilur, at the house where a hundred years ago a kindly mother gave a hungry young pilgrim the *prasad* that was being prepared for Sri Krishna's Jayanti, a *puja* was offered and a plaque unveiled, describing the house's historical significance. We were also invited to hear speakers that evening at the temple and to honor the planners of the *yatra*. As the pilgrimage progressed, the devotees seemed to share the growing feeling of being one family in Bhagavan.

The final leg of the journey, a short train ride, was made all the more memorable by the high spirits of those who had spent the previous night in the train station, as Bhagavan did, undaunted by rain or considerations of comfort. With the doors of the train flung open and chanting the *Marital Garland*, our eyes feasted on the sight of Arunachala drawing closer and closer. A rainbow appeared in the sky as if to herald the great day, and on September 1, 1996, a hundred years after Venkataraman left his mother Meenakshi's arms to journey to Father Arunachala Siva, the gates of the Arunachaleshwara Temple were again opened wide. With Siva and Sakthi in full embrace in our hearts, we were home.

— Janet Rinsson  
Conal Springs, Florida

How Bhagavan Came to Me  
Once when meditating in the presence of Bhagavan, the mind persisted in wandering. I couldn't control it. So I gave up meditation and opened my eyes. Bhagavan at once sat up and said, "Oh! You abandoned it thinking it is the *swabhava* (habit) of the mind to wander. Whatever we practise becomes the *swabhava*. If control is practised persistently that will become the *swabhava*."  
— From the January, 1971 Mountain Path  
by Sadhu Tiveneigiri Swami.

Forthcoming Festivals  
Sri Bhagavan's 117th Jayanti -- Thursday, December 26, 1996  
Pongal -- Tuesday, January 14, 1997  
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana -- Thursday, January 23, 1997  
Maha Sivarathi -- Friday, March 7, 1997  
Sri Vidya Haven -- Friday, March 21, 1997

### A poem to Rumi

You keep surprising me.  
Yet of course it's no surprise.  
This day begins like any other for the bees —  
Off to work by 7:00 a.m.  
There's pollen to gather, and it's  
Important to be there early to  
Pry open the portulaca blossoms.  
  
I'm not like the bees.  
I yawn all day at my job.  
Waiting, weaving —  
Huing, wracking yawns.  
Need a coke just to make it through the lifelong day awake.  
Finally, I make it home to my bed,  
Read some of your poems, and drop blessedly to sleep.  
  
But the body, as you say, is carrying the burden  
And the tormenting itch manifests again.  
After only an hour's sleep, you wake me suddenly  
And I sit up in bed  
And for a moment  
God is in my room  
Looking through my eyes.  
  
Barbara Cherington  
Belmont, Massachusetts

### Questions and Answers

**Visitor:** Mental activity during meditation does not seem to converge at a point, as it should, on the object of meditation and it does not stay there but gets diverted into numerous thought channels. Why is it so? How can the mind be made to overcome this tendency towards diffused thinking and attain its prime state of freedom from thought?

**Maharshi:** It is the mind's attachment to objects constituting the not-self that makes the mind wander about during meditation. Therefore, the mind should be withdrawn from the not self, and an effort should be made to fix it in Self-enquiry. All extraneous thought is effectively eliminated when you attain the entire mind to the one question, "who is it that is making the enquiry?"

**Visitor:** In spite of having come to the definite conclusion as a result of one's investigation that "I" has no essential relation with the not-self, i.e., with the body, senses and the objects perceived by the senses, the mind persists in going after these very same things which constitute the not-self. What is it due to and how can it be remedied?

**Maharshi:** It is due to lack of *abhayasa* and *vairagya*. When Self-enquiry has become steady through practice, and the spirit of renunciation firm through conviction, your mind will be free from the tendency of thinking about the not-self.

**Visitor:** How can I gain steadiness in practice?

**Maharshi:** Only through more practice.

— The Call Divine, January 1, 1957



The Sage of Arunachala  
A Documentary  
The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi  
In this seventy-three-minute, professionally-produced documentary, the unique life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi are artistically unfolded in a chronology of photographs, interviews, narration and archival film footage.

Follow the Sage from his birth in a small village to his final mortal day, as grieving crowds push in from all sides to have their last darshan.  
This video was released after a two year effort of film restoration, research and travel. It is narrated by John Flynn, a nationally recognized television and film talent, edited by James Hartel, with music by internationally famous artists.

Special Offer Both Videos for \$49.00 (price includes shipping to U.S. and Canada)  
The Archival Films The Archival Films 1935 To 1950



From 1935 to 1950, a number of visitors to Sri Ramanasaram shot films of the Maharshi and his environs. These films, taken mostly by his devotees, give us the remarkable opportunity to view a fully-enlightened sage who in the 20th century lived like an ancient rishi of yore. Two of the films were professionally produced by the Indian Information Bureau as newsreels with soundtracks and shown throughout India in movie theaters.  
In 1990, the complete collection of archival films were brought to the U.S.A. for restoration, preservation and editing. This video is a collection of all the known films of the Maharshi, restored and arranged in chronological order.

**Research Booklet**  
Included with the purchase price of the video you will receive a thirty-five page research booklet. This booklet provides interesting details, dates and identifies individuals seen with the Sage. Printed time-code references will enable you to quickly look up and read about whatever you find especially interesting in the video.

### Arunachala Ashrama in New York has moved

Please send orders to:

Arunachala Ashrama  
Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center  
66-12 Clyde Street  
Rego Park, New York 11374-5142, USA  
Telephone -- 718 575 3215

### Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation have been going on in a few places near or in large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please see the *Sri Ramana Satsang online* pages.

"The Maharshi" is a free bimonthly newsletter distributed in North America by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. You can subscribe to this newsletter's announcements by email. All back issues are available as HTML pages and in Acrobat PDF format from 2000 to the present. Books, images, videos and audio CDs on Sri Ramana Maharshi can also be found in the eLibrary, the On-line Bookstore pages and the Ashrama's YouTube channel.