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Srimati T. R. Kanakammal is Absorbed in the Feet of Sri Bhagavan by Marye Tonnaire

Srimati T.R. Kanakammal had the rare opportunity of utilizing this human birth to its fullest potential. She found refuge at the feet of her Master, Sri Ramana Maharshi, and with his guidance lived a life dedicated to Self-realization – abiding as one's own true nature. She also received the blessings of Sri Muruganar and learned the essence of Sri Bhagavan's Tamil compositions directly from him. Later, over the years, she held informal classes at her house with sincere devotees who sought her company, expounding Sri Muruganar's commentary on each of those compositions. Marye Tonnaire had the good fortune to attend some classes that were being translated into English at the time by Srimati Aparna Krishnamurti. All who attended the classes felt blessed to share the deep peace and lighthearted joy which emanated from Kanakammal as she skillfully brought us into the orbit of those glorious, golden days in Sri Bhagavan's physical presence.

Srimati Kanakammal attained the lotus feet of Sri Bhagavan on his Jayanti day in 2010, breathing her last at Sri Bhagavan's samadhi. Marye shares her first-hand account of the passing of this great devotee. She narrated this event during the celebration of Sri Bhagavan's 143rd Jayanti Celebrations held on January.29, 2023.

Sri Bhagavan said, "If a man considers he is born he cannot avoid the fear of death. Let him find out if he has been born or if the Self has any birth. He will discover that the Self always exists, that the body which is born resolves itself into thought and that the emergence of thought is the root of all mischief. Find wherefrom thoughts emerge. Then you will abide in the ever-present inmost Self and be free from the idea of birth or the fear of death."¹

On January 1st 2010, according to the Western calendar, Sri Bhagavan's Jayanti was celebrated at Sri Ramanasramam. I was living in Tiruvannamalai at the time.

That morning I arrived at the ashram a little before 9:00 am. In the Mother's temple the *mahanyasa* (great purification) that precedes the chanting of Sri Rudram, was almost completed. The priests were seated in a circle around the pots of water that would be used for abhishekam (ritual bathing) of the Siva Lingam on Sri Bhagavan's shrine. I entered and began to go around

Mother's samadhi; then I walked through the door leading to Sri Bhagavan's samadhi and made another round. Usually at Jayanti time I would stand by the side of the samadhi or sit in the little alcove where there is a window that faces Bhagavan's sofa in the Old Hall. Sitting against the wall in the alcove, one has a good view the priests performing the abhishekam and puja. During abhishekam the milk and water flow off the lingam into a large copper vessel that is then poured out so it can flow into a gully outside the railing of the shrine in front of the little alcove. Devotees take this with great reverence, sipping it and sprinkling it over their heads. On this Jayanti day, however, a friend of mine had signaled to me that there was a place right in front of the shrine beside her, and I sat down there. As the priests were continuing the rituals and chanting at the shrine, I started to read my English translation of *Sri Vishnu Sahasranamam*.

I. Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk #80.

Every morning at around 5 a.m. during the month of Margazhi, following an early morning puja and the recitation of devotional verses in Tamil composed by Manikavachagar, Andal and Muruganar, the Veda Patasala boys and teachers sit in rows facing each other on the floor just in front of Sri Bhagavan's shrine and chant *Sri Vishnu Sahasranamam*. The devotees sit on both sides and join in the chanting. It is very intense. The entire hall which is already filled even in those early hours has a very powerful vibration.

As I was reading, the Veda Patasala students and their teachers came onto the samadhi and began their parayana. Suddenly there was a commotion on the right side of the samadhi near the entrance next to the well where the priests draw water. I saw Senthil Ganapatigal, the head teacher, and a few of the boys get up and look. A lady sitting next to me said, "Oh! someone must have fainted."

From where I was seated, I could only see the soles of the feet and the hem of a light-colored saree. Then someone said, "It's Kanakammal!"

I quickly got up and ran over to the door. Some devotees were already carrying her outside, and they set her down near the well on the side of the Old Hall. Somehow, I was sitting at her feet and looking at her face. Kanakammal's eyes were rolled back, and her complexion was very gray. At one point she seemed to have very gently expelled some air three times. When I touched her legs, they were cold. I was in a bit of a daze and felt relieved when I saw A.S. Krishnamurti and his wife Aparna, friends and neighbors who had been very close to Kanakammal for many years and who had facilitated my contact with her. They both began to sing *Aksharamanamalai*, and then we all kept repeating the refrain, "Arunachala Shiva, Arunachala Shiva." More devotees came including Sundaram, the Ashram President, his wife Sushila, and Dr. Murthy from the office. Everyone there kept on chanting, "Arunachala Shiva, Arunachala Shiva." I put my hands on Kanakammal's ankles, hoping to feel a pulse, but instead I was getting incredible surges of light energy that flowed up my arms. Then, suddenly a cloth bandage was tied under her chin to the top of her head to keep her mouth closed according to the custom. I looked up at Dr. Murthy and he silently confirmed that she had passed. The Jayanti celebration with the

Vedic chanting continued in the samadhi hall.

That morning Kanakammal had approached the shrine through the entrance near the well. As usual, a car had brought her up to the Gent's guesthouse and the path that leads to the well. I didn't see her enter but was told that she had walked into the shrine totally focused on the lingam. She didn't seem to see anything or anyone else. As she walked towards the railing, she shivered a little and then fell to the ground. Some devotees quickly carried her outside. The Jayanti rituals at the shrine continued without a halt, and devotees gathered around Kanakammal chanting Arunachala Shiva. The whole episode was so natural. I felt no sadness; on the contrary, an immense joy began to well up in me. I could feel her presence. I could feel Bhagavan's presence. Among the devotees, a quiet dignity prevailed.

While several devotees lifted Kanakammal to carry her back to her house in front of the ashram, I ran back inside the Samadhi Hall to get my purse that I had left behind in the flurry. By the time I came out again everyone was gone, so I rushed over to Kanakammal's house where several devotees had started to congregate. Kanakammal's body had been placed on the floor in the traditional way. She looked like she was asleep. We all sang the full version of *Aksharamanamalai*.

Then we were told that nothing more was going to happen until Kanakammal's close relatives arrived from Chennai and Bangalore which would take some time. Since I wanted to go back to the Jayanti celebration in the samadhi hall, I ran home quickly and took a full bath, washed my clothes out, changed into fresh clothes, and then took my motorbike to the ashram. The place was very crowded by then. I ran around to the side entrance by the well. The door was locked, so I stood by the window. A devotee saw me and opened the door. I was standing near the shrine approximately at the place where Kanakammal had fallen to the floor. The Puja was over and singing had begun. The lingam was beautifully decorated with a magnificent flower arrangement. At the end, as is usually done on each Punarvasu day (the day of Bhagavan's birth star), Sushila and some ladies, including me, started singing the Punarvasu song from Muruganar's *Sannidhi Murai* and afterwards the Arati Hymns for special occasions. I have never had such an intense experience singing those familiar songs as I

did that day. It seemed like I had been granted a hint of the bliss that the Shaivite Saints must have felt when they sang their hymns to the Lord.

Afterwards, I took my lunch in the ashram and then at 3:30 p.m. I went back to Kanakammal's house to say goodbye before they took her to the cremation grounds. There were approximately 20 ladies sitting around Kanakammal's body which was still lying in the middle of the floor. They had put a garland around her neck. By around 4 p.m. the relatives had arrived, and the priest began the last rites outside the door of her house. Some of the ladies had washed Kanakammal's body and changed her saree. She was brought outside on a kind of stretcher that the men who had begun to gather there would then carry to the cremation ground. The stretcher was placed on the earth and we filed around the body, taking rice in the left hand from the priest and then placing it on her mouth. When it was my turn, I looked at her beautiful face for the last time and some tears finally did come for the loss of a beloved guide and friend whose door was always open for devotees.

Some of the men later picked up the stretcher and carried her on foot to the cremation ground at Yama Lingam. Other men followed in a procession. It was not a big crowd. As per the custom, none of the ladies attended the cremation.

Kanakammal's passing away was in keeping with the humility and simplicity of her life at Arunachala in complete devotion and surrender to Sri Bhagavan. I can't help but think of the famous 16th-century



Srimati T.R. Kanakammal

Krishna bhakta Meerabai. Legend has it that Meerabai was absorbed into a statue of Sri Krishna in Vrindavan on Krishna Janmashtami day (Sri Krishna's birthday). - *Tiruvannamalai, January 4th, 2010.*

The audio of Marye's article can be heard [here](#). Another wonderful article about her time with Kanakammal from the 2010 May-June issue of The Maharshi can be seen [here](#).

T.R. Kanakammal Initiation Through Look *from Cherished Memories*

The consecration of the Matrubhuteswara Temple took place on the 17th of March, 1949. At the entrance of the temple, there is a large hall. At one end of this hall, a throne-like sofa was installed and Bhagavan was requested to sit upon it. Bhagavan's sofa was carved out of a single block of black stone. We usually classify anything hard as being 'like a stone'. But this particular stone must have been extraordinarily pliable! It has allowed itself to be carved into an object of exquisite beauty. The most

intricate designs have been carved into this stone throne. Surely, this is only due to Bhagavan's Grace. He who could melt the hardest heart with his compassion, must have softened this stone also!

For a while, Bhagavan used to recline upon this stone sofa. On either side of the sofa, there was space for the devotees to sit down and meditate. Male devotees would sit on the eastern side of the hall, and the ladies would be seated on the western side. Devotees filled the space in front of the sofa, as well. This arrangement made it possible for the devotees to feast their eyes upon Bhagavan's enchanting form, from both sides and from the front, as well. Wherever one might be seated, however, Bhagavan's compassionate

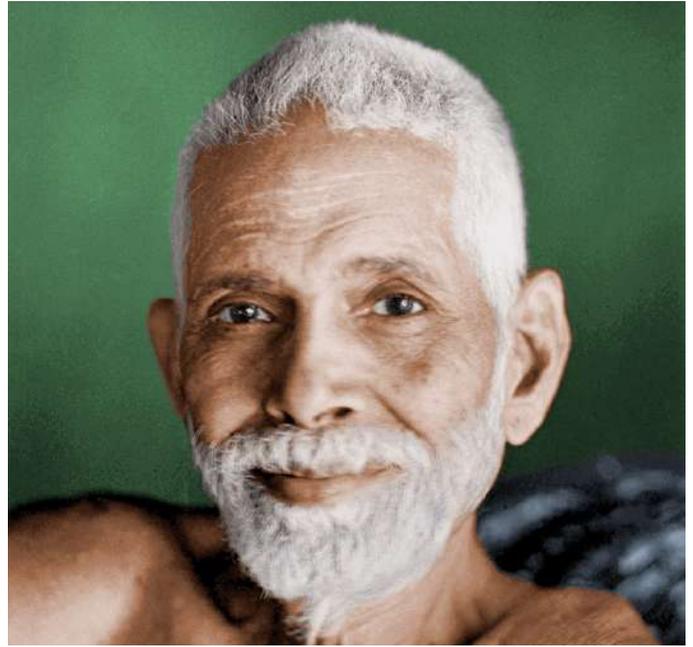
gaze would fall upon every single person. I usually sat close to the window, on the southern side of the hall, facing Bhagavan. Rani Majumdar, a Bengali lady from the Bose Compound, would sit beside me. One day, for some reason, there was nobody in the front row. Rani Majumdar said, “See, there is nobody in the front row. Let us go and sit there today.” This was a tempting idea indeed! Seeing the two of us moving to a space so close to Bhagavan, Kameswaramma, (another lady devotee) also came to sit beside us.

I prostrated myself before Bhagavan and settled down. From that instant, Bhagavan’s eyes stayed on me. If you want to look at Bhagavan, you must choose a time when he isn’t looking directly at you! When his gaze is upon you, something happens, which makes it impossible for you to keep your eyes open. The intensity of Bhagavan’s direct look is too much for an ordinary human being to take. It is as though some invisible power has entered you and made its way to the very core of your being and there is nothing but the blissful awareness of the Self.

For a short while, I gazed at Bhagavan with my eyes open. Within a few seconds, my eyes closed of their own accord, and I was totally immersed in a peace that is beyond description. I do not know how long I stayed in that state of bliss. After a while, I managed to open my eyes. I saw that Bhagavan’s gaze was still upon me. He had not changed his position nor had he lifted that magical look from me. I closed my eyes again.

After a while, I heard voices and opened my eyes to see what was happening. Srinivasa Rao (Mouni) had come in with the day’s mail. Bhagavan was going through the letters and other correspondence. After some time, Mouni left the hall. Bhagavan, too, got up and went out towards the cowshed, accompanied by his personal attendant. At that point of time, I stood up and went back to my usual place under the window.

Kameswaramma followed me. She was in a very emotional state. She embraced me and, with tears in her eyes said, “Kanakamma! You are indeed very fortunate. What a wonderful experience you have had! From the time you sat down before him to the moment when Mouni arrived, Bhagavan’s eyes were



Sri Bhagavan: Initiation through look

on you all the time. Not for a moment did he shift his gaze. I was watching you and Bhagavan all the time, and I could see the effect of Bhagavan’s look on your mind. Bhagavan has been extremely gracious to you today. He has showered his Grace on you, through the uninterrupted gaze. You have attained the ultimate point of your life today! What more can you want!” I was in no state to say anything at all. I was unable to respond to Kameswaramma’s words, because I was in a state beyond speech. The state of my mind was indescribable. I felt a deep peace within me. The outward physical sign of this mental state was the steady flow of tears that streamed down my cheeks. For many days afterwards, this peace stayed with me. Every time I think about that day’s experience, I feel the same thrill of ecstasy.

Most spiritual teachers attach a lot of importance to the initiation ceremony, but that was not Bhagavan’s way. He never gave formal initiation to anybody. Nevertheless, he wrought miracles with a mere look. Many of his devotees have had experiences very similar to mine. They can all testify to the power of Bhagavan’s ‘Glance of Grace.’ Through a mere look, Bhagavan could transform a person’s mind and heart. Through the grace that flowed from his eyes, a person could transcend all obstacles and enter the realms of supreme bliss, without any conscious personal effort.

To Sleep, Perchance to Dream...

by A Nova Scotia Devotee

Our experience of the dream state is a universal experience, common to all sentient beings. Hence, the Bard's famous soliloquy in his play, Hamlet.

I found myself in a dream the other night in a delightful conversation with a friend, a fellow devotee of Sri Bhagavan. He had called me to his residence to discuss a question that he had. After finishing this discussion, in this dream, I left to return to my place. However, he called me back and wanted to discuss another matter. Now, on returning to his place, I found that I could not enter the front door. So, not having easy immediate access, I climbed, with grace and surprising agility, the side of his building, three stories tall and entered by way of a window into his apartment. We discussed the second question that he posed, and I expressed my concern to him that I had needed to return home for an important engagement, and that we could have easily discussed this question also during my first visit with him. He apologized for causing my delay, but encouraged me by telling me to bear all events with equanimity (as in fact, my friend always did). Having encouraged me, he deftly climbed on the kitchen counter, reached high up to grab a box of cornflakes, and happily proceeded to share the treat with all of the devotees present. (A feat that did not seem out of the ordinary at all, though in day-to-day life my friend had significant mobility challenges.)

I woke with a start and with a very clear recollection of all that I had just dreamt. I was surprised to see that all that had just occurred, so very tangible that it left no doubt of its reality, was indeed "the stuff that dreams are made of".

The friend that I had intimately conversed with in the dream had passed away a few years previously. But there was no doubt in my mind of his immediate presence at that time, not one iota. I had no hesitation at all to accept what happened in the dream state as real. This is something that is experienced by us all, night after night.

Sri Bhagavan instructs us about the dream state in *Who Am I?* and in doing so gives us an insight into our own reality.

"Except that the wakeful state is long and the dream state short, there is no difference between the two. All the activities of the dream state appear, for the time being, just as real as the activities of the wakeful state seem to be while awake. During the dream state, the mind assumes another form or a different bodily sheath; for thoughts on the one hand and name and form on the other occur simultaneously during both the wakeful and dream states."

During the dream, I did indeed totally identify with another body, without any hesitation. (I can say with certainty this body of the waking state would not climb the outside of an apartment building with such ease.) In addition, an entire world was taken as real, complete with friends, objects, time and space. The dream world could not exist were it not for the thoughts that constitute it. Sri Bhagavan points out clearly that it is the same, in fact, in our waking state: *"Nor is there any such thing as the physical world apart from and independent of thought. In deep sleep there are no thoughts; nor is there the world. In the wakeful and dream states, thoughts are present, and there is also the world. Just as the spider draws out the thread for the cobweb from within itself and withdraws it again into itself, in the same way the mind projects the world out of itself and absorbs it back into itself."*

"The world is perceived as an apparent objective reality when the mind is externalized, thereby forsaking its identity with the Self. When the world is thus perceived, the true nature of the Self is not revealed; conversely, when the Self is realized, the world ceases to appear as an objective reality. By a steady and continuous investigation into the nature of the mind, the mind is transformed into That to which the 'I' refers; and that is in fact the Self."

And as Sri Bhagavan states at the beginning of *Who Am I?*, *"For obtaining such knowledge the enquiry, 'Who am I?' in quest of the Self is the best means."*

May we wake from the dream of this life into the reality of that which is the essence of all, by his grace.

Letters to Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi

New Year's Day, 1962, New York City

by *Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata*

Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata, the founder of Sri Arunachala Ashrama, wrote numerous letters of prayer and petition to his guru, Sri Ramana Maharshi. The letters that he laid at the feet of his Master were an endless outpouring of love and by reading them we can palpably feel the intensity of his surging devotion. This is taken from his book titled In Search of Self, published by Arunachala Ashrama.

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 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 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



Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata

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 directly 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 when 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 were to stray, 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 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 am not made to suffer for it and then achieve it. I have to workout 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 milk of human 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 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 him, the whole panorama

of the Ashrama, with Bhagavan in the center, becomes vivid before me. I see the yogi of yogis walking towards the hall where many devotees have been waiting to get a glimpse of Arunachala Shiva incarnate 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 that move me towards his lotus feet.

I must admit that whenever I try to accomplish something on my own strength I fail miserably 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 Bhagawata 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.

Updates

For the latest information regarding Arunachala Ashrama, New York, please visit our [home page](#) . The Ashrama has been having regular satsangs online which can be found on our [upcoming virtual events](#) page

The Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama (see our home page) is welcoming overnight guests. Guests are required to make arrangements ahead of time by contacting novascotia@ashrama.org 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.

We do request that you postpone your visit to the ashrama if you are having signs of cough, cold, fever, etc. During your stay, should you develop signs or symptoms of illness, you will be asked to isolate away from the ashrama.

As usual, the Mandiram is open to daytime visitors for prayers and meditation. Visitors will be required to wear masks while inside the temple. Tel: 902 824 2297

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

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Arunachala Ashrama, 86-06 Edgerton Boulevard, Jamaica, NY 11432-2937 Tel: (718) 560-3196 / Email: ashrama@arunachala.org