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Letters to Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi

by Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat

Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, the founder of Sri Arunachala Ashrama, poured forth his petitions and prayers to Sri Bhagavan in his prayer manuscripts. These letters of supplication to his guru, written on his trusty Hermes 3000 typewriter that served as a shrine for Sri Bhagawat, were a method for pouring out his heart's longings and placing them at the feet of Sri Bhagavan. These outpourings resulted in thousands of pages of manuscripts. They reveal the inner state of one who had taken Sri Bhagavan as his sole refuge and whose life was centered in him alone. We share here two letters from his book "In Search of Self".

Arunachala Ramana! At this time last year I was at your lotus feet along with my nephew, Rambahadur, who was made an instrument of Arunachala to enable me to be present physically before you. For a full year I have not been able to present myself at your lotus shrine, but you know how eagerly I pine for the day to return to Sri Ramanasramam with my family.

Bhagavan, I am your child and I cannot survive for a moment without your grace. I know it well that Shiva's grace flows to me all the time uninterruptedly, and I drink deep in his grace. I have been made to return to the United States not because I have wanted to come back, but because the Maharshi has something for which he has brought me here. Arunachala Shiva is ever present in my life, wherever I am. There are two things which keep on coming to me again and again: first, that I have not been lucky in sitting at the lotus feet of Bhagavan when he was in the body; second, that when Arunachala is ever present in my heart, where does the question arise of not seeing him in his lifetime? He may not be in the body, but he is with me all the time. This is what gives me solace, strength and faith, and on this basis I remain in him all the time. I am a householder and

the problem of earning a living and taking care of my family are the immediate tasks with which I am faced right now. Otherwise, I do feel I should be living at the Arunachala Shrine.

But then Maharshi says that I have to carry out the work assigned to this body, and this is a great consolation that keeps me alive and kicking. Time and again, he reminds me that he is with me all the time, provided I care to think of him. I believe that he looks after me all the time whether I am in a position to remember him or not. Since the advent of Bhagavan in my life I have found a new life and there has been peace and happiness all around amidst the worldly despair and gloom.

I always live on two planes: the physical and the spiritual. It is the spiritual plane that is the cornerstone of my life and on the sheer basis of its strength I live. Bhagavan abides in everyone's heart and I can testify to it from my personal experience that he abides in me all the time. My words are no match for the wonderful experiences that have come to me. I feel them, I realize them and drink deep in the bliss that flows direct from Arunachala Shiva Bhagavan Sri Ramana. I cannot help writing these lines because they come to me spontaneously. For

me, Bhagavan shines as brightly as the sun.

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya is the mantra I chant whenever I pick up the thread of his remembrance. I must admit that it is not all the time that I do it, not because I do not want to do it, but for the simple reason that I forget to return to my real moorings. Things of the world distract my attention and I keep sailing on the material plane until Bhagavan suddenly wakes me up from my slumber and asks me to pick up the thread I lost a little while before. For this grace I am eternally grateful to Arunachala Ramana. Who am I to be grateful to him? It is his duty to bear my burden and he does it for me. I am his child and if I went astray, no one but he would be blamed. But he is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world and it is only his *lila* which makes me feel that way. He is ever abiding in our hearts and he is taking care of us all the time.

The most wonderful thing for me who did not have the good fortune of seeing him in his lifetime is the EXPERIENCE that comes to me always. I consider myself very fortunate that the meaning of all the scriptures has been made clear to me during the short time that I have been drinking deep in his bliss. The truth is that I would not value it much if I were not made to suffer for it and then achieve it. I have to work out my destiny until I have surrendered completely to him. The obstacle that stands in my path to complete surrender is the feeling of not having surrendered myself to him. The moment I leave everything to him it does not take even seconds for the result to materialize. Maharshi is so kind, so full of the human milk of kindness, that now and then I begin to marvel whether at all I deserve his grace. But Ramana came to earth to lift the burden from our hearts and give us peace and happiness so that we may not return to the cycle of birth and death again. I always feel that he protects and saves me. The other day I kept on thinking of all the fortunate devotees who gathered at the lotus feet of Arunachala to participate in the munificent grace of Maharshi Ramana. Whenever I think of him the whole panorama of the Ashrama, with Bhagavan in the center, becomes vivid before me. I see the yogi of yogis walking slowly and steadily with the help of a walking stick towards the hall where many devotees

have been waiting to get a glimpse of Arunachala Shiva before they return to the world of their own. Months and years have passed since Bhagavan walked on the earth, but for me he walks here, there and everywhere all the time. What I am writing here is not something wonderful. I am simply unburdening myself of the noble sentiments which move me towards his lotus feet. I must admit that whenever I try to accomplish something on my own strength I miserably fail in the endeavor. But when I resign myself to the great Lord of Arunachala the result is there all at once. But my *samskaras* do not allow me to surrender to him fully, and for that reason I have to suffer in the world. But there is no suffering or trouble for me on the spiritual plane. No doubt there have been tests, acid tests, oftener than I have bargained for, but they are worth enjoying because I know that the end result of all the tests is the cleansing of my soul. I am writing these lines on the typewriter and before me is a photo of Bhagavan reclining on the sofa and looking benignly on me. Maharshi Ramana-putra Bhagawat is dedicating these flowers to the lotus feet of Arunachala Shiva Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. May he not forget his son, who is lost without his father.

– 1962, New Year's Day, New York City

Bhagavan is present in my life as the life force. Not only do I feel him but I see him. Books and letters from Bhagavan have reached me. I have been wanting to write a detailed letter to Bhagavan. But this morning the inspiration came that I should at least send a short note to the lotus feet of Bhagavan so that my troubles may be removed.

I meditate on Bhagavan all the time. I try to carry on the japa *Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya*, but many times the japa is forgotten. Suddenly I remember and begin to do the japa again. Many times I feel I have completely merged in Arunachala Ramana.

Last time when I wrote to Bhagavan referring to the classic work of Swami Ramanananda Saraswati's, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, which contains the immortal and eternal *upadesha* of Bhagavan, I had a premonition that the Swami might, or had, shed his mortal frame. By the time I finished writing the letter, our beloved Swami Ramanananda was no more in the

physical body. It was confirmed sometime later when I happened to read *The Call Divine* at the home of a friend.

The Technique of Mahayoga is a wonderful book. It contains the experiences of Sadhu Narayana Iyer. This small book contains all the teachings of the Scriptures. It simplifies the teachings of Bhagavan in such a way that a lay person like me also shares many of the experiences described in it. Since the arrival of this book my life has been brought very close to the lotus feet of Bhagavan.

On the one hand, I seem to remain very much immersed in the heart where Lord Ramana abides for ever, and on the other, my worldly problems do not give me peace of mind. My wife, Yogamaya, is very unhappy at the loss of our son, Sadhu Prabhakar, loss of her personal belongings back in our village and, last but not least, the uncertainty of a job for me. I am still praying that Bhagavan will give me back the teaching job, so that we can continue to worship at Lord Ramana's lotus feet and at the same time have a means of livelihood. When I meditate on Bhagavan even for a minute, peace seems to overflow my heart. But this comes and goes. I have not been able to maintain it all the time. But this much is certain, Bhagavan is leading me by the hand and I can see his presence in my life all the time. The worldly problems also overwhelm me and I cry out to Maharshi for protection.

When I begin to write to Bhagavan about Bhagavan, I feel he is present before me and is making me write all these things as a father makes his small child practice the school lessons. Troubles from the world keep on multiplying and many times I begin to feel that the fifty-one years of my life have been wasted, as I have not succeeded in giving a home and a secure life to my wife and our ten-year-old boy, but bliss flows to me from Bhagavan. That is the only wealth I have in this life. We almost pass our days with the minimum of food and other facilities. I sit back and begin to meditate on Bhagavan. I know that the present condition has been given to us by Bhagavan, and it is he who will bring about a change. I feel sorry that I did not have the good fortune of sitting at the lotus feet of Bhagavan, but right away the feeling comes over me that he is ever present in



Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat

my heart. When I think of Bhagavan, He appears before me and sustains me in my journey to his lotus feet. I feel happy in him.

This letter was intended to be a one-page note to Bhagavan to tell him about the unhappy state of Yogamaya, my wife. I did not want to type a long letter to Bhagavan, but he has given me the inspiration to fill so many pages in this letter. In the midst of the din and bustle of a city like New York, which is the center of much power and wealth, I begin to focus on my life and my thoughts turn to Bhagavan. It is a queer feat of destiny how my life is becoming increasingly attuned to the heart which is Arunachala Ramana.

When I sit in the plenary meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations, where my assignment takes me every day, I think of Arunachaleshwara Ramana who has placed me there. I meditate on him, think of him, read about him and often fall asleep while thinking of him. When I look at the thirty-eight story building I think of the Arunachala Hill.

So Bhagavan is helping me eradicate my *vasanas*, so that I may not desire later on to live in America. With ashes and *kumkum* on my forehead, I move amidst the world's diplomats and statesmen. All the world sees the round red mark and white ashes on my forehead and must wonder at the strange Indian that is myself. I have never been conscious that I have a red mark on my forehead. I believe that Bhagavan Ramana is on my forehead.

—1963, October 31st, New York City

Free Will in the Light of Bhagavan's Teachings by Bart Walton

Author Bart Walton described his first visit to Sri Ramanasramam in the Nov/Dec 2020 issue of The Maharshi. Here he delves further into the subject of free will.

I read with interest the feature article in the Jan/Feb issue (Vol. 32, No. 1) titled, "Our Success is Guaranteed! Or is it?" Continuing on this theme, I'd like to offer some further thoughts on free will in the light of Bhagavan's teachings.

The most universal assumption among human beings, and perhaps the greatest delusion, is the notion that we are independent agents with free will. We support this idea by remembering all the times we're able to do and accomplish exactly what we want. But in the process, we conveniently discount, or ignore altogether, all the times when we can't do what we want, get what we want, or even think what we want. The main reason why gambling casinos are successful is because people tend to remember the times when they win, and forget all the times when they lose.

We make the same mistake in assuming that we have free will. If we really investigate our lives, it's clear that our free will only seems to work some of the time. On an equal number of occasions, our efforts are stymied and our plans are thwarted, one way or another. So, we have to ask ourselves: Does free will only work some of the time? And if so, does it even make sense to speak of free will as something that comes and goes?

Let's examine free will from another angle. Consider our breathing. It's happening whether we want it to or not. We can't stop it for more than a minute or two. In a similar way, the events of our lives are unfolding along a trajectory that is not in our control. We don't have any say about being born, the place of our birth, our family of origin, our gender, our genetic makeup, our physical or psychological constitution, or the length of our lives. And these are just a few of our external circumstances. What about our internal experience? We pretend to have control over our

thoughts and feelings. But if we really did, would we ever choose to have an unhappy thought or painful feeling again?

One could counter this argument by saying, "Yes, but look at what I've accomplished." Again, we have to ask ourselves: What part did I really play in making these things happen? If we're honest, we'll have to admit that our own efforts play only a small role in a complex web of genetic, social, and environmental factors that contribute to our success or failure. The traditional Buddhist term *pratitya samutpada* (dependent origination) refers to this interdependence of everything. A flower in the forest doesn't bloom without a vast network of support from the entire universe. The human mind can comprehend only a small fraction of these influences.

For the sake of argument, let's concede that on some level, we can do what we want. If I want a cup of tea, I can go to the kitchen and make one. But where did that desire come from? The truth is that I have no idea where it came from, or even how it arose. The 19th century German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, expressed this point eloquently when he wrote, "Man can do what he wants, but he cannot want what he wants." From this perspective, how can we say that we have free will if we have no idea how that will arises?

Of course, on the surface, we appear to have free will. Without it seeming this way, and very convincingly so, I'm not sure how the world would work. The circumstances of human life demand that we live as if we are independent free agents. However, the more I consider this so-called free will, the more difficult it is to locate or to understand it as a causative factor in my life. Like the end of a rainbow, it's always just out of reach. All I can say with certainty is that free will is not what it appears to be.

There's an old Yiddish saying. "If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans." I love this little joke because it allows us to see how ridiculous we are to think that we're in control. Yet, at the same time, it begs a very serious question: If we're not running our own lives or the world around us, who or what is?

I believe this is the essential spiritual question. The founders of Alcoholics Anonymous used the term "Higher Power" instead of traditional religious

personifications. In doing so, they conveyed both the mystery of this question and the reality of our own ignorance. Perhaps *jnana* is not so much in knowing the answer to this question, as in the knowledge that the answer is unknowable. Perhaps the highest attainment is in surrender to this unknowing.

“Higher Power” is also a term Bhagavan used on occasion. For example, he said this in response to a question about free will:

“Action is impelled by desire; desire arises only after the rise of the ego; and this ego owes its origin to a Higher Power on which its existence depends. It cannot remain apart. Why then prattle, ‘I do, I act, I function.’” (*Talks*, #210, June 19, 1936)

On another occasion, he said this to an American engineer in response to a question about work:

“If you surrender yourself to the Higher Power all is well. That Power sees your affairs through. Only so long as you think that you are the worker you are obliged to reap the fruits of your actions. If on the other hand, you surrender yourself and recognize your individual self as only a tool of the Higher Power, that Power will take over your affairs along with the fruits of actions. You are no longer affected by them and the work goes on unhampered. Whether you recognize the Power or not, the scheme of things does not alter. Only there is a change of outlook.” (*Talks*, #503, Aug 17, 1938)

Some years later, Bhagavan sheds further light on this subject in another recorded conversation:

Q: Are only the important events in a man’s life, such as his main occupation or profession, predetermined, or are trifling acts in his life, such as taking a cup of water or moving from one place in the room to another, also predetermined?

Bhagavan: Yes, everything is predetermined.

Q: Then what responsibility, what free will has man?

Bhagavan: What for then does the body come into existence? It is designed for doing the various things marked out for execution in this life. The whole programme is chalked out. ‘Not an atom moves except by his will’ expresses the same truth, whether you say ‘Does not move except by his will’, or ‘Does not move except by karma’. As for freedom for man, he is always free not to identify himself with the body and not to be affected by the pleasures and pains consequent on the body’s activities. (*Day By Day with Bhagavan*, Jan 4, 1946, p. 78)

This last passage reminds me that Bhagavan often compared individuals to travelers on a train¹. In this analogy, our responsibilities and concerns in life are like the baggage we carry with us. If we choose, we can continue carrying our bags even after we board the train. Or we can set them down, relax, and let the train carry everything. I think this analogy hits the nail on the head regarding individual freedom. We may have little or no choice over the events of our lives. But we do have choice in how we respond to those events.

1. See Sri Ramana's "*Who Am I?*"

33. To say ‘I do not know myself’ or ‘I have known myself’ is cause for laughter. What? Are there two selves, one to be known by the other? There is but one, the truth of the experience of all.

34. The natural and true reality forever resides in the heart of all. Not to realize it there and stay in it but to quarrel: ‘It is’, ‘It is not’, ‘It has form’, ‘It has no form’; ‘It is one’, ‘It is two’, ‘It is neither’ – this is the mischief of maya.

– *Forty Verses on Reality (Ulladu Narpadu)*

The Meditation Song (Dhyāna Paṭṭu)

Composed and sung by Sri Sadhu Om

This composition by Sri Sadhu Om, titled “The Meditation Song”(Dhyāna Paṭṭu) is a beautiful explanation of Sri Bhagavan's atma vichara. Originally composed for children, it is a valuable gem for children of all ages! Sri Sadhu Om's lilting, inspiring rendition is indeed a joy, as it is sung by one who has dedicated himself entirely to his guru, Sri Ramana. It can be heard in the video available [here](#), along with the Tamil text, transliteration and translation.

The translation has been done by Michael James. Michael has had the great privilege of studying Sri Bhagavan's works in depth with Sri Sadhu Om in Tiruvannamalai and he has been instrumental in sharing Bhagavan's teachings with devotees the world over.

Other beautiful songs by Sri Sadhu Om can be found on the video channel of the Sri Ramana Center of Houston, hosted by Kumar Saran. The address of the website is: <https://vimeo.com/ramanahou>

The Meditation Song (Dhyāna Paṭṭu)

Closing [your] eyes, be seated. Be thinking of God. Without thinking of anything [else], be thinking of God alone. 1

By [your] thinking of the world [you] see, the thought of God will go away. Steadfastness is needed at first, [so] do meditation with love. 2

In whatever form you think [of God], in that form he will appear. He has no form or name of his own. [He] consists of pure, silent consciousness. 3

One blissful substance exists within your heart. If [you] seek it with love, unlimited happiness [will be yours]. 4

In the cave of [our] heart [we] can see God, who exists everywhere. Only after [we] have seen him here, will all that exists [be seen to] consist of him. 5

God exists within you as the witness who knows [your] thoughts. Only where [all] thoughts subside,



Sri Sadhu Om

will God come and appear. 6

Listen to the path to make thoughts subside; listen to the words of Lord Ramana: At the very moment that a thought rises, see to whom it rises. 7

Since [every] thought rises only to oneself, see who this ‘I’ is. When one looks at oneself who thinks, the thought that had risen will subside and vanish. 8

When you look, look within yourself, supreme knowledge will blossom forth. To see the knowledge that sees, practise, practise and seize victory. 9

Among the many sciences we learn, the science of God [our real self] is foremost. Among all excellent distinctions, jñāna-niṣṭhā [abiding as consciousness or self-abidance] is foremost. 10

The purpose for which we have taken a body is only to enjoy true happiness [the bliss of self-knowledge]. Abiding as God, removing and casting away the body, let us go. 11

What is called ‘God’ consists of grace, and the entire world consists of darkness [ignorance or delusion]. When [you] investigate what is real, this truth will shine [clearly]. 12

May Ramana Sadguru flourish!

May his path of knowledge flourish!

May life lived in the peace of self flourish,

May it definitely flourish!

Divine Renunciation

From *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*:

When Sri Bhagavan and Rangaswami, an attendant, were on the rocks, Bhagavan noticed someone in the Asramam rocking in a rocking chair, and remarked to the attendant:

“Siva made over all His own possessions to Vishnu and wandered away in the forests and wilderness and cemeteries and lived on food begged by him. In his view non-possession is higher in the scale of happiness than possession of things.”

D.: What is that higher happiness?

M.: To be free from anxieties. Possessions create anxieties such as their safeguarding, their utilisation, etc. Non-possession does not bring any anxieties in its train. Therefore Siva resigned everything in favour of Vishnu and he himself went away happy.

Divestment of possessions is the highest happiness.

– Talk #225

Divesting of all possessions is indeed a great freedom. It gives great joy and peace to the one who hands over all possessions and goes forth untroubled, leaving all concerns and cares for the upkeep of the physical body, including procurement of food and shelter, to Sri Bhagavan himself. We at Arunachala Ashrama and our friends have been so very fortunate

to have the company of those great devotees who have gone forth in the exact same manner and are resting firmly at his lotus feet, absorbed in his grace. Has not our Dennis Hartel done just this?

Bhagavan has also given assurance to us that the renunciation of all possessions is done also by investigating the nature of the ego, *atma vichara*. He states this unequivocally in verse 26 of *Ulladu Narpadu*. The enquiry into the nature of this phantom-like ego itself is indeed the divestment and reununciation of all possessions (including the “I am the body” idea).

Ahan-dai uṇḍā-yin anait-tum uṇḍā-gum
Ahan-dai iṇḍrēl iṇḍra-naittum – ahan-daiyē
Yāvu-mām āda-lāl yādi-dendru nāḍalē
Ovu-dal yāvu-mena ōr (26)

26. If the ego arises, all else will arise. If the ego is not, nothing else will exist. The ego, truly, is all. Know therefore that simply to enquire what it is, is to renounce everything. (Translation by Robert Butler)

May the grace of Sri Bhagavan ever guide us to that divine renunciation and to the peace which is our real nature.

– Editor

Updates

Due to continuing health restrictions, Arunachala Ashrama, New York remains closed to visitors until further notice. Please visit our [home page](#) for the latest information. The Ashrama has been having regular satsangs online which can be found on our [upcoming virtual events](#) page

The Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama (please see our [home page](#)) will be welcoming overnight guests beginning May 11, 2022. Guests are required to make arrangements ahead of time by contacting nova-scotia @ ashrama.org and submitting proof of being fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Guests will be responsible for cooking vegetarian food during their stay and ensuring that their rooms have been cleaned, and their linens and towels are laundered and replaced before they leave.

As usual, the Mandiram is open to daytime visitors for prayers and meditation. We ask that groups call ahead of time to avoid exceeding our limit based on NS COVID-19 restrictions. Tel: 902-824-2297

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](#).

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