

RAMANA SMRTI

Sri Ramana Maharshi
Birth Centenary Offering
1980

SRI RAMANASRAMAM

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SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI: HIS LIFE AND TEACHINGS

By A. Devaraja Mudaliar

SRI Ramana Maharshi, as he is now known, was born on the 30 December, 1879, the day of the *Ardra Darshan*, held to be sacred and auspicious since it commemorates the occasion when Lord Shiva appeared before great saints like Gautama and Patanjali. His father was one Sundaram Iyer of Tiruchuzhi, a village about thirty miles South-East of Madurai. Sundaram, a pleader of respectable status held in high esteem and love by all alike, was married to Alagammal, a pious Hindu, devout wife and generous hostess. The child was named Venkataraman. After a few years of schooling at Tiruchuzhi itself, Venkataraman studied for his first form at Dindigul and for the higher forms at Madurai. He does not seem to have attained any special distinction at school and is reputed to have been given more to sports than to studies. Bhagavan once told me, “They have been writing like that, but I was really indifferent to studies and sports alike”. He was physically stronger than most of his companions at school.

There is nothing particular to record in his life till November 1895. When one of his relatives spoke of his having returned from Arunachala (another name for Tiruvannamalai), the name for some unaccountable reason had a strange and profound effect on him, evoking in him awe, reverence and love combined — though this was not the first time that he had heard it. Bhagavan has told me, “From my earliest years, the name Arunachala was ‘shining and sounding’ within me. There was *sphurana* of that name”. I asked Bhagavan what *sphurana* was and he said it conveyed the idea of both sound and sight, a sound and sight not perceptible to the ears and

eyes but only to the heart, the psychic heart. A little later he came across the work *Peria Puranam* in Tamil, which recounts the lives of a number of Tamil saints, and was deeply moved by a perusal of it.

In June 1896, when he was sixteen years old, the most important event in his life took place. A sudden and great fear came over him that he was going to die, though he was then in normal bodily health and strength. The shock of this sudden and overwhelming fear of death led him to a very unusual experience which is succinctly described by the Maharshi himself thus:

The shock made me at once introspective or introverted. I said to myself mentally, 'Now death has come. What does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies'. I at once dramatized the scene of death. I extended my limbs and held them rigid as though *rigor mortis* had set in. 'Well then', said I to myself, 'this body is dead. It will be carried to the burning ground and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body, am 'I' dead? Is the body 'I'? This body is silent and inert but I feel the full force of my personality and even the sound 'I' within myself, apart from my body, so 'I' am spirit, a thing transcending the body'. All this was not a mere intellectual process. It flashed before me vividly as living truth.

This experience, which might have lasted perhaps half an hour, changed the boy completely for ever afterwards. He lost interest in his studies, friends and relatives and even his food. He would go frequently to the shrines of Meenakshi and Sundaeswara in the great temple in Madurai and spend long hours in adoration before the images. He would occasionally pray for the Lord's grace to flow into him and make him like one of the sixtythree saints in *Peria Puranam*. But, for the most part he would be lost in the divine bliss within him while tears flowed from his eyes.

Observing this change in the boy, his worldly-minded elders and especially his elder brother would rebuke him now and then. Finally on 29 August 1896, when he was studying in the sixth form, things came to a head. The elder brother burst out, “To one like this (i.e., one lost in contemplation), why this sort of life (i.e., books, school and home)”? This touched young Venkataraman’s heart and he said to himself, “Yes, that is quite true. What business have I here and with all these things”? and he decided at once to leave his home and go to Arunachala. He told his elder brother, “I must go to school now to attend a special class”. The elder brother replied, “Then take five rupees from the box downstairs and pay my college fees”. The young aspirant took this as God’s provision for his train fare to Arunachala. He searched for Tiruvannamalai in an old Atlas and spotting the place, thought that three rupees should be enough to take him there. So he took only this sum and started for the railway station, leaving in a prominent place a note in Tamil, which ran:

In search of my Father and in obedience to His command, I have left this place. This (i.e., myself) is only entering on a good enterprise; so none need feel grieved over this event, nor need one spend any money in search of this. Two rupees left herewith.

He arrived at the station much later than the hour the train was due to leave. But providentially the train too was late and so the boy was able to catch it. He had taken a ticket only to Tindivanam, for according to the old Atlas Tiruvannamalai was not on the railway line and the railway station nearest to it was Tindivanam. But an aged *Moulvi* sitting in the compartment enquired of the bright youngster where he was going and told him of the recently opened Villupuram-Katpadi link line passing through Tiruvannamalai. The Maharshi could not remember having seen the *Moulvi* in the compartment at Madurai railway station nor his entering it at any subsequent station. Anyhow there he was to guide him. And following this *Moulvi*’s advice

the lad got down at Villupuram and after a few incidents of no special interest reached a place called Arayaninalloor (Tirukoilur railway station) on his way to Tiruvannamalai. Finding a temple, viz. that of Atulyanatha Iswara, he entered it and sat in *dhyana* (meditation) in a *mantapa* dimly lit by a flickering lamp. While he was absorbed in *dhyana* he suddenly found the entire place filled with a bright light. In wonder the young devotee looked in the direction of the *garbhagriha* (the innermost shrine), to see if the light proceeded thence. But he found no such source for the light which in any case, disappeared soon. The place where this vision was vouchsafed to the young *swami* was the very spot where the celebrated *saivite* saint Tirugnanasambandar had a vision of Lord Arunachala, also in the form of light. The saint had installed a *linga* of Lord Arunachala which is still being worshipped.

From Arayaninalloor, the young boy eventually reached Tiruvannamalai on the morning of 1st September, 1896 and went straight to Lord Arunachala at the temple. Though he arrived at the temple at this unusual hour after the morning *puja*, all the doors leading to the innermost shrine were open¹ and he walked straight up and said, “Father, I have come according to Thy command, Thy will be done”. The burning sensation in the body which he had been feeling for some days also ceased after he had thus reported his arrival. After spending some time in *dhyana* there he came out. Leaving the temple he went into the town, returned with his hair shaved off and only a cod piece for cloth.

He originally took up residence in the temple’s thousand pillared hall. To avoid disturbance from crowds who were attracted by the unusual spectacle of so young a person sitting in such deep meditation, he had to shift from place to place both inside and outside the temple. Not less than three years

¹ M.G. Shanmugan and others believe that the doors were shut, but as Bhagavan approached, each door flew open.

were passed in maintaining absolute silence and in deep and all-absorbing meditation during which the young ascetic had lost all consciousness of the body. When he was sitting in the shrine of *Pathala Lingam* in a dark corner of the thousand pillared hall, it was discovered that his seat and thighs had been badly bitten by insects, that blood and pus were issuing from the wounds, and yet he sat in meditation, unaware of what was happening to the body.

Admirers gathered round and managed to keep the physical body alive. One such admirer, Annamalai Thambiran, began to worship the young *swami*, as if he were an image in a temple, with offerings of fruit and flowers and burning of camphor. The first day of this strange worship passed without a protest. But when the man came there again the following day bringing food as usual and intending to repeat his worship, he found on the wall nearby the following words in Tamil written in charcoal, “This (food) is service enough for this (body)”. It thus became clear that the youthful *swami* was literate. This knowledge was utilised later by another admirer, a *taluk* head accountant of the place, who did *satyagraha* and forced the *swami* to put down in writing that his name was Venkataraman and that he hailed from Tiruchuzhi.

The news eventually reached his relations and uncle Nelliappa Iyer came and sought to take the *swami* back to his place. There was absolutely no response. Later, the mother and elder brother came and tried their best to take the *swami* back home. Again there was no response of any sort. But finally on the entreaty of a devotee the *swami* wrote in Tamil on a piece of paper:

The Ruler of all controls the fate of souls, in accordance with their past deeds, their *prarabdha karma*. What is destined not to happen will not happen. Whatever is ordained will happen do what one may to prevent it. This is certain. Stillness then is best.

So, the mother and brother went back. And *Brahmana Swami*, as he had come to be called, stayed on beside the hill, though shifting from one spot to another there.

In 1907, Kavyakantha Ganapathi Muni, a renowned Sanskrit poet and scholar who had been strenuously carrying on spiritual *sadhana* for some years, became a devout follower of *Brahmana Swami*; and it was he and his disciples who started the vogue of referring to the youthful *swami* as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Bhagavan Ramana lived in and around the big temple for about a year, in a suburb about a mile to the east of the temple for about two years, and then around and in Virupaksha cave on the hill of the holy beacon for nearly fifteen years. After that he stayed for six years in an *Ashram* called Skandasram built for him by a band of enthusiastic devotees led by one Kandaswami. The place was rocky and covered with prickly pear bushes. No one could have imagined it was possible to raise a house there. But such was the ardent love and tireless labour of the devotees that the impossible became possible. Bhagavan has told me that it was after this Kandaswami that the place came to be called Skandasram.

While Bhagavan was living in Virupaksha cave, he was joined by his mother, who began cooking. Till then Bhagavan's devotees used to beg in the streets for food and whatever was received was divided by all those who happened to be at the *Ashram* at that moment. Bhagavan's residence changed to Skandasram in 1916. The mother was with him there and passed away in May 1922. Her body was buried at the spot where the shrine of Matrubhuteswara stands now. Bhagavan used to go now and then to visit the *Samadhi*. One day in December 1922, he went there as usual but had no urge at all to return to Skandasram. So Bhagavan lived there for more than twentyseven years till his *Mahasamadhi* in April 1950. Around the *Samadhi* of the mother have come up the cluster of buildings

which we call Sri Ramanasramam. He was accessible to all, and lived, moved and talked like any of us. He seemed to live in the world and yet his real being was not in it. He lived without any sort of attachment to his surroundings. This state of being has been compared in the books to the state of a man who is sound asleep in a cart. Whether the cart moves or rests or has the bullocks changed, it is all the same to the man who is sleeping within. The *jnani*, whose 'I' has been annihilated, whose mind or ego has been killed and who has gone to sleep in his self, i.e. who has merged in the Self, is not affected by what he may or may not do in this life.

It is a priceless privilege to have been a contemporary of such a great saint and seer. It would indeed be a great tragedy if earnest seekers failed to take advantage of this presence in our midst while people from distant lands, almost from the ends of the earth, have gained much from association with him and a study of his life and teachings. It has been laid down in our books that immeasurable spiritual gain awaits those who practise in the presence of a Self-realized Being. Book learning, observances, rites and rituals, *japa*, *tapas* or *yoga*, pilgrimages to sacred shrines and holy waters — none of these can equal the association with a real *jnani* in helping one's progress in the spiritual path.

We may now proceed to the central and the only teaching which the Maharshi imparted for all seekers to try and learn and experience for themselves.

That which shines within each one of us as 'I am' is the Self. This is the sole reality and all else is simply an appearance. In the Bible too it is said clearly and emphatically that God told Moses, 'I AM THAT I AM'. Verses thirteen and fourteen of Exodus, Chapter III sum up the message of the Maharshi, viz. that 'I am' is the name of God and the consciousness 'I am' which each has within himself is the voice of God or the Self.

The Maharshi tells all earnest seekers of the truth:

At every stage and for everything you say ‘I’, ‘I’; you say, ‘I want to know this’, ‘I feel this’, ‘I think this’, and so on. Ask yourself who this ‘I’ is, whence this ‘I’ thought proceeds, what is its source; keep your mind firmly fixed on this thought to the exclusion of all other thoughts, and the process will lead you sooner or later to the realisation of your Self.

The method is simply this: you ask yourself ‘Who am I?’ and try to keep your whole mind concentrated on getting an answer to that question. True, various thoughts will arise unbidden within you and assault you and try to divert your attention. For all these thoughts, however, the ‘I’ thought is the source and sustenance. So, as each thought arises, without allowing it to go on developing itself, ask who gets this thought. The answer will be ‘I’. Then ask yourself, “Who is this ‘I’ and whence”? The Maharshi says, “Don’t be discouraged by the variety and multitude of the thoughts which seek to distract you. Follow the above method with faith and hope and you will surely succeed”. And he gives an illustration:

You besiege a fort. As one soldier after another comes out, you cut each down with your sword. When you have thus killed the last soldier, you capture the fort. Till all thoughts are destroyed they will keep coming out. But kill them all with the sword, ‘Who am I?’, and finally the fortress will be yours. It is not by simply muttering the words ‘Who am I?’ to oneself that one can gain the end. A keen effort of the mind, complete introversion of all the faculties, total absorption in the quest wherefrom the ‘I’ springs — all this is needed for success.

In one of his verses the Maharshi says:

Plunge deep into yourself, in the inner most depths of your heart, as the pearl diver holding speech and breath plunges deep into the waters and so secure with mind alert the treasure of the Self within.

Sri Bhagavan is, however, not at all opposed to any of the other well-known methods, such as the *karma*, *bhakti* or *raja yogas*, or to *mantra japa*, ceremonial worship, temple-going, observance of rituals, or any of the different ways chosen by devotees to attain God. He advises each to follow the method which appeals to him best, or which he finds the easiest. He assures us that all pilgrims treading different paths will reach the same goal, which he insists is the realisation of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, the One without a second. All learned discussions about *advaita*, *dvaita* or *visishtadvaita* he regards as futile and unprofitable. For his view is that if the mind's activity is really reduced to nothing it will then get merged in the Self and the Self will take charge thereafter.

Let us all learn and practice this straight and simple *Maha Yoga* and attain peace and bliss!

Control of the Mind

“Other than inquiry, there are no adequate means for mind-control. If through other means it is attempted the mind will appear to be controlled, but will again rise up. Through the control of breath also, the mind will become quiescent, but only so long as the breath remains controlled; and with the movement of breath, the mind also will start moving and will wander as impelled by residual impressions. The source is same for both mind and breath. Thought, indeed, is the nature of the mind. The thought ‘I’ is the first thought of the mind; and that is egoity. It is from that whence egoity originates that breath also originates. Therefore, when the mind becomes quiescent, the breath is controlled, and when the breath is controlled, the mind becomes quiescent. But in deep sleep, although the mind becomes quiescent, the breath does not stop. This is because of the will of God, so that the body may

be preserved and others may not take it as dead. In the state of waking and in *samadhi*, when the mind becomes quiescent the breath is also so. Breath is the gross form of mind. Till the time of death, the mind keeps the breath in the body; when the body dies the mind takes the breath (*prana*) along with it. Therefore, breath-control is only an aid for mind-control (*manonigraha*); it will not bring about annihilation of the mind (*manonasa*). Like breath-control, meditation on some form of God, repetition of *mantras*, diet-regulation, etc., are but aids for rendering the mind quiescent for the time-being”.

— Sri Bhagavan in *WHO AM I?*

HE OPENED MY HEART

By Kavi Yogi Shuddhananda Bharati

DURING my dynamic silence of thirty years, about five years were spent in going from saint to saint, *ashram* to *ashram*. Even *samadhi* was not the *summum bonum* of realisation. My heart wanted something which I did not find anywhere during my long journey from Mt. Kailas to Kanyakumari. I stood in silence at the feet of the gigantic Gomateswara up the hill of Shravana Belagola when I was living among the Digambari Jain *sadhus*, wearing just a codpiece. At midnight a bright face rose like the sun in the crimson dawn, and a hymn from the Vedas came to my mind, ‘There he rises, the brilliant sun spreading a thousand rays, the cosmic form of the effulgent splendour, unique light, life of beings’! The crimson glory opened two lotus eyes, then coral lips emitted pearly smiles.

I quickly remembered Ramana Maharshi and felt his inner call. I put a semicolon to my spiritual pilgrimage and went quickly to Arunagiri. I went up the hill, took a bath in the waterfalls, meditated in the Virupaksha cave and came down. Accidentally Seshadri Swami met me and smiled at me. I went near him and in his silvery voice he declared, “Go on and on, Shuddhananda, until you go deep in and in”. He accompanied me a few yards and ran away saying, “Run, run, Ramana waits for you. Go in and in”.

I reached Ramanasramam and entered the small shrine of the Mother. There was a square room adjoining it and Nayana stood up exclaiming, “Welcome, Welcome! *Swagatam*”! Ramana’s gentle voice said, “Let Bharati come in. Bharati *varattum*”.

I saw no human form. I felt dazed. An effulgence enveloped me. My mind disappeared into silence. I sat down, closed my eyes and entered the inner cave — *nihitam guhayam*. An hour passed like five minutes. I came back to

myself, opened my eyes and saw Ramana's lotus eyes riveted on mine. He appeared like a *linga* spreading rays of burnished gold. "Now you have felt That', the cave is open! the 'I' is the Self-nectar!'. After all these years of *sadhana*, here I experienced a delightful inner reality which is beyond word and thought — *Yato vaacho nivartante aprapya manassa saha*. I caught hold of his feet and shed tears of delight singing with Saint Manickavachakar, who sang, "Today Thou hast risen in my heart a Sun destroying darkness".

Blaze on, O Light Divine
 Swallowing I and mine.
 The Self rose like the Sun
 The many merged into the ONE.
 Behold the beacon of I
 Inner Light of every Eye,
 Towering above He, She and it,
 A new dawn of inner delight.

(All songs that I dedicated to Bhagavan are contained in my book *Arul Aruvi*, Torrents of Grace.)

Nayana, whom I already knew in the *Gurukulam* congratulated me saying, "Like myself, you have found the right *guru* in the right place! Now the cave is ready for you". Sri B.V. Narasimha Swami entered the room and said joyfully, "Happy, Happy! Bhagavan has touched your heart"!

Then Niranjanananda Swami called me to the dining room. I opened my bag and brought out ground nuts and plantains and gave them to Bhagavan. He took one fruit and a few nuts, and I took the rest as his *prasad*. That has been my diet for many years.

The next morning after my bath I was meditating when Ramana came and we spoke for half an hour about practical Self-realisation. We had plenty of meetings during the nights. Maharshi is the beacon light of hope to seekers. He kept me

in the Virupaksha cave silent. Only Nayana, Seshadri Swami and B.V. Narasimha Swami (who wanted to know about Sai Baba), used to visit now and then. Ramana gave a finishing touch to Shankara's "*Brahma Satyam*, or Brahman is the unique reality". Bhagavan located that Brahman in the heart and called it Heart itself:

I, I shine the Truth in the heart's core.

That's Brahman; be That; seek no more.

Deepam crowds disturbed my cave life in Tiruvannamalai. Ramana made me live with Nayana in a mud cottage near the *ashram*. I had the joy of hearing *Vedic* hymns and Nayana's verses all day long as I remained silent and self-immersed, and prepared myself for the future fulfilment of my life.

The last day was fully spent at the feet of Bhagavan and that was my golden day. What he taught me on that day sustained me for twenty-five years:

The egoless 'I am' is realisation. The experience of 'I am' is peace. The meaning of 'I' is 'God'. The outgoing mind is bondage, the in-going mind is freedom. The heartward mind brings bliss. The restless worldly mind brings bondage and misery. The triads of knower, known and knowledge are one. You go to a cinema. Observe the projector light. If the projector light fails the whole show stops. Be Self-centered and finish your work in silence and come out. The world is nothing but the objectified mind.

BHAGAVAN RAMANA MAHARSHI

By Dilip Kumar Roy

IN Pondicherry I happened at the time to be deeply dejected. I yearned for peace, strained to meditate for hours, studied the scriptures, appealed to *Gurudev*, Sri Aurobindo. . . but all to no avail. I then recalled the joy I had enjoyed on my first visit to the Maharshi and decided that I must try again to reach peace of mind with the magic touch of his blessing. But there were a few brother disciples who warned me that it would be a *faux pas* to seek from an outside saint or sage what I could not get from my own *guru*. Their arguments were powerful, the more so as they stemmed from the love-lit gospel of *guruvad* (the *guru* principle). But after a sleepless night I resolved to take my chance and repair to the Maharshi's sanctuary.

This time I was the guest of a Parsi lady, one of his ardent devotees. She led me straight to the sage and told him, "Do you know Bhagavan, Dilip says you have a beautiful laugh". He laughed and we all swelled the chorus.

But my doubts still gave me no respite. In the end I argued that my friends in Pondicherry were right, that in all crises one should appeal, first and last, to one's own *guru* and to no other. I sat down in this distraught frame of mind and kept asking myself how I could possibly come to port if I declined to accept my great *guru*'s lead. And so when I closed my eyes to meditate, I felt miserable. Meditate on what? To pray? To pray to whom?, and so on till, lo, after just five minutes, the three weeks' incubus of gloom was lifted as though by magic and an exquisite peace descended into me, entailing an ineffable ecstasy.

The next morning I went to him and made my obeisance. His eyes shone like twin stars as he smiled kindly. I told him what had come to pass — a veritable miracle — peace settling in the heart of a storm! He nodded, pleased, but made no

comment. I then asked him if it was true what people said that he advocated *jnana* and disparaged *bhakti*. He smiled, “The old misconception! I have always said that *bhakti* is *jnana mata* (that is, *bhakti*, or love, is the mother of *jnana*, knowledge)”. When I heard this I was thrilled and understood at once why I had felt in him not merely a great *guru*, come with his kindly light to lead us back home, but a human friend and divine helper rolled into one.

I asked him to explain what the writer of *Maha Yoga* quotes as his considered opinion that no authentic sage ever contradicted another, all illuminates being essentially one.

He answered me this time at some length, contending that the paths may seem diverse, but when the pilgrims reach the goal, the perspective changes and one sees clearly, that only those who have lagged behind quarrel about the relative merits of different roads, and that only the goal matters. “So it is utter folly,” he added, “to go on wrangling among ourselves, because we were one in the beginning and shall be one again in the end. Also, this oneness is so thrillingly real that one may say, if X wants anything from Y then Y can hardly decline because in giving to X, Y only gives to himself in the last analysis”.

“But Maharshi,” I asked after a hesitant pause, “why is it that the *bhakta* so often turns away from the *jnani*, even after they have both attained the goal?” He smiled, “But your premise is wrong, to start with”, he said. “For, as soon as the *bhakta* arrives he finds he is at one with the *jnani*. For then the *bhakta* becomes *bhakti swarupa* (the essence of *bhakti*) even as the *jnani* becomes *jnana swarupa* (the essence of *jnana*) and the two are one, identical, although pseudo-*bhaktas* and pseudo-*janis* may dub the idea ‘crazy’ and start pitching into one another”. Then he added after a pause, “But such strifes break out only among the followers of the illuminates. The Masters always stay above the battle. I was reminded of Sri Ramakrishna’s joke about Rama and Shiva: “Even when they

fight”, he said, “the duel ends in perfect harmony, peace and love. But Rama’s soldiers, the monkeys, and Shiva’s henchmen, the ghouls, go ever on clashing and snarling and calling names”.

On my second visit I asked the Maharshi if he was against *guruvad*. On this point many an exegete has written and improved a great deal. So I wanted to have his final verdict. He said:

I have spoken about it many a time. To some the One reveals Himself as an outer *guru*, to others, as an inner one. But the function of either is identical, in the last analysis. For the outer *guru* pushes you inside whereas the inner *guru* draws you inside, so the two are not incompatible. Why then all this bother about His reality one way or the other?

Many a time have I been helped by his compassion and wonderful parables. Here are two I have savoured most.

The Maharshi often says with an amused smile that we can hardly afford to be vain of our so called knowledge when we don’t know even our own self, the self in whom we have homed from our cradle. An authentic *guru* G told his disciple D many a time about the tragicomedy of this human foolhardiness. But D forgot and grew vain after ripening into a resplendent savant. So the *guru* came disguised as a ne’er-do-well and watched with him a royal procession. The king was riding a grand caparisoned elephant and a seething crowd flanking him on both sides, hailed and acclaimed him along with D, entranced and proud to have been appointed the private tutor of such an august king. G nudged him and asked him what the ovation was about. D frowned and replied, “Don’t you see? Our great gorgeous king mounted on such a magnificent elephant”!

G: But who is the king and who is the elephant, sire?

D: Idiot! Have you no eyes? The one on top is the king and his mount below is the elephant royal.

G: But sire, what is top and what is below?

D: (Annoyed, knocked him down and, sitting on his chest, shouted) Here, see? I am on top and you are below.

G: But sire, who are you and who am I?

D: (shivered as though galvanised) I . . . I don't know.

G: And yet you are vain that you know all! May I ask what is the knowledge you plume yourself on?

The second parable he related with such a lovely laughter! I have rendered it in heroic couplets. I only regret I had no tape-recorder at the time to register his beautiful laughter. Here is the revealing parable:

In wrath, fierce Snake A bit the small snake B,
 Who groaned and writhed and cried in agony:
 "O merciful Mother! Soon I shall be dead!"
 A third Snake C then drew near B and said
 "Take heart, child 'twill be all right — wait and see!"
 And he sucked the poison out at once till B
 Was healed — then the rattled A vindictively
 Bit C who wailed: "Alas! now I shall die!"
 A cursed "To hell! Do you not know that I
 Am king of the snakes and so must ruthlessly
 Do them to death who madly challenge me
 And my royal verdicts". With this he went away.
 Now whispered B to C: "Fear not, I pray,
 For I'll now suck the poison from your wound
 Until you, too, compassionate friend, come round".
 Then they, cured, thanked each other in ecstasy
 And the *Yogi* thanked the Mother of sympathy.

I feel led to include here, a relevant excerpt from my reminiscences about one of my dearest friends and colleagues, the great *yogi* Sri Krishnaprem. He visited me more than three decades ago at our Pondicherry Ashram, whence he repaired to Tiruvannamalai to pay his heart's homage to the Maharshi.

On his return he spoke in a moved voice about the radiant sage and what his grace had revealed.

“You know, Dilip, how profound is my admiration and veneration for the sage. I whole-heartedly agree with Sri Aurobindo’s verdict that his *tapasya* is a shining light of India. So I went to Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai to receive his blessing.

“When, in the evening, I entered the hall where the Maharshi reclines daily on his couch, I sat down in silence, along with the others, to meditate at his feet. But believe it or not, Dilip, as soon as I sat down I heard a voice questioning me over and over again, ‘Who are you?, ‘Who are you?’ I tried hard to ignore it, but it went on and on like an importunate visitor, who knocking at the door, insisted on being admitted. So, in the end, I just had to formulate an answer, ‘I am Krishna’s servant’. At once the question changed, like a shape-changer, into, ‘Who is Krishna?’ I answered, ‘Nanda’s son’. No use. The question was repeated without pause. I thought up other answers like, ‘He’s an *avatar*, the One-in-all, the Resident of every heart’, and so on ... but the questioning would not cease, till at last, I gave it up, left the hall and returned deeply disturbed, to meditate. But I had no peace. The voice gave me no respite, till in the end, I had to evoke Radharani who asked me very simply what answers I had given. I told Her but She shook Her head and then, at last, revealed it to me”.

“She did?”, I asked, thrilled.

He anticipated me, holding up his hand.

“No, Dilip, don’t ask me, please! I won’t tell you, for you will tell everybody, don’t I know you? But listen, there are more thrills to come”.

“Next morning”, he went on, “when I sat down again at his blessed feet, the Maharshi suddenly gave me a lightning

glance and smiled. I knew at once beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was the author of it all and that he also knew that I had divined his part correctly. Then as I closed my eyes to meditate, a deep peace descended into me and settled like a block of ice as it were till my every cell was numb with an exquisite bliss. Didn't you have the same experience, as you wrote to me once"?

I nodded delightedly. "Yes Krishnaprem. If my memory doesn't fail me, I think I wrote also in what context I had received the boon from the Maharshi. I was so peaceless for having gone to Tiruvannamalai, that I told myself I was a fool to expect peace through his contact when I could not have it at the feet of my great *guru*. And yet I did feel the peace percolating through me like a scintillating light! I had an experience of this indescribable peace three or four times previously. Only, every time it had a different rhythm as it were, though the melody was the same, to exploit a simile from music. What is still more delectable is that sometimes I can almost recapture it by meditating on his tranquil face with that faraway gaze. Once or twice, this peace has soothed me, somewhat like the peace that music distills. But perhaps you find this rather vague".

"Not at all, Dilip", he said, shaking his head and continued, "As I meditated it was borne home to me through the mystic silence, that though this peace stemmed ultimately from the Lord Himself — doesn't He say in the *Gita* that He Himself is the primal source of all experience? — the peace in this instance was transmitted through His beloved agent the Maharshi".

"But isn't that precisely why He sends to us, as His deputies, the great saints and sages, messiahs and *avatars*?"

"Of course He does. Didn't Ma explain to you the soulful import of His *naralila* — that is, why He comes down to earth from age to age to play hide and seek with us humans, as a human being"?

He paused a little, then added with a quizzical look, “I feel tempted to tell you the sequel”.

“Only you have misgivings about confiding in me”?, I finished for him, laughing.

“Well, I’ll risk it”, he laughed back. “For what happened was too wonderful to keep back. So listen with bated breath”.

I hung on his words, my heart going pit-a-pat. He said, “As I went on imbibing this delectable peace, meditating at his feet, I suddenly took it into my head to return the compliment and prod him with a question in silence, ‘And who are you, may I humbly ask?’ It so happened that the next moment I opened my eyes involuntarily when — lo, I found his dais empty”!

“You don’t say so”!

“Yes, Dilip”, he nodded enjoying my mystification, and continued, “there was the dais where he had presided two seconds before, but in the twinkling of an eye, as it were, he had vanished — just melted into thin air! I closed my eyes once more and then, as I looked again — lo, there he was, reclining, tranquil and beneficent like Lord Shiva Himself! A momentary smile flickered on his lips as he gave me a meaningful glance and then turned towards the window, as was his wont”.

I caught my breath, “Marvellous”!

“In all conscience he is a *Mahayogi*, as Sri Aurobindo told you. You see the point of the miracle, don’t you?”

“That he is beyond *nama-rupa*”, I hazarded. “The nameless and formless manifesting Himself through name and form”?

“That’s right”, he answered reflectively, “or, shall I say, the One beyond all *maya*, the star beyond the phantoms, the last reality beyond the ephemera, the silence beyond the songs. You may exploit any simile you fancy. Personally, I look upon

as a sign of his grace, his giving me the answer in a way only he could have given”.

I smiled, “So, he met you more than half-way”?

“He is compassion itself, don’t you know”?

Yes, indeed. He was compassion incarnate as I have realised many a time vividly, a realisation to which I have testified gratefully in one of my ecstatic poems:

IN MEMORIAM

A face that’s still like the hushed cloudless blue,
 And eyes that even as stars drip holiness,
 Won from a Source beyond our ken, a new
 Messenger Thou, in this age, of a Grace
 Men ache for and, withal, are terrified
 When it shines too near — wan puppets of fool senses,
 They would disown the soul’s faith — even deride
 The Peace they crave yet fear — for Life’s false dances
 And siren tunes beguile the multitude!
 And they woo mad Time’s whirls and wheels — for what?
 At best a reeling moment — an interlude
 Of half-lit laughter dogged by tears — of Fate!
 O Son of Dawn! who only knowest the Sun,
 And through His eye of Light see’st all that lies
 Revealed — a flawless Plenitude which none
 Save Sun-eyed children ever might surmise!
 For only the chosen few so far have won
 The Truth that shines beyond world’s wounds and cries;
 Who hymn Thee, throned in the high dominion
 Of Self’s invulnerable Verities,
 Are granted a glimpse of Bliss of the Beyond,
 Thou singest: Nay, ‘tis here’ — yet without Thy
 Compassion’s pledge how few would understand?
 Homage to Thee, O minstrel of Clarity!

Sayings from Bhagavan

Recorded in June 1918 By C.V. Subramania Aiyer

1. Turn the mind inward and rest in your own Self.
2. Mind is the cause of bondage.
3. Give up one thing after another and rest in peace.
4. What we get, we shall lose, so desire not.
5. There are two kinds of meditation. The first is to be practised by advanced aspirants — *nirguna dhyana* — where one seeks to know the Meditator himself. The second kind is to be practised by those less advanced — a some what round about course — *saguna dhyana* — where the meditator, meditation and the object of meditation get merged ultimately into one.
6. When I come to know that I was never born, I shall never die. Death is for one who is born. I was never born. I have no body and so I shall never die. I am everywhere; where am I to go and where am I to come?
7. When a man's mind is dead, he will not die again.
8. Attain the *sushupti* (state of sleep) in the *jagrat* (waking) state, and you become a *jnani*.

IDENTITY

By Lucy Cornelssen

Question: If the ego or 'I' be an illusion, who then casts off the illusion?

Answer: The 'I' casts off the illusion of 'I' and yet remains as 'I'. This appears to be a paradox to you; it is not so to the *jnani*.¹

Question: Is an intellectual understanding of the truth necessary?

Answer: Yes. Otherwise why does not the person realise God or the Self at once, i.e. as soon as he is told that God is all or the Self is all? One must argue with himself and gradually convince himself of the truth. ²

How is this? Are there not many quotations from Sri Ramana Maharshi's works and talks quite to the contrary, wherein he clearly states that there is no reaching the truth by intellect, but that intellect (or mind) has to be transcended in order to attain to the truth? Isn't this a flagrant contradiction?

Only apparently.

According to the highest revelations of mankind we are the truth. Why then are we not aware of this plain fact? Because the intellect has developed from being a useful servant into a troublesome and tyrannic master in the house. It will not and cannot be convinced of the higher truth, because this is beyond its scope. However, it can be transcended and the conviction reached that there is a higher power, and that it will do to open the 'Heart' to the possibility of direct experience.

¹ *Guru Ramana*, 17 February, 1937.

² *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 16 December 1937.

Let us see. First of all, what is meant by 'intellect'? It is a faculty of the brain. Its roots are simply discriminating and choosing; when mature, it is the thinking faculty. In a wider sense we have to add two other faculties — emotion and will. These three together are a biological mechanism of reacting on impulses from without and within our body. It developed with the development of the brain and nervous system and is prompted and conditioned by the faculty of perceiving, consciously or unconsciously, which itself is not part of that mechanism of reacting, but is independent of it.

A newly born child reacts merely to bodily comfort and discomfort, which means that it shows only feeling. After some weeks or even months it starts to discriminate faces and tries to understand things, which means it is beginning to develop its intellect. The will is only discovered by it in its third year. In between it has learned to speak and to discriminate among the members of the family by name, using its own name when it wants to point to itself. It does not talk about 'my' ball, or 'my' doll, but 'Peter's ball, 'Mary's doll. This is an important feature, since it shows that the child has as yet no genuine feeling of 'I'. It takes itself as one person among other persons. And even when after some time it starts to use the 'I' for itself, this is still not a genuine 'I'. The child has simply learnt to imitate the way persons around itself express themselves, that everybody, though having a name by which he or she is known and spoken of by others, says 'I' when speaking of himself or herself.

During this first decade of life the child learns to discriminate between 'father' and 'mother' and 'mother' and 'I', 'myself' as persons with certain qualities, everyone occupying a certain status within the group, the family. When the brain and nervous system of the child are nearly fully developed, then it has a concept of itself as a clear-cut person, boy or girl, named so-and-so, tall or short, fair or dark, clever in school or not — in short a 'personal I', complete in itself.

However, strange to say, this young human being is not at all happy, though not knowing why.

Parents and elders believe they know the reason, if the boy or girl is in the period of puberty and adolescence, the body undergoes a certain change in its metabolism.

It does, but that is quite a natural development which started unperceived much earlier without giving trouble. The real reason for the unbalanced mental condition of the young person is quite different.

Brain and nervous system are more than just working mechanisms in the service of the individual body-mind-complex; they have a higher purpose. They are meant as a 'wireless receiver' for impulses from the universal Consciousness too. The mental and emotional struggle at the time of puberty is also caused by the first powerful impulse from cosmic Consciousness, the mystery of identity, of the parabiological 'I am', which tried to enter the individual consciousness. However the entrance is blocked by the 'personal I', which is entirely an image only, a concept, a mere construction of the intellect.

There would be no need for struggle and disturbed balance, if young people knew what was happening, if they were prepared to surrender to that wonder which is in store for them during this high time of their maturity. They should have learnt to witness what is going on within themselves. Then they would discover that their individual consciousness has a greater Consciousness for its source, from which now emanates a 'greater I' than that by which they are more troubled than pleased, an 'I' without an identity which is simply itself, omnipresent, void, silent, pure, a glorious and mysterious peaceful joy.

Alas, the entrance is blocked, though quite unconsciously, by sheer ignorance, which caused the growing intellect to be busy entirely with the impulses from outside, neglecting everything which is not sense perception.

In the young Venkataraman the genuine 'I am' broke through the unconscious resistance by means of a dramatic experience. What started as a sheer horror of physical death, developed itself during the experience as the 'death' of the manifold 'personal I' for the sake of *Aham-sphurana*, the 'I – 'I' or genuine identity.

In almost all other cases it succeeds only in sneaking in, which means not being able to overwhelm and wipe out the intellectually constructed 'I'. Both of them get confused into a knot of a personality which now is no longer simply false, as it was before, but worse. It now has the spark of genuine identity as its backbone, as it were, making it seemingly impossible to discriminate and separate one from the other! Never mind, there will be other opportunities later on in life to work on the 'wireless' as will be shown presently.

It is to be kept in mind that according to the sages, we always are that true identity, the *Atman*. It is our true nature. The change of the situation during maturity consists merely in the fact that the true identity is going to become conscious, to open up the individual consciousness to the dimension of cosmic Consciousness.

However there is the usurper intellect and the more it develops the more it obstructs. What can we do to remove it?

Intellect will never be able to grasp the reality of an identity beyond itself, but it can be brought to acknowledge its own limits. We have gently to train it, not to interfere any more; we have to keep it quiet by not listening to its arguing. When we do not pay attention to its pros and cons it finally gets tired and gives up. Meditation is the means of such systematic training. But even more efficient is a mindful awareness throughout the day. It keeps the intellect to those areas of everyday life for which it is meant and where it is a useful servant.

This is the royal means to bring it under control for the future. Usually it is restless, the favourite vehicle of *rajoguna*. But fortunately there are periods of spontaneous *sattvaguna*, when even the intellect is automatically inclined to rest. These are the moments when we may discover suddenly a free access into the beyond, where the *adhikari* (the ripe one) may meet his true identity.

Sri Bhagavan says:

Why is not the pure 'I' realised now or even remembered by us? Because of want of acquaintance with it. It can be recognised only if it is consciously attained. Therefore make the effort and gain it consciously.³

In the *Mahavakya*, '*Tatwamasi*' – Thou art That – 'That' stands for the true identity. Sri Ramana Maharshi uses the same 'That' in verse twentyseven of *Reality in Forty Verses* (and later on), 'The state in which the (personal) 'I' does not arise, is the state of being That'.

Going through our most cherished memories of the past, are there not certain situations when we were happy in a way we have never been able to forget since? Maybe we belong to those for whom a beautiful landscape is more than merely a pretty picture. Maybe it was a sunset at the seashore or even in the Himalayas, very quiet, very remote . . . Maybe we involuntarily opened ourselves to it, so that it could enter our very being with its timeless beauty, its surrender into a supreme light, a supreme silence, in which all thinking and planning, all insecurity and restlessness vanished, leaving behind a person who had forgotten himself, being completely absorbed by the mystery of this now and here.

This state is exactly a spontaneous revealing of 'That', his true nature, his true 'I'. It broke through because he surrendered himself to an impression strong enough to lift up

³ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 3 January, 1937.

for the time being the restlessness and convulsion of the reacting mechanism of the personal 'I' for the sake of the non-reacting true 'I'. This true 'I' is always only a mirror to all impressions and happenings whereas the personal 'I', responds to them by reacting.

If the person who experiences this would simply close his eyes and direct his attention towards what is going on within himself, then he would learn that all the beauty, the wonderful deep and silent bliss of this hour is only his own true Being his, true 'I'. And he would experience that the perfect man is not a mere theory, but a reality and at the same time the perfectly happy man. For perfection is not a matter of qualities but a state of Consciousness.

A person who likes music can have a similar experience with great music. Each great piece of art can have this effect on those who are able to tune themselves accordingly. But even a rather dry person, somebody who takes himself to be completely down to earth, is able to experience the true 'I', simply because it is the inevitable next step of evolution, which man is destined to recognise and to take.

It is love which is ready to receive and bless everyone and which has the magic touch to open the gate to the true identity, that remains locked up forever to intellect.

We have to forget the shade of egotism in human love and leave alone the torrent of passion which some may call love. We have to think of that feature of love which releases the radiance of the true 'I'. Neither passion nor infatuation reveals it, but it is found in the hours of silence, when words are unnecessary and thoughts about matters of day-to-day life have no strength — hours of a timeless 'here and now', without past or future.

Where there is genuine self-forgetful love, there shines instead of the habitual 'me', the pure, quiet, real 'I', and here also it is not recognised, because the lover covers it with the beloved 'thou'.

True, we have entered into these experiences more or less unconscious of their real meaning, leaving no other result than merely a nostalgic memory. But realising now what kind of treasure awaits our readiness to breakthrough our ignorance, we can even make use of an experiment which was strongly recommended by Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi.

After having retired for the night, one has first to relax from the restlessness and the tension of intellectual activity. When sleep is nearing, one has to try to keep as the last thought the resolution to meet as the first thing on awakening the experience of the true 'I'.

Deep and sincere longing will always succeed in this experiment, if not immediately then after some attempts. The first thing emerging from sleep into waking consciousness is always the true 'I' pure, silent, absolute in itself, remaining all alone for a few seconds, or even longer by practice. Other thoughts start only a little later, testifying to the little known fact that 'Consciousness' is not necessarily the same as thinking.

What is possible once even for a moment can be extended by practice. This experiment gives you the advantage that you now know the aim of endeavour. It will help you in your further *sadhana* like leavening in the dough.

Sri Ramana Maharshi called this the 'transitional I' and stressed the importance of this experience:

This transitional 'I' is a moment of pure awareness, which is aware only of itself as 'I', pure identity in itself.⁴

The 'I'-thought' is only limited 'I'. The real 'I' is unlimited, universal, beyond time and space. Just on rising up from sleep and before seeing the objective world, there is a state of awareness which is your pure Self. That must be known.⁵

⁴ Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 353.

⁵ *Ibid*, Talk No. 311

The moment you succeed, keep very quiet and observe: this 'I' neither thinks nor wills; it has no qualities, is neither man nor woman, has neither body nor mind; it has no trace of the 'person' which you thought yourself to be up to now. It is simply conscious of itself as 'I am'. Not 'I am this', 'I am that' — only 'I am'.

But beware. It is not your 'I-person', who has this 'I-Consciousness' as an object, but this Consciousness is your real 'I'. This pure be-ing 'I am' is the first glimpse of the true Identity, which is by nature Pure Consciousness.

To make this test of awakening in the morning is important insofar as one knows afterwards what the goal for which we embarked looks like. It also makes it easier to recognise it in other circumstances. Moreover, this silent, alert awareness is the last experience which the seeker can reach by his own effort. For when his 'personal I' is wiped out, then all his effort too has automatically reached its end. Where there is no 'personal I' there cannot be any effort. What remains is a consciousness which no longer feels but is listening within; no longer thinks, but is silent; no longer wills, but lets happen what will happen. It is exactly the state which reveals itself as 'I am', the true Identity.

Last but not the least it is this great experience of the true identity of man which turned the schoolboy Venkataraman into the world famous sage Ramana of Arunachala!

TRUDGING ALONG TO THE HOLY HILL

By Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata

FROM the earliest years of my childhood, Sri Bhagavan has been churning my heart with the single mission of realizing the Self and thus becoming one with him. Sri Bhagavan brought me into this phenomenal existence in a simple agricultural family which named me 'Bhagawata', a humble son and devotee of the Lord. My parents dreamt of the day when their youngest son would be able to read the Hindi *Ramayana* of Goswami Tulasidas. A beginning was made by my elementary school teacher, Sri Ramapyaresinha, who not only loved *Sri Ramacharitamansa*, but worshipped it daily. Every evening he taught us how to recite it with zeal and instilled in us love and devotion for Sri Ramachandra and the Divine Mother, Sita. These six years of my early education continued to kindle the fire of devotion in me.

Although there was none near my home who could teach me to seek the Self in a formal way, my three brothers read and recited the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Ramayana* daily, and as a result of their religious life I was dyed indelibly with *bhakti* and *jnana*. The first World War and the non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi awakened my village people. As a result, my brothers and other village young men joined the ranks of the national movement. Thus, both the fires of *deshamukti* (national liberation) and *atmamukti* began to burn brighter in my heart. Although quite young, I remained immersed in the fast-flowing fountain of *vairagya* (dispassion) and *viveka* (discrimination). Treading these difficult paths of patriotism and devotion was only possible with the infinite grace and mercy of Lord Ramana, who never allowed me to get entangled in projects that many a time lead guileless aspirants astray.

When Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi burst into my heart on Friday, 10 October 1941 in Darjeeling in the Himalayas, he removed the veils of forgetfulness from me and enabled me to realize that it was he and he alone whom I had been seeking all these years. When I saw his many pictures and read the text of the book, *A Search in Secret India*, by Paul Brunton, the old relationship was re-established. How I wished to fly to the lotus feet of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi on the slopes of the holy Arunachala hill! But he did not allow me to come to him while he was abiding in the body for the simple reason that I might look on him as the body. Instead he sent me into the world to work out my latencies before returning to him. Then, exactly eleven years later, in the guest cottage of the Quaker family of Helen and Albert Bailey, Sri Bhagavan came to me again and revived the smouldering fire of *jnana* and *bhakti*. Wherever he took me from then on, I found myself in his grip.

Now in 1979, while I sit in New York in Sri Bhagavan's Arunachala Ashrama, Sri Bhagavan makes me dream of the day when his temple shall rise on Fifth Avenue in this metropolitan city so that seekers of peace and happiness may wend their way there. Mornings and evenings shall be filled with the recitation of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, etc. "Abide in the Self, in the inmost recesses of the Heart", shall fill the temple, and people from different walks of life shall learn to tread his direct path of Self-enquiry.

During all these sixtyseven years of my bodily sojourn, I have been yearning for the day when I would be able to pay my debt to the world. Unceasing abidance in the Self is the work cut out for me, and on the sheer strength of his grace I have all along been trudging along, trudging along to the holy hill of the beacon light. In the midst of plenty or in the midst of paucity, Sri Bhagavan makes me ache for mankind, but all I can do is to contribute my mite to the world by adding a

grain of devotion. The mere existence of Sri Arunachala Ashrama in the Western hemisphere speaks for itself, and if we are able to keep the flame of devotion burning brightly in this phenomenal existence, Sri Bhagavan will have taken the destined work from all of us. One thing that has always been certain is that Sri Arunachala Ashrama has been founded and conducted by Sri Bhagavan alone, using all of us as his ordinary instruments.

When Sri Bhagavan came into the world one hundred years ago, he resuscitated the age-old teaching of ceaseless inherence in the Self in the cavity of one's heart. Anyone, anywhere, under any circumstances can profit from his unique instruction of returning to the source. He incarnated for the sake of removing the dense darkness of desire, delusion, ego and ignorance, to save us from the abysmal pit of forgetfulness. Though sometimes he taught with words, his most potent teaching has been his silence, from which all of us can profit without stirring from our place of birth or work. Arunachala Ramana teaches that no efforts ever go in vain. This teaching is the only hope for me, and with all my limitations I continue to call on him with his name, "Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya". Sri Bhagavan is the doer and I am simply his most infinitesimal instrument, and day and night I pray that he allow me to do his will. May I ever abide in Bhagavan Sri Ramana Arunachala!

THE GIST OF SRI BHAGAVAN'S TEACHINGS

By K. Padmanabhan

THE two main works of Sri Ramana Bhagavan, *Ulladu Narpadu* (Reality in Forty Verses), which is the *siddhantha* (philosophical or theoretical) treatise, and *Upadesa Saram* (Quintessence of Wisdom), which is the *sadhana* (practical) treatise, elaborate his teachings. The gist of the principle and practice of his teachings is given by him in one verse:

*Hridaya Kuhara Madhye Kevalam Brahmamathram
Hyaham Aham Ithi Sakshath Atmaroopena Bhathi
Hridhvisha Manasa Swam Chinvaatha Majjathava
Pavana Chalanarodhat Atma Nishto Bhavatwam.*

In the inmost centre of the Heart cave *Brahman* alone shines in the form of *Atman* (Self) with direct immediacy as 'I' — 'I'. Enter into the Heart with questing mind, or by diving deep within, or through control of breath, and abide in the Atman, dissolving the ego.¹

Sri Bhagavan, without decrying other practices or methods, emphasises *Atma Vichara*, or Self-enquiry, the 'Who am I?' quest. He says it is not a mere method of questioning, as that would take one nowhere, since mind cannot destroy mind by mere thinking. The source of the mind itself is to be found, and one has to transcend the mind to reach the thought-free state, the state of pure Awareness. Diving deep within, one should lose oneself in deep absorption in the Heart, the Self-effulgent bliss. Conviction of spiritual declarations is intellectual and is no doubt necessary, but the Heart must play the ultimate part for spiritual absorption.

¹ Ramana Gita, Chap 2, v.2

According to the *Upanishads*, the *Atman* is to be seen, heard and reflected upon, but it is not an object to be known. Sri Bhagavan reiterates the same and wants one to realise the *Atman* here and now and abide as such. Therefore the quest of the *Atman* is to be purely inward, within the centre of consciousness, so that the identity with the Universal Consciousness gets firmly established. Reality is neither physical nor mental, but spiritual. This knowledge gets established only with identity. It is only when the ego dies that the eternal Being in the core of the Heart is realised.

Atma Vichara is not a mere *japa* or *mantra*. It is listening or enquiring within. What is needed is a mind devoid of thoughts. Silence, paradoxical though it may seem, would be the dynamic method of Self-enquiry for merging the mind in the Heart. With *sat-darshan* or truth perception, awareness is realised as the only true Being. It is for each one to discover this truth for oneself.

There is no need for any prolonged study of the scriptures or even for a *guru*, once you get fully convinced of the efficacy of the *vichara marga*. Grace is always there to draw you from within. It is indeed grace that initiates the *vichara*, aids you to still the surface agitations, and takes you to the silence of the Self.

BHAGAVAN RAMANA AND THE BHAGAVAD GITA

By Prof. G.V. Kulkarni

IT is well known that the Bhagavad Gita is one of the main scriptures of the Hindu religion (*Prasthan Trayi*, the threefold authority). It is a universal scripture, a 'Song Divine'. Bhagavan Ramana used to say that the *Gita* and the Bible are one and one should read the *Gita* always. ¹ He often used to quote verses from it and explain them in his own inimitable and illuminating way in reply to various questions of seekers. The light that he has thrown on the teaching of the *Gita* is simply unique, extremely clear and very penetrating. This is perhaps because he lived the scripture in toto and hence had the authority to elucidate it like Bhagavan Sri Krishna or Sri Jnaneshvara. He spoke from his plenary, first-hand experience and not from verbal erudition.

Bhagavan was asked by a devotee to give in brief the contents of the *Gita*. He selected fortytwo verses and arranged them in an appropriate order to serve as guidance. ² Another devotee complained that it was difficult to keep all its seven hundred verses in mind and asked if there was not a verse that could be remembered as the gist of the whole *Gita*. Bhagavan immediately mentioned Verse twenty of Chapter ten:

*Aham Atma, Gudakesa, Sarvabhutashayasthitah Aham
Adischa Madhyam cha bhutanam anta eva cha.*

I am the Self, O Gudakesa, dwelling in the hearts of
all beings.

I am the beginning, and the middle and the end of
all beings. ³

¹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 387.

² This booklet entitled *Gita Sara* is published by Sri Ramanasramam.

Another time Bhagavan summarised the purpose of the *Gita* in a reply to a question by a devotee:

Devotee: The *Gita* seems to emphasise *karma*, for Arjuna is persuaded to fight. Sri Krishna Himself set the example by an active life of great exploits.

Maharshi: The *Gita* starts by saying that you are not the body, that you are not therefore the *karta* (doer).

D: What is the significance?

M: That one should act without thinking oneself to be the actor. The person has come into manifestation for a certain purpose. That purpose will be accomplished whether he considers himself the actor or not.

D: What is *karma yoga*?

M: *Karma yoga* is that *yoga* in which the person does not arrogate to himself the functions of being the actor. The actions go on automatically.

D: Is it the non-attachment to the fruits of action?

M: The question arises only if there is the actor. It is said throughout that you should not consider yourself the actor.

D: The *Gita* teaches active life from beginning to end.

M: Yes, the actorless action. Bhagavan Sri Krishna is an ideal example of such a *karma yogi*.⁴

Maharshi clarifies it thus:

The Self makes the universe what it is by his *shakti* and yet he does not himself act. Sri Krishna says in *Bhagavad Gita*, 'I am not the doer and yet actions go on'. It is clear from the *Mahabharata* that very wonderful actions were

³ *The Bhagavad Gita*, English translation by Arthur Osborne and Prof G.V. Subbaramayya.

⁴ Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, pp. 599-600.

effected by him. Yet He says that He is not the doer. It is like the sun and the world action.⁵

There are certain apparent contradictions in the *Gita* which baffle an ordinary reader. Maharshi in his replies removes such contradictions. In reply to a question he said:

The answers will be according to the capacity of the seeker. It is said in the second chapter of the *Gita* that no one is born or dies; but in the fourth chapter Sri Krishna says that numerous incarnations of His and of Arjuna had taken place, all known to Him but not to Arjuna. Which of these statements is true? Both statements are true, but from different standpoints. Now a question is raised, how can *jiva* rise up from the Self? Only know your real Being; then you will not raise this question. Why should a man consider himself separate? How was he before being born and how will he be after death? Why waste time in such discussions? What was your form in deep sleep? Why do you consider yourself as an individual?⁶

On another occasion a devotee asked Maharshi, “Why does Sri Krishna say, ‘After several rebirths the seeker gains Knowledge and thus knows me?’ There must be evolution from stage to stage”.

Maharshi replied:

How does *Bhagavad Gita* begin? ‘Neither I was not, nor you nor these chiefs, etc. Neither is it born, nor does it die, etc’. So there is no birth, no death, no present as you look at it. Reality was, is and will be. It is changeless. Later Arjuna asked Sri Krishna how he could have lived before Aditya. Then Krishna, seeing Arjuna was confounding Him with the gross body, spoke to him accordingly. The

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 440.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 409.

instruction is for one who sees diversity. In reality there is neither bondage nor *mukti* for himself or for others from the *jnani's* standpoint. *Abhyasa* (practice) is only to prevent any disturbance to the inherent peace. There is no question of years. Prevent this thought at this moment. You are only in your natural state whether you make *abhyasa* or not.⁷

Here Maharshi refers to his famous dictum, “You are already realized”.

People generally consider Sri Krishna as a personal God. They overemphasize the physical form of the Lord. According to them He is a mythological God of the Hindus; and thus they miss the real teaching of the *Gita*. What does Sri Krishna say about Himself throughout the *Gita*? Bhagavan clearly removes the doubt and explains the real nature of Sri Krishna. He points out even the limitations of the cosmic form shown by Him to Arjuna, as described in the eleventh chapter.

Once a devotee said, “There is a girl of eleven at Lahore. She is very remarkable. She says she can call upon Krishna twice and remain conscious, but if she calls Him a third time she becomes unconscious and remains in trance for ten hours continuously”.

Maharshi commented, “So long as you think that Krishna is different from you, you call upon Him. Falling into trance denotes the transitoriness of the *samadhi*. You are always in *samadhi*; that is what should be realized. God vision is only vision of the Self objectified as the God of one’s own faith. Know the Self.”⁸

Another devotee asked, “What is *visvarupa*”?

M: It is to see the world as the Self of God. In the *Bhagavad Gita* God is said to be various things and beings and also

⁷ *Ibid* p. 218.

⁸ *Ibid* p. 586.

the whole universe. How to realize it and see it so? Can one see one's Self?

D: Is it then wrong to say that some have seen it?

M: It is true in the same degree as you are. Realization implies perfection. When you are limited, your knowledge is thus imperfect. In *visvarupa darshan*, Arjuna is told to see whatever he desired and not what was presented before him. How can that *darshan* be real?

On another occasion a devotee asked, “*Divya chakshuh* (divine sight) is necessary to see the glory of God. This physical eye is the ordinary *chakshuh*”.⁹

M: Oh! I see, you want to see million sun-splendour and the rest of it.

D: Can we not see the glory as million sun-splendour?

M: Can you see the single sun? Why do you ask for millions of suns?

D: It must be possible to do so by divine sight.

M: All right. Find Krishna and the problem is solved.

D: Krishna is not alive

M: Is that what you have learnt from the *Gita*? Does he not say that He is eternal? Of what are you thinking, His body?

D: He taught others while alive. Those around Him must have realized. I see a similar living *guru*.

M: Is *Gita* then useless after He withdrew His body? Did He speak of His body as Krishna? ‘Never was I not, etc’.¹⁰

Later Sri Bhagavan said that divine sight means Self-luminosity. The full word means the Self.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 407-408.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 305-306.

In this dialogue Bhagavan has very logically and mercilessly removed the common ignorance about the real nature of Sri Krishna and has clearly indicated Him to be the all-pervading Self, residing in the Heart.

The three yogas, *karma*, *bhakti* and *jnana* (which includes *dhyana*) given in the *Gita* are meant for seekers of different temperaments, says Maharshi. *Karma yoga* is meant for men of active tendencies. It is calculated to eliminate the idea of doership in the seeker. *Bhakti yoga* is meant for men of powerful emotions. It dissolves the ego in supreme devotion for God. *Jnana yoga* is meant for men of reason and understanding capable of Self-enquiry. When the mind wanders, it should be controlled and brought back to the Self. It eliminates the individual 'I', the spurious ego. This is the direct path and all other *yogas* ultimately lead to this. When the false ego is understood and hence removed, the Reality shines in all its glory automatically. To understand this truth and experience it here and now is the purpose of the teaching of the *Gita*, says Bhagavan.

In the words of Saint Jnaneshvara, "It is easy to make the earth golden, to create great mountains of desire-yielding jewels, to fill the seven seas with nectar, but it is difficult to indicate the secret of the meaning of the *Gita*". Bhagavan Ramana has definitely done it. No wonder it is identical with his main teaching, "Either know who you are or surrender".

From the great Adi Shankara down to Dr Ranade and Swami Swaroopanand, many scholars and sages have written works on the *Gita*. In this galaxy, Bhagavan Ramana's contribution to the *Gita*, though couched in a few words, is remarkable and true to the original. It is at once universal and beyond the categories of time and space, and yet practical in the everyday life of man.

Let us pray to him during this birth centenary year to shower his grace and blessings on us all to help us understand this truth and experience it here and now. A thousand *pranams* to him!

Supplication to Sri Bhagavan

By A.K. Ramachandran

Decades ago, as a student, I used to gaze with admiration at the photo of a youth in a loin cloth before whom my father used to prostrate. The last words of my father before losing consciousness were about Bhagavan and about how eagerly he had been looking forward to spending some years in Sri Ramanasramam. These words were ringing in my ears when I visited Sri Ramanasramam in 1930. I was specially blessed on this occasion as I saw him all alone in the dining hall in the early hours of the morning. I caught hold of his holy feet as Markandeya caught the *lingam* and told him about the last words of my father. With tender love beaming out of his eyes, he said that my father had taken leave of him before passing away! When I beseeched him to bless me, he said, "It will be all right in the end". Those words of benediction have rung in my ears and brought me hope in moments which I cherish in my heart as the most worthwhile event in my life.

RAMANA SAT-CHIT-ANANDA GURU

By Dr. Purnima Sircar

WHENEVER there are earnest seekers God manifests in human form to guide and bestow grace upon them. The faceless *Sat-Chit-Ananda* or the original name 'I am' has been named differently through the ages. In the Vedas it has been named 'Indra-Varuna' or 'Indragni'. In the *puranas* it was 'Lakshminarayan' or 'Siva-Parvati'. Sri Ramachandra called it 'Maheswar' and devotees of Rama, 'Rama-Sita'. Jesus called it 'Father' and Christians, 'Jesus the Christ.' Sri Ramana Maharshi identified it as 'Sri Arunachala Ramana', and his devotees, as 'Sri Arunachala Ramana'. One is the eternal aspect and the other is the phenomenal aspect of one and the same thing.

What can be said about him whose voice is the voicelessness or *mouna*? "The sun is ever there; to see it you have only to turn towards it". And man inevitably turns towards the spiritual Sun. Somewhere in his evolution he has to turn from the circumference to the centre and end his dizzy circumambulation round his ego-self. Somewhere there is the question, "Who is this 'I'? What is its nature? And who seems to suffer through all these changes yet remains throughout?" A quest is launched upon, and again it is inevitable that man must pursue the quest to the last because there lies his supreme achievement and eternal bliss. "Though the 'I' is always experienced, yet one's attention has to be drawn to it. Then only the knowledge dawns". Suitable guides can be found on the path. One such is Ramana *Satguru*.

We, the latter day devotees were not fortunate enough to be in his physical presence and yet not so unfortunate as to miss him completely. For us he is the same all the time, the perennial source of inspiration, guidance and grace. Many will bear witness that even the physical manifestation was

not withheld after his death to devout seekers, if earnestly desired. What is impossible for him who is beyond any limitation — the ever-present *guru*?

“Everyone has to come to Arunachala”, said he. Whichever path may be followed it ends in ‘I’ and the investigation of the nature of the ‘I-thought’. Its elimination is the *sadhaka*’s hardest task. But what could be easier than to fall back on the experiencer and to ask oneself who perceives and who sees with each experience? All methods of *sadhana* lead to one-pointedness of the mind; thus distraction or the *vikshepa* of the mind may be overcome, but the veiling or the *avarana* might still remain. If blankness prevails, unless one persists with the question, “To whom is the blankness? Who am I?” and holds a receptive attitude with absolute surrender for the grace to prevail, the veiling is not removed. One day the door is opened and the meditator is merged in the ever-present, all-pervading peace. The peace is so profound and all absorbing that the *sadhaka* cannot give up till it is constant and abiding. A true *sadhana* begins and his inner monitor will guide him till that state is reached. “My reward consists in your permanent unbroken bliss. Do not slip away from it”, says the *guru* to a devotee in *Kaivalya Navanita*. This is endless Ramana-Consciousness.

Truth is so simple that it is hard to grasp. Sri Bhagavan said, “Who does not know that he exists? Everyone is Self-realised, only he does not know”. Who will believe that Self-realisation is so simple a process? No elaborate rite and ritual, no *asana* and *pranayama*, no dispute and dissertation, only turn the mind to its source. Ego is not boosted, not fed, but simply dissolved in this process. Indeed Ramana’s teaching is hard for the confusion-ridden, *samskara*-bound mind; only those who have already exhausted them can comprehend it. But in the spiritual world intensity is counted and not numbers, and the few are sufficient for our ever-shining *guru*.

Sri Bhagavan says, “Ego in its purity is experience in intervals between two states or two thoughts. . . Realise this interval with conviction gained by study of the three states (waking, dream and deep sleep). Just like the screen in the cinema, the Self is ever there, no matter what the time or the picture of the phenomena are. But we do not realise because our outlook is objective and not subjective. You attach too much importance to the body. In deep sleep there was no world, no ego and no trouble. Something wakes up from that happy state and says ‘I’. To that ego the world appears. Our mistake lies in our searching in the wrong place”. His dispassion towards his body during his last illness, “Where is pain if there is no mind”? — is the same detachment he had throughout his life. The *Sat-Chit-Ananda* Self and the body without the intermediary ego-self and the reflecting media of *samaskaras* — such is Ramana *Chaitayna Guru*.

Ramana removes the confusion between *manolaya* and *manonasa*, between *kevala nirvikalpa* and *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*. The wrong idea that a man will be a log or a stone after the dawn of wisdom is dispelled categorically. “If everybody does *sadhana*, who will plough the field and sow the seed”? is the fear that assails so many and keeps them away from the quest. “The physical body will do whatever work it has come for, and the body is bound by the *prarabdha*, not your mind”, he assures us. And then Sri Bhagavan, through his teachings and by living among us for so long in *sahaja samadhi* has set an outstanding example as to how a *jnani* works and lives without feeling the burden of it. “Who is there to think about it”? was his reply to the devotees who pleaded with him to cure himself. An example of complete surrender to the higher power, by Ramana, ever-compassionate *guru*.

The profound *mouna* that pervaded his holy presence not only influenced and inspired whoever came under its spell, but drew mature minds from all over the world to this spiritual

centre. And it shall continue to draw such competent ones like a magnet. To understand this silence it must be experienced. In this age of unrestrained gibbering, lecturing and preaching, who could have imagined the influence of *mouna* upon the human mind? What transformation is brought about by turning the minds of innumerable devotees to the source by the peace that emanates from his profound *mouna*. “The highest form of grace is silence. It is also the highest *upadesa*”, said the ever blissful *Guru Ramana*.

Ramana’s Self comprises all and blesses all. Any attempt on our part to extol him is like worshipping the sun with an oil lamp. He consoled his devotees, “I am not going away, where can I go? I am here”. So we are always at the feet of Arunachala Ramana. To that grace personified, peace profound, the eternal *Satguru*, our heartfelt reverence and prostrations.

No Further Change

By Prof G.V. Subbaramayya

Questioned as to what changes he underwent after coming to Arunachala, Sri Bhagavan replied, “I am ever the same. There is neither *sankalpa* (will) nor change in me. Till I reached the Mango Grove I remained indifferent, with my eyes shut. Afterwards I opened my eyes and began functioning actively. Otherwise there is no change whatsoever in me”.

“But Bhagavan,” said one, “we do note many outward changes in you”.

“Yes,” replied Bhagavan, “that is because you see me as this body. So long as you identify yourself with your body you cannot but see me as an embodied being”.

from *The Mountain Path*, January 1966.

THE SAGE OF ARUNACHALA

By Ratna Navaratna

THE light of eternity, *Para Sivam*, transcendence merging in the immanence of *Sat-Chit-Anandam*, formless form of Siva that eluded the search of Brahma and Vishnu. Into its resplendence was drawn the youngster of sixteen, Venkataraman. The call of the Father was promptly obeyed by the son of Matrubhuteswara.

He had done little *sadhana*. He made no vows, but vows were made for him. The youngster did not leave home in search of happiness, nor was he seeking a solution to life's sufferings as did Prince Siddhartha. The son of Alagu-Sundaram set out on a homeward journey, from the citadel of *Sakti*, Madurai Meenakshi, to the abiding dwelling of the Father, Arunachala Siva, the eternal flame of Pure Awareness. Saint Pattinathar sings of the self same experience thus:

I followed in the footsteps of the gracious Mother,
Till at last, I was led to the Father-Lo!
The Mother, I no longer remembered.
Bliss was mine. This is *Nishtai* indeed!
O Kanchi Ekambaranatha!

For fiftyfour years, the son moved about as the radiant smile of Arunachala Siva. He stood as a tree on this mount of transfiguration. Like sage Trisanku, immortalised in *Sikshavalli* of the *Taittreya Upanishad*, he declared:

I am the Tree of life, the splendour,
The Mountain's crowning glory;
I am its eternal support and auspiciousness,
The light of the brilliant sun. my treasures are
Luminous wisdom and nectar of immortality.

After a poignant period of total withdrawal, the young *swami* ushered in a new race of mankind with the age-old query of “Who am I?” (*Naan Yaar?*) indicating the spiritual quest for personal and social regeneration. His technique of Self-enquiry awakened the inner consciousness of man by stilling the mind. Saint Tayumanavar thus describes this stage of Awareness in his adoration of the *mouna guru*, “*Chintai yara nil*, or freed from the fetters of thought, be still”.

People came to him for illumination and peace. From all walks of life at all stages of inner growth they came. And he was accessible to them all. They came for solace, world-weary and exhausted, some hopefully and some casually. He set them all at ease by his compassionate look and drew them gently out of the quagmire of delusion into the inner sanctuary where the heart rules with the subdued mind in attendance. From the enlightened *muni* they learnt “that one illimitable force alone is responsible for all phenomena we see and for the act of seeing them”. They acclaimed him as the Dakshinamurthi, the *Jnana Guru*, of our age.

The “Who am I?” quest leads to the direct realization of the Self — Siva, Siva. It is the heart of the *Saiva* faith to recognise the eternal not as obscured, but as revealed, by the transient, and to hold infinity in the palm of one’s hand, to see the One unborn in every birth and the One undying in every death. “Find out who you are and then ponder no more on the tragic brevity of your mortal tenure or on the transience of all things seen and known”, is the injunction of Bhagavan. Basking in the sunshine of his grace, his robust family of old and young, learned and unlettered, cows and peacocks, live and grow as That which is responsible for them all. I am that I am, the experience of true Being-Awareness, lies embedded deep within each one, breathing the breath of eternity, whispering the music of peace, throbbing with power to meet the challenges of life.

True awareness is the Infinite Eye
 Which sees no other, no duality,
 No good and evil, object and subject,
 Time, space or seed and fruit of deed.

Thus it came to pass that Ramana Maharshi embodied and spread anew the message of Arunachala. He pines not. Passions sway him not. Never for a moment does he forget the Self. He unfolds every moment the natural virtue of Self-giving. In Walt Whitman's words:

I do not ask the wounded person how he feels;
 I myself become the wounded person.

... ..

I understand the large hearts of heroes,
 The courage of present times and all times.
 I am the man, I suffered, I was there.

Let us not forget that the constant meditation on the source of our being calls for loving kindness, and an active radiation of goodwill in all directions and towards all forms of life. Bhagavan's *sadhana* of Self-enquiry cures us of deafness to the still sad music of humanity, gives us courage to confront the giant agony of the world, saves us from the tendency to be self-centered, uncharitable and ill-tempered. Know who you are. Return to the source. Dive into the depths of your being. Saint Karaikal Ammaiyar, in that exquisite poem, *Atputha Tiruvandadi*, unfolds the majesty of the Supreme Siva, perfect awareness.

The Knower is Himself, the object known.
 Himself, the knowing too Himself.
 Object, subject, all the universe.
 He alone the sole Reality.

Bhagavan's experience of his being as Pure Awareness released a fount of all-fulfilling love and power. The old

¹ *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, Verse 880.

meditation hall continues to this day to be the central power station, transmitting the Master's love and wisdom. The sanctum of the Matrubhuteswara temple and the *Samadhi mantapam* of Bhagavan vibrate as dynamic power centres, so that all who meditate or worship there pick up spontaneously the bliss of *Sat-Chit-Anandam*.

The preceptors of *sanatana dharma* prescribe diverse forms of *sadhana* in order to attain the goal of Self-realisation, such as study, *dhyana*, *tapas* and *bhakti*. However, in this age of split personality, it seems most natural that the science of the Self should be learnt by investigation and experiment in the laboratory of the mind. The *jnana marga* and the *vichara* method are the most appropriate to humanity today. Bhagavan is a modern *Upanishadic* seer, pointing to Arunachala as the symbol of *Satyasya Satyam*, the pure I AM which shines in silence, Self-effulgent.

He who, his ego gone, knows through and through
I, the first person, subject substantive,
Combined with 'AM', the predicate of being,
He indeed and he alone is the true knower.

² *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, Verse 137.

SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

By C.R. Pattabhi Raman

MY first meeting with Sri Ramana Maharshi was in the early 1930's when I returned from England after my studies. I accompanied the young Maharaja of Travancore to Tiruvannamalai. The Maharshi was sitting in a small building. He was, as always, the same serene blissful self with a benign look on his face. He spoke fluently in Tamil, Malayalam, English and other languages. When the Maharaja asked him what the first step was for *atma vichara*, he said that the very fact that he had come to Tiruvannamalai was itself the first step for him.

The next important occasion when I went to Tiruvannamalai was a few days before the Maharshi's bodily demise. I accompanied my father, Dr C.P. Ramaswami Iyer along with a friend. It was about nine in the night when we reached the Ashram. We were taken to the sage, who had been operated upon for a carcinomatous growth on his left arm. Sri Bhagavan was lying on a sofa in an annexe away from the Ashram. Apart from a few beads of perspiration on his forehead, there was nothing on his face to show that he was ill or was suffering from pain. He proved beyond doubt that pain or sorrow did not affect a realised soul. A leading civil surgeon from Vellore expressed great surprise that the sage did not even want anaesthesia for the operation and yet was able to stand the pain and the shock. Sri Ramana Maharshi spoke a few words to my father and we took leave. We came to the main Ashram and got ready for dinner. My father was just then saying that he did not want food and would have some milk. At that very moment an attendant ran to us with a message from Bhagavan, "The elderly person will say he will only have milk. Let him eat some fruits also". It was miraculous because the Maharshi was nearly half

a furlong away and could not have heard what my father was just then saying.

The Maharshi was unique in many respects. Like Sri Dattatreya of the *puranas*, he did not have a *guru* as such. One could see on his face expressions of joy when recitations from the Vedas and *Upanishads* were taking place in the Ashram. His path of knowledge was not rigid or exclusive. He was also a great *bhakta* of the Supreme Arunachala in the form of the eternal fire.

Sri Ramana did not seek to establish any new cult but showed the direct way to Self-realisation. He taught as a *jivanmukta* (liberated soul), exemplifying *Tat tvam asi* ('Thou art That', of the *Chandogya Upanishad*). Like Suka Brahman of *Srimad Bhagavatam*, he was characterised by *samatva* (sameness in joy and sorrow and freedom from duality).

His few writings in Tamil, like *Ulladu Narpadu* (Forty Verses on Reality), have been translated into many languages. They epitomise the truth enunciated by the ancient seers of India. His teachings are universal, for the entire humanity, and his presence is felt by devotees all over the world — such is his *chaitanya* or magnetism.

He frequently referred to verses from *Yoga Vashista* wherein the Sage Vashista advised the young Sri Rama to fulfil his mission as *avatara purusha*, all the while abiding in the Self. The ideal of Self-realisation is not visionary, but is the very goal of life. Unswerving abidance in the Self, the one, eternal Truth, whatever one may be doing, is well described by Sage Vashista:

Firmly established in the vision that shines forth
On the renunciation of all desires, and rooted
In your own Being as a *jivanmukta*,
Act playfully in the world, Oh Raghava.

To have seen him in flesh and blood and have heard his word is for us our great good fortune and most treasured memory.

THE SILENT INITIATION OF BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA

By **Maha Krishna Swami**

IN 1938, I was taken to Bhagavan. His face radiated serenity and endless love. I prostrated myself before him and then he said to me, "It seems you have been called". After thus greeting me, he became deeply absorbed. Without looking at anyone or anything, he was penetrating into my innermost Self. Suddenly, he turned to me and, with a look that acquired an indescribable intensity, aroused in me quietness, deep peace and a great compassion for all the beings of the universe. From that day on, I knew that Bhagavan was not an ordinary master but a Universal *Sadguru*.

I then began to tune myself to his *upadesa*, which I perceived was vitalizing and transforming me in every way. I knew that what I could absorb of the light of initiation would be according to my own efforts. I was to develop more and more control of my thoughts, to calm my mind for receiving the subtle vibrations radiated by Bhagavan.

One day he told me, "Silence is the most powerful form of teaching transmitted from master to adept. The soundless voice is pure intuition. It is the voice of spiritual sound speaking in our innermost being. Self-enquiry is the only path we have in order to eliminate spiritual unconsciousness, which is widespread. Self-enquiry brings the consciousness of the divine, the universal truth and the light that governs the universe. All this must be known, felt, lived and realized. In order to realize this truth, we need to eliminate the thinking mind, to dissolve it in the Universal Self".

To forget the ego and discover the universal Being, not as one being discovering another, but through the Self-

consciousness of this Being itself, is the direct path taught by Bhagavan. After practising Self-enquiry for a period of time one awakens a current of consciousness, the supreme consciousness, that is never affected by the destruction of the body. Bhagavan recommends, “Effort is necessary to move oneself deeper and deeper in the practice of Self-enquiry, not philosophising on the subject. Firm determination is necessary to achieve experience, not trying to find it at one particular point. This is to be done until the ego is consumed and only the Self remains”.

The Self is eternal kindness and boundless love, the sole reality. It shines like the sun and reveals itself as soon as the false thought is destroyed and no residue remains, for this thought is the cause of the appearance of false forms. Diving into the right side of the chest, the adept enters into the attitude of silence. Thoughts disappear and the state of consciousness, ‘I am that I am’, arises.

Bhagavan spoke very little, and showed the world how much could be transmitted by silence. With his attitude of serene benevolence he set all at ease, removing all criticism and surrounding everyone with the most pure universal love. I felt with absolute certainty that all the knowledge to be gained would be simply assimilated from his holy presence, for I had caught the truth that he is the link to the formless Being.

WHAT I OWE TO RAMANA MAHARSHI

By Douglas E. Harding

THOUGH I lived in India from 1937 to 1945 I did not, alas, get to see Ramana Maharshi. In fact, I knew almost nothing about him at that time. Since then, however, he has become one of the great influences in my life. I would like to acknowledge in this article, with immense gratitude, what I owe to him.

But first I must set on record, briefly, how things stood with me when, in 1959 in England, I first came across Arthur Osborne's books about Maharshi. I had already seen *Who I was*. Back in 1943, when I was still in India, I had noticed the absence here of anyone and anything. Leading up to that vision I had for some years been inquiring, with growing intensity, into my true nature. In the main, this research had taken the thoroughly Western form of investigating how I appeared to observers at varying distances — from the normal human range of a few feet all the way down to the angstrom units of physics, and all the way up to the light-years of astronomy. Clearly what my observers (including myself standing aside from myself) made of me depended upon their distance from here, how far off they happened to be. At great distances they saw this spot as some kind of heavenly body; in the middle distance they found a human body; at closer range (when suitably equipped with microscopes etc.) they discovered infra-human bodies — cells, molecules, atoms, particles. . . In some sense I was all this, and more. How marvellous, how mind-boggling! But it only underlined, and did nothing to answer, the real, question: what lies right here, at the center of all these bodily shapes, these regional impressions of me? What is the reality of which these manifold views are mere appearances? It seemed unlikely that the scientist would ever get to the ultimate particles or waves, the basic substance, but would just go on unveiling, layer by layer, progressively

featureless manifestations of that ever-elusive substratum. Yet this substratum, if any, was me, and therefore absolutely fascinating. I was stuck. How to penetrate to this central Unknown, which defies the inspection of the most brilliant researchers, armed with the subtlest of instruments.

Then, suddenly, I realised how silly this question was. How could I be accessible to them; how could I be inaccessible to myself? What outsiders make of me is their business; what I, the insider, make of myself is my business. They are the experts on how I strike them at **x** feet; I am the expert on how I strike myself at **zero** feet. I had only to dare to look at this Looker, here! What I saw then was, and is, the clearest, the simplest, the most direct and obvious and indubitable of all sights — namely the Space here, speckless, unbounded, self-luminous, vividly awake to itself as at once No-thing and the Container and Source of all things.

In the years that followed this discovery I had it for breakfast and dinner and tea. I soaked it up, lived with it, explored it, worked out some of its endless applications and implications. And I tried, by every means I could find or invent, to share my delight with others. How miserably I failed! Some folks were intrigued, even me a fairly harmless eccentric, if not actually crazy. But what did it matter? Endorsement from way out there of what lies right here — this was as pointless as it was lacking. All the same, I confess I often felt frustrated, lonely, and (very occasionally) discouraged. Not that I could ever doubt the actuality of what I saw myself to be here, and certainly I never questioned my own sanity. It was the world's sanity that I questioned! I got on as best I could, very much on my own.

And then, in 1958, I started reading seriously the early Zen masters — and felt lonely no longer. Here were friends who described what was unmistakably my own experience of myself as void. O joy! And, on the heels of this delightful company, came Maharshi himself.

Why, I ask myself, did he become so important for me? Why is he still, for me, superb? What, specially, have I to thank him for?

Firstly, I have to thank him for the gift of encouragement, a precious gift indeed. Not for confirmation of what I see (only I am in a position to see what's right here); not for his support (right here is the support of all things); not for friendship or even love (unless one can be friends with oneself). I am having difficulty in saying what I mean by the kind of encouragement he gave me when I needed it most. Perhaps I should call it — his *darshan*. Anyhow, from then on my dedication to the One-I-am was complete. No more wavering, no periodical discouragement, no other real interests than This.

Secondly, I have to record my gratitude to Maharshi for his insistence on the ever-present accessibility, the naturalness, the obviousness, of Self-realisation. Many a time I had been informed, and had read, that Enlightenment is of all states the rarest and the remotest and the most difficult — in practice, impossible — and here was a great sage telling us that, on the contrary, it was the easiest. Such, indeed, was my own experience, and I had never been intimidated by those religious persons who were careful to tell me that I couldn't see what I saw. Nevertheless it was for me marvellously refreshing to find that Maharshi never sent inquirers away with instructions to work for liberation at some distant date. It is not, he insisted, a glittering prize to be awarded for future achievements of any sort: it is not for earning little by little, but for noticing now, just as one is. Other sages, of course, have stressed the availability of this, but here Maharshi is surely the clearest, the most uncompromising, of them all. How wonderful to hear, him saying, in effect, that compared with Oneself all other things are obscure, more or less invisible, fugitive, impossible to get at: only the Seer can be clearly seen.

I suspect that it was because of this renewed assurance — Maharshi's insistence on the present availability of Self-realisation — that it became possible for me at last to share this realisation

with a friend, and then with several friends, and now with many friends. Today, I won't accept that inquirers can fail to see their Absence. I don't any longer ask them whether they can see this, but what it means for them. My job is to point out the Obvious, theirs to evaluate it. It is true that among the many who see, only a few surrender at once to What they see. This is not, however, the end of the story, and in any case the words 'few' and 'many', are inapplicable here. The problem of sharing This with others never was a problem. What others? — as Maharshi would say.

Which brings me to my third debt to him. I thank him for his uncompromising attitude to people's problems. For him, all the troubles that afflict humans reduce to one trouble — mistaken identity. The answer to the problem is to see Who has it. At its own level it is insoluble. And it must be so. There is no greater absurdity, no more fundamental or damaging a madness, than to imagine one **is** centrally what one looks like at a distance. To think one is a human being here is a sickness so deep-seated that it underlies and generates all one's ills. Only cure that one basic disease — mistaken identity — and all is exactly as it should be. I know no Sage who goes more directly to the root of the disease, and refuses more consistently to treat its symptoms. WHO AM I? is the only serious question. And, most fortunately, it is the only question that can be answered without hesitation or the shadow of a doubt, absolutely.

To sum up, then, I thank Ramana Maharshi above all for tirelessly posing this question of questions, and for showing how simple the answer is, and for his lifelong dedication to that simple answer. But in the last resort all this talk of one giving and another taking is unreal. The notion that there was a consciousness associated with that body in Tiruvannamalai, and there is another consciousness associated with this body in Nacton, England, and a lot of other consciousness associated with the other bodies comprising the universe — this is the great error which Maharshi never tolerated. Consciousness is indivisible.

The Value of Book Learning

Once some very learned Sanskrit scholars were sitting in the old hall discussing portions of the *Upanishads* and other scriptural texts with Bhagavan. Bhagavan was giving them proper explanations and it was a sight to remember and adore! At the same time, I felt genuinely in my heart, ‘Oh, how great these people are and how fortunate they are to be so learned and to have such deep understanding and be able to discuss with our Bhagavan. Compared with them, what am I, a zero in scriptural learning?’ I felt miserable. After the *pundits* had taken leave Bhagavan turned to me and said, “What?”, looking into my eyes and studying my thoughts. Then, without even giving me an opportunity to explain, he continued, “This is only the husk! All this book learning and capacity to repeat the scriptures by memory is absolutely no use. To know the Truth, you need not undergo all this torture of learning. Not by reading do you get the Truth. BE QUIET, that is Truth, BE STILL, that is God”.

Then very graciously he turned to me again and there was an immediate change in his tone and attitude. He asked me, “Do you shave yourself?” Bewildered by this sudden change, I answered, trembling, that I did.

“Ah, for shaving you use a mirror, don’t you? You look into the mirror and then shave your face; you don’t shave the image in the mirror. Similarly all the scriptures are meant only to show you the way to realization. They are meant for practise and attainment. Mere book learning and discussions are comparable to a man shaving the image in the mirror”. From that day onwards the sense of inferiority that I had been feeling vanished once and for all.

WHAT DOES HE MEAN TO ME?

By Wolter A. Keers

PONDERING over the Editors' request for an article, I am asking myself — What has Bhagavan meant to me, and what does he still mean to me. And I find that it is impossible to give a neat answer to this question.

The first thing, perhaps, is that he opened my heart. Immediately when I saw him, even from a distance, I recognized that this was what I had been looking for. But when I say that this This was radiating, all-penetrating and all-overthrowing love, striking me with the power of lightning, I know that only those who had the same experience will know what I mean. To anybody else, all this is verbiage, at best creating an image of someone very magnificent.

Well, Sri Ramana Maharshi was the Unimaginable, and therefore the Indescribable.

In literature, all over the world, one finds magnificent descriptions of sorrow. But who can describe happiness? Happiness is a state without ego and therefore without a someone in it to describe it, or even to remember it. What we remember is its afterglow, its reflection in feeling and body, not the moment when we were present as happiness itself, as happiness only.

Ramana Maharshi is not the frail, old, dying body that I saw reclining on a chair, but the Unimaginable, egolessness, pure radiance, and the body, however much we may have loved its appearance, was merely like a glittering diamond reflecting the light that he really was.

I did not understand all this, when I first arrived. To me, he was something like a divine person, and I was inclined to compare him with Jesus or the Buddha. But Jesus or the Buddha were images in my head, formed on the basis of the belief in

which I had been brought up, and on stories heard and read later on. And Sri Ramana Maharshi, from the first second I saw him, was anything but an image in my head. He was a bomb, exploding the myth of my life until then, within a few minutes, and without a word. His famous, to some, notorious question, “Who Am I?” immediately got a totally new colour. For several years, at home, I had been meditating on it, and it had something of a mystical, *yogic* and philosophical ring about it. Now it turned into, “Who on earth do you think you are, that you should be so important as to cultivate a garden full of problems and questions”? And this was not by way of condemning my ‘self’, my ego as it is usually called in *Vedantic* circles — but the question took this form in a sphere of utter astonishment: how, boy, tell me, how have you been so misled as to think that you or your ego had any importance? Instead of seeing that an ego is a mere stupidity or the belief in a fantasy, you have been cherishing it and even cultivating it by feeding it with important questions and problems. Your life until now was led by the belief in something totally imaginary.

Again, there was no condemnation in this — it was a discovery, something revealed to me, suddenly, and leaving me in utter amazement. Perhaps that is what triggered it. His mere presence revealed to me how utterly stupid I had been until now, that it was love which revealed it, not the criticising father-knows-better attitude that we know only too well. My darkness was revealed by the mere confrontation with light — light that did not condemn me or wish to change me, but accepted and loved me totally and unconditionally; light, as I understood later, that saw me as nothing but light.

What I did not understand at the time, was that this confrontation inevitably threw me back, as it were, upon the love that I was myself. Seeing “myself” as an oddity with problems implied that I was taken to a position beyond this “myself”, to that one Consciousness that all beings have in common and

outside of which nothing is. In this confrontation, this “myself” was no longer the “I” which I had lived so far, but a curious object, a little whirlpool of light within an ocean of light.

I have described my “adventures” with Bhagavan elsewhere.¹ How I rebelled at one moment, finding that this all-overpowering bliss and radiance left me the moment I left the Ashram premises, and how he then broke through my inner walls; how, as my stay with him had unfortunately been only less than two months, as his body was gradually dropping away like a worn-out leaf from a tree, not all problems and questions had been answered and dissolved; how, very soon after his “departure” I got his *darshan* and he referred me to a person, most venerable and exalted, who in the course of the following years allowed me to be in his nearness until he could say that his work on me had been completed.

In other words, it was only three or four years later that the full impact of what his silence had revealed to me became clear and “my own”. Perhaps these last two words and their inverted commas indicate the problem. Bhagavan never gave anyone the possibility to believe that you, as a person, could realize the truth. The axis, the central point in the *sadhana* that he proposed to most of us, was the invitation to examine who put questions, who came to see him, who wanted to realize, who felt exalted or miserable or angry, who desired or shunned, and so on.

Recently I heard a “realised person” (there is no such thing) say to one of his pupils, “There is only one question — that is the question “Who am I”. But we come with many, many questions, as our belief that we are a person has begotten many other beliefs such as the belief that if we are to realize the truth, we are to behave in a certain way, that we should or should not eat and drink certain things, that love is an object that one person can give to or receive from another person,

¹ *The Mountain Path*, January 1977

and so on. All such questions stand solved, the moment the question 'Who am I' is solved, when the light that we are and have always been is suddenly recognized in all perceptions, in the ones usually called 'good' no more than in the ones usually called 'bad'; in the perceptions usually called 'the world' and in perceptions called 'the ego'. Self-realisation is never found by attempts to change the person, the ego that we are not. It dawns, the moment it is made possible, and that is when there is full realisation of the fact that 'I am no ego and I have no ego'. I am That unimaginable something in which all things, including the thought that 'I am a person' arise, and which remains over after such perceived thoughts or feelings or sensorial perceptions have dissolved into it.

Once Shri Bhagavan asked someone, "How do you know that you are not realised"? If you ponder over it, you will find that this question is like an earthquake. Who says so indeed? It is the person, a mere habit of thought, that says it is not realised. How can a habit of thought, or, for that matter any thought at all know what I am? On the face of it, it seems extremely humble and it is certainly most acceptable to say, "Ah, poor me, I am not realised, no, no, far from it". In reality it is lunacy to believe that thought could ever know what 'I am'. It is the arrogance, the vanity of thought, to imagine the unimaginable and to have opinions about it.

So, pondering deeply over this question, one cannot but come to the conclusion that once again Shri Bhagavan told us the plain and naked truth, when he said, "The Self is always realised".

If you wish to have information about Britain, you do not go to the Turkish Embassy, and if you wish to have information about Turkey you do not go to the British Embassy. But in matters of Self-enquiry we do so all the time. We ask the not-Self about the Self and we investigate the image of the Absolute instead of realising that the Absolute is unimaginable. A Turk

may have visited Britain and someone from Britain may have lived in Turkey, but thought and the thoughtless can never be reconciled in an idea or image. So it is not by changing thought and through holier behaviour that the Self is realised, but through the insight that no information whatsoever can be obtained by what body and senses perceive, by what thought says or by what feelings tell us: the Self is always the Self, whatever pranks body, senses or mind may play. Realising the Self occurs when we stop questioning the perceived and start listening to the Self. How? For it is clear that the Self, the Absolute Reality, can never become an object to which we might listen. So direct contemplation of the Self is out of the question.

But we may for instance direct our attention to what remains over when thoughts, feelings and sense-perceptions have disappeared. Only that, which is always here, is entitled to the name 'I'. Thoughts and feelings and perceptions leave us as fast as they have come. Therefore, we can never be anything perceived. We are that which remains over when nothing is perceived but the Presence that we are, and in which all perceptions arise.

What happens in practice, is that when awareness is directed to the Self, it dissolves into the Self and awareness becomes aware of itself.

But it is essential, in one way or the other, that the answer to the question 'Who am I' is clearly seen on all levels: countless are the *yogis* who, by directing attention to awareness, got into all kinds of samadhi, and came out just as ignorant as they were before — and even more so. This is because it has not been shown to them that the 'I', the person, is nothing but a thought, an image which appears in Consciousness like a wave in water or a current of air in space. When the wave and the current have gone, water remains, space remains, quite unchanged, completely unaffected. Water has remained H₂O and space has remained space.

To the *yogi* who has not seen this, the belief will cling that the 'I', the person, was in *samadhi*, and this is perhaps more dangerous than the other superstition that 'I am an ignorant person.' Many people, even amongst the world famous spiritual leaders of our time, got stuck up there, in India as in the West. They talk about growing still larger, reaching still higher states, having still purer love, and so on, and completely miss the point that anything which can change is a perceived something, and that we can never be defined as limited, by what is perceived within us. They talk about enjoying God's love, failing to see that in love there is no 'I' to enjoy anything and that love is our real nature; that there, we are present as love, not as an 'I' that loves.

It seems so obvious, so evident, that "I love" and unfortunately "I hate", also from time to time. The question "Who am I" helps us to get disentangled from the ever-so-obvious. When we face this question, one day the trap will release us. But face it we must.

You as an ego are born afresh infinite times every day, but, there is no reality and no permanency in you, and only the telephone needs to ring to wipe out the I-thought or I-feeling; and indeed, in reality you do not exist other than as an "imaginary image" in your own head; in reality you were never born. . . to realise all that requires courage, and lots of it, if only because it goes straight against common sense and accepted truths and respectability. But what Sri Ramana Maharshi the radiant Master stands for is murder! What he wants is the death of you as a body and you as a mind. He or his words propagate the total disappearance of everything you call 'I' and at all levels. What we now call "my body" is a standpoint that must go. There is no such thing. What we now call "my thoughts, my feelings" must go. There is no such thing as 'me' or 'mine'. And when the illusion of 'me' goes, that which we call a body now, will be seen as non-existent,

unless in imagination; what we now call “my mind” will turn out to be non-existent, unless in imagination. Whose imagination? The ‘me’ is part of the imagined, just like the dreamer is part of the dream. When the dream disappears, so does the dreamer.

Yogis usually make a mistake when they try to kill thought by refusing it and clubbing it on the head, the moment it appears. To them, thought is the enemy, and a very real one that must be fought. To other, equally unfortunate persons, the I-am-this-body is such an obstacle and such a situation of unhappiness, that they kill the body. What such misled people fail to see is that the real death they seek is the disappearance of the idea I-am-this-body and I-am-this-mind. When thought is seen as nothing but consciousness or clarity, as nothing but a little whirlpool of light, thought disappears and light remains. This is the real death that we seek, and the return to life as really is, ever now.

When it is seen that every perception, sensorial or mental, is nothing but a movement in consciousness, in light, then, from that moment on, every perception chants the glory of this Clarity, just as one can see a wave as a song of the sea.

Of every hundred people who come to visit Ashrams and *gurus*, ninety-nine come to seek food for their imaginary ego. That is why so many frauds succeed in misleading many thousands of well-intentioned people. Such imposters hand out intellectual food and even the most authentic texts, and a pleasing atmosphere for feeling, and in exchange they humbly accept your dollars.

But Sri Ramana Maharshi has never given me anything. When I arrived, regarding myself as a poor man in need of help, he revealed to me that I was more than a millionaire, and the source of all things. Nor has Sri Ramana Maharshi asked anything from me — not even my love or respect. It was his mere presence that

uncovered or unleashed in me what cannot be described by words such as love or respect; it went deeper than the deepest feeling. My meeting with him was in no way a matter of giving or receiving, even though for a long time I thought so (he had given me his love, I had given him my heart). It was the naked, radiant confrontation of illusion and truth, in which confrontation and illusion could not stand up. It was wiped away, but not because He wanted it. He wanted nothing, and accepted me as I was. He did not wish to change me, but he saw me as I really was — a whirlpool of light in an ocean of light.

Perhaps it was the radiant certainty that he was, that broke through my fears and desires and enabled me to let go of the desire to enrich an imaginary “me”. Does it mean something to you when I say that what he meant and means to me, is the mere fact, that he was what he was, and is what he is? This certainty made me face and later realize the ageless, timeless, unimaginable fact, so utterly simple — “I am what I am” — the Unthinkable.

A good deal more than half of the film reels called ‘my life’ have been projected. I do not know how many more are awaiting — but what does it matter? So far the film has shown the best and the worst; it has shown scenes of violence, death, war, blind hatred, sadness and utter despair. It has also shown scenes of tenderness, of exaltation, the sudden flash of insight when, suddenly for a moment, the screen remains white, and I am there, all along, onlooker a moment ago, something like “spaceness” now.

Here I sit, in the shadow of the temple, my back against its wall.

Opposite: blazing light.

Behind him: sand, coconut palms. A monkey walks behind him, just a few yards away, its baby clasping itself tight under its mother, and looking curiously into his direction from its

safe, protected place. Squirrels running up and down the palms. An attendant moves a fan, to protect him from the heat.

Silence.

Someone approaches, prostrates before him, and hands a bundle of incense sticks to one of the attendants, who lights them. A wave of scent floats through the stillness.

What does he mean to me? What does all this mean to me?

The question has now become absurd, really.

I look at him. He makes it clear that I am this stillness.

The stillness that he is, the stillness that I am, is the meaning of things. To find it, people do whatever they do, hoping that it will make them happy and lead them to this stillness that is the perfect equilibrium, deep unfathomable peace, fulfilment of everything, root of all joy where no desire can survive.

I am the meaning of all things, the stillness behind the pictures projected upon the screen. They all point to one thing — that I am their beholder and that their meaning derives from me. As long as there is the belief that ‘I am a person’, their meaning is fear and desire, pleasure and pain, the constant search for love. The moment it is revealed that I am all, the meaning changes. Love does not search for love. It recognizes it everywhere. This inmost meaning, not a thought and not a feeling, may yet be called love. That is what human beings are — love, in search of itself, a whirlpool of light in an ocean of light.

Deep, dreamless sleep is the dark, dark-blue stillness, the peace from which all things arise, the waking state, the dream. These states are what we call ‘all things.’ Once this is seen, the waking state-the world-is peace with form. When form dissolves, peace remains. But no ‘I’ to speak of. The ‘I’ is part of the states. When the states disappear, what we really are

remains, nameless, I-less, formless, source of the universes that we call waking state or dream.

He called it the I-I, to make us understand.

It has no name, for in It, there is no-one to name it.

Words can only give a hint. Like — *I am that I am.*

The rest is Silence.

1947 - TIRUVANNAMALAI - 1977

By Henri Hartung

IN order to celebrate this anniversary of Ramana's birth, I would like to recall two moments of my life, the first having determined, the other confirmed, its meaning — they are two stays in Tiruvannamalai, at an interval of thirty years.

According to the Hindu theory of the four ages of life, my first stay corresponded with the end of the student state — *brahmacharin*; the second was that of increasing spiritual depth and also of sharing with all those who attempt to fulfil themselves — *vanaprastha*, in some remote place. A forest for instance, with one's wife. Between the two periods came about the state of the head of a family within society — *grahastha*. What a symbol at the really sinister end of the *Kaliyuga* or dark age, to be able to relate to such a reference — Sri Ramana Maharshi! What a benediction to take advantage of his testimony, of the wise man's *darshan*, in order to progress on the road to one's own fulfilment.

It is the autumn of 1947. I am in the presence of Bhagavan. The long path which leads to these few Indian houses called Ashram, suddenly becomes for me the royal road to the discovery of oneself. Yes, what is fated to occur, occurs. A first meeting at Lyon, just ten years earlier, with Olivier de Carfort, widely opened to me the door of a spirituality as far removed from a dead religion as from a theoretical culture. A discovery, experienced as a

revelation, of Rene Guenon, of metaphysics, therefore of Hinduism, and of the transformation of oneself. This is not a formula; my life changes, marked through the storm of war by a thorough study of this message of peace and serenity. So I learn, while simultaneously engaged in the fight, that in 1939 there survived an authentic representative of the traditional wisdom, Ramana Maharshi. After several episodes related to the end of the conflict in Europe, I am sent to the far East still combining, with the impetuosity of youth, my temporal mission and my spiritual journey.

There follows a new meeting, but this time in Bombay, with a *Brahmin* who tells me without astonishment as if it were an item of the everyday news and even before greeting me, “I was waiting for you, I have to escort you to Maharshi”.

Two days and two nights of train travel follow. While admiring the Indian landscape and especially the noisy and colourful scenes which occur during the stops, I try to assess myself. Finally I frame some ten questions that remain essential for me — the meaning of my presence on earth, what happens after death? Why? How? . . . Just after Madras, in the middle of the second night, my friend wakes me. The train has stopped at a tiny station, called Villupuram and we alight. My friend asks me to board another train at seven in the morning and get down at the third station. That is all. I do not remember having slept much. All happens as planned. I read the third station’s name — Tiruvannamalai. I settle in unsteady equilibrium at the back of a small carriage drawn by two oxen with long lyre-shaped horns, driven by a coachman without visible effort. He does not ask me where I am going; that is obvious, there is only one possible destination — the Ashram. We cross many other carriages whose two colossal wheels, much higher than the animals that move them, turn slowly with an uninteresting grinding. In spite of the early hour, crowds are walking and it is a permanent astonishment to see that no one gives the

impression of bothering his neighbour in spite of the very narrow space available to the people and to the vehicles. I am shaken and rocked by the tinkling of tiny bells tied to the animals' legs, and I inhale red dust rising from the ground. On my right rises the sacred mountain, Arunachala. It looks huge, but in fact only stands a few hundred metres above the plain. Suddenly, also on the right side of the road, appears a wooden arch which constitutes the main doorway, held up by two white columns. Moreover white letters compose the words Sri Ramanasramam. Above this inscription, in the middle of the arch, is inscribed the most sacred syllable of Hinduism, OM. All is in all, a single letter of the sacred writings contains the whole doctrine. That is why it is said that *Brahman* is OM, at the same time past, present, future, the state of waking, of dreaming and deep sleep, the highest support of meditation and fulfilment.

I pass the portal. All is quiet, some men and women come and go; one of them comes to me and invites me to drink coffee. As I ask him if it will be possible for me to meet the Maharshi, he smiles and beckons slightly with his hand. Beside him, having come momentarily to a halt, leaning on a long wooden stick, he is here, silent and smiling. I am silent. During the next ten days, I share the ritual life of the Ashram, sitting for hours in front of Ramana, in the meditation hall with a simple roof of coconut-leaves, held by bamboo posts that the members of the community call a *pandal*, as in the refectory. But, on the day of my departure, a precise answer to everyone of the questions I had prepared is given to me.

I give these indications as they show well this function of Bhagavan's presence. Sometimes through a few words written by himself, sometimes through answers to questions, sometimes through some shared domestic chores, especially in the kitchen, most often in silence; so unfolds a really subtle transmission of an exceptional spiritual reality. I have to repeat the word: Ramana is the Witness. Till his last day, he will make it possible for his

visitors, from the next town or from a remote country, on foot and penniless or in luxurious cars, servants or prime minister, to see him, even to talk to him, to bow in any case not in front of what he called himself this “chump of a body”, but in front of the living incarnation of the divine reality which is in every human being. He is here, amongst us, without ever showing any sort of ambition, nor a particle of pride, one of the “self-centered” projections that accompany human relationships. Obviously, he does not have this or that, he “is”. A smile of love and peace, a look. A look which I feel, while writing these lines, words could only devalue. Testimonial of inner truth at a time of outward tumult; of silence surrounded by noise and fury, of peace in the midst of disasters and atrocities and so many wars; testimonial of the living spirit facing so many forms of dead intelligence.

Thirty years after the meeting which changed my life, in the Autumn of 1977, I am once again at Tiruvannamalai, with my wife. A pilgrimage which goes to the depths of my soul, as it did thirty years ago. The Maharshi, his *Samadhi*, Arunachala. Who is present in these high quarters where I can, without great effort, come to terms with what, inside me, is truer than myself?

And what limited means I have at my disposal to describe but what is around me? Should I not as well, in order to carry out this story, draw inspiration from a remark of the Ecclesiastes, “There is a time for silence and a time for words”, or from one of Bhagavan’s talks, “Everything will come at its time”.

Sylvie and I visit the Ashram which remains in every respect similar to what it has always been. A library, two offices in which the persons-in-charge watch over the organisation of visits and over the daily celebration of rites and songs, the room for the Ashram journal, *The Mountain Path*, reception rooms, the kitchen in which a constantly harmonious activity is centered on big charcoal fires and the dining-room. On the other side of a path which leads from the entrance of the Ashram to the foot of the mountain, stands a temple at whose end lies a pond that is in fact

a big square reservoir, surrounded on every side by stone stairs on which a few monkeys hop up and down. In the middle, a memorial which carries the architectural emblem of South India, indicates the place of rest of Maharshi's mother and, close by, a very large hall, wherein is situated the *Samadhi* of Bhagavan.

Through his life which started on 30 December, 1879, through his comments which serve as concrete references for our personal growth, through the universality of his message directed in the same way towards Oriental and Occidental people, but also through his look, his smile, his silence, Ramana Maharshi is the last link of a chain of wise and holy men whose origin is beyond time and whose influence gives a meaning to our life, a harmony to our behaviour and peace to our heart. He appears as the witness of the real finality of the human state and so puts naturally into their respective places what our contemporaries still believe they may qualify as values. Time has come to acquire cognizance of this testimonial which illustrates transformation of an anxious person who has not found a meaning to his life into a serene person, centered on the essential. Yes, to be, as always, even nowadays.

The Ego

By Ira

The ego, in its desperation for survival, goes so far as to make even the concept of itself (the idea of a limited, embodied person) an object of thought, thereby creating the illusion that it has been apprehended.

The seeker thus deluded might spend a lifetime scrutinizing and studying his captive prize. But he must eventually ask, 'Who is he that has so admirably apprehended the ego?'

Thus will he see how his captive ego is a decoy only, and the real culprit exists still, strengthened even, by a new invisibility.

RAMANA: AMANA AND SUMANA

By Ra. Ganapati

WAS Ramana only *amana*, mindless? Did he not manifest to our human view the best and most beautiful of minds? Did not the supreme Parasakti manifest through this *Parabrahman* the very cream of a good, noble, virtuous and loving mind? Himself transcending *dharma*, did not every act and every word of his reveal *dharma*? If Rama, who averred *atmanam manusham manye* (I consider myself only a human being), personified all the noble traits of man in the *Tretayuga*, it was Ramana who was ever-steeped in Atman-Consciousness, without a trace of identification with his human habiliment, who embodied the perfect man in the *Kaliyuga*. Why not write a *Ramanayana* about this *Sumana*?

If as sky — *dahara antarakasa* — he is beyond words, as the sea of virtues too — *sakala guna sagara* — he beggars description. His sky-like silence silences our mouths and minds. The variegated waves of his oceanic music, with its different *swaras* pitched to the *adhara sruti* of goodness, also baffles and stills our puny words and thoughts. *Amana or sumana*, either way he is *anirvachaniya* — indescribable; that was Sankara's word for *maya*. Strangely, that is also the apt expression for the sage who was utterly untouched by *maya*. Other sages retained a small dash of *maya* for our edification. But even the motive of edifying others was absent in Ramana.

Remembering him, in Ramana *smaranam* we experience the *Amana's* peace and the *Sumana's* love — and enjoy the sweetness of a melody unheard.

UNIQUE MESSIAH SPEAKING THROUGH SILENCE

By S. Ramakrishna

A trepidation overpowers one while attempting to weave a tiny garland of homage to the immortal sage of Arunachala, Maharshi Sri Ramana, on the occasion of his birth Centenary.

The remarks Sri Ramana proffered to his devoted disciples when they planned to celebrate his birthday for the first time in 1912, come back to the mind as a strident warning and severe chastisement:

At least on one's birthday one may mourn his entry into this world (*samsara*). To glory in it and celebrate it, on the other hand, is like delighting in decorating a corpse. To seek one's Self and merge in the Self — that is wisdom.

Ye, that wish to celebrate the birthday seek first whence was your birth. That indeed is one's birthday, when he enters that which transcends birth and death, the Eternal being.

Yet, with due deference to the feelings of his devotees, he did not prevent them from celebrating his *jayanti* year after year. But, as for himself, this celebration was like an inconsequential ripple in the ocean of serenity and silence that he ever was.

In a situation like this, Sri Ramana must have considered two aspects that were involved in the celebrations. Which was his real birthday? Was it not the day when he was well and truly established in the *Brahma Stithi* — the state of equanimity so eloquently expounded in the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*? Such a one is immune from all delusions. But there were the fervent pleadings of the disciples who yearned to utilise his advent for reinforcing in themselves all that they had learnt at

his feet and gave them anchorage in life. They also wished to widen the pathway to the blessings of a purposeful life divine to their brethren all over India and the world.

Sri Ramana could easily fathom the sincerity of the intent, and the selflessness of the effort. His attitude was verily that of the *jnani* of the *Bhagavad Gita* who participates in the affairs of the world wisely but with total abandon and disinterestedness.

This brings us to the question of the ultimate goal that Sri Ramana always taught — the goal of Self-knowledge, of Self-identity, which he had actually experienced and achieved. To him, there was the non-dual *Brahman* and nothing else. This transcendental experience of the non-dual *Brahman* could be got only through a constant and searching inquiry into oneself — “Who am I?” Self-enquiry, therefore, is the means he taught to reach this goal.

The numerous anecdotes, accounts of various encounters, and the questions and answers that punctuate the life of Sri Ramana reveal beyond doubt his persevering reiteration of the need for Self-enquiry. Sometimes questions seemingly unconnected with the subject elicited from him instructions regarding Self-knowledge.

This search for the true nature of human personality, the meaning and significance of human life on earth, the source of the “Intimations of Immortality” that gifted men receive now and again, has been going on from time immemorial.

Perhaps, in the earlier stages, this search was directed outwards but very soon man turned his gaze inwards and looked for an answer not in the depths and distances of Nature but in the innermost recesses of his heart. We have in the *Upanishads*, the young seeker Nachiketas turning boldly his eyes inwards and seeking from the God of death an answer to the eternal question, “Who am I?” The quintessence of the

life and message of Sri Ramana is also the same — relentless quest for “Self knowledge.”

Sri Ramana never consciously did anything to make an impact and to carve out a niche for himself in the annals of history. He shunned all publicity and image building. He never gave discourses, much less went out on lecture-tours. When people went to him and put questions, he answered them in his own simple way, devoid of pontifical solemnity. True, he did some writing, in response to the entreaties of seekers, but they are very few though very precious. Asleep or awake, he was so fully immersed in the bliss of the immortal Self, that he gave no attention to his mortal, transient self. He was totally unassuming and had successfully effaced himself.

Sri Ramana did not found a new cult or a new religion. He did not insist on compliance with any *marga*, ritual or line of conduct. Neither did he give any new direction or effect any reform within an existing one. But he showed a new path to adherents of all religions — the direct path of erasing the ego and discovering the Self, by Self-enquiry.

The timeless snows on the Himalayas have been enriching the plains below with nourishing waters for many millennia and will continue to do so for many more. Similarly, in perpetual confirmation of the standing proclamation of the Lord in the *Gita*, age after age, whenever the waters of spirituality seemed to be ebbing away, *rishis* and *munis* have descended on this *punyabhumi* of ours and made the tide of spirituality rise higher and bathe the low-lying areas of human existence, again and again. Sri Ramana undoubtedly belongs to this *parampara* of immortal Godmen.

Strange are the ways in which sages and saints keep the stream of spirituality constantly flowing. Some lead a life of incessant activity, while others withdraw into the quietness and the silence of some hallowed place. There, like a dynamo,

they generate the power that transforms people from lead to gold. To the superficial eye, pomp and pageantry might appeal, but behind them all there is a vast storehouse — *akshayapatra* — of inexhaustible power, luminous and strong, serene and silent.

The Vedas themselves point out that the most potent form of sound is inaudible. It is only when it gets modified into lower forms that it becomes audible speech. So it was with Sri Ramana. This is his uniqueness. Beneath the small quantum of his utterances lies the depth of wisdom beyond one's gaze and hearing.

Maharshi Sri Ramana is a symbol of serenity and compassion. He will remain for generations to come as a living embodiment of *Advaita Vedanta*, the ideal of a perfect *jivanmukta*.

A few days before he cast off his body, the Maharshi proclaimed, "They say that I am dying, but I shall be more alive than before".

There is no doubt that the message that this Messiah teaches through silence will become more and more eloquent and reverberate with greater power as the eternal wheel of time — *kalachakra* — turns on and on.

The highest tribute to such greatness is silence.

Silence is golden.

SRI RAMANA'S BOYHOOD IN MADURAI

By **N.R. Krishnamurti Aiyer**

AFTER the passing away of their father Sundaram Iyer at Tiruchuzhi, the boys Nagasami and Venkataraman (later to be known as Ramana Maharshi) were brought up by their paternal uncle Subbier residing at Chokkappa Naickan Street (now known as Ramana Mandiram) in Madurai. The brothers, who were robust and ardent sportsmen in their early teens, gathered around themselves a circle of sturdy young friends among whom M.S. Venkataraman, Suppiah Thevar and Narayanasami were most prominent. All these three predeceased the Maharshi. The writer of this article knew these persons in the early thirties, and could get from them the following accounts of their personal relations with the boy Ramana.

The following account was given by M.S. Venkataraman who was a clerk in the Health Department of the District Board in Madurai.

M.S. Venkataraman was then just about ten years old, too young to participate fully in the outdoor adventures of the company. Nevertheless he had his share in them. The members of his family were co-tenants of the house with Subbier's family. Every night, when the whole house was silent in sleep, Nagasami and Ramana whose beds were in a remote corner of the house, would appropriately adjust their pillows and cover them up with their bedsheets so that it would create the impression of their presence in their beds. It was the duty of little Venkataraman to bolt the door of the house when the brothers went out at about 11 p.m., and to admit them on their return at about 4 a.m.

Now let us turn our attention to Suppiah Thevar. At the time the author saw Suppiah Thevar he was employed in a firewood depot. He also conducted during the cool hours of the morning

and evening a physical training school in which young men had training in *silambam* in which Thevar was an adept. *Silambam* is a sort of quarterstaff, a very hard bamboo stick of about five feet, to be whirled about so that the wielder could knock out any opponent who dared to come near. The stick was an instrument of defence as well as of attack. Strength of body and muscle was also developed by physical training in the school. Suppiah Thevar was a master in this field.

The following account was obtained from Suppiah Thevar who was himself an active participant in those activities.

The venue of the activities, fixed well in advance, would be either the sandy river bed of the Vaigai or the Pillaiyarpaliam Kanmoi (rain fed tank) close to Aruppukottai road, the outskirts of Madurai city. Every member of the group would, while passing the house of Ramana, leave a pebble at the door step. Nagasami and Ramana, as leaders of the group, would be the last to sally forth from the house after a check of the pebbles showed that all their friends had gone to the place of the meeting. There was rarely a defaulter. Ramana and his playmates had a jolly time playing games on the sandy bed of the Vaigai river or engaging in swimming contests in the Pillaiyarpaliam tank. They would then return sufficiently early to their beds without exciting the least suspicion of their absence from home.

The next account was obtained from Narayanasami. When the author met him he was Librarian in the Town Hall of Madurai, known as Victoria Edward hall.

Usually, the terrace of the house and the small room in which the boy Venkataraman made his “Self-enquiry” were vacant and rarely used by the families in the ground floor. Here the youngsters played. One of the games they played was what they called ‘throw-ball’. Young Ramana would roll his body into something like a ball and the sturdy group of youngsters would throw him from one player to another.

Sometimes the human ball fell down when the player failed to catch it. The wonder of it was that for all this rough tossing and dropping, there was not the least scratch on the skin, let alone any muscular sprain or bone fracture!

Narayanasami said that he used to see his friend sitting still for long stretches of time in the small room on the first floor. Narayanasami asked Ramana whether he could also do likewise. Forthwith Ramana told his friend to squat on the floor with his legs crossed (as in the semi-*padmasana* posture) and pressed a pencil point midway between his eyebrows. Narayanasami lost sense of body and world and sat still in a trance for more than half an hour. When he came to himself he saw Ramana sitting, with his face wreathed in smiles. Narayanasami said that he failed when he tried to repeat the experience by himself.

Bhagavan's Teaching in America

By Dennis Hartel

We young devotees in the West, striving and gasping for a breath of air in the stormy sea of this world, have found not only pure fresh air but a vessel to carry us to the shore of immortality and truth, in the life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

To be deposited in what we consider to be HIS Ashrama in the Western Hemisphere, to dedicate our lives to the ideal of the Ashrama, and to have the warm friendship and support of those who have no other ideal, no other goal but to realize the truth as taught by Sri Bhagavan, is for us the greatest gift of grace in which we find an incomparable wealth of inspiration and joy.

What more is there for us to do but to strive with all our strength and might to realize the truth of our Master's teachings. Then only may we be worthy recipients of his grace. Then only may we be called true devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

BHAGAVAN RAMANA – THE SVARAAT (SOVEREIGN OF THE SELF)

By K. Sivaraj and Smt. Vimala Sivaraj

IF Sri Bhagavan Ramakrishna ushered in the spiritual resurgence of India in the last century, Sri Bhagavan Ramana helped establish firmly man's spiritual identity and the eternal truth of *sanatana dharma*. His advent as a *jnani* was particularly timely for twentieth century man, obsessed with his scientific and technological progress and his crass materialism.

Having attained *atmanusandhana* at the tender age of 16, a fatherless son being educated in an uncle's house, he sought out Arunachaleswara and with sublime *vairagya*, he lived on and in the vicinity of the hill of the holy beacon, from 1896 till his *Maha Nirvana* in April, 1950. Out of infinite compassion born of strength and *Brahmic* bliss, he revealed the truth in an inimitable manner to all devotees. His very active, open and lustrous life was one prolonged revelation of the truth of the *Upanishads*. He wore only a loin cloth but was a sovereign master (*svaraata*).

Witnessing the changes of body and mind,
Naught but the Self within him beholding,
Heedless of outer or inner and middle,
Blest indeed is he in the loin-cloth. ¹

The core of his teachings consists in the fact that between the luminous Self (or Pure Consciousness or *Isvara*) that we truly are and the *jada* (insentient) body, a spurious 'I' or ego-self, formless like a phantom, arises; our little self limited by the body struts about in the world of *nama* and *rupa*. This ego-self is an impostor and has only a shadow reality and if investigated will flee. The elimination of this phantom which is the cause of

¹ *Kaupina Panchakam*.

all illusion, is the goal of all religions. When the little ‘I’ recedes and ‘dies’, and ‘I-I’ current emerges and stands revealed, that is the *poornam* or the plenitude, eternal and perfect. To be that ‘I-I’ is the aim and purpose of human life.

Ramana constantly urged that Self-realisation or *jnana* is our true nature. Realisation consists only in giving up as unreal what is unreal. There is nothing new to be sought or gained. You are the Self always. The *jiva*, *jagat* and *Isvara* — all three of them (the interrelationship amongst which has been the subject of all religions) do not exist apart from ‘I’. Seek your true Self and you shall know the truth. To the curious who asked him about God, he would say, “Leave God alone. Do you exist or not? Find out who you are”.

Bhagavan repeatedly emphasised that the Self-enquiry (*Atma Vichara*) method is the only direct or infallible means to realise the unconditioned, absolute Being that one really is. All other kinds of *sadhana* presuppose the retention of the mind as the instrument for carrying on the *sadhana* and without the mind, they cannot be practised. If the *sadhana* itself assumes the existence of limitations, how can it help one to transcend them? The ego may take different and subtler forms at different stages of one’s practice, for myriad are the hues of the veil of *maya*, but is itself never destroyed. When King Janaka exclaimed, “Now I have discovered the thief who has been ruining me all along; he shall be dealt with summarily”, the King was really referring to the ego or the mind.

The attempt to destroy the ego or the mind through *sadhanas* other than *Atma Vichara*, is just like a thief turning a policeman to catch the thief that is himself. *Atma Vichara* alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exists, and enables one to realise the pure undifferentiated Being. Yes, in *vichara* also a small portion of the mind is used for the enquiry, but is like the pole used to

stoke the embers in the funeral pyre, which eventually gets consumed in the fire. Having realised the Self, nothing remains to be known, because it is perfect bliss, it is the all.

Man is constantly seeking happiness, but does not realise that it comes from within. What is required is to remove the cause of misery which is not in the life without but in us as the ego. We impose limitations on ourselves in the first instance and then make a vain struggle to transcend them. What happiness can be got from things extraneous to ourselves? When we get it, how long will it last?

Bhagavan was a perfect *guru* who made no distinction between one disciple and another. Many have actually experienced a single look from him breaking through many coverings or encrustations of their ego and have felt the radiant Presence in the core of their being. His gaze was so powerful that it churned the interior of the seeker beyond the latter's own comprehension. Silence, he would say, is more powerful than the spoken word. And as Dakshinamurthi incarnate, he could by a single gaze dissolve the doubts of his devotees.

The fetters of the heart are broken, all doubts are dissolved and one's works melt away when he that is both high and low is seen. ²

Such is the direct result of his grace which is ever-flowing. Bhagavan says, "What does it matter if one is a hundred or a thousand miles away; IT ACTS". The Sun is ever shedding its lustre. Why should we see darkness? All we have to do is to turn in the right direction.

Bhagavan never asked anyone to shun the world or give up family responsibilities, as true *sannyasa* is in the mind and not in the change of robes or location of the body. The mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberation. Self-realisation is not

² *Mundakopanishad*, 2-2-8.

something to be sought in the distant future by the chosen few; it is the goal of all *sadhana* and man's ineluctable destiny. It is near at hand, nay, here and now, for the earnest seeker.

While living on this earth we realise that;
 Realising Him thus, one becomes immortal here;
 He realises Brahman **here**; then the mortal
 Becomes immortal, and attains Brahman **here**.³

In the *Ramana Gita*, all aspects of human life and endeavour are succinctly described and many abstruse topics clarified. To sum up: the universe is nothing but the mind and the mind is nothing but the Heart. Thus the entire story of the Universe culminates in the Heart.

This is the *Hridaya Vidya* to be learnt by the new technique of *Atma Vichara*. No doubt, such Self-enquiry is referred to in older texts, but the technique of using it for removing the *upadhis* or sense of separation and reaching the Centre of Being, was taught by Bhagavan throughout his whole life, coupled with the outpouring of his grace to evoke the actual experience in his devotees.

He is the one God hidden in all beings and pervading all things; He is the self within of all creatures, the ordainer of all deeds, the dweller in all beings, the witness, the knower, the Alone, the One who is devoid of all qualities.⁴

He made no distinction of caste or creed, neither did he regard animals and birds inferior to man; he did not differentiate between different religions. The pure Self that he was, his *samadrishti* is as exemplified in the *Gita*:

The knowers of the Self look with an equal eye on a *Brahmana* endowed with learning and humility, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and an outcaste.

³ *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*

⁴ *Svetasvatara Upanishad*

He used to decry his mother's insistence on outer purity and ideas of pollution; in his own life, many of his attendants (how fortunate they were indeed!) were the so-called untouchables and he treated them on an equal footing. His teachings crossed the man made frontiers of denominations. He assured everyone that their own religion, if properly understood, would take them surely to the goal.

The *jnani* is in the permanent state of Pure Awareness absolute, the state of *jagrat-sushupti* and his mind is like the moon in the noon-day sky or like a burnt rope, a form to see but none in reality.

As early as in 1902, answering a question by Sri Sivaprakasam Pillai, Sri Bhagavan described the nature of the Self with clarity and authority:

The Self is that when there is absolutely no 'I'-thought. That is called Silence The Self itself is the world; the Self itself is 'I'; the Self itself is God; all is Siva, the Self.

The quintessence of our vast *Vedantic* literature is enshrined in this simple and direct *sutra* of Bhagavan. He has described elsewhere how as one progresses with the *Atma Vichara*, the frenzied thought-processes slowly subside and one reaches a calm expanse of Consciousness which is the region of the Self.⁵ It is not a void; it is the plenum or infinitude, a state of vibrant Silence, in which all things are so to say like beads strung on a thread.⁶

The old meditation hall where Bhagavan held his *Chitsabha* is more hallowed than ever before and his grace is ever available to the earnest seeker. It is open to anyone to visit this shrine of eternal peace and glory and imbibe his vibrant grace. Like the moth which seeks the light and is consumed

⁵ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 256.

⁶ *Bhagavad Gita*, 7-7

by it, we can lose our identification with the ego and the phenomenal world and the sense of separation from him.

In this vast cosmic wheel in which all things live and rest the soul flutters about as long as it thinks that it is different from the Mover. But when it is blessed by Him then it gains immortality.⁷

Bhagavan, you allow every one to follow the path best suited to him or her, for you know very well that they all reach you at last, as all rivers flow finally into the sea!

⁷ *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 1-5,

“Can a man ever understand God’s ways? I too think of God sometimes as good and sometimes as bad. He has kept us deluded by His great illusion. Sometimes He wakes us up and sometimes He keeps us unconscious. One moment the ignorance disappears, and the next moment it covers our mind. If you throw a brickbat into a pond covered with moss, you get a glimpse of the water. But a few moments later the moss comes dancing back and covers the water. One is aware of pleasure and pain, birth and death, disease and grief, as long as one is identified with the body. All these belong to the body alone, and not to the soul. . . Attaining Self-knowledge, one looks on pleasure and pain, birth and death, as a dream”.

— Sri Ramakrishna

RAMANA MAHARSHI AS
A VEDIC SEER
By Patrick Lebail

THE January 1968 issue of *The Mountain Path* included a paper by Professor Abinash Chandra Bose under the title “The *Vedic* Hymns”. It was and stays extremely interesting. I would like to stress here how relevant it was for this paper to sound a few chords of the *Vedic* symphony as an accompaniment to Sri Bhagavan’s teachings.

A knowledge of the Vedas and of the *Vedic* path is certainly not a prerequisite for understanding, loving and practising — every one in his own way and according to his own abilities — these teachings. They are of an universal nature and do appeal to every spiritual seeker whatever may be his local culture. Sri Ramana was quite conversant with the subtleties of Hindu thought and put them to good use whenever he spoke to Hindus (and to non-Hindus who had a knowledge of the Hindu *dharma*). He did not need them for expressing deep, fundamental truths. As a result, a Westerner is quite able to tread the path which he delineated so clearly. Sri Bhagavan’s words fulfil the deepest needs both of our intelligence and of our heart. It is however a fact that Sri Bhagavan was a Hindu and his own experience as he expounded it was the rediscovery of that ancient Hindu experience. To be sure, these discoveries ring true for any human being, whether Hindu or non-Hindu. It proves nevertheless rewarding to understand how ancient they are and how much their profundity bears the seal of a timeless revelation.

Strictly speaking, Veda means these collections of *Vedic* hymns about which Professor Bose wrote. They expound the subtle and variegated *Vedic* thought, which arises from the *Vedic* vision of truth. It was the gift of a lineage of seers, the *rishis*. These ancient thinkers and mystics had deciphered the

riddle which the world proposes to keen minds. According to them, the universe was ruled by an overall harmony which originated from a universal law, itself rooted in basic truth. Gods, the resplendent ones, were its guardians. These same Gods were friends and helpers of man. Attempting to emulate the divine splendour in power, joy and righteousness was the right path for all men. God and men were exchanging strength and food through rituals. Gods were the dynamic facets of one nameless, fundamental deity, “That One”, which in turn was seen, understood and sung by the *rishis*.

How was one to become a *rishi*? Just as, for instance, one is born to be a major composer of music, one had to be born with the ability to “see”; one had furthermore to undertake a severe, ascetic training with great dedication. The *rishi* was an ascetic and also a man of high literacy (the *Vedic* language is much more complex than classical Sanskrit and most *Vedic* poems are exquisite). He was a teacher of men and a bridge between men and gods. As a group the *rishis* were the jewel of *Vedic* mankind, a higher sub-species of homo-sapiens, utterly dedicated to truth and to the service of man.

This sub-species did evolve during the millennia of its existence, as Indian mankind was maturing out of its primeval youth. The *Vedic* collections (*samhitas*) are a lasting testimony to this youth, to the clearness of its mind and to the freshness of its sensitivity. The last texts of the Vedas are the *Upanishads*. In their time, the bold impetus of the *Vedic* spirit had somewhat quieted. *Vedic* exuberance had flown past the *rishis*. They were digging deeper into the innermost meaning of their former discoveries. This was possible because of the stability of the Hindu culture, which has often been denounced as being static and stifling. Very subtle discoveries, however, take time; they shape themselves during repeated generations of men. They can blossom only in a stable culture. The human mind is better able to ponder the infinite if it knows that tomorrow will be

the same as today. In the same way, Nature teaches us that a large tree needs much time to unfold itself to its full size and will not reach it if its roots are disturbed by a shifting ground.

The *Upanisadic rishis* meditated upon “That One”. They discovered, within this unitary vision, a revelation of the timeless, changeless, non-dual reality as being the innermost truth and ground of the world at large, of Gods, of men. The reality, *Brahman*, was oneself, *atman*, for every creature. A clear experience of this reality as being oneself and everything else was liberation from the existential bondage. Ritual was good, but non-essential.

Vedic seers had already seen that their speech would be heard in ages to come; this inspired prophecy was to prove to be true; the *Upanishadic rishis* were no longer speaking for the *Vedic* people, for India, but for every being in every possible time and place. If there are Martians, *Atman* and *Brahman* are the same for them as for Earthlings, just as physical laws are the same.

The earliest parts of the *Mahabharatam* were probably shaped during the last *Upanishadic* period. *Rishis* are often met within the text. Its reputed author, Vyasa, is one of its protagonists and a very high *rishi* himself. Several chapters show us that *rishis* practised severe austerities. They conducted the traditional worship since the Gods kept their place in the structure of the world. Religion was a natural element of right living. The *rishis* did mix with men, as living examples and as teachers. Their glory was that they studied the Veda. They enjoyed perfect inner peace. Truth was their vow. Meditation was their very nature. *Rishis* used to alleviate the sufferings of every creature by speech and deed.

Now, thousands of years later, here comes Ramana. Is he not a member of this sub-species, a proof also that it is not extinct and that mankind is still able to bring forth *rishis*, great

or small, among whom he will loom as one of the greatest? *Maha-Rishi*, Maharshi, as Ganapathi Muni saw it so clearly at the end of the year 1907.

Anybody who has studied the *Upanishads* and possibly their native ground, the Veda, will agree that the core of what Sri Bhagavan taught is precisely what lies at the heart of these ancient teachings. Supremacy of the knowledge of the Self (*atman*); need for inner austerity (*tapas*) but not necessarily for leaving aside one's worldly avocation; self-dedication to the pursuit of liberation; even *bhakti*. . . the *rishis* spoke this kind of language and lived this kind of language and lived this kind of experience. They expounded it in very ancient book, written in archaic Sanskrit which no translation can adequately render. They used similes and a symbolism which are quite foreign to Western cultures and which only Hindu scholars can properly fathom. As a contrast, the voice of Sri Bhagavan arises in our twentieth century; he uses an everyday language of India; we can understand at once any image he develops. The value of a study of the *Upanishads* and the Veda stays undiminished. It is however, much easier to sit at the feet of Sri Bhagavan and listen to his words; just as we would have loved to sit at the feet of some great *rishi* of olden times and listen to his inspired speech.

While attempting to set up a parallel between Sri Bhagavan and the *rishis* we meet an interesting problem. Nobody knows whether any *rishi* did step directly from ordinary manhood to *rishi*-hood, just as Sri Bhagavan did in July 1896 when he leapt over both life and death, recognizing in a flash that he did not differ from the Supreme. The *Mahabharatam* does not seem to record such a feat. The saintly mother of Sri Ramana had impressed upon him, from conception, the mysterious seal of high wisdom which triggered the sudden transfiguration, from a gawky teenager into a full-grown saint and sage. May we bow down before such an event, in awe and wonder.

Austerity, *tapas* in the usual sense, was not the path of Sri Ramana. He lived the simple life of the Hindu ascetic. We find that he felt particularly happy when he subsisted by begging. Austerity, *tapas*, is seen by him as an inner attitude of mental dedication. He taught that ultimate *tapas* is direct enquiry into the fundamental problem, “Who am I?” (Let us point out here that, in the *Mahabharatam*, a *rishi* does advise to meditate according to “Who am I?”). Sri Bhagavan explained that “one-pointedness is the *tapas* wanted”. This is both an excellent instruction and an example of the *Upanishadic* process of getting to the essence of things.

The *rishis* were devotees. This facet of Sri Ramana does not seem to be very widely known among Westerners. We know that Sri Bhagavan was in his heart a devotee of Arunachala Shiva. Whenever any incident full of love took place, or whenever passages saturated with *bhakti* were read, we often saw Bhagavan overwhelmed with emotion.

Many *Vedic* themes appear in his talks. They lie at the core of Hindu sensitivity which stems itself from the Veda. Seeing “the One in the many” was a great *Vedic* revelation. When Ramana said, “The devotees, God and the hymns are all the Self”, the ring of this remark is deeply, authentically *Vedic*. The same thought, slightly transposed (but through the same *Upanishadic* process of going to the root matter) was evoked by him, “Engage yourself in the living present I”.

Sri Bhagavan did not study the Veda, nor go through protracted austerities but, he was Veda. His innate adherence to pure truth and the clearness of his vision set him amongst the great *rishis*, amongst the eternal glories of India and the eternal refuges of mankind. What Sri Ramana wrote is *Upanishad*.

“May he enlighten our spirit”, prayed an *Upanishad* in ancient times. Thinking of Sri Bhagavan, let us pray again, “May he enlighten our spirit”!

ARUNACHALA RAMANA

By Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan

A very small house near the Southern gate of the great Minakshi temple received one day a traveller. His purpose, he had thought, was to visit his relatives, but it turned out that he had come without his knowing as a messenger from Arunachala. The tidings he was to convey were intended for a young boy of sixteen. "Where do you come from?", asked the boy. "From Arunachala", was the answer. As if awakened from slumber the boy began asking many questions, "What! From Arunachala! Where is it?" He was told that Arunachala was the holy mountain in Tiruvannamalai. Thus was conveyed Lord Arunachala's call to his "Son". The word acted like a *mantra* in the soul of young Venkataraman. As the weeks rolled on, it seemed as if he had outwardly forgotten about the visit from the relative, yet silently the power of Arunachala worked on inside him, leading him to a book about the lives of the sixtythree *saiva* saints. Devotion welled up from his heart and, deeply inspired by the lives of these holy ones, he would go to the temple, and stand in awed reverence and spiritual longing before the sacred images.

Then came that fateful day that brought to him the profound experience which was to turn the youth into a full-blown sage. An unwarranted, inexplicable fear of death had caught hold of him and, like the hero of our ancient tradition, he decided to face it as Nachiketas had done. And the fear of death was vanquished once and for all. His courage was rewarded by the plenary experience wherein the distinction between life and death disappears, leaving behind pure Being fully revealed in all its splendour.

After this experience, death could never more frighten him, but also life at home with his family had lost its meaning.

“O Arunachala! Dragging me out of my house (the ego), Thou hast made me enter into the Heart home and slowly Thou hast shown me That itself as Thy home. (Such is Thy grace)”. Thus has sung the great sage reminiscing on his state of mind after that experience in the well known hymn in praise of Arunachala called *Aksharamanamalai*. At school as well as at home the change in the youth was noticed and a rebuke from his elder brother became the incentive for young Venkataraman to leave the so-called comfort of life in a household. Where was he to go? He remembered Tiruvannamalai, the dwelling-place of Arunachala. That message from Arunachala through the relative finally filled the young sage’s consciousness; he realized that the relative’s visit had been an invitation from his Father. The note he left behind for his family reads, “I have started from this place in search of my Father in accordance with His command. This has embarked only on a good enterprise. Therefore, let no one grieve over this act. No money need be spent on looking for this”. Commenting on this later in life the sage sings, “O Arunachala! The day when Thou didst say ‘come’ and I by Thy grace entered along with Thee into the Heart (that very day) I lost my individual life. This is Thy grace!”

Externally he conceived of the relationship of Arunachala and himself as father to son but inwardly it was a relationship of identity. Much later this was expressed thus in the aforementioned hymn, “O Arunachala! Thou dost root out the egoity of those who think ‘I am verily Arunachala!’”

The epic journey and the significant happenings on his arrival are well known. Destiny initiated him into *sannyasa* for, without asking for his head to be shaved as is the custom for renunciates, someone offered to do so. Nature herself assisted by sending down a torrent of rain which became the ceremonial bath.

So engrossed was the young sage in the bliss of “the open space of his heart”, that to the outward world he looked as if

silent and withdrawn. In fact people thought he was doing severe austerities of not speaking, not eating, merely meditating, etc. But as he pointed out later, it was not the result of any *sankalpa* or vow of penance. There simply was no inclination to speak. It was a revelling in the kind of enjoyment that is unknown to most human beings. He had merged with his Father. God had taken possession of him and his bodily form became the vehicle of infinite grace.

How could such a one remain unknown? No amount of silence and seclusion would stop devotees from coming to him for blessings and instructions. He taught mostly through silence. Most of his valuable early teaching was not spoken but written down in response to ardent aspirants during his early days at Tiruvannamalai. Two sets of answers were given to two different devotees who ventured to approach the young sage. One devotee was Gambhiram Seshayya, an ardent Rama *bhakta* who was interested in the practice of *yoga*. He was a mature man, holding the position of Municipal Overseer at Tiruvannamalai, while the *Guru* was only a lad of twentyone years. One is reminded of the first *Guru* Dakshinamurti, the youthful preceptor surrounded by elderly disciples. The divine youth of our century, out of compassion, responded to the earnest supplications of his devotee by writing out his earliest teachings on bits of paper. Later the material was gathered and became the famous *Vicara Sangraham* (the Compendium of Self-Inquiry).

The basic teaching that was received from the silent youth was the ageless eternal teaching of *Advaita*. The plenary experience which he had merged into is the non-dual Self, and to discover this truth is the goal of all aspiration. Enquiry into the nature of the Self is the way to this goal. When the mind identifies with the not-Self (the body, senses, thoughts, etc.) there is bondage to ever-fleeting plurality. But when this identification is understood to be erroneous by means of the enquiry 'Who am I?', there is release. This enquiry into the Self was taught by the

sage as the direct path. Luminous and clear explanations about the proper purpose of established traditional disciplines such as *pranayama*, *dhyana* and *jnana* were imparted to the blessed disciple. Devotees who compared his teaching with holy scriptures would find, to their delight, that his teaching was the same and they would read out to him relevant passages. These he would cite sometimes as confirmations of the truth he had discovered by himself in his own experience.

Sri Sivaprakasam Pillai was the other fortunate devotee. At that time he was employed in the revenue department of the South Arcot Collectorate. He had philosophical training, yet, overwhelmed by this living embodiment of the highest in our philosophy, he submitted in utter humility questions on spiritual matters to this youth who had no academic degrees to his credit.

Still not inclined to speak, young Ramana did condescend to answer these questions by gestures, and when these were not understood, he would write on the floor or on a slate. Sri Pillai carefully recollected the fourteen questions and answers and this collection has come to be known as *Naan Yaar?* (*Who am I?*). Along with ‘Self-inquiry’, ‘Who Am I?’ is the earliest instruction gathered from the Master in words completely his own. Here too, the main theme running throughout the questions and answers is Self-enquiry. This is lucidly set forth in *Naan Yaar*. Continuous enquiry should enable the mind to stay in its source, without being allowed to wander away and get distracted in the labyrinth of thought created by itself. All other disciplines such as controlling the breath and fixed meditation on the chosen form of God must be understood as auxillary practices. They are very useful in getting the mind to become quiescent and one-pointed. However, for the mind that has gained the ability to sustain concentration, Self-enquiry becomes relatively easy. By persistent enquiry thoughts are destroyed and the Self realized. The plenary reality remains in which even the ‘I’ thought has vanished. In one of the five gem-like verses on

Arunachala composed by Bhagavan Ramana there is a beautiful expression of his devotion to this unique Holy Mountain coupled with his teaching and experience:

He who enquires whence arises the 'I' thought, with a mind that is pure, inward-turned, and realizes his own nature, becomes quiescent, O Arunachala, in Thee, as a river in the ocean.

Let us celebrate the hundredth birthday of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi by contemplating this luminous gem in order to join him in the experience of non-separation.

Sayings of Sri Bhagavan

Two Congress volunteers asked the following questions:

Devotee: By obtaining wisdom through your grace, I want to teach and spread the knowledge all over the world.

Bhagavan: First know yourself. Then if there is a world, you may think of teaching it. Without knowing yourself first, how can you help the world? It is like the blind leading the blind.

D: Why, can't I get the knowledge of the Atma from studying the *vedanta sastras*, where it is said that 'I am Brahman'?

B: The knowledge of the Atma is not in the *vedanta sastras*. Study yourself to gain the knowledge.

D: How to study the Self?

B: Is there anything apart from the Self? Abiding as the Self is studying the Self. Instead of this, if one learns *sastras* then he will get only garlands, good meals, wealth, name and fame, which are hindrances to knowledge.

D: But still we suffer from *samsara*.

B: Look for whom the *samsara* is.

THE MAHARSHI AND HIS MOTHER

By A.R. Natarajan

RELIGIOUS historians like Prof. D. S. Sarma have unhesitatingly stated that Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is the greatest exemplar of *jnana marga* after Adi Sankara.

Some people are under the erroneous impression that *jnana*, which involves total disidentification with the body-mind complex, implies a certain lack of emotional depth. It is assumed that since people, events and things are viewed by *jnanis* purely as witnesses, with total detachment, they would not have the normal human feelings in their relationship with their relatives and others. The fact however is the exact opposite and it is only *jnanis* who can truly bestow total undistracted love on one and all including their own blood relations.

It seems to me that the best way to illustrate the truth of this statement would be to refer briefly to the relationship that some great spiritual geniuses had with their mothers, and to deal more exhaustively with the relationship which Bhagavan Sri Ramana had with his mother. The example of the mother has been taken not only because the *Vedic* texts extol the greatness of the mother as embodiment of God-head, but also because the mother-child relationship is peerless in its own way.

It is said that the great Sankara had promised his mother while taking *sannyasa* that he would come back and be at her bed-side if she thought of him at the time of her death. Not only was he by her side at the time of her passing away, but he also performed the final obsequies, ignoring the orthodox injunctions against a *sannyasin* performing these rites.

In the life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa there are several instances of his having acted with the tenderest of concern for

his mother, Chandra Devi. When he went on a pilgrimage to Brindavan, he was so taken by the spiritual atmosphere with which that place was surcharged that he wanted to stay on there itself. He most reluctantly left the place because of his consideration for his old mother who, he felt would have been left uncared for if he stayed far away in Brindavan.

Another incident showing his concern for his mother is worth recalling. One of his brothers, Rameswar, died at a comparatively young age. Sri Ramakrishna was afraid that this news would break his mother's heart. Therefore, instead of communicating the news to her he straightaway went to the temple of Kali and prayed to the Divine Mother to give the necessary strength of mind and detachment to his mother so that she would be able to bear the great loss.

Coming to the life of Ramana Maharshi we find an extraordinarily beautiful and tender relationship between Sri Ramana and His mother, Alagammal. For ostensible purposes, one finds three different stages in the relationship, but throughout, the undercurrent of love Sri Bhagavan had for his mother and the regard and love she had for him are evident.

In the biography of Sri Bhagavan we first find a detailed account of this relationship when his mother went to Tiruvannamalai in 1898 to persuade him to return home. Seeing Sri Bhagavan with his matted hair and dirty loin cloth, his mother's heart bled and she used all kinds of persuasion to take him back home.

Sri Ramana who was then observing *mouna* wrote in Tamil on a sheet of paper, "The Lord, remaining everywhere, gives the fruits of all actions at the appropriate time. That which is destined not to happen will not happen despite any amount of effort. What is destined to happen cannot be prevented. The best course is, therefore to have an attitude of resignation".

Knowing that it was not possible for him to go back, Sri Ramana thought that the only recourse open to him was to give his mother the appropriate advice.

In 1914, while returning from a trip from the shrine of Venkataramana at Tirupati, she stayed for some time with Sri Ramana at Virupaksha cave on the Arunachala Hill where she fell ill with typhoid. On this occasion when her condition became serious Sri Bhagavan composed touching poems in Tamil on Arunachala praying for the recovery of his mother. Two of these verses are given below:

Hill of my refuge that cures
The ills of recurring births!
O Lord! It is for Thee
To cure my mother's fever.

O God that smitest Death itself!
My sole refuge! Vouchsafe Thy grace
Unto my mother and shield her from
Death. What is Death if scrutinised?

This is the only known instance of prayer by Sri Bhagavan to change the course of events. Needless to say, Alagammal recovered.

From 1916 to 1922, the mother was in Tiruvannamalai and spent the last few years of her life with Sri Ramana. These years were used by Sri Bhagavan to hasten her spiritual growth and make her fit for liberation.

So deep was the mother's love for Sri Bhagavan that she even refused to go to her daughter's place for a brief spell when the daughter had built a house and had invited her just to set her foot in it. It is reported that she told Sri Ramana, "Even if you throw my dead body on these thorny bushes, I must end this life in your arms". Sri Ramana, on his part, used every opportunity to guide his mother in the spiritual

path. The famous *Appala Pattu* (song of the *pappad*) came to be composed for her spiritual edification.

On 19 May, 1922, the mother took seriously ill, and the Maharshi, knowing that the time had come, sat by her side with his right hand on her chest, and the left hand on her head. At about eight in the night Alagammal attained *Mahasamadhi*. When somebody said that she had passed away, Sri Ramana corrected him with the curt remark, “Not passed away, absorbed”. Further explaining what happened in the ten or twelve hours when his hands were on the head and heart of his mother, Maharshi said:

Innate tendencies (*vasanas*) and the subtle memory of past experiences leading to future possibilities became very active. Scene after scene rolled before her in the subtle consciousness, the outer senses having already gone. The soul was passing through a series of experiences, thus avoiding the need for rebirth and effecting union with the Supreme Spirit. The soul was at last disrobed of the subtle sheaths before it reached the final Destination, the Supreme Peace of liberation from which there is no return to ignorance.

Maharshi had already stated that in *jnana* there was no difference between man and woman and that the body of a woman liberated from life should not be cremated for it was a temple. Accordingly, she was buried in the southern slopes of Arunachala, and a *lingam*, *Matrubhuteswara* was installed on the *Samadhi*. Within a few months, Bhagavan shifted from Skandasramam to the site of the *Samadhi* where Sri Ramanasramam has grown through the years.

In 1949, devotees of Sri Bhagavan completed the building of a beautiful shrine over the mother’s *Samadhi* and now the shrine of Bhagavan Sri Ramana and that of the mother are adjacent, underscoring the beauty of their wonderful relationship.

MY REMINISCENCES OF SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

By Swami Chidbhavananda

IT was in the year 1921 that a few of us, religiously inclined college students, undertook a pilgrimage from Madras to Tiruvannamalai for a *darshan* of Sri Ramana Maharshi. The Ashram was then in its initial stage. An august person was seated on a raised platform, and it was evident he was the sage whom we had come to see. Around him on the floor were seated a number of devotees, all intently looking at him, and we found our places among them. Silence reigned supreme. The presiding deity of the Ashram was the author of that silence — hence its perfection. This was a novel experience for us, but we took to this congenial environment quite happily.

There was no such thing as the formal introduction of newly arrived devotees. As others did, we sat quietly. Sri Maharshi turned his penetrating gaze at us off and on. We felt ourselves highly blessed by his benign look. Occasionally he spoke a word or two, which were always pertinent and to the point. But his silence was more eloquent. An occasional smile revealed his bliss.

Visiting devotees often brought packets of sugar-candy or some such thing and offered them to him. He would help himself to a tiny piece from the packet and pass it on to the assembled group. Then and there it would be shared by the entire lot.

I made deeper personal contact with the Maharshi in the year 1928. I had renounced the world in 1923 and joined the Ramakrishna Math. In 1926 I entered the Order of *sannyasa*. From 1926 to 1940 I was in charge of Sri Ramakrishna Ashram

at Ootacamund. During that period, when I travelled between Ootacamund and Madras I took as many opportunities as possible to go to Tiruvannamalai in order to see the Maharshi. I was not inclined to talk much with him; being seated in his presence was more than sufficient. Occasionally he spoke, but his silence was what I sought and prized every time I went to him. A purified enquirer makes a rich harvest of the blissful calmness that prevails in his presence.

The Maharshi occupied a couch in a corner of a middle sized hall in the Ashram. Barring this corner the entire hall was at the disposal of the visiting public, and anybody could go into the hall at any time of day or night. Visiting devotees would quietly steal in, sit for awhile in quiet meditation, and then leave unobtrusively. One day a man following the path of devotion came in and occupied a place very near the sage. Then he unburdened all that lay buried in his heart. His speech was choked with feeling. He poured forth, "I have gone on pilgrimage all over the land. I have been regular in my spiritual practices. Many a sleepless night have I passed in prayer. Still to this day I have had no mercy from the Lord. I am forlorn". He cried bitterly, but the Maharshi sat unconcerned. Eventually all his suppressed feelings were worked out, and then in a measured voice the sage said, "Funny man. He cries — what is there to sob about? Instead of being poised in the blissful Self, he goes on wailing". This observation had a telling effect. He saw that his problem was self-created, and a new chapter in his life started.

On another occasion a talkative man made his appearance in the hall. He chose to sit near the sage and unceremoniously raised a question, "Bhagavan, what is your view on birth control"? There was no answer, so the man explained at length the importance of the topic. Again getting no reply, he continued until he could say no more, and then fell silent.

Silence reigned supreme in the hall. In the midst of this silence, the Maharshi asked, “Do you know death control”? There was no response.

One day it was suggested to Sri Maharshi that no spiritual progress could ever be made without *sadhana*, or discipline. After a pause he made these observations:

Mind it is that binds man, and the same mind it is that liberates him. Mind is constituted of *sankalpa* and *vikalpa* — desire and disposition. Desire shapes and governs disposition. Desire is of two kinds — the noble and the base. The base desires are lust and greed. Noble desire is directed towards enlightenment and emancipation. Base desire contaminates and clouds the understanding. *Sadhana* is easy for the aspirant who is endowed with noble desires. Calmness is the criterion of spiritual progress. Plunge the purified mind into the Heart. Then the work is over. This is the essence of all spiritual discipline!

During one of my visits I was seated at some distance from the Maharshi. There were many devotees in the hall and the usual silence prevailed. I remembered his injunction, “Plunge the pure mind into the Heart”, and decided to practise it then. I gazed at him and he gazed back at me. What followed was indescribable. His body seemed a glass case from which a blissful brilliance streamed out. More than half an hour passed this way. It was an experience unique and unforgettable. It confirmed Sri Ramakrishna’s statement that spiritual experience can be transmitted from one person to another in the manner in which material things are handed over.

Bharata Varsha is ever the bestower of spirituality on mankind. Sri Ramana Maharshi is verily a true spiritual son of this holy land, who spontaneously and impersonally showered benediction on mankind.

THE PATH AND THE GOAL

By Doris Williamson

EVERY action in Bhagavan's life was meaningful. His teaching, simple and direct, requires no temple or ceremonies. Yet, to the puzzlement of some, Bhagavan personally supervised the construction of the beautiful little Matrubhuteswara Temple. Superficially this seems to conflict with his pure *advaitic* teaching.

All paths lead to God. Bhagavan's teaching is silence, but he denies no path. These wonderful gods and goddesses of India symbolise and embody the qualities to which we aspire, the qualities we need for our own completion and awakening; they give to each his *Ishta Devata*. The deities fill one's lack — until the soul eventually aspires to Dakshinamurthi, with single-minded devotion to Siva Himself, whose living manifestation was Ramana. Then in peace and utter stillness, one knows that all is *Brahman*.

There are as many paths as there are men. Every being is a facet of *Brahman* so each path is essentially individual, yet there is only one path, one God. For those with ears to hear, Bhagavan teaches the no-path which in essence contains within itself all paths. Bhagavan consistently brought enquirers back to the living centre by asking, "To whom is this thought, who is asking this question"?

Another mystery to some of us is the call of the Mountain and the potency of its circumambulation — man spiralling to the centre until the final absorption. What magic is it that the all-pervading grace of Bhagavan is with us always and everywhere, seeking out the very being, and yet is more powerfully present in Arunachala than elsewhere? What mystery drew Bhagavan to the holy Mountain, the mystery that so powerfully radiates peace and silence in its vicinity? It is that mysterious silence of the holy Mountain that stills

the mind which nowhere else can be so still. Bhagavan was drawn irresistibly to this physical centre for a good reason. As the mind of man became less subtle, the column of fire which was too bright for earthly eyes appeared as mere earth, as does the body of man. In 1879 the fire externalised itself once again, in the form of Siva-Arunachala, to attract its devotees like a magnet, to recharge the ageless Mountain. Himself that power, he recharged the Mountain which is his symbol, the holy Mountain which is our very Self.

There undoubtedly are spiritual centres in the world, the most potent of which is Arunachala. Bhagavan came to recharge the power and to unveil the eyes of those who would see. Three decades after his passing, Bhagavan's presence is as powerful as ever. The reality, pure light, invisible to earthly eyes, seen by the gods as a column of fire, and eventually by man as the holy red Mountain, was glimpsed by man and known as Ramana.

His teaching, turns one to the inner *guru*. Only the realised Being can be a true *guru* — a lesson to those of lesser wisdom who endeavour, or presume, to teach or preach. With mind externalised, it is difficult to question “Who am I?” Bhagavan asked this while in a state of intense awareness, the ‘I’ observing the apparent death of the body. It is a question not by the mind, but by the witness, and the atmosphere at the Ashram helps one to be that witness. Yet “I am here”, said Bhagavan, and that here is the universe, not confined by time and space. Even reading about Bhagavan brings us in touch with the wonder of his reality, and love wells up in the heart at a sight of his picture.

Fully alive, without attachment, how well he demonstrates that this is an interesting and beautiful world, as we see him appreciating the dream from his awakened state, the unreal and the real as one perfect whole. All is *Brahman*. One is inspired by his keen observation, his interest in detail. By his

complete acceptance of the person as he is, he sees only divinity and thus unveils that divinity.

Blessed are the devotees of Bhagavan Ramana. He is our path which is the goal. Through his grace we live in the world in fullness, knowing that we are ever at his lotus feet and that one day our veils will dissolve and we shall be absorbed in Arunachala.

Abiding Grace of Bhagavan Sri Ramana

By B. Anjaneyulu

It was in 1948 that I went to Tiruvannamalai along with my mother and other relatives, as the nephew of my mother, Sri Lakshmana Yogeewara of Gudur, was staying at Ramanasramam engaged in meditation there. On the morning after our arrival, we entered the hall of Sri Bhagavan to have his holy *darshan*. There was a large concourse of devotees in the hall. It was 8.00 a.m. when Bhagavan entered the hall with his bewitchingly divine smile. Everybody in the hall stood up in great veneration and there was absolute silence.

I was overwhelmed with joy to see so many earnest souls and I was thrilled at the sight of Bhagavan's divine personality. Never before had I experienced such profound bliss. Waves of some strange power swept through me and I was lost in inexpressible ecstasy. My mind was free from all thoughts. Bhagavan alone pervaded my being. I did not know what it was then, as I was only a lad of 14. This was my first and last *darshan* of Sri Bhagavan and the only time I had such a rare spiritual experience. His eternal and all-pervading grace has been with me in all the ups and downs of my life.

THE HERALD OF A NEW ERA

By Dr. Robert Fuchsberger

WE are on the threshold of a new era. Old values have lost their significance and new ones are gradually becoming visible in the foggy atmosphere of these apocalyptic times. As we witness these tremendous material, mental and spiritual changes and the concomitant suffering that all mankind is going through, it is useful to pause and consider what spiritual treasures we have inherited from the past and what new revelations we may expect in the future.

The most obvious of the spiritual currents from the past is religion, which, in some form or another, is as old as mankind. In the range of religion from the most primitive forms to the most sublime, we can find the veneration of natural forces, the worship of gods and goddesses, the worship of one God. We also find in almost all of these situations the hidden idea of one Godhead, the One without a second.

Here religion meets and melts into philosophy. Philosophy was originally closely connected with religion; only after many centuries did it separate itself from religion and go its own way. The history of philosophy shows a shift from the heights of *Upanishadic* lore and neo-Platonic thought to an emphasis on the power of the human intellect to solve the puzzles of the universe. From the time of Kant, reason has reigned supreme in the kingdom of philosophy.

The youngest spiritual discipline, psychology, was popularised in the last century by the work of Freud and Jung on the unconscious part of the human psyche. Jung, tracing the psyche to its archetypal roots, appropriately compares human consciousness to a small isle in the vast ocean of the unconscious.

When we look to these disciplines for the help they offer to modern man, we find a gloomy picture indeed. Religion is on the decline throughout the world. Modern man, seeking scientific proofs, has lost his faith in divine forces and religion, in which the mystical is dwindling or has already dried up and changed into mere profession of faith, moral teachings and idolatry. Philosophy has even less to offer. In its modern form, as a science, it either interprets the universe with an acrobatic play of concepts or declares openly that science cannot explain the basic questions of being.

This was the dark spiritual atmosphere of the twentieth century, into which Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, the Sage of Arunachala, came to fulfill his mission on our globe. His message, partly conveyed to mankind through a few booklets, partly through cryptic, profound answers to questions from visitors, soon reached every corner of the world. But the most important part of his message was conveyed through silence, through transmission of spiritual strength, and it is this thunderous silence which still has the greatest influence on the whole world.

During the bodily presence of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, crowds of people daily visited Tiruvannamalai to have his *darshan*. Some of these visitors were attracted by his extraordinary personality — which was obvious to all — but they went away without being deeply influenced by him, although they acknowledged his greatness. Others were more deeply moved, and became then and there devotees and true *bhaktas*. For them the Maharshi became their haven of refuge, and for the rest of their lives they submitted their egos to his divinity. A small minority of visitors acknowledged his divinity, but at the same time understood his teaching and began to practice Self-enquiry according to his advice.

So we see that different people, with their ego-ridden minds, saw Sri Bhagavan in different ways. That is natural, because the Divine, being always beyond relativity, assumes,

like a colourless gem, many facets according to the faculty of the admirer's eye. So mortals see the Maharshi as a great personality, a *rishi*, a *jivanmukta*, a *sadguru*, a *sthitaprajna*, an *avatara*, and so on.

I see Sri Bhagavan as harbinger of a new epoch, a messenger of the times yet to come. In this role I see Sri Bhagavan standing on the threshold of the coming millennium, as the prophet of a new spiritual high tide. Standing on this threshold and focussing the wisdom of the *Upanishads*, he presents to posterity the age old wisdom in a new form well suited to the man of modern times.

And what is this message? It is the teaching of the unity of Being, the accessibility of this Being through one's own Self, and the practical path to its realisation: *Atma Vichara*, the search for this Self. In a nutshell this is the whole of the Maharshi's teaching. It seems very simple and it is really too simple for the speculative intellects of the majority of mankind today. How many individuals are at present capable of understanding a teaching which is neither a religion, nor a philosophy, nor even a psychology, a teaching which needs no belief, no scholarship and no psychological doctrine? Even today those who really understand the teaching of Sri Bhagavan, which is far beyond all doctrines and practise it accordingly, are very few.

But certainly the future will produce a human race which will be capable of understanding and comprehending his message in its fullness and following the path shown by him. Sri Maharshi's mission surely did not end with the death of his bodily form, but in reality it only began. He himself said, "You think I am going to die, but I shall be more alive than ever". This promise of his was substantiated at the moment of his *Mahasamadhi*, when a bright star appeared in the sky, and crossed the nightly firmament, herealding a new spiritual era.

KAVYAKANTHA: A COLOSSUS OF LEARNING AND TAPAS

By K. Natesan

SRI Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni (1878-1936), who was unique in being at once a scholar, poet, patriot, political thinker and *tapasvi*, was one of the most esteemed figures of his times. Various branches of Sanskrit learning — the Vedas, *Upanishads*, *itihisas*, *puranas*, *mantra sastra*, *alankara*, *ayurveda*, philosophy, grammar, poetry and astrology — were all mastered by him quite early in life. He could speak fluently in Sanskrit and compose poems extempore. An assembly of *pandits* held in the year 1900 at Nadia were so impressed by his poetic powers and in particular his skill in the special literary exercise of completing a verse begun by another poet, that they conferred on him the title of *Kavyakantha* (one from whose throat poetry gushed spontaneously).

A Sanskrit poet even at the age of twelve, Kavyakantha had also drunk deep at the fount of religious literature and was well set for a rigorous spiritual life before he was eighteen. After his marriage he engaged himself in serious spiritual practice, visiting various holy centres for the purpose. He was a firm believer in *mantra japa* and in its power to solve all problems, including that of Indian Independence. *Siva Panchakshari* was his favourite *mantra*, and he recited it a crore of times. In 1903 he came to Arunachala to perform *tapas*. He visited Sri Ramana Maharshi, who was then known as Brahmana Swami on the hill twice before he accepted a teacher's job at Vellore in 1904. With his organising ability, he gathered a group of students whose *mantra japa* was to generate enough spiritual energy to cure the ills of the nation and promote its welfare. In fact it was his strong conviction, like Swami Vivekananda, that national welfare should be placed above individual salvation. He soon resigned his job at Vellore and returned to Arunachala in 1907.

An intellectual and spiritual giant who had high achievements to his credit and a host of followers as well, Kavyakantha still felt that his life's purpose was not fulfilled. He remembered Brahmana Swami whom he had met before and went to him again. This was to give him the inward peace that he still seemed to lack. The meeting was of profound significance not only for Kavyakantha but for the world at large which could learn from such a high authority about the real stature of the *swami*.

Kavyakantha approached the Virupaksha cave where Brahmana Swami was staying, and prostrating himself before him, said in a trembling voice, "All that has to be read I have read. Even *Vedanta Sastra* I have fully understood. I have performed *japa* to my heart's content. Yet I have not up to this time understood what *tapas* is. Hence have I sought refuge at thy feet. Pray, enlighten me about the nature of *tapas*". For fifteen minutes Sri Ramana silently gazed at Kavyakantha. He then spoke:

If one watches whence this notion of 'I' springs, the mind will be absorbed into that. That is *tapas*. If a *mantra* is repeated and attention is directed to the source whence the *mantra* sound is produced, the mind will be absorbed in that. That is *tapas*.

The scholar was filled with joy and announced that the *upadesa* was original, and that Brahmana Swami was a Maharshi and should be so called thereafter. He gave the full name of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi to Brahmana Swami, whose original name had been Venkataraman (named after the Lord of Tirupati). Kavyakantha was now the foremost disciple of Sri Ramana. His disciples also came to the Maharshi. They sought and obtained clarification on many doubtful points. His *Sri Ramana Gita* recording these questions and answers (between the years 1913 and 1917) is divided into eighteen chapters like the *Bhagavad Gita* and is a great source of inspiration. His *Ramana Chatvarimsat* is a hymn well known

to devotees and is recited daily at Bhagavan's shrine. Moving to various places he finally settled down in a village near Kharagpur and passed away in 1936. His was an eventful life spent in writing, research, *tapas* and in guiding his disciples.

The works of Kavyakantha numbering over a hundred fall under numerous categories. There are hymns, *sutras* (aphorisms), commentaries, researches in the Rig Veda, a model constitution for India, and even fiction. *Uma Sahasram* sings in a thousand verses the glories of the Divine Mother. A few hundred verses towards the end were composed in the immediate presence of Sri Ramana in an incredibly short time, Kavyakantha having four men busy writing to his dictation. *Indrani Saptasadi*, *Chandi Trisati* and *Gita Mala* are other important works, the last being praise of deities like Indra and Agni. The most outstanding of his *sutras* is that on *Dasa Maha Vidya*, which reconciles the *Vedantic* and *Tantric* schools on the subject of the ten cosmic powers. The *Sahasranama* strings together Indra's thousand names culled from the Rig Veda. His Rig Vedic commentaries have brought within the reach of readers an abstruse subject which needed clarification. His research work on the *Mahabharata* deals with the question of its Vedic basis. *Satdarsanam*, a rendering in Sanskrit of Sri Ramana's *Ulladu Narpadu*, and a commentary on his *Upadesa Saram* are very popular with the devotees of Sri Ramana.

As evidence of Kavyakantha's burning patriotism the following may be cited from his *Indrani Saptasati*:

O Mother! I take refuge at thy feet so that my country may prosper, this country long beaten, shattered and weeping.

May the enemies of dharma perish. May friends of our land prosper. This would gladden my heart. O Divine Mother! I take refuge at thy feet.

O beloved of Indra! Spies dog the heels of our mighty men. We are afraid even to give vent to our sorrows. They bow to Thee for grace. Refuge at Thy feet.

The Magician Ramana

(Three stanzas from Muruganar's 'Suttaruttal'
translated by Prof K. Swaminathan)

Awareness wherein brightly shine
 These many forms of persons, places, time,
 All separate-seeming though in substance One:
 Into that same Awareness he transmuted
 This 'I' of mine. Now, nothing to be known,
 My past undone, my being his,
 I stand, unruffled Bliss,
 Untouched by any shock.
 Lord Siva-Venkatesa he who,
 King of kings, came conquering
 And made me his alone.

What is this 'I' that rises from within?
 Only a thought that, like a bubble, floats
 Up to the troubled surface of Awareness.
 In sleep the sea is still, no bubble rises:
 Then too you are.
 You're not the 'I' that rises and then sets,
 You are the sole Awareness in the All,
 The eternal, uncreated Light of Being.

No form or feature has he of his own,
 Yet form and feature to all beings gives;
 Knowledge and ignorance, both to him unknown,
 Each human mind from him alone derives.
 He brought me into being but to think
 Of him as 'you', of me and mine as 'yours';
 And he has left me wordless, deedless, prone,
 Helpless on death's brink.
 Only the vast beatitude endures.

Pradakshina

By Charles Reeder

IN the Colorado mountains I look into a cluster of pine needles. In the autumn sun they radiate clear and pure from the bough. Has it really been eleven years since we first came to Arunachala, to Bhagavan? Time itself has rotated like those needles in the sun, and we can no longer find the point where we started. And that itself is happiness, the endless turning around of small pebbles in the swift current of his grace.

It is wonderful that Bhagavan's path of enquiry is not something that gives itself to exact description or mapmaking, for it is the stirring of the self in each of us. If we point to the way or the Self as an object, we pretend to be strangers in our own home. It is only Bhagavan who makes it clear to us — we see it so plainly in his smile — for who is he but our own Self? And it is he who tells his devotees that wherever they go in the world or beyond it, they continue to circle around him and within him who is Arunachala.

And that is not all, for time and space themselves are forever doing this *pradakshina* around their source. So we cannot speak in some ordinary way about Bhagavan's centennial, for he was not one who merely appeared and disappeared in time. The centennial itself is doing *pradakshina* around him; the blue sky is doing it as well. He sits with the deepest absorption in the centre, blessing those who move. The *pradakshina* itself is but his in-breathing and out-breathing, manifesting the original pattern of being to all who can receive it.

To speak of Bhagavan's birth and passing is to do *pradakshina* to our small conception of who he is, but this too is resolved in him, for he is the most infinitesimal being as well as the great one who manifests the being of all the world systems. No matter which path we may take, we

ultimately find ourselves worshipping in the most fundamental sense that primal being who dwells within each of us. It was and is Bhagavan's gift to the world to manifest this being so unmistakably and so lovingly. On this, his centennial, the human beings, the animals and the mountains, the dwellers in the six realms, whether consciously or unconsciously all join in the *pradakshina* of that unutterably great being.

Idol Worship

By C.L. Narasimha Rao

Softly, your head resting on your left palm,
 You look at me from the corners of your eyes.
 I feel a sensation creep from toe to top.
 You smile, white teeth vying with white beard,
 Face lit up with the glance and the smile.
 Are you angry with me for dwelling thus on your
 outer form?
 What else can I do but stare at that
 As if it were you?
 Do I not think my body is 'I'?
 How can I see the light behind
 The brightness of your face?
 How can I see the God in the idol.
 While I am an idol, nothing else?
 An idol can only worship an idol.
 But the god in that idol stirs to life
 The god in this.
*That sat swallows this **aham***
*So in **Soham**, I in That*
 Disappear and cease to be.
 And yet I am, I am, for I

Am now You and You are That.

A TRIBUTE TO BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

By Jack Dawson

PROSTRATIONS to Bhagavan Sri Ramana, ever-living, ever-present sage, who is lighting lights throughout the world!

Several years had passed since I was at Sri Ramanasramam. Now the real work began, as the understanding that had been grasped there was slowly supplied to life in the West, with all its complexities. Years of arduous mountain-climbing, a foothold here, a handhold there, several feet upwards and not infrequently a disappointing slide downhill, and then the ascent towards the summit was resumed. At times breathtaking, panoramic views would present themselves, but the climb itself remained of utmost, desperate importance.

As time went by, something kept saying, as though a compassionate voice from a peak far above, “Why all this strain? Who is it that is climbing this mountain”? At first, I paid little heed to these words, which, while comforting, were as yet beyond my understanding for any practical use. I went on with the climb, struggling harder than ever, hoping to reach the topmost summit, hoping possibly also to catch another word from this quiet voice, a refreshing drink of cool mountain water. Sometimes feelings of guilt and hopelessness and the like would nearly engulf my being, extinguishing most of my remaining strength to climb any further. The voice would say again, “Stop, relax, take rest. Be the witness of this ascent”. Gradually the words began to make a little sense, if for no other reason than that I was worn out by then. The climb continued, although somewhat differently now. Attempts were made at standing back a little. Then to my surprise, foot and handholds would become apparent when needed; downhill slips would occur, but

recovery would come almost instantaneously, leaving barely a scratch. The beauty of the mountain also began to reveal itself, with its glistening rocks, enchanting lakes and flowering meadows. “Who are you? Become now comfortable with the Self that you are and will be forever — it is right here, and now! Bliss is obtainable only through Self-enquiry”. A totally new kind of relief came over me. The wielder of the magnificent divine weapon of Self-enquiry, Bhagavan Ramana, had taken a stand — a mighty, yet gentle and completely rational stand — against ego.

Not only did *sadhana* begin to improve, but relationships did too. Where previously there had always been a gnawing need to be liked by others, simple application of the enquiry would replace these thoughts with a natural self-esteem, a knowledge that one truly is all right, and that the best business to engage in now was to silently acknowledge others as Self, infinitely worthy of esteem. Worried thoughts such as, ‘How am I doing in my *sadhana*’? also vanished instantly. The answer came in question form — ‘Who am I?’

Whence came this mountain-like sage, benevolent giver of the powerful medicine of Self-knowledge, whom we affectionately call Bhagavan? That we could have such a Master in times like these, capable of guiding millions to peace, is almost unbelievable.

Endless thanks to Bhagavan, fountain of grace!

SADHANA WITH BHAGAVAN RAMANA

By Ursulla Muller

IN the night of December 21-22, 1964, I was told by the Lord Himself:

Within you I fulfill my word;
Behold I am creating all anew.

These words arose out of the boundless depth of blissful silence and faded away again, leaving naught but an unlimited expanse. Throughout the night these words were repeated at long intervals until the young day was breaking.

At that time, I had been meditating already for about six years in accordance with Sri Ramana's teaching. All the same, and especially at first, I felt I was not mature to receive such a communication from the one Father of all, and there was none to whom I would have dared speak of this new spiritual experience. Yet, in spite of the hardship of those days, I was always aware of the gracious hand of Sri Ramana whose glorious renewal of ancient lore had made me tread the blissful path to Arunachala Siva. Thus, I was able to realize in course of time that the Lord alone is the doer, within and without, while I was to stay silent to allow the divine in me grow and the poor ego decrease.

During my *sadhana* there was always Bhagavan Ramana's guidance. He had for instance advised me to stop reading unnecessary things, at times with an apparent sense of humour, as can be deduced from the following incident.

Once after meditation late in the evening, I had gone to bed. In order to improve my knowledge of the English language, I would read some pages in English before sleeping. That evening I was going to have a short look into a copy of the *Readers' Digest*. However, being tired, I was

not able to read but was staring at some text in the booklet without taking in its contents. Suddenly I felt Bhagavan Ramana looking in smiling surprise over my shoulder at the text I was reading. Only now I cognized the heading of the article I was staring at, which was, *Famous Recipes of German Housewives*, a topic I for sure would not have selected consciously from the table of contents. It was now my turn to laugh silently at myself and to end the mistaken enterprise by switching off the light.

Again there was Sri Ramana's loving guidance when I was physically and spiritually exhausted on account of having undertaken a new task without considering carefully enough, my daily meditation practice as well as my demanding part time office job. Having started *hatha yoga* at a *yoga* school, Ramana Maharshi wanted me to go on with my daily *hatha yoga* exercises despite my fatigue, as I learned from the following incident: One early morning, while sitting on the carpet ready to start my exercises, yet feeling tired, I suddenly found myself kneeling at the feet of Sri Ramana touching them with my forehead in utter devotion. Immediately I knew in my heart that I was to continue my regular exercises without considering my body's condition. I have been following Bhagavan's advice strictly until this day and am much better now.

On the other hand, when I was too fatigued for sitting in *padmasana* posture for meditation, Bhagavan taught me that silence alone is important and not the physical posture observed along with it. Subsequently I learnt to sit comfortably in an easy-chair during meditation time. This has been a great help for my continuous *sadhana* during the past years, and I gratefully bow down at Sri Ramana's holy feet.

Kinder far art Thou than one's own mother.
Is this then Thy all-kindness, Oh Arunachala?

¹ *Marital Garland of Letters*, Verse 6.

My newest experience of Sri Ramana's unceasing grace is only some days old. I had to stay at home on account of a sudden, serious cold and felt miserable, supposing that my *hatha yoga* practice might be too poor. Two or three days later, still in bed, I happened to take in hand an old copy of *The Mountain Path* and open it on page 117 where my eyes fell exactly on the passage, "Bhagavan's feet are ever over your head". A wave of bliss ran through my mind and body and a little later I could think of going on with my *sadhana* again.

May Sri Ramana's grace be with all of us!

Sayings of Sri Bhagavan

A crippled disabled Brahmin came and complained: "O Bhagavan, right from my birth I have been suffering. Is it due to my past actions?"

Sri Bhagavan said:

We have to say that it is due to past actions. Then, if one asks what is the cause of those past actions, we have to bring in previous past actions and so on with out end. Instead of enquiring into *karma* or actions, why not enquire whose *karma* it is? If we are the body, then let the body ask the questions. When you say, you suffer, it is your thought. Happiness is our natural state. That which comes and goes is the ego. We think we are miserable, because we forget our essential nature, which is Bliss. Even an emperor, in spite of his wealth and power, often suffers because of his disturbed mind. The sage, who does not know where his next meal will come from, is ever happy. See who enjoys Bliss.

WHY RAMANA?

By **Kumari Sarada**

Life pours forth from the incomparable grace of Thy steady and shining eyes". The light which pours forth from Sri Bhagavan's vibrant eyes gives meaning and fulfilment to our lives. His serene presence draws us in silence and envelops every tiny detail of our daily existence. I too have partaken of his extravagant grace, my parents having been drawn to Bhagavan even before I was born. His loving grace and gentle smile solve all my problems, answer every question and clear all confusion. His presence, I feel, is the source of perennial joy for me. Our Master is an ocean, and blessed as I am, I am eager that all should share my blessedness. To satisfy such sceptics as may look down upon this subjective experience and in my eagerness to share my joy I would like to emphasise the objectivity and universal applicability of Bhagavan's method of Self-enquiry, which will stand always as the simplest solution to every problem. I say this because Self-enquiry as taught by Sri Bhagavan only requires keen, alert and constant search for one's own identity, by observing the source of the I-thought. Since the mind is a bundle of thoughts and all thoughts revolve round the I-thought, watching that thought introverts the mind back to its source, the Heart, our true identity.

The process of Self-enquiry is scientific and does not demand blind faith. On the other hand, constant awareness, alertness and keen, continued questioning is advocated. Ah! There is still scope to criticise — it is far too dry and intellectual! It is *hridaya vidya*, the knowledge of the Heart. One who is aware of the power of the immensity of the Heart through Self-enquiry experiences its presence in every activity so that even a routine activity like reading a newspaper is an act done with total absorption and spontaneity. Every act is

natural — how then can it merely be intellectual or dry? The alertness to every minute of life is not an intellectual process but an awareness and aliveness of being which responds fully in all naturalness and hence most appropriately.

The method which Sri Bhagavan has taught and the perfection it implies appear too simple to be accepted by the mind. The human mind, which has conquered many complicated fields through scientific research, prefers not to accept the fact that in such a simple method lies the answer to everything. When Copernicus explained simpler orbits of the planets, he was burnt at the stake. Many may prefer to go in for things complicated and ornate, for the mind can revel in the glory of mastering such techniques.

Sri Maharshi's teaching, easy as it is, gives no scope for this pride of mastery. Yet the method is attractive to the mind, because the mind is the fulcrum of Self-enquiry.

Self-enquiry as taught by Bhagavan Ramana is the greatest adventure as it is the adventure into the world of the spirit. It includes the adventure of science in its rational analysis, that of the explorer, as it explores the very nature of one's being. And it is the adventure of the artist in its spontaneous creativity. What does it create? It creates and infuses life and beauty into our routine habits of existence. It is the simplest of methods but, being the greatest of adventures as well, it does not allow us to wallow in ease.

Why Ramana? Because his life was the living of this method, not in order to practise what he preached, not as an intellectualisation, but out of the spontaneity, the naturalness synonymous with Self-enquiry. I say naturalness because, Self-enquiry implies the constant awareness of our true nature.

CELEBRATING THE BIRTHDAY

By Jean Dunn

BHAGAVAN Sri Ramana Maharshi was requested by Vasudeva Sastri in 1912 to allow his birthday to be celebrated by his devotees. Bhagavan refused to be drawn into our illusion and, as do all his actions and words, his reply on this occasion serves as a guide to bring us out of illusion into reality:

You who wish to celebrate the birthday, seek first whence was your birth. One's true birthday is when one enters that which transcends birth and death — the Eternal Being.

At least on one's birthday one should mourn one's entry into this world (*samsara*). To glory in it and celebrate it is like delighting in and decorating a corpse. To seek one's self and merge in the Self — that is wisdom.

Sri Bhagavan had no reasons of his own for anything he did. All was for our benefit. By 'our' I mean all of us who have been drawn to him and all those who in the future will be drawn to him. What was he teaching us by this verse? What does it mean, "Seek first whence was your birth"? Aren't we all aware of who our parents are and the date of our birth? Yes, but that is the date of the birth of a body and the parents are the bodies from which this body is born. Are we the body? If so we will surely die. What did Bhagavan do when, as a youngster of sixteen, he was faced with the overwhelming certainty of immediate death? By a deep enquiry he discovered that he was not the body, that he was never born and would never die. That was his true birthday, when he "entered that which transcends birth and death — the Eternal Being". He was reborn as the spirit Immortal. Ignorance had vanished and he knew his true identity — the Eternal Being. The illusion that he was a body in time and space died. We can only imagine

that state, but because of Bhagavan, we know that it is possible for us also to attain. In truth, as he tells us, there is nothing to attain, only question the illusion and it will disappear.

“To seek one’s self and merge in the Self, that is Wisdom”. How to seek one’s self? Bhagavan has told us repeatedly to enquire, in every situation, whatever happens, “to whom is this happening?” “Who am I?”, to keep our attention focused on this ‘I’. Gradually our mind will lose interest in the magic show of the world and our own self will grow stronger. We have so many concepts about everything — our self, the world, God, and even the Absolute. These concepts we have gathered from others and made our own, thereby imprisoning ourselves. No one else binds us, we bind our self with bonds of illusion. The mind tends to be satisfied with words. If we can name a thing, we think we know it; we fail to seek the meaning of words. Bhagavan was uncompromising in his insistence that we need only remove illusion; no effort is needed for realization because it is already there. By persistent enquiry, ignorance will vanish. This is wisdom. We have great joy and good cause for celebration in the birth of Sri Ramana Maharshi, the great sage whose presence will guide us out of our ignorance to wisdom. Although the body has died, the truth which is Bhagavan, our own Self, lives eternally.

MERCIES OF BHAGAVAN

By Dr. S. Siva

HE came into my life when I was at a tender age. In 1938 I accompanied my parents to Ramanasramam. I remember sitting in the old meditation hall watching Bhagavan. The hall was crowded with people. Restlessly I waited to go outside to play with the peacocks and roam the Ashram grounds.

After our return home I began worshipping Bhagavan as God. I had seen this God with my own eyes and it was easier to visualise his form than God in other forms.

Some years later I was sent to live in the home of an ardent devotee of Bhagavan. He was a shining example of a true *bhakta* and all around him were drawn closer to Bhagavan.

When Bhagavan shed his body I thought he had left us forever. Many years were to pass by before I felt his presence once more. Worldly activities turned me away from him time and again, but mercifully I would always return to his lotus feet. Like a ship lost at sea, seeking a lighthouse to guide it safely to port, I would seek him in troubled moments and let him carry me to safety.

Then, during one especially difficult period of my life, I surrendered totally to him. I began for the first time to study his teachings in earnest. All doubts and problems began to fade. I visited his Ashram again after a lapse of thirty years. Nothing had changed; Bhagavan's presence was felt everywhere. I had finally come home.

THE CALL

By I.S. Varghese

THE Divine Call comes to man in several guises. It may be through a devastating incident in life; it may be through admonition from a very insignificant quarter; it may be through a 'small voice' speaking to one from the depths of the heart; it may be through anything. But the common factor is that the person to whom it comes recognises it unmistakably as the Divine Call.

This is closely connected with a basic axiom of Hindu religious thought, that anyone or anything can serve as Master (*Guru*). In common language this just means that one may learn a profound spiritual truth from anyone or any quarter. This is a fact, however much some people have tried to represent truth as confined to their own pet scriptures and premises. The former President of India, the late Dr Radhakrishnan, very aptly expressed this fact when he wrote, "It is a persistent delusion of the Semitic race that a particular theology is necessary for salvation". This delusion has been the cause of much conflict and cruelty and the loss of innumerable lives throughout history. That the *guru* may be anyone or anything has been explicitly stated by Sri Ramana Maharshi in his reply to Dilip Kumar Roy, the famous singer of Sri Aurobindo Ashram:

What is a *guru*? *Guru* is God or the Self. . . He need not necessarily be in human form. Dattatreya had twentyfour *gurus* — the elements, etc. That means that any form in the world could be his *guru*.

In the case of Sri Ramana Maharshi he had no visible *guru*. He was initiated by God Himself. The call came to him in July, 1896, when he was a boy of sixteen years. It was in the form of a confrontation with death which drove

him inwards into the innermost recesses of his being till he realised that he was the *Atman* (Spirit or Self) and not the body or the mind. In his own words, he came to the conclusion:

So I am the Spirit. All this was not a feat of intellectual gymnastics, but came as a flash before me vividly as living truth, something which I perceived immediately, almost without any argument. ‘I’ was something very real, the only real thing in that state, and all the conscious activity that was connected with my body was centred on that . The ‘I’ or myself was holding the focus of attention with a powerful fascination. Fear of death vanished at once and for ever. The absorption in the Self has continued from that moment right up to now.

Young Ramana’s conviction that he had received the call is reflected in the message he left for his relatives before leaving home for Tiruvannamalai:

I am starting from this place in search of my Father and in obedience to his call. This is a virtuous enterprise. Therefore none need grieve about this, or spend any money to trace this out.

There are many touching anecdotes about the Divine Call coming to mortals who appeared to be quite unworthy by all human standards. We have the case of Arunagirinathar, who was called when he was a riotous and dissolute young man always full of strong drink and profanity and addicted to visiting wayward women. One day he wanted to visit one of his paramours and worried his sister for money. She got so annoyed and disgusted that she cried out in anguish, “I know why you want the money. If you are so much in need of a woman, take me”. This utterance penetrated the heart of the young man. The enormity of his sinful life was brought home to him. In great remorse he rushed away shedding copious tears and went straight to the Arunachaleswara temple of

Tiruvannamalai. He climbed one of the *gopurams* of the temple and cast himself down to end his miserable life. The invisible Lord supported him and he came down slowly, as if he were a feather, and landed softly on the ground. The grace of God overwhelmed him. He used his own sister's words, "Lord! Here I am, take me". He was called indeed. Today his soul-stirring devotional hymns and the story of his life move devout hearts and he is venerated as one of the *Saivite* Saints.

There are other such cases among the twelve Alwars and sixtythree Nayanmars (saints) of South India. In the Christian tradition we have St. Paul, who as Saul in his *purvasrama* (previous station in life) persecuted the early Christian Church. He had a vision on the road to Damascus and was transformed into the main apostle of Christ in person. It is significant that about half the New Testament is made up of the epistles of St. Paul. Coming nearer our times, we have the case of Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes in France (later St. Bernadette), the poor asthmatic girl whose father was a labourer and mother a washerwoman, who was graced with a vision of St. Mary, the mother of Christ. Now Lourdes is a premier place of Christian pilgrimage in the world, second only to Jerusalem, and it is the venue of small and great favours from above to all and sundry without distinction of caste, creed or race.

In the case of many, the Divine Call does not come as an overwhelming experience but as messages to lead them on the road to sanctity. It is just as Jesus Christ has said, "The wind blows wherever it wishes; you hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is the same way with everyone who is born of the Spirit".

As for Tiruvannamalai, the holy hill, it is very significant that Sri Maharshi was called to take his abode there and be there continuously for a period of over fifty years, thus confirming the sanctity of the hill. There is nothing peculiar

about a place being considered holy. In the Old Testament of the Bible there are many references to God declaring Zion in Jerusalem as his holy hill and as His abode. In Exodus we get the account of Moses facing the burning bush and God asking him to remove his shoes as he was standing on holy ground. Tiruvannamalai has been calling people continuously to the life in the Spirit, more loudly after Sri Maharshi made it his abode. The place has unmistakably shown truly evangelical characteristics — the signs of Divine presence — peace, healing and amendment of life.

The call of Tiruvannamalai has been mainly through the printed word and oral testimonies. The very first devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi of whom we have record, Sivaprakasam Pillai, who approached him with some doctrinal questions in 1901, had come to know of the Maharshi from oral testimony. So also, the first Western devotee, Frank Humphreys, Assistant Superintendent of Police, came to know of the Maharshi in 1911 from his Telugu tutor, one Narasimhayya. A very large number of people, especially Westerners, came to know of the Maharshi through that remarkable book, *A Search in Secret India* by Paul Brunton, the well-known writer on religious and esoteric subjects. From then onwards the name and fame of Tiruvannamalai and the Maharshi have been spread abroad by many Ashram publications and innumerable visitors from all parts of India and abroad.

There is no doubt that many have been called, and out of those the fortunate ones have responded. It is for them to heed the advice given to St. Bernadette by her Father Confessor, “Great grace has been shown to you — should you not try to deserve it?”

BOUNDLESS LOVE

By Gladys De Meuter

GRACE is always there". Sri Ramana Maharshi said these words to one of the countless hearts who came to him for spiritual guidance and solace. Is not the sage grace embodied?

Once, when Sri Bhagavan was asked whether grace was not the gift conferred by the *guru*, he replied, "God, *guru* and grace are synonymous terms. They are immanent and eternal".

Grace! Here lies the heart of spiritual life!

From this source wells forth the infinite variety of forms which grace assumes, as it were, in order to dissipate the mists of the chimera called ignorance. These are relative terms, for on a loftier level, Sri Bhagavan taught that there is neither seeker nor goal, for Self alone is.

Few are ready, however, to follow the Sage's supreme teaching or *Maha Yoga*; others must take hold of the Ariadne thread which will lead them out of the labyrinth of wrong identification with the spurious ego. This thread is made of simple twine, and every pilgrim may take hold of it. One qualification is necessary — sincerity! The sage of Arunachala knew who was sincere. In the questions answered by Sri Bhagavan it is striking how infinitely gentle and patient he was with certain humble enquirers, and how he refrained from replying in like vein to other persons whose questions were not sincere.

Without the mysterious operation of grace, no seeker would be aware that there was something lacking which must be found, or something lost which must be rediscovered. Grace may be likened to an exquisite love song which is an invitation to the sacred grove of silence where all who have ears to hear may hear this divine call, and enter. Sri Ramana Maharshi

radiated grace, and his compassion excluded none. His wisdom-power-love was, and remains, measureless.

Faith without works is dead. This is so true, for to pay homage to Sri Bhagavan without following his path would be to pay but lip service whilst the heart is not alive. The Ariadne thread is there, but those who revere the Sage of Arunachala should ever bear in mind that *ahimsa* in thought, word and deed must be observed faithfully and put into practice daily. As in days of yore, by the fruits shall be known the devotees of the Master!

Sri Bhagavan's teachings have been brilliantly expounded by eminent scholars, poets and devotees, and different individuals may be attracted to different facets of the sage's life.

To this heart, ever vividly present is Sri Maharshi's infinite tenderness towards even the tiniest creatures. His beautiful smile greeted the mother-bird busily preparing her nest for her family in the meditation hall. The wild monkeys, including Nondi the lame one, knew that they had nothing to fear from Sri Bhagavan. Likewise came many other animals. One remembers especially Lakshmi the cow, whose great love for the Master is deeply touching and is beautifully told by Arthur Osborne. The gentle solicitude, patience and compassion shown by Sri Ramana Maharshi towards all forms of life is not mere sentimentality. It has profound meaning. Every action of the Maharshi is of utmost importance.

Sri Bhagavan showed reverence for life by example. This reverence for life extended to all living things. When someone declared that surely he could not be compared to a tree, the quiet reply of the sage was most revealing, "You may call a tree a standing man, and man a walking tree".

We cannot pretend to comprehend fully the sagacity of a sage, but throughout history we find that the true measure of the sage is that he is compassion itself, and this Sri Ramana

Maharshi is. Whether Sri Bhagavan gently guided a devotee on the path of surrender, or another to follow the steep *vichara* method, or yet another to practise his or her own form of worship, whether it be along the lines of Hinduism or another religion, the sage always taught according to the receptivity of the enquirer. Unfailingly, his love forged a spiritual link which would never be severed. A striking example of this is the scene when a devotee asked heart-rendingly, “What if I go to hell”? The sage assured him that even there he would not let go of him.

Whether Sri Bhagavan walks the earth in physical frame, or whether he has shed it, does not matter, since his love is everpresent. everpowerful, everactive. Whatever path one follows, surely the greatest comfort is to know that the *guru* within is truly there, as Sri Bhagavan has taught.

To quote but one example:

It is night. A passenger peers out of an aircraft window. Suddenly, from the desert below, a glow of light is perceived. From the tempest-torn heart of this passenger a prayer pours forth, “God, be my light in the night of life’s day”. This person had never beheld the physical form of Sri Ramana Maharshi, yet the presence is here-now-always. How did this spontaneous prayer come about? It sufficed that one day a hand was guided to a book which bore a countenance, one with starlike eyes, a visage which radiated a glory which beggars description. Thus was the love song heard!

The Sage of Arunachala does not belong to any specific time or place. He is beyond both. Only in this context does he emerge in his true grandeur.

As homage to that wondrous love song, which, once heard, is never forgotten or silenced, a modest spiritual bouquet is tendered to the Beloved:

Thou who alone knowest how to love —
 Blessed am I to know that Thou lovest me.
 Thou wilt never forsake me.
 No matter What manner of misfortune befalls me,
 When I am shunned, derided, cast aside by others,
 Thou art ever there, folding me in tender protectiveness.
 When aloneness, fears, doubts, temptations and other
 foes assail me,
 Thou art there to disperse them and put them to flight.
 Thou art my true eternal Love!
 In Thee alone do I find repose
 How to thank Thee, O boundless Love?
 By offering Thee my poverty-stricken heart!

The Answer

By Wei Wu Wei

“Where could Maharshi go”?

Out of voidness, from which he perceived, where could he go?

‘Void’ has neither ingress nor exit.

Concerning ‘void’ nothing could ever be said, for about no thing there could not be anything to say.

Hence three hundred pages by ‘Sages’?

Three hundred or three thousand pages may be written concerning concepts termed ‘void’, as about any other conceptual object, but concerning ‘void’ as such no word could ever apply, for no thought could ever think itself, and no eye could ever see what is looking.

Note: ‘Void’, of course, can also be discussed as ‘Noumenon’, which is discussion concerning the discussing of discussion.

REMEMBRANCE

By **Barbara Rose**

RAMANA is the saviour of this life. At the mere thought of his name there is a burst of harmony inside this physical frame which reverberates and joins in the song of the heavenly spheres and the song of the most minute life-unit, wheresoever that consciousness extends! That name and harmony form the theme and background to every breath and motion. Thanks to them, the perceived world becomes a place of remembrance. Slowly we learn to look through the peep-holes of the circus tent to the quiet beyond. Slowly comes the strength to focus not on the scenes of the fleeting wonders of the mind, but to see with our hearts more and more. Happily, to see the blue sky and to let its vastness fill us till the mind becomes serene. Peacefully, to hear the tiny songbird, insignificant to the grand organ of sight, but so much in tune with what IS.

The faith grows, the trust grows, thanks to the grace of Sri Bhagavan. He is the mother, tirelessly gentle, ready to cradle the devotee in caring arms when it bruises itself so often because of stubborn *vasanas* of the past. He is there to hear the prayer of which the tongue and heart never tire, "Please help us to love more in our hearts each day". He is the father, ever watchful and ready with the reminder of what we are here for, reminding us that our one and only freedom is in remembrance, in being with him and in him.

Thank you for your guidance, Bhagavan. It is in everything. The blessings pour in. They are for all nature. They are for me. They are for all humanity.

EMBODIMENT OF PURITY

By **Robin E. Lagemann**

BHAGAVAN alone IS. . . Such a deed, abiding and assured awareness fills the heart with relief and rejoicing. Awakening from the dream of *samsara* to find Sri Bhagavan as the Being, the Reality, is relief beyond comprehension — it is so complete. Then, knowing this and realizing through his grace that consciousness surrendered to him can never again be engulfed by *samsara* makes us rejoice beyond expression. For, with no *samsara* there is only him to abide with forever. What joy is more complete than that?

Self-realization is the only purpose of human birth, its highest experience and its supreme good. Most wonderful of all is that it is one's natural state. How simple! But then Sri Bhagavan is simplicity itself. And, if we feel it is lost, Sri Bhagavan reminds us to enquire, "To whom is it lost"? And so, to abide in That is to remain as one IS — without concepts.

Remaining free from concepts means annihilation of thoughts. The enquiry, 'Who am I?' effectively quells the onrush of 'I am this or I am that' which engenders 'we' and 'they' and the manifold problems arising therefrom. Sri Bhagavan's method of Self-enquiry causes an abiding interest in the 'I-am' which leads to the eternally existing 'I' beyond all qualifying concepts. As a result, even that 'I', like the stick used to stir the fire which is then itself thrown in, disappears, for as Sri Bhagavan has said, "There really is no such thing as 'I'".

What inexpressible relief and restoration of joy it is to know that one is neither this nor that, neither God nor man etc. One only IS.

So, in Him who manifested as Sri Bhagavan Ramana, embodiment of purity and wisdom, personification of the eternal *dharma*, may we be eternally consumed.

Let the Master's words conclude:

Devotee: Why should Self-enquiry alone be considered the direct means to *jnana*?

Bhagavan: Because every kind of *sadhana* except that of *Atma Vichara* presupposes the retention of the mind as the instrument for carrying out the *sadhana*, and without the mind it cannot be practised. The ego may take different and subtler forms at different stages of one's practice, but itself is never destroyed. The attempt to destroy the ego or the mind through *sadhanas* other than *Atma vichara*, is just like the thief turning policeman to catch the thief, that is, himself. *Atma vichara* alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exists, and enables one to realize the pure, undifferentiated Being of the Self or the Absolute. Having realized the Self, nothing remains to be known, because it is perfect Bliss, it is All.

The ignorant man, attached to his body, is controlled by the impressions and tendencies created by his past deeds, and is bound by the law of *karma*. But the wise man, his desires being quenched, is not affected by deeds. He is beyond the law of *karma*. Since his mind rests in the *Atman* he is not affected by the conditions which surround him, though he may continue to live in the body and though his senses may move amongst sense objects. For he has realized the vanity of all objects, and in multiplicity sees one infinite Lord. He is like a man who has awakened from sleep and learned that his dream was a dream.

— *Srimad Bhagavatam*.

HOW BHAGAVAN CAME INTO MY LIFE

By Karin Stegemann

ALREADY in early childhood I felt a deep religious longing. But only after many years of seeking and intense study of religion and philosophy did I finally find the answers to my questions in Buddhism. Later on it was the practice of Zen Buddhism in particular which guided me on the path of realization.

In 1952 my husband founded a Buddhist Society in Hamburg, Germany. I became his colleague and worked for more than twenty years, my main duty being the editing of a journal. During this time I first saw Sri Ramana Maharshi's photograph and it made a deep impression on me. I also found in the book, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, a dimension of spiritual experience which attracted me as if by magic. From that time onwards this book became my daily spiritual food, and my longing to see the places where the sage had lived grew daily.

The love of Bhagavan was with me most powerfully when I sat for meditation. This was immediately after the passing away of my husband. In those days I experienced a Being beyond birth and death, and he revealed himself to me as the *Sadguru*, working from within. Many years had to pass until I was able to arrange everything in such a way that all my activities could go on without me for some time. This set me free for my first pilgrimage to Sri Ramanasramam.

Never in my life was I so happy and so full of deep peace as during that blessed time at the foot of Arunachala! After my return to the West, I expressed my gratefulness in a series of lectures in which I showed slides of all the sacred places where the sage had lived in the body and of those who work nowadays in a selfless way to keep the Ashram running and to preserve the atmosphere as it was during his bodily presence.

After a second visit I was certain that Bhagavan is working within us beyond time and space, and that it is only the body which travels from one place to the other. After my first journey there was still the painful dualistic feeling of departing; now it had disappeared. Where is coming and going? In a similar way I experienced that sickness and other difficulties cannot disturb the inner peace, once the wrong identification has dropped off.

To meet the wishes of my friends for a seminar on Bhagavan, I studied anew all available material on the sage, which points to the incomparable greatness of this Enlightened One, who, almost as a child, experienced the true nature of man without any help from outside, without a further development, without falling back into ignorance. After his great experience he remained once and for all the embodiment of the supreme wisdom of India. May his birth centenary remind us to follow gratefully and wholeheartedly the path which he has opened to all.

Sayings of Bhagavan

“What will it be like when one achieves Self-realization?” a devotee asked. “The question is wrong, one does not realize anything new”, said Bhagavan. “I do not get you, Swami”, persisted the devotee. “It is very simple. Now you feel you are in the world. There you feel that the world is in you”, explained Bhagavan.

WHERE HAS BHAGAVAN GONE?

By Swami Virajananda

THEY are despondent that Bhagavan is going to leave them and go away. Where can he go, and how"? These words of Sri Bhagavan contain the whole truth of what he is; they are assurance and more than that, they are fact. But how are we to grasp this promise, how to understand this mysterious eternal presence?

Imagine, if you will, an endless sheet of pure light. Call it the Absolute, or *Brahman*, or That Which Is ... it does not matter. All the names and forms you wish to behold — mountains, rivers, plants, countless beings — see them as if painted on this sheet, some of them completely opaque, so that you cannot see any of the underlying light, some fully transparent, others partly transparent, according to the predominance of the various *gunas*. Now see in the middle of each being a tiny aperture, as in the lens of a camera. That is the Self, seated in the hearts of all, and it is of course identical with the substratum; the less ego, the more is it open, and the more the light can come through. What an infinite combination of light transparencies and aperture-sizes God has thus made!

How do the sages, the *jivanmuktas*, look ? There is no question any longer of transparency or darkness, for, being devoid of ego, their aperture has opened until it reached the outline of their shape, so that, except for this outline, the underlying light is all there is. And all that happens when their bodies die is that this outline gets erased. What remains is the light they always were — call it God, or *Brahman*, or That Which Is. This is why there is no question of Bhagavan going away; this is why he is our very Self.

The *Smriti* says:

Neither inward nor outward turned consciousness, nor the two together; not an undifferentiated mass of dormant

omniscience; neither knowing nor unknowing, because invisible, ineffable, intangible, devoid of characteristics, inconceivable, indefinable, its sole essence being the assurance of its own Self; the coming to peaceful rest of all differentiated, relative existence; utterly quiet; peaceful, blissful, without a second: this is *Atman*, the Self, which is to be realized.¹

¹ Mandukyopanishad, V.7.

Bhagavan's Silence

By S. Bhanu Sharma

I came to Bangalore in 1935 with the blessings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana. I was under the care of a Polish engineer, Mr. Maurice Frydman, who was a frequent visitor to the Ashram. In 1937 one of his Dutch friends, Dr. G.H. Mees, a staunch philosopher, came to visit him and was discussing philosophy with him. Dr. Mees said that he had not been able to get clarification on certain points in Indian Philosophy, despite all his efforts. Mr. Frydman suggested that he go and meet Bhagavan and that from him he was sure to get what he wanted.

I was asked to accompany Dr. Mees to introduce him to Bhagavan. Dr. Mees noted down all his questions on a sheet of paper. We arrived at about 8.30 a.m., prostrated before Bhagavan and sat down in the Hall in front of him. Several devotees were putting questions and Bhagavan was answering them. Dr. Mees kept silent, and at 10.45 I reminded him about his questions. He said that he no longer had any doubt on any point and that all of the answers had become clear to him after the darshan of Bhagavan.

Thus was the grace of Bhagavan bestowed on devotees without their asking, when they went to him for his blessings.

ARUNACHALA AND RAMANACHALA

By K. Subrahmanian

THE Maharshi and Arunachala embody the same principle of stillness. The Maharshi too was *achala*, the stillness of Awareness. He was the *utsava vigraha*, the hill the *mula vigraha*. He never moved away from Tiruvannamalai, from the day he arrived there in his sixteenth year till he merged in its light in April, 1950. As the hill is rooted in the earth, Sri Ramana is rooted in the Self. The hill still draws people to it. Sri Ramana too, unmoving, draws people towards himself. Even people who had not seen him during his lifetime are drawn towards him and the hill.

The Sage appealed to humanity through silence. This silence, like the hill's own silence, is more potent than the eloquence of preachers. It brings about silence of the beholder's mind. It is not the negation of speech but the pure awareness which is the source and end of all sound.

Going round the hill is recommended by Sri Bhagavan, as this physical movement results in mental calm. Strangely enough, one feels no fatigue in going round the hill. Going round Sri Bhagavan was thought equal to going round the hill and was found by some to yield the same mental calm. However, he discouraged this practice. The hill and the Maharshi are two forms assumed by the formless Self.

Smaranad Arunachalam — If one thinks of Arunachala, one gains liberation. Like Arunachala, Ramana too brings enlightenment by ending the illusion that the body is oneself. The hill is Lord Siva himself. And Ramana lived and moved as Sivananda. And he is present still as we sit in silence in his Ashram or walk round the hill.

MY BELOVED BHAGAVAN

By Swami Ramdas

What shall I say of Him who towers high,
 A veritable Everest of spiritual glory,
 A resplendent sun who sheds light on all.
 He is our soul, our life and sole refuge.
 The sage par-excellence dwells on the Sacred Hill,
 Arunachala, the abode of holy ones, the *Rishis*.
 His compassionate eyes pour forth nectar on all He sees,
 Drowning us in a sea of joy and ecstasy.
 Our lives are aflame with divine wisdom
 At a moment's touch of His world-redeeming feet.
 He is God Himself who walked on earth.
 His grace and delight enter our hearts,
 Transforming us into His beauteous image.
 He belongs to the dizzy heights ;
 Still He stands firm on the earth of ours
 To redeem and save those who behold
 His face reflected in the mirror
 Of His toe-nails, which glow with celestial radiance.
 The care-worn go to Him and become
 Free and cheerful like children at play.
 The earnest aspirants approach Him
 To return deeply permeated with knowledge eternal.
 Verily, to be in His presence is to know
 All that exists is Himself, His grandiose being and form.
 His unfailing power of love is most potent;
 How He draws me to Him is a mystery.
 O Lord! like a rudderless boat adrift
 On that vast ocean of the world, I wandered
 Hither and thither seeking in darkness
 The supreme light and goal that liberates life
 From galling bondage and depthless sorrow.

Lo! Thy grace drew me to Thy feet
And I came to Thee a vagrant and a beggar.
Thy very sight was burning with the all-consuming
fire of the world.
The instant my head touched Thy holy feet
The fever of my soul left me for ever.
I felt lightness and freedom and peace;
Then Thine eyes, redolent with Thy Infinite Grace
Tenderly looked on me and I was thrilled.
I stood before Thee, a figure of pure bliss,
Fully bathed in Thy divine halo.
Now, I am Thy child, free and happy.
My face is suffused with smiles drawn from Thee.
My life is entirely enlightened
With Thy Love, Knowledge and Power.
Thou art my Mother, Master and Friend, my only
Beloved.
All glory to Thee! All glory to Thee!

YEARS OF GRACE

By R. Narayana Iyer

I first saw Bhagavan in 1913 at the Virupaksha Cave. But it was in 1936 that I really met him. When I reached the Ashram and entered the hall, Bhagavan pointed at me and said, "He has come from Madras". I thought myself very fortunate in having been blessed by his attention immediately on my arrival. That evening while sitting in the hall, Bhagavan looked at me intently for about five minutes. It was an extraordinary experience. The experience, the feeling, remained long after I returned home.

I took voluntary retirement from service in order to pursue the spiritual path and shifted my family to Tiruvannamalai so as to be near Bhagavan. One day while trying to meditate in the presence of Bhagavan I just could not fix my thoughts and became restless. In the meantime a boy who used to come daily and give a performance of numberless prostrations gave us a super show that day. Bhagavan rebuked him, "What is the use of your prostrations? Control of the mind is real worship". Somehow these words had a tremendous effect on me.

There are many instances of Bhagavan's compassion that have graced my life. My wife died of small pox. On that day it rained in torrents. I was afraid that the cremation would be delayed. Bhagavan sent some Ashram workers to help me. When Bhagavan was told that the rain was too heavy for the funeral, he said, "Go on with it, never mind the rain". When the body was taken to the cremation ground, the rain stopped, and when the body was burnt to white ashes, it started raining again!

A few days later my daughter was singing in the hall. Suddenly she stopped and then, after a pause she continued.

Bhagavan asked, “Why did you stop in the middle? Was it the grief for your mother? Why do you grieve for her? Is she not with Lord Arunachala”?

In 1942 I had to arrange for the marriage of my daughter. I had a suitable boy in mind, but he raised some objections. Anxiously I showed his letter to Bhagavan, who said, “Don’t worry, it will come off”. Soon afterwards the boy himself came and the marriage was celebrated.

After Bhagavan left the body I spent two years in my village and then came to the Ashram again. There were difficulties in my spiritual practices, but I felt Bhagavan’s guidance very clearly.

I had muscular rheumatism at that time and wrote to my son, who was coming from Madras to bring some medicine. He however forgot. The next day Sundaram’s brother, coming from his village brought the very medicine I wanted. I asked him how he had thought of bringing them. He told me that he saw them in his house unused and that it occurred to him that it might be of some use to me. It dawned on me that it was Bhagavan’s love for us that filled our lives with miracles.

On another occasion a nerve in my leg got inflamed. I was all alone and puzzled, when unexpectedly, Sundaram came from his village. When I asked him why he came, he said, “I just felt like coming”. From the very next day I had high fever and Sundaram nursed me for a fortnight. Who could have arranged all this but Bhagavan?

During the years after Bhagavan left his body I felt His continued guidance very clearly. How carefully he watches over every legitimate need of his devotees!

ETERNAL BHAGAVAN

By Shantamma

MY search for a Master who would lead me to salvation began when I was 40 years old. It was ten years later, in 1927, that I went to Tiruvannamalai in the company of three ladies. When I went to Ramanasramam, Bhagavan was seated on a cot in a grass-thatched shed. As soon as I saw him I knew that he was God in human form. Muruganar, who was a native of Ramnad like me, was by his side. I bowed to Bhagavan and said, "Today I am blessed. Please grant that my mind does not trouble me any more". Bhagavan turned to Muruganar and said, "Ask her to find out whether there is such a thing as mind. If there is, ask her to describe it". I stood still, not knowing what to say. Muruganar explained to me, "Don't you see? You have been initiated in the search for the Self.

We stayed for forty days. We would cook some food, and take it to the Ashram. Bhagavan would taste it and the rest was given to the devotees. In those days, Bhagavan's brother Chinnaswami was cooking in the Ashram. Often there were no *curries* or *sambar*, only plain rice and pickles. Though I wanted to stay on until Bhagavan's birthday, my companions had to leave. When I went to Bhagavan to take his leave, He asked me to wait a day longer for the newly printed *Upadesa Saram*. The next day he gave me a copy with his own hands. The thought of leaving him broke my heart and I wept bitterly. Bhagavan graciously said, "You are going to Ramnad, but you are not leaving Arunachala. Go and come soon".

Fortunately by his grace I was able to attend the next *jayanti*. It was the experience of every devotee that he who is determined to visit him, finds that all obstacles somehow vanish. This time Bhagavan was seated on a sofa in a newly built hall. He was explaining something from *Ulladu Narpadu* to Dandapani Swami. When he saw me his first question was,

“Have you a copy of this book? I asked them to post one to you.” How my Lord remembers us by name and how loving is his personal attention to our needs. From dawn to dusk I stayed at the Ashram and engaged myself in its chores.

After the celebration, the guests were leaving and I felt that I too would have to go. I gathered sufficient courage and told Bhagavan about my deep desire to stay on. “As long as I am with you Bhagavan, my mind is at peace. Away from you, I am restless. What am I to do”? He said, “Stay here until your mind gets settled. After that you can go anywhere and nothing will disturb you”. It seemed miraculous when minutes later I was asked to stay and cook for two months, as Chinnaswami who was cooking for the Ashram was sick and had to leave for Madras for treatment. Thus I came to stay — not for two months, but forever.

During that period in the history of the Ashram, Bhagavan used to be active working both in the kitchen and outside. He would clean grain, shell nuts, grind seeds, stick together the leaf plates we ate from and so on. We would join him in every task and listen to his stories, jokes, reminiscences and spiritual teachings. Occasionally he would scold us lovingly like a mother. Everything we did, every problem we faced, was made use of in teaching the art of total reliance on him.

One morning a European came in a horse carriage to the Ashram and went straight to Bhagavan. He wrote something on a piece of paper and showed it to Bhagavan. Bhagavan did not answer, instead he gazed at the stranger steadily. The stranger stared back at him. Then Bhagavan closed his eyes and the stranger also closed his. Time passed and the whole atmosphere was silent and still. Lunch hour struck but Bhagavan would not open his eyes. Madhavaswami, the attendant, got Bhagavan’s water pot and stood ready to lead him out of the hall. Bhagavan would not stir. We felt afraid to go near, such was the intensity around him. His face was glowing with a

strange light. Chinnaswami was talking loudly to attract Bhagavan's attention. Even vessels were banged about, but all in vain. When the clock was striking twelve Bhagavan opened his eyes. They were glowing very brightly. Madhavaswami took up the water jug; the European got into the carriage and went away. It was the last we saw of him. Everybody was wonderstruck at the great good fortune of the man, to have received such immediate initiation from Bhagavan.

Once the Maharaja of Mysore visited the Ashram. He asked for a private interview. Of course, Bhagavan never allowed such a thing. Finally it was decided that Maharaja be brought in when Bhagavan was having his bath. Trays and trays of sweets and other costly presents were laid at Bhagavan's feet. For ten minutes the Maharaja just stood looking and then prostrated before Bhagavan. Tears flowing from his eyes made Bhagavan's feet wet. He told Bhagavan, "They made me a Maharaja and bound me to a throne. For the sin of being born a king, I lost the chance of sitting at your feet and serving in your glorious presence. I do not hope to come again. Only these few minutes are mine. I pray for your grace".

Once the cow Lakshmi came into the hall. She was pregnant at that time. It was after lunch time and Bhagavan was reading the newspapers. Lakshmi came near and started licking the papers. Bhagavan looked up and said, "Wait a little Lakshmi", but Lakshmi went on licking. Bhagavan laid his paper aside, put his hands behind Lakshmi's horns and put his head against hers. They stayed thus for quite a long time. All of us watched the wonderful scene. After sometime Bhagavan turned to me and said, "Do you know what Lakshmi is doing? She is in *samadhi*". Tears were flowing from Lakshmi's eyes. Her eyes were fixed on Bhagavan. After sometime Bhagavan asked her, "Lakshmi, how do you feel now"? Lakshmi moved backward, reluctant to turn her tail towards Bhagavan, and went out of the hall. On the fourth day she gave birth to a calf. The man with whom she was staying in town brought her with her three

calves and left them in the Ashram for good. Lakshmi and her three calves came into the hall and lay down beside Bhagavan's sofa. He said, "All these days Lakshmi had to go back in the evening and she used to be in tears. Today she is delighted for she need not go away anymore. She knows that her home is here now. We have to look after her. Look at her with what self-assurance she has stretched herself out"!

In the early days of the Ashram, a *harijan* used to stand near the well and accompany Bhagavan whenever he went up the hill. One day Bhagavan called him near and said, "Go on repeating 'Shiva, Shiva'". It was very unusual for an untouchable to receive this kind of initiation. He could never have secured it without Bhagavan's infinite grace. After that the man disappeared.

Once I related to Bhagavan some vision I had and he said:

Yes, such visions do occur. To know how you look you must look into a mirror, but don't take that reflection to be yourself. What is perceived by our senses and mind is never the truth. All visions are mere mental creations, and if you believe in them, your progress ceases. Enquire to whom the visions occur, who is their witness. Free from all thought, stay in pure awareness. Out of that don't move.

A visitor while taking leave of Bhagavan expressed a wish that Bhagavan should keep him in mind as he was going very far away and would probably not come back to the Ashram. Bhagavan replied:

Ajnani has no mind. How can one without a mind remember or even think? This man goes somewhere and I have to go there and look after him? Can I keep on remembering all these prayers? Well, I shall transmit your prayer to the Lord of the Universe. He will look after you. It is his business.

After the devotee departed, Bhagavan turned towards us and said:

People imagine that the devotees crowding around a *jnani* get special favours from him. If a *Guru* shows partiality, how can he be a *jnani*? Is he so foolish as to be flattered by people's attendance on him and the service they do? Does distance matter? The *Guru* is pleased with him only who gives himself up entirely, who abandons his ego forever. Such a man is taken care of wherever he may be. He need not pray. God looks after him unasked. The frog lives by the side of the fragrant lotus, but it is the bee that gets the honey.

When I cooked, Bhagavan would come to the kitchen to taste the food and see whether the seasoning was just right. Once he said, "The Maharajas employ special taste experts and pay them huge salaries. I wonder what will be my pay". "I am a beggar Bhagavan, and all I can offer is my life", I said, to which Bhagavan nodded his head lovingly.

In the kitchen there were no proper jars for storing foodstuffs and everything was kept in tins and pots which would leak and spill and render the floor slippery. Once I scrubbed the kitchen floor carefully. Bhagavan on seeing it congratulated me on the neatness in the kitchen. I sighed, "What is the use Bhagavan? People will come, spill oil, scatter flour and the kitchen will be the same again. We must have proper jars and containers". Ten days later they called me to the hall. Attendants were opening wooden boxes and there were six beautiful jars. "You wanted jars, now you have them", said Bhagavan. On enquiry it was found that some railway station master had booked them in the name of our Ashram for no ostensible reason. Such mysterious coincidences occurred almost daily, both at the Ashram and in the homes of devotees.

One day, when I was still new in the kitchen, I served Bhagavan with a few more pieces of potato than the rest. Bhagavan noticed it and got very angry with me. He turned his face away and did not look at those who were serving food. In the evening the women working in the kitchen would

take leave of him. Usually he would exchange a few words with us. That evening he called me near and asked:

“What did you do today”?

“I don’t know Bhagavan. Have I done something wrong”?

“You served me more curry than you served others”.

“What does it matter. I did it with love and devotion”.

“I felt ashamed to eat more than others. Have you come all this way to stuff me with food? You should always serve me less than the others. Do you hope to earn grace through a potato curry”?

“Out of my love for you I committed a blunder. Forgive me Bhagavan”.

“The more you love my people, the more you love me”, said Bhagavan.

A good lesson was learned and never forgotten. Many mundane occurrences in the kitchen and in the dining hall during meal times showed us the silent ways in which Bhagavan pointed out to us the path of realization. Bhagavan was a stern task master and one had to implicitly obey him. Each day was a day of trial and lesson in spirituality. Those who have not lived through it cannot appreciate the deep spiritual effect of these anxieties and conflicts. Our ‘I’ would hurl itself against the rock of truth and the rock would not yield. The ‘I’ had to yield and in that yielding was the highest blessing. His anger would sometimes seem to shatter us to pieces, and blessed are they indeed who have seen in His wrath His utmost grace.

One day there was talk about a devotee having come under the influence of another Swami. Bhagavan said:

Once a man has surrendered his life here, he belongs here. Wherever he may go, he shall return. For him this is the door to liberation.

SRI RAMANASRAMAM

By Lokammal

MY intense desire to go to Ramanasramam was fulfilled when I got a chance to go to Tiruvannamalai along with some friends. We arrived in the evening and took shelter for the night in a *dharmashala*. The next morning we went to the Ashram which at that time was a mere thatched shed. I looked at Bhagavan and could not take my eyes off Him. I even forgot to offer him the fruits I had brought with me. That was my first meeting. As my friends returned from Tirupati I had to leave for home. When I asked Bhagavan permission to go home he exclaimed, “What, you are going”? I told him all about the trouble I had at home for wanting to come to the Ashram. I said that I had no attachments and prayed to him to keep me at his feet.

Bhagavan was at that moment reading *Upadesa Saram*. Muruganar came in and Bhagavan said to him, “She wants some instructions to take home with her. Read this to her”. He gave him his copy of *Upadesa Saram* and Muruganar read out some points for me. Before leaving I asked Bhagavan to give me the book. Bhagavan said if this copy were given away the Ashram would be without a copy. Just then Somasundara Swami told Bhagavan that he had a copy which he would give to the Ashram and requested Bhagavan to give me his copy of *Upadesa Saram*.

After this first visit I used to come to the Ashram often and stay for a month or two. One day I was asked to cook some *dhal* (split pulses) and some *curry* for the next day. I came very early but Bhagavan was quicker than me. He told me that the *dhal* was ready and that I had only to prepare the *curry*.

Very often we found ourselves caught in the trap of outmoded customs and conventions that discriminated against

the less fortunate, especially women and the lower castes. Bhagavan was strict in treating all equally. He often said, “The Ashram does not see any differences. There are no untouchables here. Those who do not like it may eat elsewhere. At Skandashramam there used to be the same trouble with mother. She would not give food to the man who brought us firewood. She would insist that I eat first, then she would eat and then the woodcutter could have the remnants left outside the Ashram. I would refuse to eat until the man was decently fed. At first she would not yield and would suffer and weep and fast, but I was adamant too. She then saw that she could not have her way in these matters. What is the difference between man and man? Am I a Brahmin and he a *pariah*? Is it not correct to see only God in all”? We were all astounded. The rebuke went deep into our hearts. We asked Bhagavan to make our minds clear and our hearts pure so that we would sin no more against God in man.

One morning I was singing a *Tevaram* Song in front of Bhagavan and read one verse incorrectly. Bhagavan noticed it and asked, “Is it written like that? Better read it again”. I read it wrong several times. At last Bhagavan said sternly, “Find out by yourself where you made the mistake. I shall not correct you. If I do, you will not learn to see where you are wrong and you will repeat the same mistake again and again”. Kunju Swami was in the hall and wanted to help me. But Bhagavan ordered him to keep quiet. Then K.V. Ratnam begged Bhagavan to show me where I was wrong, but he refused firmly, saying, “No, I must not do it. She is reading it incorrectly again and again because her secret wish is that I should correct it”. I went on reading the passage trying to find out where I was reading it incorrectly. It was nearing noon and I had to help serve lunch. When I was about to go to the kitchen, Bhagavan told me to sit down. He said, “No, you cannot go. First find out your mistake. You must not just run

away. Better sit down”. The bell rang for lunch. Bhagavan got up from his sofa and went to the dining hall.

After lunch I went to Somasundaram Pillai who showed me my mistake. I came to Bhagavan and recited the verse correctly. “Who has shown you the mistake”? he asked. “It is useless to do so. Only when you yourself have found out where you were wrong will it remain firmly in your mind and you will have the knowledge and the capacity not to go wrong again.”

On some other occasion Bhagavan gave me *Vasudeva Mananam* to read. I finished the book and brought it back to Bhagavan. “Have you read it”? he asked. “Yes, I did, but I understood nothing at all”. “That does not matter. We remember even if we do not understand at the moment. We may come to understand much later. We may think we forgot it, but nothing of real value is ever forgotten.” said Bhagavan graciously.

Once we had only some dried vegetables for the soup to eat with our rice and I did my best to make it palatable. After the meal I asked Bhagavan how he liked the soup. He replied, “What is taste? It is what our tongue tells us. We think the taste is in the food itself. But it is not so. The food itself is neither tasty nor tasteless, it is the tongue that makes it so. To me no taste is pleasant or unpleasant, it is just as it is.”

Bhagavan’s sayings

One day when the doctor was dressing Bhagavan’s arm, they chatted about taking photos. Bhagavan said, “In a pin-hole camera, when the hole is small, you see shapes and colours. When the hole is made big, the images disappear and one sees only clear light. Similarly when the mind is small and narrow, it is full of shapes and words. When it broadens, it sees pure light. When the box is destroyed altogether, only the light remains.

GLIMPSES OF SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

By Raja Iyer

IN 1911 when I was in the high school in Tiruvannamalai, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi was living in Virupaksha Cave. At that time we boys would climb the Arunachala hill in small parties to visit Bhagavan. He was usually found sitting on the elevated place outside the cave. He would smile at us as a sign of recognition and would allow us to sit at his feet and sing devotional songs to our hearts' content. When the singing was over, we would share with him the food we had brought and wash it down with the cool water from a spring just above the cave. We would then return home in high spirits.

After high school I used to stay with Bhagavan whenever I felt like it and eat and sleep there. By that time, he had left the cave which was too small for the crowd that came to see him and moved a little higher to Skandasramam where the devotees had built some terraces and huts. Echammal, Mudaliar granny and a few others made it their duty to bring cooked food up the hill regularly for Bhagavan. This enabled some of us to stay with him permanently. The food was meant for him, but there was enough for all. He would not allow any discrimination in matters of food. It was shared equally and what remained was consumed the next morning. Nor were there regular hours for food. We would sit down for food when there was food and when we felt the need. Bhagavan would not eat food from the previous day; but he was willing to cook for all and he made me his kitchen boy.

Then Bhagavan's mother and his younger brother Chinnaswami came to live with him. The mother started a regular household. Devotees would bring rice and other provisions and all partook of the frugal meals, oftentimes consisting of some rice, buttermilk and pickles.

While in Skandasramam, Bhagavan used to build walls, embankments and stone and mud benches, the poor man's furniture in India. Once he was plastering a wall with mud. Bespattered with mud, with a rag tied round his head, he looked like an ordinary labourer. Some visitors came up the hill in search of Bhagavan and one of them shouted, "Hey coolie, where is the *swami* who lives hereabouts"? Bhagavan looked round and said, "He has gone up the hill". A visitor protested that they were told that he could be found there at that hour. Bhagavan shrugged his shoulders and said, "He has gone up the hill. I can't help it". While the disappointed visitors were going down the hill Echammal met them. She told them that the *swami* would not go anywhere at that time. She offered to show them the *swami*. In the meantime Bhagavan had washed himself, smeared his body with sacred ash, and was sitting in the classic *yogic padmasana* posture. The visitors greeted him very reverently but were all the time looking for the coolie. After they left Echammal asked Bhagavan why he had played a joke on them. He said, "What else could I do? Do you want me to go around proclaiming, 'I am the *swami*', or to wear a board, 'This is Sri Ramana Maharshi'?"

While Bhagavan was still at Skandasramam he often went round Arunachala. We used to take with us what was needed for cooking some food by the roadside. Food was usually cooked at Palakottu and what remained was taken along and eaten at Gautama Ashram, which we would reach at about nine in the evening. We would sleep there, get up early in the morning and walk to Pachaiamman Temple, which was, according to Bhagavan, the most spiritually charged of all the Pachaiamman temples. Bhagavan used to walk round the hill so slowly that a walk with him was like a festival procession. We would reach Skandasramam by ten or even later.

Though I was married I was not interested in family life. My wife also passed away sometime after marriage and I was free to roam about and live as I wished to.

I am not by nature a willing worker but for the sake of staying at the Ashram I was ready to work. Bhagavan had come down from the hill after his mother's *samadhi* and an Ashram grew around him. I did odd jobs like collecting flowers for worship, drawing water from the well, grinding sandalwood paste etc. For sometime I was performing the *puja* at Bhagavan's mother's shrine.

One day ChinnaSwami asked me to take up the preparation of the morning *iddlies*, the steamed rice and pulse cakes common to South India. This gave me a chance to become a permanent resident of the Ashram. In preparing *iddlies* I achieved such excellence that visitors commented that nowhere had they tasted *iddlies* comparable to those of the Ashram.

Once the workers in the kitchen asked me to grind some pulses to a paste. Try as I might I could not do it. I was told not to leave the kitchen without finishing the job but I just refused to continue. Bhagavan heard the quarrel and advised me to add some salt. When I did so the grinding became easy, and ever since the dislike for grinding left me completely. Very often Bhagavan would work with us side by side cutting vegetables etc. He kept a watchful eye on me and taught me the right way of doing everything. He was very particular about avoiding waste. He showed me how to use a ladle so that not even a drop of food would fall on the ground, how to avoid spilling while pouring and how to start a fire with just a few drops of kerosene. If all this were not a part of my spiritual discipline, why should he have bothered? When we prepared *iddlies* we would send him two, steaming hot. He would eat one and give the other to the people present. At breakfast everybody would get two *iddlies* and a cup of coffee, But Bhagavan would take only one *iddlie*, counting as his first, the one he took earlier.

In 1937 a post office was opened in the Ashram and I was made the Postmaster. On the first two days Bhagavan came to the post office and did all the stamping. Prior to that I used to bring the mail from the town post office to the Ashram.

“Oh, the postman has been made the Postmaster”, remarked Bhagavan. I thus had the opportunity of serving Bhagavan and the Ashram for several years.

In whatever manner and at whatever level the devotee approached him, he responded in the same way, fulfilled his needs and made him happy. Bhagavan showed us tangibly to what extent all devotion will find its way to him, whatever its level, provided it is sincere.

The White Peacock

Bhagavan seems to have developed a fancy for the white peacock which devotees think to be the incarnation of the late Madhavasami, his old attendant who died about two years ago. Today (18-6-1948) the famous cow Lakshmi died. Some believe that she was a disciple of Bhagavan in her previous birth. They draw this conclusion from her birth, the events of her life, her great attachment to him, etc. After finishing the history of Lakshmi, Bhagavan takes up that of the white peacock, which had been brought from such a great distance as Baroda. It was born in October 1946, three months after the death of Madhavasami (July 1946) and brought to Madras in April 1947 by the Maharani of Baroda and to Ramanasramam by Mr David MacIver on the same day.

Bhagavan then watched the peacock's movements. It used to go to the cupboard where books were kept and touched its glass door with its beak in a straight line from east to west, as if scanning the titles of the books. Secondly it used to appear in the hall and quit it at the very hours when Madhava used to come and go. Thirdly it used to sit in the very places where Madhavasami used to sit and, like him, used to visit the office, bookshop, library, etc., also at the hours he used to visit these places. Its habits used to be a copy of Madhava's. Hence the conclusion of several devotees that he was Madhava reincarnated.

From Residual Reminiscences by S.S. Cohen.

BHAGAVAN'S COOKING

By Sundaram

WITH the death of my wife the bond between me and my family snapped. The desire to serve God had been in my mind for quite a long time. I gave up my job. I had heard a lot about Bhagavan. So I decided to go to Ramanasramam. Immediately after my arrival I was fortunate to be taken on the Ashram staff. I was looking after the Ashram's correspondence. Still later I was asked to work in the kitchen. There I had the good fortune to work under Bhagavan's direct supervision.

I was suffering for long from Asthma. It gave me a lot of trouble while cooking, but I never mentioned it to Bhagavan. I felt that I should endure it to the very end.

Bhagavan used to prepare various kinds of *chutney*, usually made of coconut with fragrant herbs and condiments. He was very fond of using the cheapest and most commonly found herbs and seeds and was a wizard in making wonderful dishes from the simplest ingredients. When something unusual was ready, he would give everybody in the kitchen a pinch to taste and we would take it with eyes closed, deeming it to be *prasad*. On one such occasion he gave me a pinch of some *chutney* and said, "This is medicine for you". Without giving much thought to it I swallowed the titbit and soon realised that I was completely cured of asthma.

Once somebody complained to Bhagavan that the Ashram food was very pungent. He said, "When *sattvic* food is essential for spiritual practice how is it that the Ashram food is so heavily spiced"? Bhagavan explained that as long as the ingredients were pure and prepared in a pure place and in the proper way, seasoning was a matter of taste and habit and did not make food less *sattvic*.

An unwritten rule in the Ashram demanded that until the last meal was served and cleared, the workers should attend to their duties only. Sitting in meditation or in Bhagavan's hall was strongly discouraged. The manager argued, with good reason, that devoted service to the Ashram was itself spiritual practice of the highest order and no other practice was needed. He would not allow us to linger in the hall during working hours, which was often tantalising because of the interesting discussions and happenings that were going on there. When we would sneak in and hide ourselves behind people's backs, Bhagavan would look at us significantly, as if saying, "Better go to your work. Don't ask for trouble".

At night, after dinner, we would all collect around Bhagavan. The visitors would have left by that time and we had him all to ourselves. We felt like a big family collected after a day's work. During this short hour Bhagavan would enquire about our welfare, chat with us, make us laugh, and also give instructions for the next day.

With time I realized that working with Bhagavan in the kitchen was not mere cooking, but definitely a form of spiritual training. The first lesson in spiritual education to learn, and to learn for good, is to obey the *guru* implicitly without questioning or using one's own judgement in the least. Even if we knew a better way of doing it, we had to do it exactly as the Master told us. It might have appeared that by obeying him the work would be ruined, but still one had to obey. One must master this art of instantaneous and unquestioning obedience, for the secret of realization lies in this utter surrender and renunciation of one's own judgement.

Bhagavan himself was an excellent cook and made a point of teaching us to cook properly. Cooking is the most rewarding work, for good cooks are usually poor eaters, and all profit goes to others. That is probably why Bhagavan selected cooking as a training ground for some of his devoted disciples.

It was Bhagavan's order that the leftovers should be used as stock for the next day's breakfast. *Iddlies* with *sambar* being the standard breakfast at the Ashram, the leftovers from the previous day would come in handy. Bhagavan would come into the kitchen in the early hours of the morning, warm the leftovers, dilute it and add some more ingredients for the morning *sambar*. The injunction against taking food from the previous day was very much respected among the higher castes. He insisted that avoidance of waste overrules everything else, and he would never permit God's gifts to be thrown away. As to giving leftovers to beggars, it was not practicable, for he insisted that beggars be given the same food as everybody else and not some inferior stuff. Even dogs had to be fed from the common meal, and first, too!

Every morning just before breakfast Bhagavan would enter the kitchen. The vessels containing coffee, *iddlies* and *sambar* were kept ready, covered and shining bright. He would lift the lid, look inside and say, "This is coffee. These are *iddlies*. This is *sambar*". We all felt that this consecrated the food before it was distributed to the visitors and inmates.

Once he came to the kitchen before dawn and put some of the previous day's soup on the fire for heating. Some leaves were washed and cut and he told me to mix them in the soup and continue mixing until they lost their bright green colour. For a long time he did not return. The leaves would not change colour, the soup was getting dry and I was afraid there might be no *sambar* for breakfast. Bhagavan came in just before breakfast. "What, you are still mixing"? he asked with a bright smile. He was pleased that I had implicitly obeyed him and asked me to continue mixing. The gravy was ready in time and was delicious.

Once Bhagavan was frying a large quantity of condiments in a big iron pan over a strong fire. I was standing beside him when he quietly asked me to remove the pan from the fire at once. Probably he saw that more heating would burn the spices. There

was nothing nearby to hold the pan with, so I caught the pan with my bare hands, lifted it and put it on the ground. I was not at all afraid to touch the hot iron, nor was I surprised that I could lift it without feeling its weight. The surprise came later when I realized how utterly impossible was all that had happened. It was a striking instance of the power of obedience to one's *guru*.

Sometimes I was fortunate enough to be able to serve food to Bhagavan with my own hands. I studied carefully how I should serve to please him and was very alert and careful. Yet he would be more alert than me and notice the slightest mistake. "Why did you serve me more than usual? Do I need more food today than yesterday? And why do I get more sweets and dainties than others? How do you dare to make distinctions?" People nearby would plead for me. "No, Bhagavan", they would say, "Sundaram did not serve you more. Look, we got as much as you did". But Bhagavan would not be easily appeased. "You do not know, the ego is strong in him. His giving preference to me is the working of his ego". I could not find out where I was at fault, but I took his scolding as a kind of blessing and would not worry.

The women working in the kitchen were so orthodox that they could not accept the previous day's food. Once when some leftover *sambar* was taken to a devotee's house, a special ceremony was ordered to purify the house. On hearing that Bhagavan told the ladies, "Call the purifiers and get your kitchen purified. I shall never more enter your kitchen". The women, for the sake of their orthodox customs, lost Bhagavan's constant presence, company and guidance. It was a real tragedy. Each devotee in the Ashram believed that Bhagavan was God Himself who had come to purify and bless him and put his feet firmly on the path to liberation. Yet when God Himself went against their religious customs, they would rather cling to their customs than to God. Blessed were those who had no other rule but obedience to Bhagavan. It was clear that he was trying to teach us the simple lesson that in his presence no rule was valid except the rule of

absolute surrender. But it was not an easy lesson to learn. Again and again old habits and loyalties would assert themselves and make us pit our will against his, to our greatest harm.

Bhagavan was not a rebel or a reformer. He did not discourage people from following their religious customs at home. But in the Ashram he would not take all customs for granted. In the Ashram he was the religion and the custom, and those who forgot it had to face his very strong will.

APOLOGY TO HORNETS

One day a disciple said to Bhagavan, “When you stepped on a hornet’s nest, mistaking it for a bush and the hornets attacked your leg and stung it badly, why did you feel remorse for what had happened only accidentally, as if you had done it intentionally?”

Bhagavan replied:

When I was stung by hornets in revenge
 Upon the leg until it was inflamed,
 Although ‘twas but by chance I stepped upon
 Their nest, constructed in a leafy bush;
 What kind of mind is his if he does not
 At least repent for doing such a wrong ?

The story relating to the above is as follows: One day when Bhagavan was climbing about the Hill as was his wont in the early days of his sojourn in Tiruvannamalai, his leg struck against a hornet’s nest and disturbed the hornets. They attacked him in a body and stung his leg and thigh very badly so that it became terribly swollen and painful. Bhagavan expressed great sorrow for what he had done unwittingly. He would not move from the place till they had finished the punishment and flown away.

A DAY WITH BHAGAVAN

By P. L. N. Sharma

IN 1932 I had the good fortune to attend a conference of cooperative organisations which was held at Tiruvannamalai. It enabled me to see the holy Arunachala hill and also pay a visit to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. When I saw him he was in his hall, reclining on a couch. The hall was clean and cool and the sofa was well covered with coloured shawls and a tiger's skin, but Bhagavan himself had only a loin cloth on his body and nothing more. In the subdued light of the hall his body shone like burnished gold and his eyes were luminous, full of flashes of some very intense inner life. The more I looked at him, the more his face seemed to be radiating a mysterious light, the source of which was somewhere deep within. I found myself unable to guess his mental state. I could not make out whether he was aware of the world or not, whether he saw me or not, whether he was in some *yogic* trance or in contemplation of something quite beyond my vision and knowledge.

The hall was full of silence, serenity and peace. About twenty people sat on the ground, apparently in deep meditation. When the bell rang for the midday meal, he invited us all with a nod of his head and we followed him to the dining hall. After food I was asked to clean the spot where I had eaten and take away the banana leaf which was used as a plate. Anywhere else I would have taken it as a sign of disrespect; but I told myself that it may have been a necessary lesson and swallowed my pride.

The next morning I went again to the Ashram and sat near the door facing Bhagavan. Some government officer, accompanied by a retinue of peons, entered the hall and at once started telling Bhagavan how corrupt the government

servants were, how they abused and misused their positions, how they quarrelled and fought among themselves making the administration inefficient and unreliable, how he had been entrusted with the task of cleaning up the government machinery and how he was busy fighting against all the evils of the world. He complained that in his loyalty to his superiors, who had given him their confidence, and in his anxiety to make a success of himself, he had lost his peace of mind and had come to ask Bhagavan to make him calm and contented. It was clear that he thought himself to be a very important person whose request must be promptly met. After he had finished talking he looked expectantly at Bhagavan, as if saying, “Now it is your turn to show what you can do”.

Bhagavan did not even look at him. The clock was striking hours, but Bhagavan was completely silent. The officer lost patience, got up and said, “You are silent, Bhagavan. Does it mean that you want me to be silent too”? “Yes, yes”, said Bhagavan, and that was all.

On the last day of our conference all the delegates went in a body to Ramanasramam and sat in the hall before Bhagavan. Sri Veruvarupu Ramdas, the President of the conference, addressed him, “Bhagavan, we are all social workers and disciples of Mahatma Gandhi. We have all sworn our lives to work for the removal of untouchability from our religion and customs. Be gracious to tell us what your views are on the subject”. Again there was no reply from Bhagavan. One could not even make out whether he had heard the question. Time was passing. The delegates were getting tired of sitting quietly and began whispering to each other. The situation grew embarrassing. Sri Yagnanarayana Iyer, the principal of Pachayappa College in Madras, got up and said, “Bhagavan, our question concerns worldly life. Perhaps it was improper to put it to you. Kindly forgive us”. “There is nothing to forgive”, said Bhagavan quite readily, and with a bright smile.

“When the ocean is surging and carrying away everything before it, who cares what are your views or mine”? The delegates could not find much sense in the answer. Only the great events a decade later gave meaning to it.

On the fourth day of the conference I went to the Ashram all alone, with the intention of asking Bhagavan a personal question. I was told by others that in Bhagavan’s presence doubts get cleared spontaneously, without the need of questions or answers. Nothing of the kind happened to me. On the three previous days I tried to catch his eye, but could not. Several times I got up to ask a question, but was not encouraged and sat down again. On the fourth day I managed to address him, while he seemed to be looking into some infinity of space. “Bhagavan, my mind does not obey me. It wanders as it likes and lands me into trouble. Be merciful to me and tell me clearly how to bring it under control”. Even before I completed the question Bhagavan turned to me and looked at me affectionately. He spoke to me most kindly and his words sparkled with meaning:

All religious and spiritual practices have no other purpose than getting the mind under control. The three paths of knowledge, devotion and duty aim at this and this alone. By immersing yourself in your work you forget your mind as separate from your work and the problem of controlling the mind ceases. In devotion your mind is merged in the God you love and ceases to exist as separate from Him. He guides your mind step by step and no control is needed. In knowledge you find that there is no such thing as mind, no control, controller, or controlled. The path of devotion is the easiest of all. Meditate on God or on some mental or material image of Him. This will slow down your mind and it will get controlled of its own accord.

Somehow I felt satisfied and there was deep peace in me when I looked at him for the last time.

SHRI BHAGAVAN'S GRACE

By Gouriammal

MY father was always an earnest devotee of Sri Bhagavan. Whenever he happened to be at Tiruvannamalai on an official visit he never missed going to see Bhagavan. At that time Bhagavan was residing at Virupaksha Cave. My father would sometimes take me with him. I think I was seven years old when I saw Bhagavan for the first time. But it was much later that I came to stay close to Ramanasramam. Thus I got many opportunities to meet and talk to Bhagavan.

Once I asked Bhagavan what I should do to be on the spiritual path. He said, "Do what you want to do but keep doing it; don't remain doing nothing. Repeat the name, or think deeply or seek the source of your 'I' consciousness, do *Atma Vichara* but keep working on yourself. This is very important".

One instance of his grace to his devotees is his recommendation of two songs from *Tiruppugazh* to help them get their daughters married. The devotees of Bhagavan believed firmly that it was enough to sing the two songs from *Tiruppugazh* before Bhagavan to have the marriage arranged in the best way possible. There is another song in *Tiruppugazh* in which God is invited to come to the house as a newborn child. When anyone approached Bhagavan praying for a child he would tell them to sing that song.

I stayed at Ramana Nagar, where my house was situated, for eight years. Those were the most memorable and fruitful years of my life. How sweet they were and how many miracles happened before my very eyes! Once Dr Sreenivasa Rao was telling Bhagavan how good it would be for him to eat more pineapples, when somebody entered the hall with a heap of pineapples on a tray. On another occasion, Bhagavan was mentioning one Gajanana Sharma who used

to stay with him some years earlier and enquired about his present whereabouts and doings. At that very moment the Postmaster entered the hall and in the mail there was a letter from Gajanana Sharma with photos and details about his life, Ashram, and disciples. Bhagavan said, “Look at this, how wonderful! I was telling about him just now and here it all comes”.

On another day a well-meaning but ignorant devotee insisted that Bhagavan should take the glass of orange juice that he had brought. Bhagavan was annoyed at being treated partially and said, “If you give anything to me without giving it to all, it will be like poison to me”. When the devotee said that next time all would be given orange juice, Bhagavan said, “What is the use of giving because I tell you? You should know by this time that they are all myself and what you give them you are giving me”. Bhagavan disapproved of any difference made between him and others.

Once my sister’s five-year old son was bitten by a snake and in desperation she brought the child to Bhagavan. The doctor had given up hope and the boy was perspiring profusely and was in great pain. The child was already stiff with glazed eyes and was breathing heavily. The mother of the child was weeping all the way and carried him to Bhagavan. When Bhagavan saw her he said, “Don’t weep, don’t weep. It is nothing”. He passed his hand over the child and within a few minutes the boy recovered his senses and sat up. They sat in the hall for some time but as it was late in the evening the mother was told to take the child home. As she was leaving she saw a Muslim devotee on the porch in front of Bhagavan’s Hall, murmuring his prayers. By profession he was a snake charmer and a snakebite healer. When he saw them he said, “The boy was dying of snakebite, but since you were going to see Bhagavan I kept quiet. Now the child is safe, but the

poison is still in his body and I had better chant some charms to get it out". He chanted some prayers and then asked them to go. Bhagavan had saved the child but wanted the snake charmer to take the credit.

Ramana Sadguru

By Arthur Osborne

To feel, to know, to be the Christ within —
 Can there then be love for Christ on earth,
 Walking like men, seen as a man is seen?
 Seek not to argue; love has greater worth.
 Love makes man kin.

With the Beloved. Such have I known,
 Him of the lustrous eyes, Him whose sole look
 Pierced to the heart, wherein the seed was sown
 Of wisdom deeper than in holy book,
 Of truth alone

Not to be learned but lived, Truth in its hour
 To sprout within the heart's dark, wintry earth
 And grow a vibrant thing, then, come to power,
 To slay the seeming self that gave it birth,
 Or to devour.

Heart of my heart, seen outwardly as one
 In human form, to draw my human love,
 Lord Ramana, Guru, the risen Sun,
 Self manifest, the guide of all who rove,
 Lost and alone.

In tangled thoughts and vain imaginings,
 Back to pure Being, which your radiant smile,
 Full of compassion for my wanderings,
 Tells me I always was, though lost this while
 In a world of things.

A LIFETIME WITH BHAGAVAN

By **T. K. Sundaresa Iyer**

IN 1908, when I was 12 years old, Bhagavan was living in Virupaksha cave. My cousin, Krishnamurty, used to go to Bhagavan every day and sing songs of devotion and worship before him. One day I asked him where he went everyday. He told me, “The Lord of the hill himself is sitting there in human form. Why don’t you come with me”? I too climbed the hill and found Bhagavan sitting on a stone slab, with about ten devotees around him. Each would sing a song. Bhagavan turned to me and asked, “Well, won’t you sing a song for me”? One of Sundaramurti Nayanar’s songs came to my mind and I sang it. Its meaning was:

No other support I have except thy holy feet. By holding on to them, I shall win your grace. Great men sing your praise, Oh, Lord. Grant that my tongue may repeat thy name even when my mind strays.

“Yes, that is what must be done”, said Bhagavan, and I took it to be his teaching for me. From then on I went to him regularly for several years without missing a day.

One day I wondered why I was visiting him at all. What was the use? There seemed to be no inner advancement. Going up the hill was meaningless toil. I decided to end my visits on the hill. For a hundred days exactly I did not see Bhagavan. On the hundred and first day I could suffer no longer and ran to Skandashram, above Virupaksha cave. Bhagavan saw me climbing, got up and came forward to meet me. When I fell at his feet, I could not restrain myself and burst out in tears. I clung to his feet and would not get up. Bhagavan pulled me up and asked, “It is over three months since I saw you. Where were you”? I told him how I thought that seeing him was of no use. “All right”, he said, “maybe it is of no use, so what? You felt the

loss, did you not”? Then I understood that we did not go to him for profit, but because, away from him there was no life for us.

Once I wrote two verses in Tamil, one in praise of the Lord without attributes, the other of the Lord with numberless forms. In the latter I wrote, “From whom grace is flowing over the sentient and insentient”. Bhagavan asked me to change one letter and this altered the meaning to, “Who directs his grace to the sentient and the insentient”. The idea was that grace was not a mere influence but could be directed with a purpose where it was needed most.

Whenever I went up the hill to see Bhagavan, I used to buy something to eat and take it with me as an offering. One day I had no money. I stood before Bhagavan in a dejected mood and said, “This poor man has brought nothing”. Bhagavan looked at me enquiringly and remarked, “Why, you brought the main thing. All else is unimportant”. I wondered, not knowing what I had brought. “Don’t you understand? You have brought yourself”, laughed Bhagavan.

Once I got an offer of a job at Sholapur to teach Jewish refugees. It carried a good pay. I intimated my consent and received an appointment order by wire. I showed the wire to Bhagavan. “All right, go”, he said. Even before I left the hall, I felt gloom settling over me and I started shivering. My heart wailed, “What are you doing? You are going away from the presence of your *Guru*”! I went back, fell at Bhagavan’s feet and cried, “I cannot go, I cannot leave you”. Bhagavan laughed, “Look at the man! He has been here for twenty years and look at the result. He thinks there are places where Bhagavan is not and he refuses to go there”! He ridiculed me mercilessly and told me to pack off to Sholapur. I was getting ready to start. A very rich Seth came to the Ashram with a hundred questions, all on paper. Bhagavan replied to them all, but in Tamil. The Seth noted down the oral translation of the answers. The next day a big car appeared before my school and I was told that I

was wanted in the Ashram. Bhagavan told me to see the Seth and see that there were no mistakes in his translation. This work took me six hours. I was offered thirty rupees for my trouble. I refused the money, saying that it was Bhagavan's work and no money should be offered for it. He referred the matter to Bhagavan. Bhagavan ordered me to accept and added, "Now you have enough money to go to Sholapur". On my way I fell ill at Bangalore with high fever. It was increasing from day to day. I wired to Sholapur expressing my inability to start work and the fever disappeared the next day! I was without a job and without money when I returned, repentant, to Bhagavan's feet. The bitter lesson was learned: I should not have been tempted by the job in the first instance.

Years passed. I was married and led a well-ordered family life as laid down in the scriptures, studying the Vedas, worshipping ancestors and deities in the prescribed way, and feeding the five kinds of living beings. I was associated with political and religious activities and used to go from village to village teaching the *Periya Puranam*; yet I would find time to visit Bhagavan quite often.

About 1920, Kavyakanta Ganapathi Shastri came to reside at Tiruvannamalai. Everyone used to address him as 'Nayana' (father). He became the President of the Tiruvannamalai Town Congress Committee. From my early days I was in Tilak's movement and did not see much future in Mahatma Gandhi's programme. One day I said to Nayana, "I do not expect much from political activities; without God's grace no action will prosper. To ask for grace is our main task. People like you, who are blessed with grace in abundance, should use your spiritual powers for the uplift of the world and liberation of the country and not waste your time in speeches". He liked the idea and asked me to stay with him and pray to God for grace. He made me study the Vedas and taught me verses from the Rig Veda, with their meaning. Mahendra societies were started all over

India and I was made the General Secretary. Their object was to win freedom for our country by purely devotional means, like rituals, prayers, and personal and collective penance. We managed to register about ten thousand members.

Nayana mainly stayed in the Mango Tree cave on Arunachala and used to visit Bhagavan off and on. Nayana used to discuss *sastras* with him and get his doubts cleared. He was a mighty scholar, while Bhagavan was just literate, yet Nayana would say, “Without Bhagavan’s grace, the intricacies of the scriptures are beyond one’s power of understanding. One word from him makes everything clear”. When Nayana would see someone sitting in front of Bhagavan, meditating with his eyes closed, he would scold the devotee saying, “When the sun is shining in front of you, why do you need to close your eyes? Are you serious or do you only want to show what a pious fellow you are”? Those were happy days indeed, and I was blessed with many visions of deities and divinities. It was all due to Nayana’s powers and Bhagavan’s grace.

At Skandashram a peacock would follow Bhagavan everywhere. One day a huge black cobra appeared in the Ashram and the peacock attacked it fiercely. The cobra spread its hood and the two natural enemies were poised for a fight to the death, when Bhagavan came quite near the cobra and said, “Why did you come here? That peacock will kill you. Better go away at once”. The cobra immediately lowered its hood and slithered away.

There lived at that time a great *Vaishnava guru*, Vilakshananda Swami. He was well advanced in *yoga* and had the power of attracting crowds. I went to see him one day and he asked me to take him to Bhagavan. With thirty disciples, he appeared before Bhagavan and just stood, neither bowing nor joining his palms in greeting. For ten minutes he stood motionless, and then fell flat at Bhagavan’s feet. Tears were flowing from his eyes and he said, “This head of mine has

never bowed before a human being. This is the first time and bless me that it may also be the last”. Coming down the hill he met Nayana. They started talking and during the discussion Nayana told the *swami* that divine powers should not be used for public shows and propaganda. This must have had its effect, for Vilakshanananda Swami never left his residence again.

Once Nayana was composing his *magnum opus* called *Uma Sahasram*, a thousand verses in praise of Uma, the power aspect of Shiva. He had written seven hundred, and three hundred still remained. Nevertheless, he had already fixed the date for the book to be offered to the Goddess and had sent out invitations to friends and devotees all over India. Hundreds of people had gathered, but on the eve of the day fixed, the three hundred verses had yet to be written. In the evening Bhagavan asked Nayana whether he would postpone the function. Nayana replied in the negative and said that he would, by the grace of God, have the verses written before the next morning. He had four people sit before him with pen and paper and started dictating a verse to each in turn. Bhagavan was present, sitting with eyes closed, apparently quite oblivious to all that was going on. Nayana appeared possessed with some tremendous fervour; he was dictating without break and without hesitation; the verses were flowing from his mouth in a torrent. By midnight the work was completed. Bhagavan, who until then was sitting motionless with his eyes closed, opened them and asked whether all had been written down. Nayana, who seemed unconscious of his surroundings when he was dictating, instantly replied that he had dictated everything exactly as inspired by Bhagavan. When he later read what was dictated by him, he was amazed and exclaimed, “Oh, how wonderful! Only Bhagavan could produce such beauty. I was only his mouthpiece”. They were so perfect that no improvement was possible.

In 1926 Nayana went to some place near Belgaum for a course of austerities and, when leaving, he handed me over to

Bhagavan's care. Later he wrote, "Sundaresa must be feeling lonely and sad since I left him. May Bhagavan be especially kind to him". Showing this letter to me, Bhagavan said, "Better keep near me. You see, I must be able to produce you and hand you over to Nayana when he comes back and claims you". Since then I lived in the Ashram. I would teach at school everyday, and at the end of the month, hand over my salary to my wife. This was my only contact with my family.

In 1929 I got tired of the relative shapelessness of my inner life and asked Bhagavan to give me some clear instructions as to what direction I should proceed in my spiritual practice. He gave me *Kaivalyam* to read and explained to me the inner meaning of some sacred verses. From that time until 1938 I gave myself completely to spiritual life. I did my duty at school and supported my family, just as something that had to be done, but it was of no importance to me. It was wonderful how I could keep so detached for so many years; it was all Bhagavan's grace.

On my thirtysixth birthday I wrote a poem in which I complained that the vision of the glory of God had not yet been given to me and gave the poem to Bhagavan. He read the whole of it very slowly and carefully, as he usually did, and then asked me to sit down and go within myself. I did so and soon the physical world disappeared and in its place I saw an all-pervading white light. An inner voice told me to ask what I would like to see. I wanted to see the divine Ramachandra, and suddenly I saw the coronation of Rama as king in the minutest detail, with shapes and colours, clear and alive beyond description. It lasted for about an hour and then again everything was normal. Some time later, Bhagavan asked me whether I had read *Dakshinamurti Asthotharam*. I said I had not, and was told to read the last few verses in the book. Bhagavan added that Rama and Dakshinamurti are the same Great Being.

One day Bhagavan was explaining to me the meaning of some abstruse *Vedantic* verse. It was half past ten by the clock

in the hall. But I was completely absorbed in the subject and forgot all about my school. Suddenly Bhagavan reminded me that it was getting late. “But no school today”, I exclaimed, “today is Sunday”. Bhagavan laughed, “Is this the way you work? Today is Monday. Hurry, your headmaster is waiting for you at the gate”. I ran to the school and, to my surprise, I found the headmaster waiting for me at the school gate, looking towards the temple. When I came near, he said, “Well, probably you forgot that it is Monday and perhaps Maharshi had to remind you about it”. I admitted that that was exactly what had happened and we both had a hearty laugh!

There was a proposal to print all that Bhagavan had written in Tamil. A preface was needed but nobody came forward to write it. Even learned *pandits* did not feel confident and backed out under some excuse. The talk was going on in the hall all day long and Bhagavan was watching. At about half past ten in the night he called me and asked me why I should not take up the preface. I said that with his blessings I would do it. “It will be all right”, said Bhagavan. Immediately I started writing and finished the preface in an hour. While writing I felt a silent influence as if someone was guiding my pen. At two in the morning Bhagavan was up and I showed him the preface. He was quite pleased and asked me to go to sleep. From the door he called back and asked me to revise the last sentence which said, “It is hoped that those who go through this book will attain divine salvation, which gives peace and happiness”. Bhagavan said, “There is no question of hoping. The reader will definitely attain salvation”, and told me to correct the sentence accordingly.

A couple from Peru, husband and wife, came to the Ashram once and were telling Bhagavan their story; how after reading about him, they felt that he was Christ Himself reincarnated, and wanted above everything else to meet him. They were not rich and had to save from their wages, a little every week. After a few years struggle they sailed to India in the cheapest possible way.

The journey lasted some months and gave them a lot of trouble, but at last they had arrived. Bhagavan listened carefully to the very end, and then said, “You have travelled a long distance and experienced so many hardships. You could have meditated on me there with the same result, and the added satisfaction of seeing me in Peru”. Bhagavan’s words sounded strange to them and they could not get their meaning. In the evening Bhagavan was inquiring about Peru and her people, how they looked, lived, and worked. The Peruvian couple were telling him about the capital, the seaports, the industries and commerce of their countrymen. When they were describing a place on the seashore, Bhagavan asked, “Is not the beach paved with marble slabs, with coconuts planted between”? The two were astonished and asked Bhagavan how he came to know such details. He replied, “Why do you ask how I came to know? Understand once and for all that time and space do not exist apart from the mind and that the heart is not bound by them”. Then they understood that, with Bhagavan’s grace they could have him at their own place.

A devotee of Bhagavan, one Mahadeva Ayyar, was suffering from hiccups in Madras for over a month. His daughter wrote to Bhagavan praying that he should help her father. Bhagavan told us to write to Mahadeva that dry ginger, powdered, and mixed with brown coloured sugar, would cure the disease. At the same time he enquired of Madhavaswami, his attendant, whether this mixture was available at the Ashram. Madhavaswami brought the bottle with the ginger and sugar mixture in it. Bhagavan took a pinch and gave a little to each of the people present in the hall. I said, jokingly, “Well, there is no need of writing to Mahadeva Ayyar. He must be free of hiccups by this time”. The letter with the prescription was sent the same day. The next day, a letter came from Madras saying that Mahadeva’s hiccups had vanished at 1.00 p.m. the day before. It was exactly the time when Bhagavan was taking his share of ginger powder!

On a Shivaratri day, after dinner, Bhagavan was reclining on the sofa surrounded by many devotees. A *sadhu* suggested that since this was a most auspicious night, the meaning of the verses in praise of Dakshinamurti could be expounded by Bhagavan. Bhagavan gave his approval and all were eagerly waiting for him to say something. He simply sat, gazing at us. We were gradually absorbed in ever deepening silence, which was not disturbed by the clock striking the hour, every hour, until 4 a.m. None moved or talked. Time and space ceased to exist. Bhagavan's grace kept us in peace and silence for seven hours. In this silence Bhagavan taught us the Ultimate, like Dakshinamurti. At the stroke of four Bhagavan asked us whether we had understood the meaning of silent teaching. Like waves on the infinite ocean of bliss, we fell at Bhagavan's feet.

One day when Bhagavan was staying at Pachiamman Temple, Rangaswami Ayyangar, a devotee from Madras, arrived on a hot noon and went to bathe in the pond in front of the temple. It was at that time a forest area and rather lonely. Bhagavan, who was talking with his devotees, suddenly got up and went towards the pond. A cheetah was drinking water on one side of it, unnoticed by Rangaswami. Bhagavan looked at the cheetah for some time and said, "Now go away and come later. The man may get frightened if he sees you". The cheetah looked at Bhagavan, looked at the devotee, and went away.

One Mr Knowles came to pay his respects to Bhagavan. Being well versed in Eastern and Western philosophy, he used to have long discussions with Bhagavan. One day the discussion was about the condition of a realised person. In the heat of the discussion Mr Knowles asked whether the Bhagavan who was talking to him was a reality or not. Everybody was eagerly waiting for a reply. Clearly and loudly Bhagavan said, "No, I am not talking". Mr. Knowles was quite satisfied. He said, "Yes, Bhagavan is not talking to me. He never talks. He only exists. That is all".

An optician from Madras visited the Ashram. Chinnaswami wanted him to examine Bhagavan's eyesight and prescribe glasses. The optician found that his own glasses suited Bhagavan well and offered them to him. They were bifocals for near and distant vision, a beautiful and costly pair. Bhagavan said that he only needed reading glasses and that a simple pair of spectacles would do. Chinnaswami wanted the best for Bhagavan and insisted that Bhagavan accept the bifocals. I took them again to Bhagavan, but he refused to touch them. I was rather anxious to please Chinnaswami and pleaded with Bhagavan to use the bifocals. He looked at me intently and said, "When I do not want them, why do you press it"? I went away disheartened. This happened just before Bhagavan's birthday celebrations.

From the moment I left Bhagavan I felt a burning sensation inside, and although I was busy with preparations, I was racked with pain. On the third day it became so unbearable that I ran into the hall, packed at that time with devotees, and fell flat on my face before Bhagavan and cried, "Bhagavan, forgive me. I blundered when I tried to force those glasses on you. You got angry with me and it burns like fire. I can bear it no longer. I know it is my *karma* and not your will that punishes me, but have mercy and help me". Bhagavan, who was gazing into space immersed in bliss, turned his luminous eyes on me and said calmly, "What is all this? Who is angry? Sit down quietly; everything will be right with you". I wept like a child, and within a few minutes the pain disappeared.

One day I asked my wife to prepare some rice pancakes and added in fun that all the broken ones should be offered to God. It is not difficult to make rice pancakes and usually they come out whole. My wife was a good cook, yet when I came home I found all the cakes in pieces. To please my conscience I took them to Bhagavan and told him the story of Lord Shiva who took the shape of a *coolie* and undertook to work and be paid in crumbled rice cakes. From that time there were no whole cakes to be had until he had been worshipped. Bhagavan enjoyed the story, tasted some of the cakes and had the remainder distributed to all.

The attendant, Madhavaswami, used to dry Bhagavan's towel on a bamboo tied between two trees. On one end of this bamboo a bird had built a nest. One day, while removing the towel, Bhagavan dislodged the nest, which fell down. One of the three eggs rolled out and cracked but did not break. Bhagavan told Madhavan that a grievous sin had been committed and examined the egg with pity and repentance. "The poor mother will think that the egg is broken and will weep bitterly. She will surely curse me for having broken her egg. Can this egg be mended to hatch a young one"? He wrapped the damaged egg in a piece of cloth and put it back in the nest, and every few hours he would take the egg in his hands, look at it for some time and then put it back, wrapped in its piece of cloth. All the time he was murmuring to himself, "Will the crack heal? Will the egg hatch"? With such care and compassion Bhagavan nursed the egg for a week. On the eighth day Bhagavan exclaimed like an excited child, "Look, the cracks have gone. The mother will be glad. Let us watch and see when the little one will come out". The egg was watched all the time and the little thing finally appeared. Bhagavan took it in his hand tenderly beaming with joy, showed it to everybody and finally gave it back to its mother.

One *Amavasya* (new moon day) all the Ashram inmates were sitting down for breakfast in the dining room. I was standing and looking on. Bhagavan asked me to sit down for breakfast. I said that I had to perform my late father's ceremony on that day and would eat nothing (Usually the ceremonies are performed to enable the ancestors to go to heaven). Bhagavan retorted that my father was already in heaven and there was nothing more to be done for him. My taking breakfast would not hurt him in any way. I still hesitated, accustomed as I was to age-old tradition. Bhagavan got up, made me sit down and eat some rice cakes. From that day I gave up performing ceremonies for ancestors.

Once ChinnaSwami got very cross with me and I felt quite nervous about it. I could not eat my dinner and the next morning,

feeling unreconciled and yet hungry, I told Bhagavan, who was preparing rice cakes, that I was in a hurry to go to town as some pupils were waiting for me. “The cat is out of the bag”, said Bhagavan. “Today is Sunday and there is no teaching work for you. Come, I have prepared a special *sambar* for breakfast and I shall make you taste it. Take your seat”. So saying, he brought a leaf, spread it before me, heaped it with *iddlies* and *sambar* and, sitting by my side, joked and related funny stories to make me forget my woes. How great was Bhagavan’s compassion!

My wife used to prepare some food every afternoon and bring it to the Ashram. Bhagavan often asked her to break this habit, but she would not. One day he said, “This is the last time I am eating your food. Next time I shall not”. The same day Bhagavan was telling us how a certain dish should be prepared. The next day my wife brought it all ready. Bhagavan remembered what he had told her, but what could he do against her imploring look? He tasted her dish and said that it had been prepared very well. Such was his graciousness towards his devotees.

My second son was lazy and not at all good at school. The time for his final high school examinations was rapidly approaching and the boy’s sole preparation was the purchase of a new fountain pen! He brought it to Bhagavan and asked him to bless the pen with his touch so that it would write the examination papers well. Bhagavan knew his lazy ways and said that having hardly studied, he could not expect to pass. My son replied that Bhagavan’s blessings were more effective than studies. Bhagavan laughed, wrote a few words with the new pen and gave it back to him. And the boy did pass, which was a miracle indeed!

In those days I was attending to the foreign correspondence of the Ashram. I used to show Bhagavan the draft of every reply, get his approval, give it the final shape and despatch it. We used to receive some very intelligent and intricate questions. These questions and the answers would have formed a very

enlightening volume. One day an office copy of such a reply was used for wrapping some sweets and it fell into Bhagavan's hands. He raised a storm, sent for me and told me plainly what he thought about such misuse of spiritual records. I was very frightened and at the same time sorry for the condition of the foreign correspondence files. I tried to find out who took the old files to the dining hall, but nobody would confess. All blamed me, the last man in the chain!

Chinnaswami started building something and needed money to complete the work. He made a plan that the Maharaja of Mysore should be approached by some senior members of the Ashram, introduced by Sri Sundaram Chettiar, the retired Judge. I was asked to put the matter before Bhagavan and obtain his blessings. Knowing Bhagavan's dislike of such things, I was very much afraid of him, but still more of Chinnaswami. Finally I did it indirectly, by drafting a letter to the Judge and explaining the matter to him. This draft I took to Bhagavan for perusal. Bhagavan read it and threw it away, saying with scorn, "Always asking for money. We think of money every moment and waste our lives for it. What have I to do with money"?

The town municipality was divided in its attitude towards the Ashram. There was a group supporting the Ashram and another group vilifying the Ashram and creating trouble. A tax was imposed on the Ashram and we protested. At every meeting of the municipality the matter was raised, hotly discussed and left undecided. One day when the subject of the tax was to come up again for discussion, I was asked to attend and defend the Ashram's interests. I could only pray to Bhagavan, "You are the ruler in the hearts of all including those who abuse the Ashram". To my surprise not a single person opposed me at the meeting and the tax was repealed.

Individually these incidents may appear trivial and insignificant, but collectively they are impressive. They created the atmosphere in which he lived, in which every day would

bring new miracles of power, wisdom and love. Bhagavan gave us a tangible demonstration of God's omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. Our sense of 'I' would burn up in wonder and adoration on seeing his unconditional love for all beings. Though outwardly we seemed to remain very much the same persons, inwardly he was working on us and destroying the deep roots of separateness and self-concern, the greatest obstacles on our way to him. A day always comes when the tree of the 'I', severed from its roots, crashes suddenly and is no more.

Birth Place - By T.P.R.

It was the command of Sri Bhagavan that I should go to Tiruchuzhi and see the house where Bhagavan was born. It was then in someone else's possession. Sri Bhagavan gave me all minute details about Tiruchuzhi and what places I should see: the temple, the tower on which he played, the *mantapam*, the school, the tank. He particularly instructed me to meet some very old people there who would still remember him. Bhagavan also wanted to know whether *pujas* in the temple there continued to be performed with *prasadam*s and other offerings on the customary scale. I had the unique experience of visiting these places and noting down all details required by Sri Bhagavan. On my return, when I gave my report in writing, Bhagavan took enormous interest in reading it aloud to devotees in the hall. In the last paragraph of that report I had made an appeal to Sri Chinnaswami, Bhagavan's brother and Sarvadhikari, that his duty would not be complete if that house did not come into the possession of the Ashram and that it should be renovated and kept as a pilgrim centre for all Ramana devotees. Sri N.R. Krishnamurthi Iyer was of great help to me in all these undertakings. Thereafter Sri Chinnaswami took a lot of interest and the house was eventually bought and now it is in the possession of Sri Ramanasramam. The house was named by Sri Bhagavan as Sundara Mandiram.

MAHARSHI'S TEACHINGS AND MODERN SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT

By K. K. NAMBIAR

BHAGAVAN Sri Ramana Maharshi has taught us that eternal happiness is one's real nature and the best way for realising it is for the Self to be itself. In other words one has just to be. Abiding as the Self, which is Pure Consciousness, is the greatest happiness, perfect and permanent. Any other form of so-called happiness, obtained from external sources is illusory and evanescent. It might go the way it came. So, the pursuit of the Self by the continuous quest "Who am I?" is the safest and surest way to dispel ignorance and remain as the Self.

I had once approached Bhagavan and asked him about the different locations suggested for concentration in various *srutis*, e.g., between eyebrows, tip of the nose, heart centre, *muladhara*, etc. Bhagavan who was reclining on the couch, got down and took out a copy of *Sri Ramana Gita*, from the rotating shelf nearby and opened it right on the page containing the sloka:

If the Heart be located in *anahata chakra* 1, how does the practice of *yoga* begin in *muladharas*?

In *yoga shastra*, *anahata chakra* is the fourth, and *muladhara* is the first and lowest of the six centres in the spinal chord.

It looked like a miracle when the book opened on the right page; but such experiences are common to devotees of Sri Bhagavan. He added in Malayalam, "Why should one desirous of coming to Tiruvannamalai first go to Kasi (Banaras) or Rameswaram and then come here? Why not straight to Tiruvannamalai instead of the long detour?" I felt a great sense of remorse when Sri Bhagavan had to point out this sloka from *Sri Ramana Gita* to me. Though I had with me a sacred treasure, a volume of Sri Ramana Gita in Malayalam in Sri Bhagavan's

own handwriting, given to me with his blessings, I had not closely studied it, or tried to put into practice the instructions contained therein. The whole of the fifth chapter entitled *hridaya vidya* deals with the technique of meditation and elucidates points regarding the respective functions of nerve centres, *nadis*, etc.

Also, at the daily *vedaparayana* at the Ashram in Sri Bhagavan's presence, the verse appearing in *Mahanarayana anuvakam* at the end of *Purushasuktam* underlines the above instructions:

The *Hridayam* (the heart which is the place of meditation) resembles an inverted lotus bud. A span below the throat and above the navel. . .

So, the continuous quest Who Am I?, guided by the grace of Sri Bhagavan, who is always with us, will lead one to the Heart centre, the seat of Consciousness, which is neither within nor without, all pervading and eternal This supreme awareness is all that IS, and abiding therein is the ultimate goal.

Let us now have a look at recent developments in scientific knowledge At one time the world around us was supposed to consist of matter, made up of molecules and atoms. Physicists chased them further and broke them down to nucleus, electrons, quanta, waves, particles and fields. Einstein said that the universe of our experience consists of matter and energy in a space-time-continuum He established the famous equation $E= MC^2$, where C is a constant representing the velocity of light. Matter and energy became interchangeable. Max Planck, famous for his quantum theory, added a further dimension to this, stating that it is consciousness that is fundamental and that matter is derivative of consciousness As a corollary even space and time are only concepts of our consciousness. Thus scientists are veering round to the conclusion that since every object is a sum of its qualities and these qualities are perceived by us the whole objective

universe of matter and energy, atoms and stars does not exist except as a construction of consciousness.

Yoga Vashista says:

All things that exist everywhere are experienced by us; there is nothing here anywhere which has not been experienced by us.

Bhagavan has told us that the world as such is not real. It is real as Brahman or Consciousness. The world we see and experience with our senses is a product of the mind; the mind is part of the ego, which rises from Pure Consciousness, which is the same as Reality. One has to realise That and just BE.

The Other Worlds

Someone enquired of Bhagavan: “People talk of Vaikunta, Kailasa, Indraloka, Chandraloka, etc. Do they really exist?” Bhagavan replied: “Certainly. You can rest assured that they all exist. There also a *swami* like me will be found seated, and disciples like this will also be seated around. They will ask something and he will say something in reply. Everything will be more or less like this. What of that? If one sees Chandraloka, he will ask for Indraloka, and after Indraloka, Vaikunta and after Vaikunta, Kailasa, and then this and that, and the mind goes on wandering. Where is *shanti*? If *shanti* is required, the one correct method of securing it is by Self-enquiry and through Self-enquiry Self-realisation is possible. If one realises the Self, one can see all these worlds within one’s Self. The source of everything is one’s own Self. Then this doubt will not arise. There may or may not be a Vaikunta or a Kailasa but it is a fact that you are here, isn’t it? How are you here? Where are you? After you know about these things, you can think of all these worlds”.

- *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, By Suri Nagamma, p.46.

BHAGAVAN IN THE KITCHEN

By **Sampurnamma**

IN 1932 I went to Tiruvannamalai with my sister and her husband Narayanan. We found Bhagavan in a palm leaf hut built over his mother's *Samadhi*. Dandapani Swami introduced me to Bhagavan saying, "This is Dr Narayanan's wife's sister". The days that followed were days of deep and calm happiness. My devotion to Bhagavan took firm roots and never left me. I was able to sit for long hours in Bhagavan's presence without any mental activity and I would not notice the passing of time. I was not taught to meditate and surely did not know how to stop the mind from thinking, It would happen quite by itself, by his grace. I stayed for twenty days. When I was leaving, Bhagavan took a copy of *Who am I?* and gave it to me with his own hands.

I came back to Ramanasramam after a period of absence and I was asked to help in the kitchen. Bhagavan helped us in the kitchen, I soon learnt with his guidance the Ashram way of cooking. Bhagavan's firm principle was that health depended on food and could be set right and kept well by proper diet. He also believed that fine grinding and careful cooking would make any food easily digestible. So we used to spend hours in grinding and stewing.

He paid very close attention to proper cooking. He was always willing to leave the hall to give advice in the kitchen. He would teach us numberless ways of cooking grains, pulses and vegetables. He would tell us stories from his childhood, or about his mother, her ways and how she cooked *sampurnam* (sweet filling).

He was very strict with us in the kitchen. His orders were to be obeyed to the last detail. No choice was left to us to guess or try on our own. We had to do blindly as he taught us and by doing so, we were convinced that he was always right

and that we would never fail if we put our trust in him. When I think of it now, I can see clearly that he used the work in the kitchen as a background for spiritual training. He taught us that work is love for others, that we never can work for ourselves. By his very presence he taught us that we are always in the presence of God and that all work is His. He used cooking to teach us religion and philosophy.

In the kitchen he was the master cook aiming at perfection in taste and appearance. One would think that he liked good food and enjoyed a hearty meal. Not at all. At dinner time he would mix up the little food he would allow to be put on his leaf — the sweet, the sour, and the savoury — everything together, and gulp it down carelessly as if he had no taste in his mouth. When we told him that it was not right to mix such nicely made up dishes, he would say, “Enough of multiplicity, Let us have some unity”.

It was obvious that all the extraordinary care he gave to cooking was for our sake. He wanted us to keep good health and to those who worked in the kitchen, cooking became a deep spiritual experience. “You must cover your vegetables when you cook them,” he used to say, “Then only will they keep their flavour and be fit for food. It is the same with the mind. You must put a lid over it and let it simmer quietly. Then only does a man become food fit for God to eat”.

One day he gave me a copy of *Ribhu Gita* and asked me to study it. I was not at all anxious to pore over a difficult text good only for learned *pandits*, and asked to be excused, saying that I did not understand a single word of it. “It does not matter that you do not understand,” he said, “Still it will be of great benefit to you”.

He would allow nothing to go to waste. Even a grain of rice or a mustard seed lying on the ground would be picked up, dusted carefully, taken to the kitchen and put in its proper

tin. I asked him why he gave himself so much trouble for a grain of rice. He said, “Yes, this is my way. I let nothing go to waste. In these matters I am quite strict. Were I married no woman could get on with me. She would run away”. On some other day he said, “This is the property of my Father Arunachala. I have to preserve it and pass it on to His children”. He would use for food things we would not even dream of as edible. Wild plants, bitter roots and pungent leaves were turned under his guidance into delicious dishes.

Once someone sent a huge load of brinjals on the occasion of his birthday feast. We ate brinjals day after day. The stalks alone made a big heap which was lying in a corner. I was stunned when Bhagavan asked us to cook the stalks as a *curry*. Bhagavan insisted that the stalks were edible and so we put them in a pot to boil along with dry peas. After six hours of boiling they were as hard as ever. We wondered what to do and yet we did not dare to disturb Bhagavan. But he always knew when he was needed and he would leave the hall even in the middle of a discussion. As usual he did not fail us, and appeared in the kitchen. He asked, “How is the *curry* getting on”? “Is it a *curry* we are cooking? We are boiling steel nails”, I exclaimed laughing. He stirred the stalks with the ladle and went away without saying anything. Soon after we found them quite tender. The dish was simply delicious and everybody was asking for a second helping. Everybody except Bhagavan praised the *curry* and the cook. He swallowed one mouthful like medicine and refused a second helping. I was very disappointed, for I had taken so much trouble to cook his stalks and he did not even taste them properly. The next day he told somebody, “Sampurnam was distressed that I did not eat her wonderful *curry*. Can she not see that everyone who eats is myself? And what does it matter who eats the food? It is the cooking that matters, not the cook or the eater. A thing done well, with love and devotion, is its own reward. What happens to it later matters little, for it is out of our hands”.

In the evening before I left the Ashram for the town to sleep, he would ask me what was available for cooking the next day. Then, arriving at daybreak the next morning, I would find everything ready — vegetables peeled and cut, lentils soaked, spices ground, coconuts scraped. As soon as he saw me he would give detailed instructions as to what should be cooked and how. He would then sit in the hall awhile and return to the kitchen. He would taste the various dishes to see if they were cooked properly and go back to the hall. It was strange to see him so eager to cook and so unwilling to eat.

As a cook, Bhagavan was perfect. He would never put in too much or too little salt or spices. As long as we followed his instructions, everything would go well with our cooking. But the moment we acted on our own we would be in trouble. Even then, if we sought his help, he would taste our brew and tell us what to do to make the food fit for serving. Every little incident in our kitchen had a spiritual lesson for us. We thus learnt the art of implicit obedience while perfecting our culinary skills under Bhagavan's guidance.

On my way from the town to the Ashram and back, I had to walk in the dark along a jungle path skirting the hill and I would feel afraid. Bhagavan knew this and once said to me, "Why are you afraid, am I not with you"? Chinnaswami, Bhagavan's brother and the manager of the Ashram once asked me whether I was not afraid to travel alone in the dark. Bhagavan rebuked him saying, "Why are you surprised? Was she alone? Was I not with her all the time"?

Once Subbalakshmiamma and myself were going round the hill early in the morning chatting about our homes and relatives. We noticed a man following us at a distance. We had to pass through a stretch of forest, so we stopped to let him pass and go ahead. He too stopped. When we walked he also walked. We were quite alarmed and started praying, "Oh Lord! Oh Arunachala! Only you can save us"! The man said suddenly,

“Yes, Arunachala is our only refuge. Keep your mind on him constantly. It is His light that fills all space”. We wondered who he was. Was he sent by Bhagavan to remind us that it was not proper to talk of worldly matters when going round the hill? Or was it Arunachala Himself in human disguise? We looked back but there was nobody on the path. In so many ways Bhagavan made us feel that he was always with us, until the conviction grew and became part of our nature.

Those were the days when we lived on the threshold of a new world — a world of ecstasy and joy. We were not conscious of what we were eating, of what we were doing. Time just rolled on noiselessly, unfelt and unperceived. The heaviest task seemed a trifle. We knew no fatigue. Commenting on our early completion of work in the kitchen on one occasion, Bhagavan pointed out, “The greatest spirit, Arunachala is here, towering over you. It is He who works not you”.

Bhagavan’s Sayings

A traveller in a cart has fallen asleep. The bullocks move, stand still or are unyoked during the journey. He does not know these events but finds himself in a different place after he wakes up. He has been blissfully ignorant of the occurrences on the way, but the journey has been finished. Similarly with the Self of a person. The ever-wakeful Self is compared to the traveller asleep in the cart. The waking state is the moving of the bulls; *samadhi* is their standing still (because *samadhi* means *jagrat-sushupti*, that is to say, the person is aware but not concerned in the action; the bulls are yoked but do not move); sleep is the unyoking of the bulls for there is complete stopping of activity corresponding to the relief of the bulls from the yoke.

HEALING GRACE

By M. V. Ramaswami Iyer

IN the year 1907 I went to Tiruvannamalai to have *darshan* of Bhagavan. I climbed up to the Virupaksha cave. In order to safeguard Bhagavan from the intruding pilgrims of the *Kartikai* festival, one Krishnayya kept guard at the gate of the cave. So I had to wait outside till Bhagavan came out. He soon came out and went away without even glancing at me. I followed and overtook him. He stopped and looked at me. Words poured out of my mouth, "I am suffering, beset with many diseases. Have mercy on me". He replied, "I am neither a physician nor a magician. What can I do or tell you". Anguish welled up from the depths of my heart, and I said, "I came because I heard of your greatness. Will not my good luck be as great"? He looked at me for a long moment and said, "Go home, have courage. No harm will come to you". And he waved his hand in a peculiar way. Somehow it gave me hope.

Soon I settled at Tiruvannamalai and thus began my daily visits to Bhagavan, sometimes staying for the night with him. One day Bhagavan was sitting all alone in front of Virupaksha cave. A strange emotion got hold of me and I asked him in English, "My Lord, Jesus and other great souls have come down to earth to save sinners like me. Is there hope for me"? Bhagavan seemed moved by my cry of distress. He came closer and said in a quiet voice, "Yes, there is hope, there is hope."

When I returned home a song welled up in my mind and I wrote it down. Since then I wrote songs by Bhagavan's grace. When I brought my first song to Bhagavan and recited it before him, he gave me some instructions in prosody and illustrated them with examples from great Telugu poets. Since then I wrote songs and poems without much thought or effort all the

years until Bhagavan's *samadhi*. Then the spring dried up, for it was not a gift I brought with me. It was all His grace.

My physical ailments tormented me so much that on a festival day I was plunged in deep dejection. When Echammal brought some special food in the evening, all except me went to the nearby waterfall to have their meal. Everything was pleasant and joyous but my mind was full of darkness and my body full of pain. Bhagavan sent Vasudeva Sastri to call me. I said that the rich food did not agree with me and that I had to stick to my diet. As I spoke my head turned towards Bhagavan as if impelled by some superior force and I saw him beckon to me. I went near and sat down. I was served various dishes. I had no courage to eat and was sitting gloomily when Bhagavan said, "Eat". All fear gone, I started eating and had my first hearty meal in many years. That night I had a sound sleep.

In the morning I felt strong and healthy. My dyspepsia had disappeared completely and my heart overflowed with gratitude. Bhagavan's grace continued to manifest in my life and helped me overcome all family problems. When I was transferred to Berhampore I was afflicted with boils on my legs. The pain was terrible and all medication failed. I had a fixed idea that only Arunachala could help me. One day I was surprised to find two Brahmins from Tiruvannamalai standing at my door. When I asked who knocked they replied, 'Arunachala'. They were on their way to the North and had been asked by Bhagavan to break journey at Berhampore and meet me. When they saw my pitiable condition they made a paste of tamarind mixed with some fragrant gum and smeared my legs with it. The next day there was no trace of boils. It was then that I composed the song *Saranagati* in praise of the Holy Feet of Bhagavan, my only refuge. This famous song has often been sung by devotees for invoking the grace of Bhagavan.

MY LIFE MY LIGHT

By Varanasi Subhalakshmiamma

ONCE we went on a pilgrimage to Kaveri Pushkaram and on our way back we stopped at Arunachala. We were told that a young *Brahmin* saint was living on the hill for the past ten years. The next morning we went up the hill along with the others. We found the young swami near Virupaksha cave. As soon as I saw him I was convinced that God Arunachala Himself had come in human form to give salvation to all who approached him.

The next time I visited Bhagavan he was living at the foot of the hill. He was seated on a couch and about a dozen devotees were sitting on the bare floor. We sat in silence for ten minutes and returned to the town. Bhagavan's presence gave me the experience of inner silence and mental stillness, but away from him I could not regain it and I spent a year vainly trying to free myself from all thought. But soon I got a chance to visit Tiruvannamalai. I met Bhagavan the same day. The next day after the midday meal Bhagavan was explaining a verse from the *Bhagavad Gita* to Sri Yogi Ramaiah. As no one else was in the hall, I gathered courage and asked, "What is *Atma*? Is it the limitless ether of space or the awareness that cognizes everything?" Bhagavan replied, "To remain without thinking this is *Atma* and that is *Atma*, is itself *Atma*". He looked at me and I felt my mind melt away into nothing. No thought would come, only the feeling of immense, unutterable peace.

Several times I was invited to work in the kitchen, but I felt that the Ashram ways were not orthodox enough for me. One day Bhagavan's own sister asked me to take her place in the Ashram kitchen as she had to leave for some time. I could not refuse. Though I was very happy to work in the kitchen directly under Bhagavan's supervision I wanted to go home. I left and after a year returned to Ramanasramam to discover that I

belonged there. Yet I would feel restless, thinking that I should spend my time in meditation. One day Bhagavan looked at me intently and said “It looks as if you are still hankering after meditation”. I replied, “What have I got except endless work in the kitchen”? Bhagavan said with deep feeling, “Your hands may do the work but your mind can remain still. You are that which never moves. Realise that and you will find that work is not a strain. But as long as you think that you are the body and that the work is done by you, you will feel your life to be an endless toil. In fact it is the mind that toils, not the body. Even if your body keeps quiet, will your mind keep quiet? Even in sleep the mind is busy with its dreams”.

Regarding the need to fast as enjoined by scriptural texts Bhagavan explained, “It does not mean that you should starve. You need not torture the body. It only means not giving the body more than it needs. With your mind, hold on to enquiry and just keep the body going so that it does not become a hindrance. For this, pure and fresh food, simply prepared and taken in moderation is a great help”. Once I prepared curds and served it to Bhagavan alone while all the others were served buttermilk. The moment he saw the curds on his leaf he looked at me. That look scorched me to the very depths of my soul! When we went to take leave of him in the evening he turned away his face from me. He stopped taking buttermilk. I suffered agonies and remorse for disobeying Bhagavan. At last I got a chance to ask for his forgiveness and prayed that he should start having his buttermilk again. He said, “No, no, why do you worry? I happened to have a cold and is not buttermilk bad for colds”? That very afternoon Echammal brought some curds and Bhagavan said, “Tell Subbalakshmi not to suffer. I shall have my buttermilk”.

Once five or six devotees sat down before Bhagavan and sang a hymn in praise of the *Guru*. He got up in the middle of the recitation and went away, saying, “Prayers and praises will not take one far. It is the merciful look of the teacher that

bestows true knowledge”. I felt elated. But the next day he said, “Unless one becomes a six-month old baby, there is no hope for him in the realm of Self-knowledge”. My heart sank. Although I lived in the presence of Lord Arunachala Himself, I was far from becoming an infant.

I made a habit of offering him a few dry grapes whenever I came from the town. He disliked all formal devotion. One day when I gave him the grapes, he started scolding us, “Why all this show of respect and devotion? Who taught you all this hypocrisy? Can’t you just be natural? What is needed is a heart, pure and sincere. How can you please me with a show”? It went on for quite a long time. Addressing Muruganar, he complained that our devotion was shallow and its expressions cheap. He told some stories about false disciples, “They take their *Guru* in procession and parade him before the crowd. When they have done with him, they dig a pit and ask him, ‘Will you get into the pit yourself or shall we push you in’”? That day even Muruganar was afraid to do the usual prostrations to Bhagavan, who continued, “When people come here they are quite sincere, but as soon as they settle down they become the masters of this place. The *swami* must do their bidding and ignore their mischief; in return for their prostrations the *swami* has to put up with all the mess they create around him. They think it is his duty to carry them on his head”.

During the meal I would pour *rasam* (soup) into Bhagavan’s hands. He would sip it slowly and when his palms were empty I would fill them again. One day he asked me to pour *rasam* over the rice and go. He would not cup his hands as before. I thought I had offended him in some way and asked Santammal to find out the reason. Bhagavan told her, “When she serves me, she makes others wait”. Despite my remonstrations he never took *rasam* again in his palms.

Bhagavan wanted us to learn well the lesson that God is present in every being in all his glory and fullness and must be

given equal reverence. He would ruthlessly sacrifice the little comforts we so loved to provide for him, as soon as he noticed a trace of preference. The law that what cannot be shared must not be touched was supreme in his way of dealing with us. Separative and exclusive feelings are the cause of the 'I' and therefore the greatest obstacles in the realization of the One. No wonder he was exterminating them so relentlessly.

One day I saw him grinding black gram. We always felt ashamed when we saw him working, but when we offered to take over, he would get cross and stop coming to the kitchen, which would make us sad; for in the hall he belonged to everybody but in the kitchen he was our own. That day I summoned courage and asked him to let me grind the gram. To my astonishment he got up and said, "Yes, finish it. I was waiting for you to come". When I finished grinding and went back to the kitchen I saw him boiling pumpkin in a huge cauldron. The day was hot, the fire and the steam rising from the cauldron were hot and Bhagavan was bathed in perspiration. So it was to save me from this tiresome work that Bhagavan invited me to grind for him! The stew was boiling vigorously and a piece of pumpkin fell on Bhagavan's finger. The next day we saw a big blister and when somebody asked about it he replied, "Oh, it is only a ring. I wanted some jewellery". Thus I learned not to interfere.

Nothing brought to the Ashram could be wasted, not even when it was obviously useless. In this Bhagavan was adamant. A pious offering was Arunachala's own property and had to be looked after. Even the water in which bitter gourd was boiling could not be thrown away. With salt added it would be taken to the cows.

One had to live and work with him to know what a great teacher he was. Through the trifles of daily life he taught us *Vedanta* in theory and practice. He led us with absolute wisdom and infinite kindness and we were changed to the very root of

our being, not even knowing the depth and scope of his influence. Sri Krishna in his mercy became a cowherd to teach simple milkmaids the way to salvation. Similarly Bhagavan, the same supreme being in another form, took to cooking in order to save a few ignorant women.

The Lost Sheep

Poovan, a shepherd, says that he knows Sri Bhagavan since thirty years ago, the days of Virupakshi cave. He used at times to supply milk to the visitors in those days.

Some six years ago he had lost a sheep, for which he was searching for three days. The sheep was pregnant and he had lost all hopes of recovering her, because he thought that she had been set upon by wild animals. He was one day passing by the Asramam, when Sri Bhagavan saw him and enquired how he was. The man replied that he was looking out for a lost sheep. Sri Bhagavan kept quiet, as is usual with Him. Then He told the shepherd to help in lifting some stones, which he did with great pleasure. After the work was finished, Sri Bhagavan told him, “Go this way”, pointing the footpath towards the town. “You will find the stray sheep on the way”. So he did and found the lost sheep with two little lambs.

He now says, “What a Bhagavan is this! Look at the force of his words! He is great! He never forgets even a poor man like me. He remembers my son Manikkam also with kindness. Such are the great ones! I am happy when I do any little work for Him, such as looking to the cows when they are in heat”.

From *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, No.296,
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THE BHAGAVAN I KNOW

By Voruganti Krishnayya

A strong, desire to meet Sri Ramana Maharshi was born in my heart after my unforgettable meeting with Nayana — Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri. During my first visit to Ramanasramam I spent three days with Bhagavan. He was a great *Mahatma* but his ways were very simple. Most of the cooking was done by him in those days. The Ashram lived from hand to mouth and usually only rice and vegetable soup were prepared. When I was about to leave I asked the Maharshi, “Bhagavan kindly show me a good path”.

“What are you doing now”? he asked.

“When I am in the right mood, I sing the songs of Tyagaraja and I recite the holy *Gayatri*. I was also doing some *pranayama* but these breathing exercises have upset my health”.

“You had better stop them. But never give up the *advaita drishti* (non-dual vision)”.

At that time I could not understand his words.

I went to different places and I found that people placed conditions for my spiritual progress. Only Bhagavan asked for nothing, found fault with nothing. In truth there was nothing in me that entitled me to his grace. But it did not matter with Bhagavan. He wanted me, not my goodness. It was enough to tell him, ‘I am yours’, for him to do the rest. In that way he was unsurpassed. Those who gave themselves to him and trusted him and did his bidding were overwhelmed by his immense solicitude and kindness.

In 1930 I visited Ramanasramam for the second time and stayed a month. Our life was very simple at that time. Bhagavan would talk quite freely with us every night after food. The

devotees would ply him with questions on philosophy and metaphysics. In the evening he would sit on a wooden cot near the well and gaze at Arunachala in deep silence. His face would glow with an inner radiance which would appear to increase with the deepening darkness. We sat all around him, either silently or singing songs. The silence and peace at those hours were quite remarkable. At night after dinner all the inmates of the Ashram would collect around Bhagavan and then he was our own, telling stories, answering questions, dispelling doubts, laughing and joking. We never knew how late it was until Madhavaswami would go behind Bhagavan and give us signs that it was time to allow Bhagavan some rest.

Once I asked him, “You told me to repeat the *Gayatri*. It is too long. Also I am expected to know its meaning and to meditate on it”. Bhagavan said, “Who asked you to bother about the meaning and all that? I have only asked you to see who is repeating the *Gayatri*, or who is the *japi*”. Bhagavan did not limit his teaching to the one question ‘Who am I?’. He invariably adjusted his advice to the needs of the devotee. He would say, “Sooner or later the question ‘Who am I?’ will have to be faced. All that leads to this question is good. By itself nothing else is fully effective, for Self-knowledge comes only through Self-enquiry, but other methods purify the mind and help it to see its own limits. When the mind comes to the end of its resources and stands baffled before the unanswerable question, then a higher power takes charge of the mind and the Self stands revealed”.

Once a visitor started weeping suddenly and cried out that he was a horrible sinner who could not reform himself. He asked Bhagavan if there was any hope for him and declared that Bhagavan was his *Guru* and as his Master he must save him. On his insistence Bhagavan told him that fees were due to the Master. The man said he would give him all his merit and whatever good he had done. Bhagavan told him that was

not enough and demanded his sins too. The man was aghast and refused to offer his sins. But Bhagavan was adamant. He said, “Either give me your sins along with your merits, or keep both and don’t think of me as your Master”. Finally the visitor surrendered and declared that he was giving away all his sins and their results to Ramana. Bhagavan said, “From now on there is no good or bad in you. You are just pure, Go and do nothing, neither good nor bad. Remain yourself, remain what you are”. A great peace fell over the man and over us all. He was never seen in the Ashram again.

This was not an isolated incident. To everyone who deplored his sins Bhagavan said, “What do you know about yourself? What do you know about good and evil except what is in your mind? When you see that the mind invents everything, all will vanish. The good will vanish, the evil will vanish and you will remain as you are”. Thus Bhagavan was most tender with people who thought themselves for some reason or other to be miserable sinners, and went to him torn by repentance.

Bhagavan’s grace and compassion for his devotees was evident in impossible situations. For instance Dr Syed a great Muslim scholar and his wife were devotees of Bhagavan. Mrs Syed continued to follow her faith in the ways and conventions of the Muslim religion. She would hide herself in one of the rooms and implore her husband to ask Bhagavan to come and see her. It was an unusual request but such was Bhagavan’s grace and compassion that even this was granted. One day Mrs Syed felt a deep desire to invite Bhagavan to their house for food. Syed was not brave enough to utter his wife’s prayer to Bhagavan. It was unthinkable. But his wife did not leave him in peace. Unable to resist her pressure Dr Syed hinted her wish to Bhagavan who smiled and kept quiet. She was certain that Bhagavan would grant her wish if the matter were put before him in the proper spirit and form. At last, while

Bhagavan was going up the hill, Syed and his wife stood before him and told him her desire. Bhagavan just laughed and went up the hill.

Disappointed, both Doctor and Mrs Syed started a row in their house, each accusing the other that the request was not made in the proper manner. Finally Dr Syed told her, “The truth of the matter is that your devotion is deficient. That is the reason why Bhagavan refused”. She was deeply affected by those words and she sat in meditation throughout the night. She wanted to bring Bhagavan to dinner by sheer intensity of prayer. During the early hours of the morning she must have dozed. Bhagavan appeared to her in a dream or vision and told her, “Why are you so obstinate? How can I leave the Ashram and come to your house for food? I must dine along with others, or they won’t eat. Besides, as you know, people are coming from distant places, facing a lot of trouble to see me and to have food with me. How can I leave all these guests and come to your place? Feed three devotees of mine and it will be the same as feeding me. I shall be fully satisfied.” In her vision she saw the three devotees whom she had to invite. One was Dr Melkote, the second Swami Prabudhananda and the third was myself. She told Dr Syed about her vision and he invited all three of us for dinner to his house. We had to accept the invitation when we heard the whole story. At the same time we were assailed by doubts and anxiety as it was a serious breach of convention for us Brahmins to dine in a Muslim house. Dr Melkote spoke brave words to me and said he took it as Bhagavan’s direct order. Despite these brave words Dr Melkote was perplexed. We were worried about the cleanliness of the kitchen and the utensils, about the authenticity of the dream, about the reaction of the Ashram *Brahmins* and so on and so forth. The next day when the bell for dinner rang we three went before Bhagavan and

bowed. Bhagavan did not ask us the reason, but merely looked at us. Instead of going to the dining hall with others we marched out of the Ashram, passing in front of Chinnaswami who, O wonder! did not ask us why we were going out without taking food.

Mrs Syed had taken great trouble over the dinner. She would not allow the servant girl to enter the kitchen. The food was excellent, prepared with great love and devotion. After the meal she offered us betel with her own hands. This was something unusual, for a Muslim lady offers betel only to her husband or a *fakir*. As Dr Melkote said, "In her eyes we were *fakirs*, the forms Bhagavan took to go to her place". When we returned to the Ashram, we were astonished that nobody enquired why we had not been present in the dining hall, where we had gone or what we did in a Muslim house. How wonderfully does Bhagavan protect those who obey him!

When the construction of the big temple over Bhagavan's mother's *Samadhi* was about to be started, Bhagavan was asked to give his permission and blessings for collection of funds. He replied, "I am a hermit. I do not want money to be collected in my name for the purpose of building temples. I am not in need of temples, nor do I wish to see them built. If you want a temple, do not go and beg for money. If funds come unasked entirely on their own then go ahead". Bhagavan never asked for anything and did not like his name being used for collecting money, however praiseworthy the purpose.

Thus there was never an incident or occasion when we were not reminded of the supreme truth that only the Self remains. Whether it was a matter of cooking or of kindness to dumb animals and birds or a case of philosophic discussion, Bhagavan always impressed upon us the unity of all Being.

TALES OF BHAGAVAN

Recounted by Chalam

1. This happened about two years before Bhagavan's *Maha Nirvana*. One morning Bhagavan was in the hall surrounded by devotees from many lands. It was time for lunch and everybody was hungry. Some were already in the dining hall, waiting for Bhagavan to come. At that time Bhagavan was suffering from severe rheumatism in his knees, which were swollen and gave him severe pain; to get up he had to rub them first to remove the stiffness and it would take some time. At last he got up slowly from the sofa, and leaning on his walking stick, was about to go through the doorway when he noticed a village milkman, wrapped in a cotton shawl, with a mudpot hanging on a strap from his shoulder. Bhagavan stopped, looked at him and exclaimed, "Look, is it not Chinnappaya"? "Yes, it is me, *Swami*," the villager replied with devotion and respect. Bhagavan asked him, "How are you? Are you well? You have come to see me? Very well. But what is in your pot? Have you brought some *koolu* (gruel)"? "Yes *Swami*, I have brought some *koolu*", replied the milkman shyly. "Then come on, let me have it". Bhagavan put away his stick, cupped his two hands together and bent forward holding his hands near his lips. The milkman started pouring the porridge from his pot in a thin stream into Bhagavan's hands, as he sipped it with his chin between his wrists. The poor man's face was beaming with joy and Bhagavan was drinking steadily, as if the grey porridge was nectar to him.

The dining hall was full of hungry and somewhat angry people. One of them came out to see what could be the cause of the delay in Bhagavan's coming, and when he saw what kind of lunch Bhagavan was taking, he exclaimed, "How unfair, Bhagavan. We are all waiting for you and you are late

for the sake of this peasant”! Bhagavan grew indignant. “What, do you all think that I am here for your sakes only? Do I belong to you? Did you care for me when I was on the hill? Nobody wanted me then, only the shepherds, who would share their *koolu* with me.” And he went into the dining hall followed by the milkman and his pot.

2. On a moonlit night some devotees were going round the holy Arunachala Hill, chanting the Vedas. Suddenly they saw a leopard standing right in the middle of the road and looking at them. The singers were paralysed with fear. They could neither sing nor walk ahead or run away. The leopard looked at them quietly for quite a long time and then slowly crossed the road and disappeared into the jungle. The devotees thanked their stars, completed their round of the hill and, after returning to the Ashram, related their adventure to Bhagavan, who listened carefully and said, “There was no reason for fear. The leopard is a *jnani* who came down from the hill to listen to your chanting the Vedas. He went away deeply disappointed because out of fright you broke off singing. Why were you afraid”?

3. In front of the temple dedicated to Bhagavan’s mother a magnificent hall was built and a gorgeous sofa carved from a single block of black granite was placed in the hall for Bhagavan to sit on. When all was ready he was requested to move from the old hall to the new one. Bhagavan refused. A stone statue of him was being carved and he said, “The stone *swami* will sit on the stone sofa”. And it came true. Bhagavan used the stone sofa very little and only for the sake of the large gatherings which were brought by the news of his fatal illness. When he was no more in the body, the statue was enthroned in the new hall and there it is now.

4. Once somebody brought Bhagavan a wounded dove. Bhagavan held it in his hands for some time and then asked the devotees gathered in the hall, “Who will take good care of this bird until it is quite well”? No offer came. Some time

back the Maharani of Baroda had presented a white peacock to the Ashram and everybody was eager to take charge of it. Bhagavan looked around and started talking to the dove, “What a pity you are not a peacock. You are a mere dove, a useless little thing, not a costly bird presented by a Maharani. Who wants you? Who will care for you”? The dove was kept in the Ashram in a clumsy cage, became well and flew away. But the lesson of universal compassion remained.

5. An old Telugu man with a long beard, an iron pot and chopper for cutting wood made his abode in the Draupadi temple. He would beg some food in the town, boil something or other in his iron pot on a small fire of wood cut with his chopper and eat it during the day. For hours together he could be seen standing and looking at Bhagavan. He would spend the night in the temple, which was dilapidated and abandoned and surrounded by jungle. Once Chalam found him standing all alone in front of the temple and gazing at Arunachala. “I sleep here”, he said when Chalam asked him what he was doing in the forsaken temple. “What, sleeping here all alone? Are you not afraid”? exclaimed Chalam. The old man seemed indignant. “Afraid of what? Bhagavan throws his light upon me. All through the night I am surrounded by a blue radiance. As long as his light is with me, how can I be afraid”? The incident made Chalam deeply humble. Bhagavan’s love and light was given in full measure to a poor old beggar, while those who pride themselves on being his chosen disciples are left high and dry because they have themselves to attend to.

6. A devotee wanted to take a photo of Bhagavan together with Ganapati Muni. Bhagavan consented, and a carpet was spread near the well, on which a sofa was put for Bhagavan to sit on. Ganapati Muni sat down at his feet, but Bhagavan asked him to sit by his side. Ganapati Muni was reluctant, but Bhagavan lifted him up and made him sit on the sofa. The photo was taken, and some prints were made and distributed among

the devotees. The Ashram authorities came to know about it when it was all over and, quite naturally, were indignant, for sitting on the same level with one's *Guru* was a serious breach of custom, implying a claim for spiritual equality. The negative and the prints had to be given up. But the man who had taken the photo refused to surrender his copy. It did not bring him any luck; shortly after he committed suicide. The question why Bhagavan forced Ganapati Muni to sit on the sofa was never answered. Maybe it was his way of bringing the deeply hidden weaknesses of everybody to the surface.

7. We were sitting one morning in the hall in deep meditation. Suddenly there was the sound of the tap-tap of a stick. A tall blind Muslim was trying to find the entry to the hall with his stick. I helped him to come inside. He asked me in Urdu where Bhagavan was sitting. I made him sit right in front of Bhagavan and told him, "You are now sitting just in front of Bhagavan. You can salute him". The Muslim told his story. He lived near Peshawar and he was a *moulvi* (teacher) of repute. Once he happened to hear somebody reading in Urdu about Bhagavan and at once he felt that Bhagavan was his spiritual father and that he must go to him. Blind as he was, he took the next train and travelled thousands of miles all alone, changing trains many times, till at last he reached Ramanasramam. When asked what he was going to do next, he said. "Whatever Bhagavan tells me, I shall do". His immense faith made me ashamed of myself. How little did the man hesitate to place his life in the hands of a South Indian *swami*. And what a mountain of doubts and hesitations I had to wade through before I came to Bhagavan's feet in earnest!

8. Echammal was one of Bhagavan's earliest devotees. She regularly brought food to him when he was living on the hill. Her property went to help his devotees. She practised *yoga* assiduously and died when in a *yogic* trance. When Bhagavan heard the news, he said, "Oh, is it so"? After Echammal's

body was burnt, Shantamma came into the hall and told Bhagavan that the cremation was over. He said, “Yes, it is all right”. And he added after a while, “I warned her not to practice *yoga*. She would not listen. Therefore she had to die unconscious and not in full awareness”.

9. During Bhagavan’s last days, just after an operation, he was kept in a room under doctor’s strict orders that he should not be disturbed. A guard was placed to enforce the orders. A *sadhu* arrived asking for an audience. The guard explained the situation and assured him that his request could not possibly be granted. The *sadhu* went to the office and pressed for an audience, saying that he must leave the same day and that he could not wait for Bhagavan’s recovery. The staff also could do nothing against doctor’s orders. The *sadhu* sadly started walking from the office towards the gate, when to his amazement and great joy he saw Bhagavan standing on the narrow veranda in front of his room. The *sadhu* came nearer and they gazed at each other silently for about ten minutes. The *sadhu* went his way and Bhagavan returned to the room.

10. People who expected the Supreme to be uniformly monotonous, acting in an invariable and stereotyped way, could not find their bearings when they had to deal with Bhagavan. He never reacted twice in the same way. The unexpected with him was inevitable. He would deny every expectation, go against every probability. He seemed to be completely indifferent to whatever was going on in the Ashram and would give an immense amount of care to some apparently insignificant detail. He would be highly critical of the Ashram manager’s passion for improvement and expansion and yet take personal interest in the work of the carpenters and masons. He would scold his younger brother soundly, but would rebuke anybody who came to him with some complaint against him. He did not even want to hear about the money coming to the Ashram, but would read carefully the incoming and outgoing letters. He would refuse his consent

to a certain work, but if it were done against his wishes, he would earnestly cooperate. When asked to agree to the building of the temple, he said, "Do as you please, but do not use my name for collecting money". Yet he would closely watch the progress of the work and wander in the night among the scaffolding, with his torch in one hand and his stick in the other. When the *Sri Chakra* was placed in the sanctum of the temple, he went there at midnight and laid his hands on it. He would deny all responsibility for starting and developing the Ashram, would refuse to claim it as his property, but signed a will creating a hereditary managership for the Ashram. He would refuse all treatment when asked, but would swallow any medicine that was given to him without asking. If each well-wisher offered his own remedy, he would take them all at the same time. He would relish some rustic dish and would turn away from costly delicacies. He would invite people for food, but when asked for a meal he would plead his helplessness in the matter. Sometimes he would take a man to the kitchen and cook and serve him with his own hands. He insisted that beggars should be fed first, but would say that the Ashram was for visitors, not for beggars. He would be tender with a sick squirrel and would not outwardly show any feeling when an old and faithful devotee was dying. A serious loss or damage would leave him unconcerned, while he may shout warnings lest a glass pane in a cupboard should break. Greatness, wealth, beauty, power, penance, fame, philanthropy — all these would make no impression on him, but a lame monkey would absorb him for days on end. He would ignore a man for a long time and then suddenly turn to him with a broad smile and start an animated discussion. To a question about life after death he would retort, 'Who is asking'? but to another man he would explain in great detail what death was and what the state of mind was after death. It was clear that all he did was rooted in some hidden centre to which none of us had any access. He was entirely self-directed, or rather, Self-directed.

11. Once Bhagavan fell down and was injured. The Ashram people wanted to call a doctor, but he would not allow it. A woman in the hall started weeping. “Why do you cry”? he asked. “I am sorry that you do not allow us to call for a doctor”, she said. Bhagavan sighed, “Oh well, call in the doctor. In this place I have no freedom”.

12. Bose and Yogi Ramaiah were accompanying Bhagavan up the hill. While they were waiting for him to return, Yogi Ramaiah told Bose that a cement platform would be useful for Bhagavan to rest on. On his return Bhagavan was told of the idea and he said, “Don’t. If you construct a platform, somebody will erect a temple”.

13. Once Suryanarayana’s wife asked Bhagavan whether he had ever seen God. He replied, “You see your Self just as you see me”. Suryanarayana complained bitterly, “I am spending every minute of my time in the repetition of your name and yet I am without peace”. Bhagavan gently rebuked him and said, “Come on, you do not expect me to hide your peace under my pillow”!

14. Once a devotee asked Bhagavan, “Have you seen Shiva, Nandi and Kailas?” Bhagavan replied, “No, never. But the Self I see every moment”.

15. Somerset Maugham, the famous English writer, came to the Ashram to meet Bhagavan. He fell ill, probably due to heat, and Chadwick arranged a comfortable bed for him in his room. Bhagavan heard about it and came to see Maugham. They just looked at each other silently for about an hour. When Bhagavan got up, Chadwick asked Maugham whether he would like to ask anything. “What is there to speak about”? he answered. “Yes, there is no need for words”, said Bhagavan, who then returned to the hall. Maugham too departed soon.

16. Bhagavan was very ill. Hundreds of people had come to see him, but he would not look at anybody. Nartaki was

saying that Bhagavan looked at her each time she came. Chalam asked her how it happened. She said, “Each time, before coming to Bhagavan, I said within myself, ‘Bhagavan, do look at me’. And he would always look at me”. Chalam tried the same and it worked!

17. A man was telling Bhagavan that he learnt one type of *yoga* under one master, some other type under a different master and so on. The dinner bell started ringing. “Now learn the *yoga* of eating under this master”, said Bhagavan, and took the man to have his dinner.

18. A lady devotee prayed to Bhagavan, “My only desire is that you may always be with us”. Bhagavan exclaimed, “Look at her, she wants us all to turn into stones, so that we may sit here forever”.

19. Bhagavan’s mother had a hard life when she came to live by the side of her glorious son. She was a very orthodox lady, full of prejudices, superstitions and possessive pride. Bhagavan would be ruthless in destroying all that stood in the way of her emancipation from ignorance and fear. He succeeded wonderfully and gave his mother *videha mukti* (liberation at the moment of death), which is by far the most common form of realization with the majority of earnest aspirants.

One of her pet aversions was onions, which are taboo to *Brahmin* widows. She would refuse to cook onions. Bhagavan would show her an onion and say, “How mighty is this little bulb, that it can stop my mother from going to heaven”! The mother would cry her heart out in some corner. But he would only say, “Cry, cry, the more you cry, the better”. It was supreme love, eager to bestow the supreme good, and merciless with every obstacle, however sacred or rooted in tradition.

20. A friend from Bombay came to have a look at the Ashram and to find out what it was all about. He had little faith himself, but wanted to know what exactly drew people to Bhagavan.

He would get hold of this man and that and keep on asking all sorts of questions. A Norwegian *sadhu* lived at that time near the Ashram and we went one evening in search of him. He lived in a small cubby hole, meant for a bathroom. He slept and cooked his food there. It was wonderful to think that an educated European had accepted this kind of life just to be near Bhagavan. With his beard, long hair and weather-beaten face he looked old, but in reality he was quite young. During his university years he had studied comparative religion and thus was attracted to India and to Indian philosophy. Even in Norway, whenever he would meet an Indian he would question him eagerly, only to discover that Indians on the whole knew very little of their glorious heritage. This had only strengthened his desire to go to India, meet the people who knew, and learn from them. He tried hard and got a job as a lecturer in religion in one of the North Indian colleges. He joined and in his spare time was searching for a *Guru*. He was told that he could find one only in the Himalayas. He roamed the mountains and at last he found somebody who agreed to guide and instruct him. The Norwegian was very reticent about his *Guru* and would tell neither name nor place. But he gave up his job, joined his *Guru* in the mountains, learnt *sankhya yoga* under him and was told to do *sadhana* for four years and then come back. How was he to live for these four years? Again he got a job, this time in Bangalore. A fellow traveller in the train advised him strongly to go and meet Bhagavan before he took up his duties. He broke his journey, saw Bhagavan and could not leave. In Bhagavan's presence his *sankhya sadhana* became very vigorous and speedy. He had no money and just stretched every copper. He did not feel the need to return to the Himalayas. He said he would go on till the goal was reached. We returned wondering at Bhagavan's mighty power which attracted all, however small or great. Our Bombay friend felt that there might be something in the Ashram beyond his ken and grew very humble.

21. When Bhagavan was living on the hill, a big monkey came one day when he was having his food, and sat near him. Bhagavan was about to put a morsel of food into his mouth, but when he saw the monkey he gave it the morsel. The monkey took it, put it on the plate and gave Bhagavan a square slap on the cheek. “What do you mean, you fellow? Why are you angry? I gave you the first morsel!” exclaimed Bhagavan. Then he understood his mistake. It was a king monkey and he had to be treated in the right royal manner. Bhagavan called for a separate leaf plate and a full meal was served to the king, who ate it all with dignity and proudly went away.

POOSALAR

IN Tinnanur, an ancient town in Tondai district, there dwelt a Brahmin, Poosalar by name. His mind forever fixed on Siva’s feet, he grew in love and learning day by day and spent his all in service to His devotees.

Wishing to build a temple to the Lord, he tried to raise funds. But try as he might, he failed. In grief he pondered, “What shall I do?” He resolved at last to raise within his heart a temple to his Lord. From far and near he fetched in fancy, little by little, stone and metal and other building material. Skilled masons and sculptors too he engaged and instructed in thought. And at an auspicious hour, he dug the ground and laid the foundation stone. Devoted, busy, sleepless even by night, he watched the temple grow, part by part and layer by layer, gateway, tower and central shrine, all planned according to the rules of *Agama*, and wrought in detail with the minutest care. On top of the domed turret over the holy of holies he installed a stone a cubit long. And so with hard, steady effort of the mind, he completed the structure, plastered chinks with lime, dug wells and tanks, put up the outer walls and fixed in

his mind the auspicious day and hour for consecrating the shrine and installing the Presence.

The Pallava King had built in the city of Kanchi a mighty granite temple and appointed a day for the grand ceremony of its consecration. But, on the night preceding, the Lord appeared to the King in his dream and said, “Poosalar, my friend, has laboured lovingly for many months and raised a temple for me in his heart, and I must be there tomorrow at its consecration. So postpone your temple ceremony to some later day”.

The King awoke, eager to visit Tinnanur and greet this favoured servant of the Lord. He reached the place and enquired of the people, “Whereabouts is this temple built by Poosalar”? But they all said, “We know of no such temple”. Then he sent for the leading *Brahmins* of the town and asked them, “Who is this pure and perfect man, this Poosalar”? They answered, “A *Brahmin* of that name does dwell in this town. We shall go and bring him, Sire”. But the King would have none of it. Instead he went himself to the man’s house and falling at his feet, asked, “Where is your famed temple? Today, I know, the Lord comes there to dwell. And at His bidding I too have come, to meet you and greet you on this day”.

Staggered by this speech, the *Brahmin* said, “If the Lord pleases, the world shall know,” and told the King the story of the building of the temple thought by thought. The King heard it all, fell again at the good man’s feet, and marched back to Kanchi, accompanied by his army with drums and trumpets.

Poosalar regularly performed the daily *pujas* in his ideal temple in the prescribed manner and in the end attained the feet of the Lord.

VISITOR'S GUIDE

By K. Padmanabhan

1. TIRUVANNAMALAI

A. THE TOWN

TIRUVANNAMALAI is a medium sized South Indian town in the North Arcot district of the state of Tamil Nadu. It is situated at 544 feet above mean sea level and has an average rainfall of twelve inches. The town is surrounded by rocky hills and the climate is generally hot except for the rainy season between November and January. The area of the town is about eight square miles and the population nearly a lakh. Besides being a pilgrimage centre, it is a commercial centre famous for brass vessels, chillies and groundnuts.

Tiruvannamalai is a railway station almost midway on the Katpadi-Villupuram section of the Southern Railway. Though the railway connection is not very convenient, the town is connected to various important places by a good network of roads. It is a hundred and twenty miles to the South-West of Madras, a hundred and twentyfive miles South-East of Bangalore, seventy miles from Pondicherry, and one hundred miles from Salem. Regular bus services are available from each of these towns, the journey from Madras taking approximately five hours.

The town has a municipal guest house, a number of lodges, *dharmashalas* and choultries, and a few retiring rooms attached to the Temple of Arunachaleswara. Limited accommodation is also available at the Ashram.

The primary language spoken in the area is Tamil. Speakers of other Indian languages can also be found, but the second most commonly spoken language is English. Speakers of other European languages also live in and around the Ashram.

The town takes its name from the hill. The prefix *Tiru* means blessed or auspicious, like the Sanskrit prefix *Sri*. *Malai* means mountain and *Anna* supreme or high, so the name of the town signifies the Auspicious Supreme Mountain.

B. ARUNACHALA, THE HILL

It is the hill that has brought importance to Tiruvannamalai. Arunachala is a Sanskrit word, whose Tamil equivalent is Annamalai. *Aruna* means free from bondage, free from action, righteous, silent, brightening or red, Siva, and beneficent. *Achala* means motionless or steady. Arunachala is therefore the red mount or the effulgent mount. It is also called the hill of the holy beacon and hill of the holy fire. The philosophical interpretation is that *Aruna* as force or *shakti* represents Parvati, the consort of Siva, and *Achala* is Siva, Arunachala being both Siva and Parvati. Sages have said that one can attain liberation by being born in Tiruvarur, by meeting death in Benares, by worshipping at Chidambaram and by merely thinking of Arunachala (*Smaranath Arunachalam*).

The hill has a high status in the Hindu sacred tradition and it is held that it is far more ancient than the Himalayas. It is made up of igneous rock and has little vegetation. The hill is 2668 feet in height with a basal circumference of nearly eight miles, and stands in prominence amidst picturesque surroundings. *Pradakshina*, or circumambulation of the base of the hill, which represents the constant circling of the ego around the Self in the Heart, is a common practice, especially on full-moon nights and at festival times. The hill displays different shapes from different directions and is visible for miles around. The temple with its stately towers, combined with the background of the tall hill in the West, gives an awe-inspiring and magnificent picture.

Besides Goddess Parvati and Lord Muruga, the Nayanmars and Arunagirinathar, some prominent devotees of Arunachala were Gautama Rishi, Guru Namashivayar, Isanya, Desikar

Mana, and Virupaksha Devar. In recent years these have included such great saints as Sri Seshadri Swamigal, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni, Jatini Shanmuga Yogi and Iswara Swamigal.

C. TIRUVANNAMALAI AS A PILGRIMAGE CENTRE

Besides the religious significance of the hill, the town has one of the biggest temples in the South, where two important festivals — the Arunagirinathar festival in the month of August and the *Kartikai deepam* festival for ten days in November-December — take place, drawing large crowds. The sight of more than a lakh of people circumambulating the hill on the night when the beacon light is lit on the top of the hill during the *Kartikai Deepam* festival beggars description.

A number of great *Saivite* saints have lived in Tiruvannamalai over the centuries. Here Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar have sung sacred hymns known as *Thevaram*, and *Tiruvachakam* and Sri Arunagirinathar has praised God with his *Tiruppugazh*. The importance of the town as a pilgrim centre has grown with the arrival of Sri Ramana Maharshi and the establishment of Sri Ramanasramam. Sri Ramana has said that even today many saints are on the hill, living in caves.

The proximity of other places of pilgrimage like Chidambaram, Tirukoilur and Tirupati has also contributed to the town's importance. Tiruvannamalai is one of the five *Saivite* shrines known as *Panchabhuta Sthalams*. Each of these is a form of Siva as one of the five elements. The hill is regarded as the *Tejolingam* or *Jyotilingam*, the Fire symbol of God. These five together constitute the Heartseat of Siva and the world.

D. THE ARUNACHALESWARA TEMPLE:

The temple, situated to the east of the hill and on its base, about half a mile from the railway station and covering twentyfive acres, is one of the biggest amongst the South

Indian temples. The *Rajagopuram* on the east of the temple, 217 feet in height and comprising eleven stories, is the second tallest temple tower in South India. The earliest of the inscriptions in the temple is of 850 A.D. The Chola kings who ruled the area between 850 A.D. and 1280 A.D. were probably responsible for the construction of the temple, though some of the earlier kings of the Vijayanagara dynasty must have constructed the inner shrine. The towers and the pillars in the *mantapams* and *vimanams* contain figures of sculptural excellence. The temple is also of epigraphical importance. The inscriptions in the temple contain a wealth of information on various subjects.

The main deity in the temple is Arunachaleswara or Annamalai and the Goddess is Apeethakuchamba or Sri Unnamulai Nayaki. The temples of Lord Subramanya and of Arunagirinathar are within the compound of the main temple. The latter is situated at the place where Lord Subramanya gave liberation to Arunagirinathar. The *Patalalingam* shrine where Sri Bhagavan spent a few months shrouded in the vault and several other spots where he stayed during his first few years in Tiruvannamalai, are situated within the temple precincts. The *Patalalingam* is where a great sage is supposed to have done penance many centuries ago.

E. TRADITIONS AND LEGENDS ABOUT TIRUVANNAMALAI

Even the Gods of the Trinity do not seem to be devoid of the ego-sense of 'I' and 'mine'. A quarrel arose between Brahma and Vishnu about their relative superiority, which forced them to go to Lord Siva for a settlement. Siva took the form of a blazing column of light, and challenged them to find either the top or bottom of it. They both failed in their attempts, and surrendered themselves to Siva, the Supreme Being. Vishnu, however, was judged by Siva to be the superior of the two. Both of them prayed to Siva that the blazing pillar

should establish itself as a small hill, that He should take the form of a *lingam* on the east of the hill, and that a *jyoti* or light should appear every year on the top of the hill as a remembrance of the fiery column. This is the legend about the hill, the temple, and the beacon light which is lit during the *Kartikai deepam* festival.

Another story tells of the day that Goddess Parvati, in sport, shut the eyes of Siva for a moment, which resulted in the whole universe plunging into darkness and suffering. Lord Siva banished Her to atone for the sin She had committed. Accordingly, She did penance and worshipped Lord Siva at Tiruvannamalai. Pleased with Her deep and ardent penance, Lord Siva absorbed Her as the left half of His body. Thus came the form *Ardhanareeswarar*, and the deity by that name is taken out of the temple at the time of the *Kartikai deepam* festival.

Legends also say that Tiruvannamalai was a fire (*Agni*) mountain in *Krithayuga* (the earliest age), a gold (*Suvarna*) mountain in *Threthayuga*, a copper (*Thamra*) mountain in *Dwaparayuga*, and a rock mountain in this *Kaliyuga* (the present age).

2. BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI AND SRI RAMANASRAMAM

A. THE TEMPLE, THE HILL, AND BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA

The word Arunachala had symbolised something great and mysterious for Sri Ramana since his early childhood, and he was quite surprised when in his fifteenth year he found out from a relative that it was an actual place. After his experience of death and realization of the Self the following year, he intuitively felt the call of Arunachala. He left his home on 29 August, 1896, not even fully conversant with the route he had to take, and reached Tiruvannamalai on 1 September,

travelling by train and on foot. The note he wrote when he left his house in Madurai read, “I have in search of my Father, according to His command, started from this place”, and in it we can see the great significance the hill had for him.

He is Arunachala and Arunachala is Lord Siva. The hill and Ramana Maharshi have come to be recognised as inseparable. There was something essentially static and rocklike in the Maharshi. He was *achala*, as he never moved out of the orbit of Arunachala from the day he reached the place. His first entry into the temple is of striking importance. He had a natural rain bath after having his head shaven. He was all alone in the temple, whose doors were kept open as if Sri Arunachaleswara was eager to receive him. As Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh has said, “The holy hill was the *moola vigraha* (stationary image of a deity) and Bhagavan Ramana was the *utsava murti* (image of the same deity that is taken in procession during festival times)”.

During his first few years in Tiruvannamalai Sri Ramana lived at a number of different places, always seeking a place where he could remain absorbed in the Self without disturbance. His most well-known residence in the temple is the *Patalalingam* shrine, though he also stayed at other places such as in the thousand pillared hall and under an *Iluppai* tree within the temple grounds. He lived at various places nearby before he settled in Virupaksha cave in 1901 — such as Namashivaya cave above the temple, Pavalakunru, on a spur of the hill, where his mother first came to visit, and Gurumurtam, which is south of the town near the Vettavalam Road. He stayed in the Virupaksha cave most of the next sixteen years, though the hottest parts of the year were spent in the Mango Tree cave. A couple of times in this period he moved to the Pachaiamman temple on the east side of the hill when the town was afflicted by plague. Soon after his mother came for good, they all moved up to Skandashram, which

was built by a devotee called Kandasami. Regular housekeeping was set up by the Mother, and they remained there until after her death in 1922. All these places can be easily reached from either the Ashram or the temple.

Bhagavan's devotion to the hill was great, and he was reputed to know every inch of it. He also had a great fondness for *pradakshina*, which he did as long as he was able to, and he always encouraged devotees to do it. Referring to its value, he said, "My fire is at the bottom of the hill".

B. SRI RAMANA AND THE GROWTH OF SRI RAMANASRAMAM

When his mother passed away in 1922 she was a liberated being, and her body had to be buried in accordance with Hindu tradition. As no burial was allowed on the sacred mountain, the body was buried at the southern foot of the hill near an already existing cemetery. He visited her *Samadhi* daily from Skandashram, a distance of about a mile, and one day he chose to remain there. This is the present site of Sri Ramanasramam.

At first there was just a shed with bamboo uprights and a roof of palm leaves. There was no organisation of an Ashram as such, and Sri Bhagavan was able to live a relatively unfettered existence. But, as he became more widely known, donations and visitors started pouring in, and some of the visitors stayed there itself. The hub of Ashram life for many years, until just before his death, was the old meditation hall, where devotees sat with the Maharshi. There was a couch there where he sat in the day time and slept at night. Feeling that he should be accessible to all, he never left the Ashram except for his daily walks on the hill, and, in the early years, an occasional *pradakshina*.

The Ashram office and bookstall, a large dining hall and kitchen, a branch Post Office, the meditation hall, residential quarters on a limited scale, the *gosala* (cowshed), *Veda patasala* (Vedic school), a hospital, and the imposing temple over the Mother's *Samadhi* with a stone pillared hall — all these were

established by 1950, when Sri Bhagavan attained *Nirvana*, after declaring that the Ashram was to remain a spiritual centre. Sri Niranjanananda Swami, the brother of Sri Bhagavan, served as *Sarvadhikari* or general manager of the Ashram for many years, and it was primarily his efforts that resulted in the establishment and growth of the Ashram. New buildings have been added since 1950 — a spacious hall round the *Samadhi*, a number of new guest units, a separate office, etc. But true to the Maharshi's statement shortly before his death, "They say that I am going away, but where could I go? I am here", his presence is still felt as the guiding force of the Ashram. The Ashram continues as a spiritual centre known around the world, and there are now a number of branches in India and other countries.

There is no spiritual head of the Ashram in human form. The presence of the Maharshi is powerful and pervasive and instructions for meditation are given in his writings and sayings. Spiritual support comes directly from him and all that is needed is sincere practice with firm faith. Sri Ramanasramam is not a place visited by large crowds in search of transient gains. It is for the serious aspirant who has understood that liberation is the supreme goal and therefore chooses to seek the grace and support of the Master to guide him on his way. Devotees of the Maharshi living there permanently or in other places pledge their lives to silent, unobtrusive *sadhana* while performing their obligations in the world. They follow the path set out by the Master to find out their true identity. He used to say, "The purpose of the outer *Guru* is only to awaken the inner *Guru* in the heart; when the *Guru* has awakened, he is free to leave the body".

C. CURRENT LIFE AT THE ASHRAM

The bulk of the Maharshi's instructions to devotees concerned direct inner discipline. So there is a minimum of ritual and organisation at the Ashram. People go and sit silently in meditation before the Maharshi's shrine or in the old hall

where he sat for so many years with his devotees. They walk on the sacred mountain, Arunachala, or sit in their rooms.

Every morning portions of the Vedas and a few hymns of praise are chanted in front of Sri Maharshi's shrine, just as they were chanted before him in his time. This is followed by *puja*, which is done both at the Maharshi's shrine and at the Mother's shrine. The programme is repeated in the evening and on both occasions lasts for less than an hour. On the days of the *Sri Chakra puja* at the Mother's shrine, worship is more elaborate and lasts longer. Certain days during the year are days of large crowds and greater celebrations. The most popular are the *Kartikai deepam* festival, the *Jayanti* or birthday of Sri Maharshi, which falls in December-January, and the *Aradhana*, or the day on which he passed away, which falls in April-May. Participation in any of these functions is purely voluntary.

As there is considerable shortage of accommodation, visitors are not permitted to stay for long periods. Ordinarily they are allowed to stay only for three days. The stay can, however, be extended in special cases. Intending visitors are advised to write to the President of the Ashram sufficiently in advance to ascertain whether accommodations are available. The Ashram maintains a kitchen for serving simple South Indian meals to the residents and visitors. Some vegetable dishes without condiments and spices are also served to those who are not accustomed to take South Indian dishes. No charges are levied for boarding or lodging, but voluntary donations are gratefully received.

As the teaching of the Maharshi is contained in the works composed by him as well as the books written by his devotees, the Ashram has brought them out in English, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and other languages. They are moderately priced and are kept for sale in the bookstall. Books may also be borrowed from the Ashram library. The library consists of nearly five thousand books in various languages, mostly on religious and

spiritual subjects. The Ashram also publishes a quarterly journal in English named *The Mountain Path*, dedicated to the propagation of the traditional wisdom of all religions and ages.

3. OTHER PLACES TO VISIT

A. PLACES CONNECTED WITH SRI RAMANA

The birthplace of Sri Ramana is Tiruchuzhi, which is about thirty miles south of Madurai. The house in which he was born is being maintained by the Ashram, as Sundara Mandiram. Just across the street is the Bhoominatha temple, and a few blocks away the primary school he attended. The house in Madurai where he had his death experience is also being maintained by the Ashram, as Ramana Mandiram. Down the street is the imposing Meenakshi temple, to which he went many times after this experience. The high school he attended is near the bus and train stations. Madurai can easily be reached by bus from Tiruvannamalai, and then Tiruchuzhi is a convenient day's journey. The train still runs on the same line that Sri Bhagavan took to Villupuram on his way to Tiruvannamalai. Other spots on his journey there can also be visited. The temple of Arayanainallur is about a mile from Tirukoilur. These latter spots are probably best visited by bus.

B. OTHER PLACES

Famous pilgrimage spots like Kanchipuram, Chidambaram, Tirupati and Tirukoilur are not very distant and can be easily visited by rail or road. The ancient fortresses in Gingee and Vellore are quite near and are of historical and archaeological importance. The Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry about seventy miles distant is a place on the itinerary of pilgrims visiting Tiruvannamalai.

THE PATH TO SURRENDER

(From Teachings of Bhagavan

Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words.)

There are only two ways to conquer destiny or to be independent of it. One is to enquire whose this destiny is and discover that only the ego is bound by it and not the Self, and that the ego is non-existent. The other way is to kill the ego by completely surrendering to the Lord, realizing one's helplessness and saying all the time, 'Not I, but Thou, oh Lord', giving up all sense of 'I' and 'mine' and leaving it to the Lord to do what he likes with you. Surrender can never be regarded as complete so long as the devotee wants this or that from the Lord. True surrender is the love of God for the sake of love and nothing else, not even for the sake of salvation. In other words, complete effacement of the ego is necessary to conquer destiny, whether you achieve this effacement through Self-enquiry or through *bhakti* marga.

The spark of spiritual knowledge (*jnana*) will consume all creation. Since all the countless worlds are built upon the weak or non-existent foundation of the ego, they all disintegrate when the atom-bomb of knowledge falls on them. All talk of surrender is like stealing sugar from a sugar image of Ganesha and then offering it to the same Ganesha. You say that you offer up your body and soul and all your possessions to God, but were they yours to offer? At best you can say, 'I wrongly imagined till now that all these, which are Yours, were mine. Now I realise that they are Yours and shall no longer act as though they were mine'. And this knowledge that there is nothing but God or Self, that 'I' and 'mine' do not exist and that only the Self exists is *jnana*.

It is enough that one surrenders oneself. Surrender is giving oneself up to the original cause of one's being. Do not delude

yourself by imagining this source to be some God outside you. One's source is within oneself. Give yourself up to it. That means that you should seek the source and merge in it. Because you imagine yourself to be out of it, you raise the question, 'Where is the source'? Some contend that just as sugar cannot taste its own sweetness and that there must be someone to taste and enjoy it, so an individual cannot both be the Supreme and also enjoy the bliss of that state; therefore the individuality must be maintained separate from the Godhead in order to make enjoyment possible. But is God insentient like sugar? How can one surrender oneself and yet retain one's individuality for supreme enjoyment? Furthermore they also say that the soul, on reaching the divine region and remaining there, serves the Supreme Being. Can the sound of the word 'service' deceive the Lord? Does He not know? Is He waiting for these people's services? Would He not – the Pure Consciousness – ask in turn, 'Who are you apart from Me that presume to serve Me'?

TRANSLITERATION OF SARANAGATHI SONG

(Raga: Navaraj — composed by Manavasi V.
Ramaswamy Iyer in 1914)

Pallavi

*Saranagathi Un Para Nan
Inippugathunaithan Yedu
Nee Pugalai —
(Saranagathi)*

Anupallavi

*Smaranath Gathi Phala Arunachala Nirai
Ramana. . . Karuna. . . Varuna
(Saranagathi)*

Saranam

*Tharunam Idu Vanro Karunai Nokkave
Kalaharanam Aakkidil Haa Haa En Seiven
Thunbai Neecki Inbai Alikka En Anba
Innam Paramukham Ennal Thaladayya
Sri Vediya
(Saranagathi)*

TRANSLATION OF THE SARANAGATHI SONG INTO ENGLISH

Pallavi

I surrender — unto you
Where else am I to surrender myself tell me
(I surrender)

Anupallavi

Who is perfect in Arunachala
Which endows one with ultimate Release
O Ramana, Raincloud of Compassion!
(I surrender)

Saranam

Is this not the appropriate time
For granting me your glance of Grace?
If you delay, Lo! What am I to do?
My beloved, remove my sorrow
and grant me Bliss
I can't bear indifference any further,
O Vediya (One who is Brahman Itself)
(I surrender myself unto you)