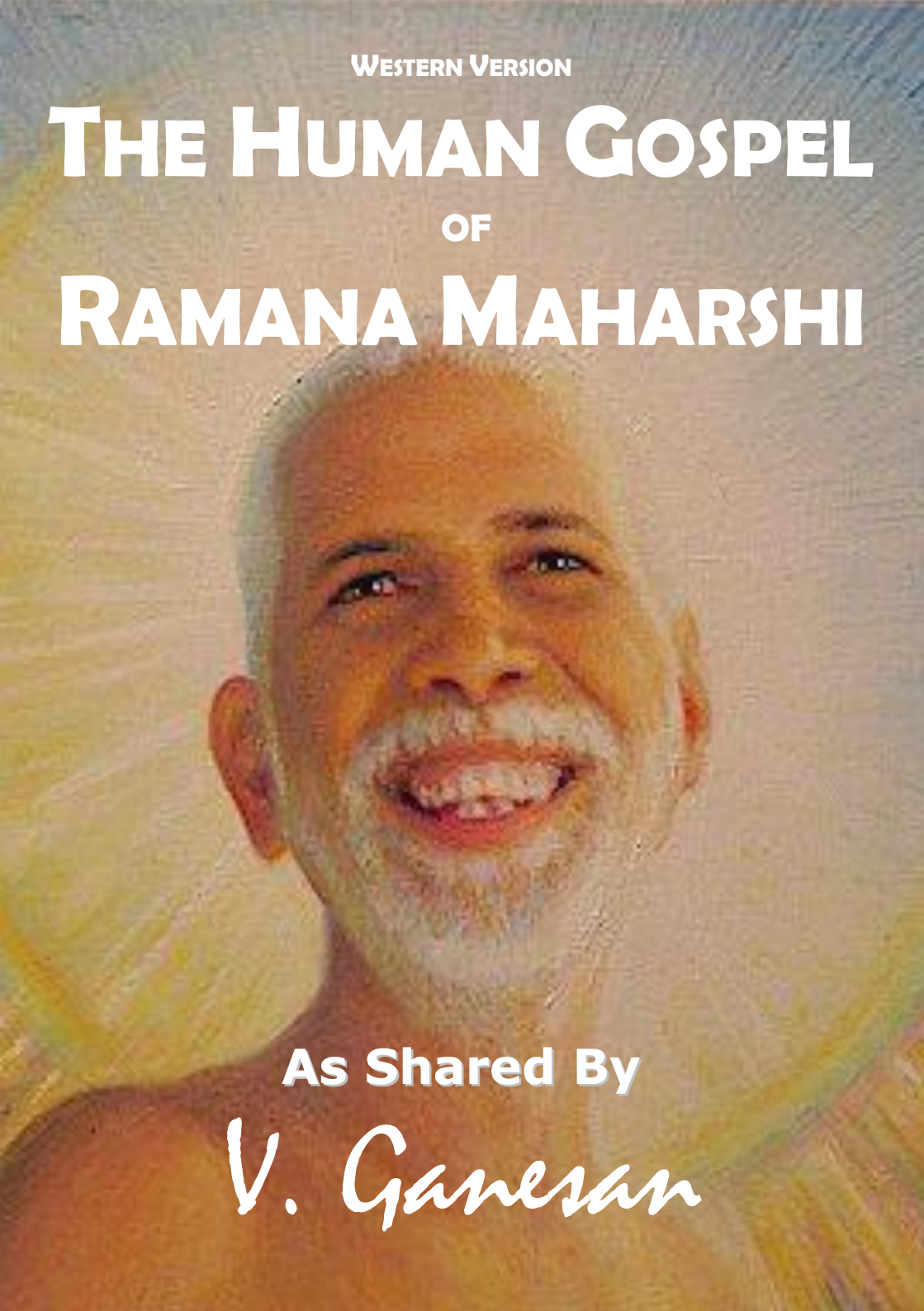
Western Version

The Human Gospel of Ramana Maharshi



As Shared By

V. Ganesan

THE HUMAN GOSPEL OF RAMANA MAHARSHI

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The Human Gospel of Ramana Maharshi
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As Freely Shared by V. Ganesan in Talks at AHAM, Asheboro, NC, USA and AHAM, India. Ganesan shared his life's personal intimate time with the old devotees of Ramana Maharshi and other spiritual adepts throughout his life and spiritual sojourns.

"The joy of sharing the Truth is unparalleled"
~ V. Ganesan, *"Drops"*

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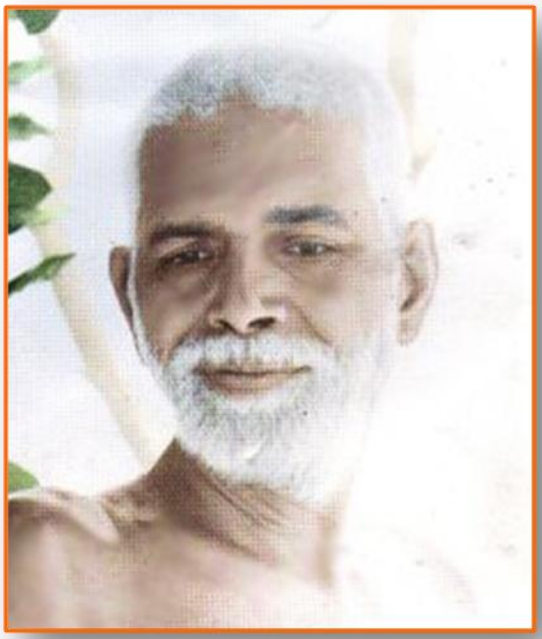
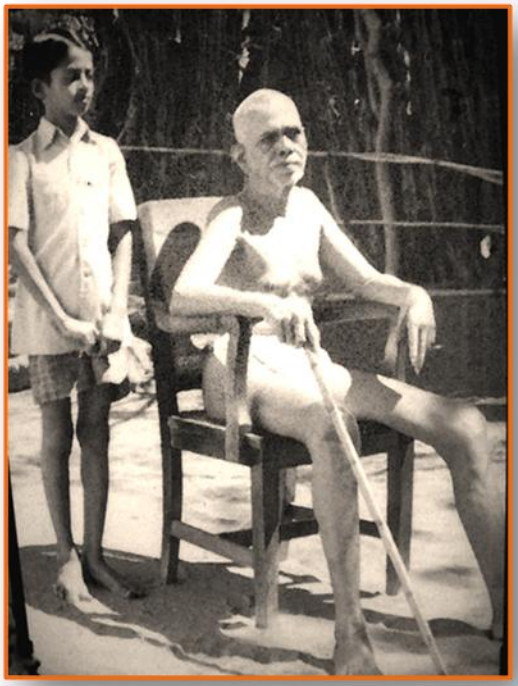


BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

V. GANESAN SHARING HIS SPIRITUAL SOJOURN,
VERANDAH IN INDIA

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN



A YOUNG V. GANESAN STANDING BEHIND
HIS GRAND UNCLE, RAMANA MAHARSHI

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

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Lakshmana Swami
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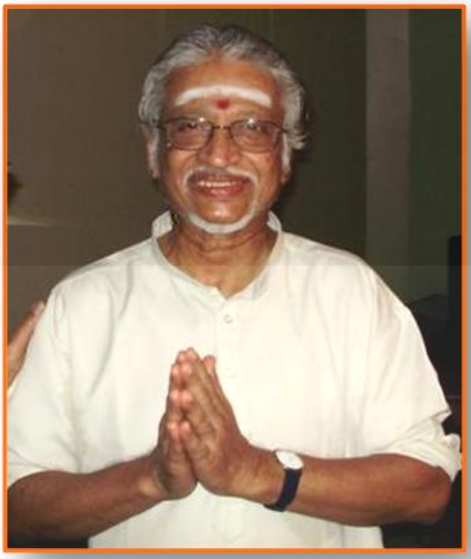
Nagalakshmi

THIS SHARING IS AN OFFERING AT THE FEET OF
BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN



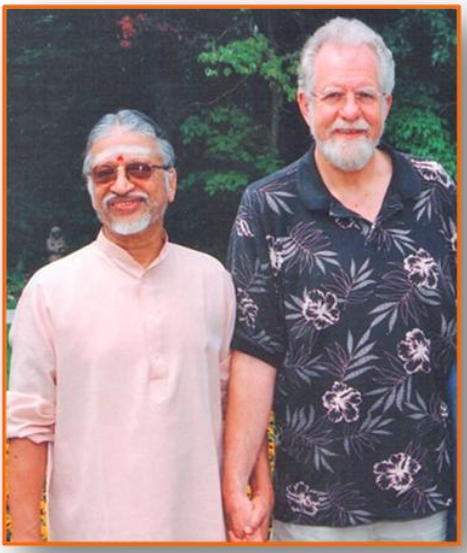
V. Ganesan

V. Ganesan grew up until the age of fourteen, in the company of his great uncle, Ramana Maharshi. After the Mahanirvana (Bodily Death) of Ramana Maharshi in 1950, Ganesan received a Master's degree in philosophy. He returned to Sri *Ramanashram* at Tiruvannamalai, India in 1960, to call back and attend the Elder Devotees of Sri Bhagavan as his life of service and spiritual practice. As a result, he was able to absorb reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi and the Master's intimate mandala of devotees and satsang that had never been recorded before. In addition to this, close contacts with authentic Sages, like Yogi Ram Surat Kumar, Swami Ramdas, Mother Krishna Bai, Nisargadatta Maharaj, and J. Krishnamurti, helped him to deepen and affirm his understanding of the essence of the Maharshi's satsang and direct teaching of *Self-Enquiry*, edification for most spiritual endeavors.

For thirty-five years, Ganesan was also Manager of *Ramanashram*, Ramana Maharshi's *Ashram* in India, and for twenty-five years, as the Managing Editor of *The Mountain Path*, the *Ashram's* newsletter. His collection and recording of the reminiscences as well as his own deep illumination have allowed him an incredible ability to present the stories of devotees in his own words from the Heart. The gentle humility and the lion's voice of Vedanta that Ganesan exudes is worthy of a sage and an honor to his Guru, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

The collective wisdom of Ganesan's spiritual insight in now shared as *The Human Gospel of Ramana Maharshi,* Ganesan's sharing. V. Ganesan has authored: *Be the Self*, *Moments Remembered*, *Purushottama Ramana* and *The Direct Teaching of Bhagavan Ramana* and *Drops from the Ocean*. This sharing, *The Human Gospel of Ramana Maharshi, a* true gift for any spiritual aspirant in this age of information and a quickening in awakening, it is a blessing to have Ganesan's confession and insight into an authentic divine emergence or God-flower. This is true spiritual satsang framed with a unique perspective in Indian cultural nuances and the spiritual etiquette of the time and place in sacred Tamil Nadu, Southern India.

Preface



What is Truth? Consider the kind of Truth that is often mentioned in spiritual literature and discourse, the Truth of who you really are. Not a relative "Truth", as betwe S

of perception, death and resurrection. You and everyone are truly pure unadulterated spirit and have always been and will always be. That's the good news! That's the Gospel. *Darshan* (Divine Love) and equality of vision affirms it. Ganesan's sharing lays it all out multiple times. All that is required for you to experience the Truth is the relinquishment of the phantom ego. The ego "I" that assumes and usurps doer-ship, then takes on form to accomplish the desired objective. One gets attached to the idea of carnal form and doership; thereby obstructing the native spiritual vision.

There are awakened beings whose identification as existence is with pure spirit and not exclusively with the mortal body and mind. The known messengers usually have no models of behavior and are referred to as Saints, Sages, Seers, Gurus, Mystics, Masters, Jnanis, Siddhas, Messiahs, Shamans, and even rascals. Some are hidden in our midst under different disguises. A doer (ego-I) seeks material things and accomplishments. Then this "I am the body" notion starts seeking God or Truth when faced with mortality or from some other rude shock or reason. The same techniques and desires that worked before, don't work anymore. The "I" seeking for what one already is, is a futile search. Still, the "I" tends to seek until the seeking for remedies is exhausted.

Then, surrender. With simple insight, the "I-thought" disappears and existence is re-cognized as non local. *Darshan* and Truth dawn by Grace. A *Higher Power* assumes the burdensome doership. Many words and symbols point to the same supreme, natural nameless Truth of immortality. No name being closer than an apparent another. It is just different masks; no one mask closer than any other. *Darshan* is removing the mask to reveal the One God Self. This was the revelation for

Ganesan and the disciples he attended that he most beautifully shares in this sharing.

This *Higher Power* affirms this Truth by gracefully placing you in the company of others who share an enlightened perception. Call it *Darshan*, synchronicity, fellowship, divine love or satsang. It is all the same *Darshan*. It is shared vision of divinity; an equality of vision. It is a revelation; a blooming God flower in your midst. You notice every action is perfect. The doctrine of sin is gone. The pages of life affirm your conversion and facilitate acclimation to non physical spiritual existence. That is spiritual practice, free of religious ownership and death of forms.

Sages, seers, and saints, since antiquity, have practiced the beneficial spiritual endeavor of *Yatra* - "pilgrimage". Worldly-wise, it often takes one to a location charged with the projection of devotional surrender and faith of many spiritual aspirants of Truth. Yet, Truth is rarely, if ever, discovered "outside one's Self". Conversely, spiritually, it serves one to sojourn deep within One's own Being, beyond thoughts, further than the "I" thought, beyond consciousness and yet remaining a simple being, remaining without effort, the Presence of the non physical silent Self (*Arunachala*, Heart, Here & Now… its all the same). This *Revelation of Darshan* is Ganesan's "pilgrimage", a true *Yatra* to that supreme Self, your Self, where true faith is born of actual sharing.

These human chronicles have rarely been put or expressed in Modern Chicago style English. (The Chicago Manual of Style is used in most historical journals. It remains the basis for the Style Guide of the American Anthropological Association and the Style Sheet for the Organization of American Historian.) The stories are framed in Tamil

Nadu, Southern India, at the early part of this past century. English was not the primary language. When it was used it was British English or a composite of both British English and Hindi. With that in mind, some degree of this latest western translation is open to interpretation.

Over 100 years ago, when Ganesan's great uncle awakened as young man, he found himself in Tiruvannamalai. Later, he was discovered and named by a renowned theist as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. By that time he was situated on a hill considered sacred ground, Arunachala, and the teachings remarkably recorded for posterity with great integrity. This sharing is supported by the most remarkable collection of devotees imaginable that found themselves in the Master's company by many notable synchronistic events. Ganesan's stories are shrouded in mysterious mythological imaginings, cultural nuances, vivid dreams and guru-disciple relationships, with the overlay of the theological etiquette of the time and place. However, a beautiful and simple pearl of the divine wisdom *(Darshan)* is openly revealed and shared by V. Ganesan. It is about the elder devotees of The Maharshi that Ganesan loved and served most of his life. The sharing is an immaculate gift to humanity.

Ganesan's pilgrimage that lies herein is genuine and its Gospel may relieve one of seeking and suffering, restoring the peace of *'Arunachala'* in and as your own true Being, transcending the "I am the body" idea to be established as eternal love. This is a true spiritual sojourn and *Darshan*. May this *Human Gospel* and sharing be the hall of mirrors that reveal and reflect the glorious Truth of your Self in the depth of the well of divine Being. May your Heart open in and as the NOW and remain, unmoved, in true nameless faith as these words of sharing fall away. ~John Troy

THE ASHRAM WELL BETWEEN OLD HALL AND EATING HALL

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Introduction

According to Hindu mythology, culture and beliefs, *Arunachala* is Lord Shiva in the physical form of a hill in Tamil Nadu, Southern India. Shiva is recognized to be the formless Father of all creation. His language is silence. His *asana* (posture) is stillness. Accordingly, *Arunachala* is a natural icon as stillness personified and immovable being. Everpresent and solid like a hill, Lord Shiva is, in Truth, actually the pristine nameless Self of all, in the kinship of our divine Father.

My great uncle, Ramana Maharshi was an ordinary human being just like you and me. He was and is, at the same time, the deathless Self. There is no difference. This sharing reveals it via my many relationships with saints and elder devotees. The simple Truth shared in relationship with those who are called to him is precious. It is satsang, the company and community of Truth. Being an immediate experience of nonduality, shared, it is also a very contagious and peaceful love. Christ said, "I and my Father are One." That is *Darshan*. This was also the case of my Grand Uncle, Ramana Maharshi and his devotees. The sweet essence of this

Darshan is now silently pervading through our global habitat and emerging through many different forms and cultures. Some are known, some unknown.

My Great Uncle, Ramana Maharshi was actually named, Venkataraman, who was to later become known as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. The Maharshi, it is said, had no name that he called his own, following an ego-death and consequently did not sign letters. However, he did refer to a name, and he did reveal it, not once, but three times. The first time was in his hymn *Aksharamanamaalai*, in the very last verse, Bhagavan sings, "Place your garland around my neck and wear the garland strung by this *Arunachala Ramanan*."

The second time was some days later. A devotee at *Virupaksha* cave wanted to know who Bhagavan really was. He wrote a verse on a piece of paper, which went, "Oh Ramana, who are you? Are you the highest God, Hari, or a rishi, or a celestial being? Who are you?" He left the note under Bhagavan's stone seat. When the Master saw it, he wrote behind it, "I am *Arunachala Ramanan*, dwelling as the Heart of every being, beginning with Lord Hari to the so-called lowest being." He added, "You can understand him if, with melting love, you plunge deep into your Heart. Your inner eye shall be opened. You will be this *Arunachala Ramanan* as the silent expanse, the fullness of non-dual awareness."

The third time was when Viswanatha Swami wanted to write a verse on Muruganar, a senior devotee. Unable to compose an entire verse in Tamil, he wrote two words, "Mugavapuri Murugan." When Bhagavan was not there he left the paper on Bhagavan's seat and slipped away. When Bhagavan came back, he filled the paper with a verse that said,

"*Arunachala Ramanan,* who resides in the Heart lotus of all beings, intently revealed *Darshan* with Muruganar and all his tendencies were destroyed." This enabled him to come out with countless spontaneous verses. The beauty of these verses is comparable with that of the book, *Thiruvachakam,* written centuries ago by the saint Manickavachakar.

What was the meaning of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's appearance in our midst? *Arunachala*, Our Father of Truth, inspired Ramana Maharshi to herald the advent of an awakened state of nonphysical being to reveal the omniscient Self, present in and as every human, at one's core Heart of Being, and thereby put an end to the false identity and suffering that each one is the mortal body, regardless of race, creed, culture, gender, or religion. It is *Darshan.* to
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I y "*A la,*" the nameless, formless Self, emerged and appeared as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, in a humble human form. The hill, *Arunachala,* has been and is an ancient mystical and mythical symbolic manifestation of our universal formless Self, Shiva. This hill of faith actually affirms this principle as self-evident to all who approach with open Heart. Millions of spiritual aspirants from around the world have brought their sincere faith to this hill throughout the ages and experienced *Darshan of the hill*, further deifying the hill. Their faith is affirmed with supreme silence, peace, and stillness. Saints, sages, and seers have made this hill their abode since antiquity. This sacred space in Southern India and its inherent symbolism was and is the eternal abode of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, symbolically and physically.

I once shared this with Bhagavan's elder devotee, Professor N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer, a distinguished physics professor and scientist. He

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exclaimed, "How wonderful! This is true! *Arunachala* did come as Ramana; but Ganesan, add another sentence to that." He continued, "It is true that Bhagavan is *Arunachala*—but we are also of *Arunachala*." This revelation overjoyed me. Professor Iyer added, "Whenever an enlightened being emerges, they appear with their supporters."

It was ironic that Bhagavan did not travel away from *Arunachala* for fifty-four years. However, his simple message was to ripple throughout all cultures, beliefs, and classes of the world without uprooting cultures and belief systems. The Truth is that Bhagavan did not need to move because the world came to him, moved in him, and manifested in him.

Frank Humphreys was the first Westerner to visit him at the remote camp and many people followed, including others like Paul Brunton, S. S. Cohen, Maurice Frydman, and Arthur Osborne. The right people showed up at the right time with the right skill and right receptivity. It was sublime synchronicity. Their skill and function came together perfectly to record the message of the Master with impeccable integrity for posterity. Their lives and functions have dovetailed into a story to share, a human Gospel, a story of "good news" for all spiritual aspirants.

An example of an awakened being that came with a mandala of devotees earlier is Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. When no disciple had come to him yet, and at times intoxicated with divine communion, he would stand at the bank of the river Ganges and shout, "Mother, where are the young people who you said you are sending? They have not arrived yet!" The Divine Mother (Ramakrishna recognized the Divine Mother in all Forms) eventually provided eighteen impressive disciples.

Bhagavan had many sincere and well-known devotees**,** but the human and sacred relationships of these devotees with Bhagavan were never formally recorded in the form of

studied Eastern and Western philosophy. Nowhere had I heard of serving the guru's devotees as a form of practice. She added, "Another important hurdle is that since you are related to Ramana Maharshi, everybody will tell you and treat you like you are already liberated. They will tell you that according to the Hindu scriptures, a realized Master's relatives are already realized beings. Seven generations preceding and the subsequent seven generations are supposedly free of karma. Be here now. It is a golden chain into the non-existent past. It is a lie. You must earn your bread—your spiritual bread. God is absolutely impartial. You are to practice Ramana Maharshi's teachings, so pursue *Self-Enquiry for your Self*."

Overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task before me, I shed tears, "Mother, I am leaving, and you will be far away!" "I am going to guide you," she reassured me. "You are six hundred miles away from me! How are you going to guide me?" I looked at her questioningly. She replied, "Don't worry about that. I will be guiding you every moment." (Sure enough, I can palpably feel her guidance even now.)

When I came back to *Ramanashram*, I acted on Maatha ji's counsel very sincerely. I started searching for the elder devotees, coaxing them back to the *Ashram*, serving them, and putting Bhagavan's teachings and satsang into practice. In the beginning, I didn't always get it my way nor did I have a complete grasp of it, but I did not give up. I kept wondering why she had said that to serve the elder devotees was my practice.

Then the revelation dawned. I am being called to record and share all the devotees' reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi and their relationship with him, the satsang, the *Darshans*. I began working on this sharing with renewed inspiration. Veneration goes to the old devotees who started

sharing their memories of Bhagavan. I owe much to beings like Kunjuswami, Annamalai Swami, G. Ramaswami Pillai, and Major Chadwick for coming forward with beautiful instances of their meetings with Ramana Maharshi. A deluge of reminiscences came down gracefully from these and other devotees. I pleaded with all of them to write them down. "Please share your memories of Bhagavan, your interactions with him, and his interactions with the earlier devotees . . . everything. Because whatever you say will be direct from the source. And they graciously responded. In the thirty five years I was in *Ramanashram*, it was my association with elder devotees of Bhagavan that shared with me the joy and wisdom for posterity. It has been my Heart's wish to further share the joy and understanding of this literal and beautiful life in a sharing for many years."

From my perception, each and every devotee has a perfect role to play in the Master's spontaneous mandala—and this forms the foundation of the *Human Gospel of Ramana Maharshi*. The inspiration is to bring to light how Ramana Maharshi's devotees came together gracefully, basked in his *Darshan* and naturally supported the Master in his mission, and to reveal the function of their life in relationship with Ramana Maharshi. The revealing satsang is filled with synchronicity, blessings, sacrifice, humor, and human love for our Master. A beautiful divine scent of this God flower is now released in our midst.

I am most grateful to Elizabeth MacDonald and the staff at AHAM Retreat Center, Asheboro, NC, as well as in India, for hosting a significant portion of talks on the old devotees of Sri Bhagavan during my summer visits to America and North Carolina and at AHAM, India. They have all the talks recorded in the form of DVDs, from which many

aspects of this sharing were culled by the services of friends. To them all, I owe a sincere deep sense of gratitude. This original sharing of Ganesan entitled *The Human Gospel Of Ramana Maharshi* is edited and shared in America and complies with American Chicago Style English; I have suitably edified some obscure traditional Hindu expressions and quotations to suit this popular style English nomenclature for easy grasping in Western cultures. In any case, allow the words to fall away, leaving the essence of your own pure understanding.

As you read, notice devotees respectfully, and with great humility refer to Ramana Maharshi as simply *Bhagavan*, an affectionate name of God.
Namaskar,

V. Ganesan

Mother Alagammal

Throughout his early childhood, my great uncle, Venkataraman noticed the sound '*Arunachala*' within himself. The sound stayed with him all the time but he did not know what it was. Later when he became known as Ramana Maharshi, he was asked, "If you could hear the sound all the time, why did you not ask people about it? Why did you not seek an explanation for it?" Bhagavan replied, "Would someone go about checking with people if they breathe? It was built into my system, and I thought everyone could hear it too. I did not know it was an aberration." (Similarly, Swami Vivekananda would see a splendid blue pearl or light between his eyebrows from his childhood. When asked why he did not ask anyone about this strange occurrence, Swami replied, "I thought everyone was seeing the light.")

Other than this, Venkataraman was an ordinary boy. There was nothing spectacular about him that suggested that he was to become a rishi or sage. After his father died, the family was split. Bhagavan's mother, now a widow, had to stay in her brother-in-law's house in Manmadurai, about forty to fifty miles away from Madurai where her son, Venkataraman, was sent to school.

In Madurai, Venkataraman studied at the American Mission School.

Strangely enough, he had not wholly read any Hindu scriptures. He was not a theist. He had only read *Periapuranam*, a devotional composition on the lives of the sixty-three saint-devotees of Shiva. He later said, "I did not know any terms from philosophy or spirituality—Brahman, atman, samadhi, *Darshan*, jnana, Self, mind—nothing."

At the age of sixteen, he experienced a spontaneous death experience following a sudden, common anxiety attack. Rather than a typical reaction of panic, his response was of acceptance of the sense of impending death. With synchronicity, Father (*Arunachala*) called Venkataraman back from bodily existence into His silent fold and so graced him this ego-death, which was expressed in the form of his body and mind being symbolically *burned*. He 'saw' with an inner vision, the body being carried to the cremation ground and *burned*. However, the present deathless, sentient Spirit or substratum remained untainted as the stillness, the sentient "Now". The burning sensation smoldered as the shell of the body later ran away from Madurai and continued until reaching Tiruvannamalai. The temple gates that had been closed for so long opened spontaneously, and he entered and embraced the *lingam* of *Arunachaleshwara* in the temple. He said, "Father, I have come at thy bidding. Thy will be done." The burning stopped. The notion of being a bodily form was completely *burned* up.

After my young Grand Uncle left home, nobody knew of his whereabouts. When his mother heard the news, she was sorrow-stricken and made enormous efforts to find him. Reports trickled in that he had moved far south to Trivandrum. Someone else sent news that a young Brahmin boy was seen roaming about in the streets. She packed her things and left for Trivandrum. On spotting the boy there, she begged

him to just look at her but he ignored her and fled. She thought surely that he was her son, Venkataraman. She continued to suffer in sorrow until one day somebody informed her that he had met a person in Tiruvannamalai who noted his name as Venkataraman of Tiruchuzhi. Encouraged by this news, she sent her brother-in-law, a softhearted man, to look for her son in Tiruvannamalai. On his return he confirmed, "Yes, I saw Venkataraman. He is totally absorbed in meditation. I pleaded with him to come back but he did not even reply. There was no response; he was motionless just like a rock." Mother Alagammal decided to go herself and plead with him to return, confident that he would not reject her pleas.

It was 1898, two years after Bhagavan had left Madurai and come to Tiruvannamalai. Bhagavan was seated on a rock at *Pavalakundru*, a small hillock within Tiruvannamalai. On reaching there, his mother pleaded with him, "Come back home. I won't disturb you. I will feed you. You are uncared for here. I will attend to your needs. I will not interfere in your life. You can continue your spiritual life there. Please come back." There was absolutely no response from Bhagavan. Like a rock, he remained motionless and still. As Muruganar would say, "Even a big boulder on *Arunachala* may move sometimes, but Bhagavan will seldom move. You cannot move Bhagavan."

One day, some residents in Tiruvannamalai, on seeing this elder woman crying all the way up the hill and down, reproached the young ascetic, "Why don't you give a reply? Either accept or decline! We have been observing this lady suffer for the last three days, and you do not even reply!" Then Bhagavan wrote a response on a piece of paper. This reply to his mother is his first written teaching and perhaps the best teaching.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

It is a forerunner to the book about *Self-Enquiry*, *Who am I?* He wrote, "The Ordainer prevailing everywhere makes each one play their role in life according to their karma. That which is not destined will not happen despite every effort. What is destined is bound to happen. This is certain; therefore the best course is to remain silent."

At face value, this merely looks like a reply rejecting a mother's plea. However, these words bear a deeper meaning. That which is not destined is bound not to happen. Then what is the role of an individual? If everything is predestined and everyone is acting according to how he or she is being directed to act, then what is the reality of an individual? This doubt raises the fundamental question, "Who am I?" With the next sentence, "This is certain," Bhagavan gives a stamp of authority, certainty, finality, for the mind needs a mirror of affirmation after an initial *Darshan*. The last sentence is, "The best course is to remain silent." To remain in silence is surrender. The first step is to surrender. Surrender in silence to be the stillness is the practice of being the Self. One cannot do this with a disturbed mind. This is the hidden wisdom in this first *upadesa* (instruction), which serves to quieten the mind when pondered. When we read about the life of a sage, not like a novel or a historical narrative, but with reverence and *bhakti*, a sentence, even a word can guide us, still us. This first teaching, which the mother Alagammal brought out from Bhagavan *Arunachala Ramanan*, is a most important and powerful one. *Every action is perfect.*

Bhagavan, through his note and his action, was indicating to his mother, "I am grateful to you, oh Mother Alagammal! I have this function of my Father, to allow the spread of the message that the true state is the awareness that is hidden in the Heart of everyone and that most of

humanity has simply forgotten it. This One is to remind everyone that *Arunachala* is actually the simple state of 'I Am' awareness as everyone's Heart. Vision is now obstructed by the mind, and this obstruction necessitates being recognized so that the Heart may shine forth in its entire splendor. This is my Father's command!" Bhagavan's mother went back to the rest of her family in disappointment. Though Bhagavan had given the highest *upadesa* to his mother in 1898, for nearly fifteen years after that, she was entangled in family affairs. Then in 1913, disaster struck: she lost all her close relatives except her youngest son, Bhagavan's younger brother.

In 1914, while still held in family entanglements, Mother came down with a raging fever. She was diagnosed with typhoid. Then Bhagavan, for the first time, pleaded with *Arunachala* saying, "Oh *Arunachala*, fire of wisdom, enfold my mother in your light and bring about her oneness with you!" Bhagavan's Mother, now fed up with the world, returned to Bhagavan to stay with him, for good, on the hill.

It took eight years for her to spiritually mature with Bhagavan—there are beautiful stories of how this happened. For instance, as a Brahmin, she was steeped in orthodoxy, and Bhagavan had to release her from her cultural prejudices. According to Hindu Brahmin orthodoxy, a Brahmin's clothes, kitchen, food, and personal items must be washed and touched by Brahmins alone, or else they were considered "impure." Brahmins would not even eat onions or garlic. Bhagavan one day brought a small onion, showed it to his mother and gently reprimanded her saying, "Be careful, this will be standing there at the gates of heaven, and it will push you out."
Being an orthodox Brahmin, Mother would feel defiled at the touch of

any dog. Since there were so many dogs residing with Bhagavan at *Skandashram*, Mother could not avoid coming in contact with them. As a result, she would bathe up to ten times a day to purify herself! Taking pity on her, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, a scholarly devotee said, "According to the Hindu scriptures if you touch a *jnani*, a realized soul, all pollution and sin is dropped from the body. You need not bathe." Whenever Bhagavan would see his mother approaching, he would know why she was coming to him. After she had touched him and gone away, he would give a mischievous smile saying, "Some dog must have touched her." By reprimanding and commenting gently like this, he slowly freed her from the grip of her prejudices. Her attachment to relatives had gone, but her maternal attachment to Bhagavan remained. She knew Bhagavan liked spinach and *Pappadam* (a thin wafer-like lentil crisp, only much bigger) and she would ask people to bring them for him.

One day when Mother was trying to gather ingredients to make *Pappadam*, she called out to Bhagavan, "Why don't you come help me? I am going to make *Pappadam*!" Bhagavan saw her attachment. Blinded by a mother's affection toward her son and not realizing his full spiritual stature, she wanted to satisfy his childhood desires. Bhagavan replied, "You make your *Pappadam* inside the cave, and I will make my *Pappadam* outside." This is how the '*Pappadam Song'* came about. In it, the arduous process of making a *Pappadam* is used as a metaphor for the process of attaining liberation. The Tamil in the song is beautiful. Bhagavan interpreted the song in the light of every ingredient used, including pepper and cumin, saying, "Let the ego be crushed in the quern of *Self-Enquiry*, seasoned with good company, i.e. satsang, softened and flattened, fried in the ghee of Brahman and eaten by the Self." The song asks, "How one's soul should be ripened? How should one's ego be

pounded, like flour is pounded?" The answer is with the enquiry, "Who am I? I? I? I?" This song touched the depth of the Mother's soul and slowly transformed her.

She was attached to her possessions and the *Higher Power* (*Shakti*) transformed this quality in a beautiful way. One day a resident at *Skandashram*, Sabapati, a renunciate, was wearing a torn cloth that did not cover much. Mother asked, "Sabapati, why are you wearing this torn cloth?" He playfully replied, "You are wearing a long sari. It is eight yards long, why don't you give me some of it?" She immediately tore two yards from the sari and gave it to Sabapati. Her detachment from material possessions had already begun.

Another day, some woodcutters came to Bhagavan at *Skandashram* and cried, "Bhagavan we are all hungry." Mother, who had cooked, would not share the food with others until she had eaten first, as she thought the food would get polluted. Bhagavan knew this. He told Kunjuswami, "Ask Mother to bring food and give it to them." She was hesitant. "Tell Bhagavan that I have not yet eaten," she protested. When Kunjuswami reported this to Bhagavan, he came to his mother, looked at her reproachfully and said, "Oh! So that's the reason. You think they are all different from you. Come and look. They are all standing down there. Do you know who they are? Look at them." She looked at them and Bhagavan said, "They are all *Arunachala* swaroopam, the forms of *Arunachala* (Self)." He did not use the word *untouchable*. From that moment on, she saw *Arunachala*, the Self, inclusive of everyone—there was no difference between her and anyone else.

A further instance is when Bhagavan's sister came to Mother and said,

"You are not well, mother. Come, I have a comfortable house." Mother refused, turned to Bhagavan and said, "I want to die in your arms. After my death you can even throw away my body into the thorny bushes, it does not matter."

Bhagavan fulfilled his duties to her as a son. He was already well known, with many people beginning to serve him. They would fetch water for him and painstakingly carry it uphill. However, for his own mother's needs, Bhagavan would bring water himself. He would carry two big *kamandalus*, make her sit and then, he would pour water over her to bathe her. He would also wash her clothes. While he attended to her physical requirements and was affectionate with her, she matured spiritually. Over eight years, slowly but surely, she was weaned away from the limiting confines of narrow-mindedness, dogma, orthodoxy, superstition, myths and social customs. The beauty of their relationship is that Bhagavan's mother surrendered to it all and allowed the transformation to take place.

Eventually, Mother fell seriously ill. Early in the morning, on the day of her death, Bhagavan sat next to her and put his left hand on her head and his right hand on the right side of her chest. He remained like that for nearly eight hours. The devotees who had gathered there knew that her end had come. They observed the beauty and the sanctity of the son relinquishing the Mother to the infinite. Kunju Swami and others, who were present, later said that they felt that it was a physical demonstration to his devotees of one's Self becoming seamless with the Absolute; the *Darshan* was like the heat and light spreading from a flame. After eight hours, Bhagavan removed his hands.

Previously with another devotee, Palani Swami, Bhagavan had done the

same thing, but at the last moment when he took his hands off, the life force vanished. This time, he remained with his hands placed on her until he felt a tingling sensation. Bhagavan said, "When the one merges with the Self and is completely annihilated, a soft clang, like that of a bell, can be felt." It was a common practice that after witnessing a death, all those present must bathe. However Bhagavan said that in this case there was no need to, as there was no pollution. "She did not die. Instead, she is now absorbed in *Arunachala*, the Self" he stated.

Later the devotees who were present enquired, "Bhagavan, what did you do by keeping your hands on her head and her chest? What exactly took place?" Bhagavan explained, "Innate tendencies and subtle memories of past experiences that lead to future possibilities became very active when my hands were placed on her. Scene after scene rolled before her in subtle consciousness. The outer senses had already gone. The being was at last disrobed of all the sheaths and limitations as it seamlessly joined the ocean, the supreme peace of liberation, from which there is no return to ignorance."

What is the precept that Bhagavan lay down before us through Mother's example? When Bhagavan was asked what the essence of his teaching was, he would reply, "Either ask, 'Who am I?' or surrender. They both are two sides of the same coin." Bhagavan clearly demonstrated the nuances of 'Who am I' in the lives of many devotees. However, with the example of his mother, he taught the aspect of surrender—for his mother had surrendered completely.

Mother's example also shows us what happens when one is immersed in *Self-Enquiry* and a state of silence is at hand. An experience like the one during Mother's death takes place. "Innate tendencies and subtle memories of past experiences leading to future possibilities become very active": when one is immersed in *Self-Enquiry* and silence, this happens. At this point, one is tempted to give up and say, "I am not able to proceed." "Scene after scene rolled before her in the subtle consciousness. The outer senses had already gone**….**" I.e., when one enquires deeply, the inner doors open to the seamless silent expanse. Once the soul is disrobed of all subtleties, it merges with a supreme peace or liberation, from which there is no boundary or return."

This teaching of the Mother is a clear example of the imminent grace that serves us all. She has shown us the way. Have complete faith—either take up the path of *Self-Enquiry,* or surrender totally to the *Higher Power*. In both cases Bhagavan has said, "Ego has no place." The ego, the "me," the "my," has no abode. That which rules is the infinite Self—*Arunachala*." As Bhagavan has said, "*Arunachala* is the Heart, the Self, and the [state of] I Am."

This *Human Gospel* shares chronicles of these spiritual elders returning to the physical, mystical *Arunachala* and being absorbed by *Arunachala*, the Self, prior to and after, relinquishing their bodies. Being the inexpressible, *Arunachala* is not only in space or in time as a hill. It is always the very here and now. All are inherent in it, like birds in the sky or fish in the ocean. This Truth is not going to enter your Heart; the Heart already inheres in it. Turn attention to "That". You are "That."

Bhagavan once said, "The function of the outer guru is to give a push, and that of the inner guru is to pull." *Arunachala* is also the outward guru who will give us all the push while remaining in the Heart as our nonphysical Self, pulling the moth-form of ego to the flame. So what is our destiny? We simply surrender doership. Wherever we are, we should live effortlessly in our Heart. Sacredness means that we let go into deep repose or silence. Wherever and whenever we are in silence, we are in sacredness—and that sacredness is called *Arunachala* by these spiritual elders.

Arunachala is not just a Hindu God or a dirt hill**,** but a sacred utterance and ancient natural symbol for reality, formless nonphysical existence itself. Since we have identified with our bodies and have imagined being limited selves, *Arunachala* has appeared as a hill to affirm our faith in silence: "There is no you, there is only the state of freedom. Be That." Be free like the sky. Be still like the hill. Accept change like the seasons. Be silent like complete emptiness. You are "That"!

GURUMURTAM

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

MOTHER'S TEMPLE
WITH THE PEAK OF ARUNACHALA BEHIND

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Palani Swami

Palani Swami (Nandi) was a reclusive ascetic. He religiously worshipped a stone image of Ganesa on the banks of a pool in Tiruvannamalai. Every day, he ate a simple single meal of boiled rice without salt or side dishes. This simple ascetic had but one aim, and that was to recognize the Truth. One day, one of his friends told him, "What is the use of worshipping this stone image? This will not give you anything. There is a God in flesh and blood. Like the five-year-old Dhruva, who did penance standing on one leg during ancient Puranic times, there is this young ascetic totally absorbed in samadhi. Go and serve him. Your life's purpose will be achieved."

Palani Swami went to Gurumurtam. Young Bhagavan was totally immersed in samadhi. The very first look at him shook Palani Swami to his roots. He saw not just God, but his guru as well. From that *Darshan* onward, for Palani Swami, there existed no world other than this supreme ascetic. Being an ascetic himself, he could perceive the boy-saint's depth of spiritual surrender. He vowed to himself, "Until death, I will serve this saint."

He then began to serve Bhagavan at Gurumurtam and saw to it that the insects did not bother his Master. While Bhagavan was immersed in

Nirvikalpa samadhi (deep body-less repose), people would shake the body, try to talk to him, and touch him. Palani Swami's duty was to protect this physical form and also ensure that this highest spiritual state remained undisturbed. He would feed Bhagavan one cup of whatever food was collected. This way, some food was offered regularly to Bhagavan. He even raised a fence around Bhagavan who remained inside. Whenever Palani Swami needed to go outside, he would lock the door so that nobody could bother Bhagavan.

In this manner he attended to Bhagavan for eighteen months, day and night. Sometime later, Bhagavan had to move out of these premises. In the next compound, there was a mango orchard. Its owner requested Bhagavan and Palani Swami to come and stay there. There was only a thatched hut made of coconut leaves. Palani Swami and Bhagavan stayed there for six months, undisturbed, because the owner of the orchard strictly prohibited visitors. This was the time when another facet of Bhagavan opened up. Palani Swami was thirty years older than Bhagavan and held a fatherly affection for him. Like a caring father, Palani Swami would go to the town library and get books for his adopted son to read. Palani Swami's mother tongue was Malayalam. The books he brought were, naturally, in Malayalam. But Bhagavan had no knowledge of Malayalam, as his native language was Tamil. So Bhagavan requested him, "Palani Swami, teach me Malayalam." Within a few hours, Bhagavan had picked up the language and was able to read, write, and understand it. (Kunju Swami told me that Bhagavan was an *ekagrahi*, which in Sanskrit means "the one with one-pointed observation." Like the negative of a photograph, which, when once exposed, remains imprinted with the image, there was no need for him to refer to anything again — without

mental distractions; he had a clear memory.

It was thus that Bhagavan first read *Kaivalya Navaneetam*, *Adyatma Ramayanam*, *Yoga Vashistam, Prabhulinga Lilai,* and many other works. When reading some of these advaitic and vedantic books, he recognized that what he had experienced at the age of sixteen until the present moment was being described in these books. This was where he learned words like *samadhi*, *atma*, *Maya*, *Darshan*, and *samsara*. It was "after" the spiritual conversion, and was an affirmation, not a prerequisite.

Arunachala, the still, omniscient Self, had dominion over Ramana Maharshi to abide in his state of awareness and let it be approachable throughout humanity by revealing that it is the same nameless Self, existence, or Heart, of every being. In order to carry out this communication and sharing with theists, some theist education was indispensable. Bhagavan's fluency in scriptures and vedantic language had its roots in this phase of his life after his conversion.

Sometime later, the owner of the orchard wanted them to vacate the premises. They moved to the *Arunaigirinathar* temple. There, he told Palani Swami, "You go begging this way, and I will go begging the other way." Bhagavan himself has described all this. He would go stand in front of a house, clap twice, and wait. If they gave something in his hands, he would eat it then and there. Without feeling the need to wash regularly, he would wipe his hand on his hair. Later, Bhagavan recalled, "When I was doing that, I felt I was the single sovereign monarch of the world." That is why Bhagavan declares that true renunciation is not only to not embrace the notion of ownership, but also to not feel dependent on anyone or anything. He would not be a beggar a second time in the same

house. Consequently, he ended up begging in almost all the streets and houses in Tiruvannamalai. In the *Arunaigirinathar* temple also, the crowd of people began to harass him. They could not understand why Bhagavan was seated in *samadhi* all the time. When Palani Swami wasn't present, they would disturb him.

Palani Swami noticed a small knoll called *Pavalakundru*, and moved Bhagavan there. Throughout Palani Swami's relationship with Bhagavan, he was always in the background because his duty was to preserve the physical vehicle of Bhagavan and see that his deep *samadhi* state was not disturbed. He never interfered with the other activities of Bhagavan.

Gradually, word of Bhagavan spread throughout the town, and a few people started gathering at *Pavalakundru,* as well. Palaniswami went in search of another place and noticed the *Virupaksha* cave on the hill. Bhagavan later on said, "When we went to *Virupaksha* cave for the first time, there was nothing there except an earthen pot."

A few years later, a few female devotees started serving food during daytime at *Virupaksha* cave. Other attendants like Perumal Swami, Ayya Swami, and Kandaswami also joined him in the course of the years, but Palani Swami always remained the primary attendant. One day, someone put a statue of Ganesa in a niche inside *Virupaksha* cave. Palani Swami was overwhelmed and requested Bhagavan, "Why don't you make some offering to Lord Ganesa?" Bhagavan's way of making an offering was not through food, garlands, or flowers, but through verse. This was the first composition by Bhagavan:

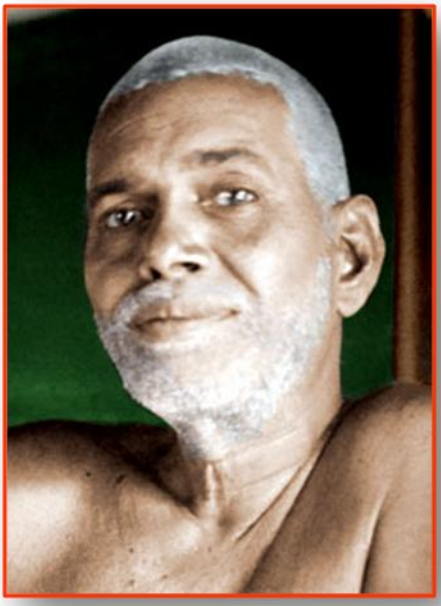
Lord residing in the niche with a big and fat belly, You who allowed your father to go around begging, at least now shower your glance of grace on me, Who too is the son of the Father.

In the evenings, the people who served Bhagavan would beg in the streets to collect food. The traditional song sung to collect alms was one by Adi Shankara: "*Shamba Sadashiva Samba Sadashiva Samba Sadashiva Samba Shiva Om*." When they heard this refrain, people in the town of Tiruvannamalai knew that Bhagavan's attendants were coming for alms, and they would be ready with food. Knowing this, some mischief maker began to go ahead of them and collect the food instead. So his attendants requested Bhagavan, "Please compose a song, which we can sing exclusively to collect alms." Bhagavan, in his usual manner, did not respond. The very next day when they were going around the hill with the devotees, Palani Swami called Ayya Swami, the most literate among them, aside and said, "Our Bhagavan is murmuring, so perhaps he is composing some verses. Take this paper and pencil." During that one circumambulation, one hundred and eight verses were compiled by Bhagavan. These were faithfully taken down by Ayya Swami. Titled *Aksharamanamaalai,* or *The Marital Garland of Letters*, it is one of the most spiritually moving, devotional hymns ever written.

After a while, Bhagavan moved further up the hill to *Skandashram,* the higher cave. Palani Swami spent a few days there. But due to old age, he became weak and could not climb up the hill to the *Ashram*. With Bhagavan's permission, he stayed on at *Virupaksha* cave. Every day, Bhagavan would come and spend time with Palani Swami. One day while in *Skandashram*, Bhagavan noticed a peacock flying up from *Virupaksha*

cave, making abnormal noises. He immediately rushed, saying, "This is the end of Palani Swami." When he reached *Virupaksha* cave, Palani Swami was already breathing very hard. Like a son, Bhagavan kept Palani Swami's head on his lap until he dropped the body. (In Hindu tradition, when the father dies, the son must keep the father's head on his lap as his final duty. According to the scriptures, if a father gets such an opportunity, he will go to heaven.)

For years, Palani Swami had selflessly served his Master. Now it was time for this "*Nandi*" to return to *Arunachala*, the silent abode of God.



AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Perumal Swami

Perumal Swami was a ruffian with a robust body and a rough demeanor. He came to Bhagavan in *Virupaksha* cave in 1914. He was well known in Tiruvannamalai town and had many wealthy friends. Perumal Swami could have lived very affluently, even as a sadhu, because his friends would have looked after him very well. The first meeting with Bhagavan left him awestruck. He accepted Bhagavan as his guru and chose to beg for him in the streets of Tiruvannamalai.

At *Virupaksha* cave, he prevented many untoward things from happening to Bhagavan. Once, when he and Palani Swami were away in the town leaving Bhagavan alone in the cave, a group of fierce-looking *hairagi sadhus* arrived with swords and spears. They said, "We are from the Vindhya hills, the kingdom of the *Siddhas*. The head of the *Siddhas* told us that at *Arunachala,* there is a ripe soul who needs the final initiation. He commanded us to bring him there. Whether you accept it or not, we are going to physically remove you to the Vindhya hills."

Bhagavan sat silently, unmoved. Some of the shepherd boys heard the commotion and felt that something troublesome was happening. They rushed to Perumal Swami. He ran back to *Virupaksha* cave, and in one look sized up the situation. He cleverly told the *hairagis*, "I come from a

nearby village." Last night I had a dream, in which the head *Siddha* of the Vindhya hills appeared and said, "My disciples will be coming to *Virupaksha* cave tomorrow. You go there and ready a cauldron of oil, fry them in that cauldron, and bring their fried bodies to me." Then he ordered the shepherd boys, "Hey! Go and bring the firewood. I will go into town and bring a cauldron and some tins of oil, so that we can fry these people." End of story!

Perumal Swami had managerial qualities, which Palani Swami did not have. However, his being a robust, forceful man had its drawbacks. When Bhagavan's mother came to stay at *Virupaksha* cave, Perumal Swami disliked it and shouted, "You get out! You cannot stay here." Though deeply hurt, she obeyed. Tucking her one sari or so in a bundle under her arm, she walked out in sadness. Bhagavan, who was seated outside, got up, and with tender affection, took the bundle from her and said, "Come, let us go away from where we are not needed." Perumal Swami fell at Bhagavan's feet and requested them to stay.

When Bhagavan went to *Skandashram*, Perumal Swami also went along with the others. Among the many attendants that gathered in the *Ashram*, there was one Yazhpani from Sri Lanka. (Sri Lanka was known as Yazhpanam. He was called Yazhpani.) He was a scrupulously clean person. He would sweep *Skandashram* daily and keep everything spotless. His reputation was equally spotless; whenever Bhagavan returned to the *Ashram* and leaves were scattered about, he would ask, "Is Yazhpani not here?"

Once, Yazhpani spread a paste of cow dung on the rough, soft earth of *Skandashram*, to make the ground smoother and harder. When Perumal Swami, who was somewhat like the manager of *Skandashram*, came and saw it while it was still wet and slippery, he became livid and shouted, "Yazhpani, get out of *Skandashram*!" Yazhpani was a very sincere devotee of Bhagavan. He could not leave Bhagavan, but also wanted to obey the orders of the manager. Being a clever man, he tried to find a way out. There was a tall coconut tree inside *Skandashram* that protruded outside the *Ashram* grounds. Quickly he got onto the tree, climbed to the top of it, and stayed there. Now he was technically "out" of the *Ashram* without leaving it! Everyone pleaded with him to come down, but he refused. At lunch, Bhagavan noticed that Yazhpani was missing. The other devotees then related what had happened. Bhagavan got up, went toward the coconut tree and gently said, "Yazhpani, you may come and share the food." He spoke so softly that this man came down like a child, and started eating his food.

Another day, Bhagavan was heard saying, "I had a notebook, in which I had written verses. A person from Uttarkasi took it, but has not returned it. It is several months now. I need that notebook." Yazhpani disappeared for many days. He went to Uttarkasi, found the particular sadhu and fetched the notebook. He came back one day and presented it to Bhagavan. Bhagavan was very happy. Yazhpani told the other devotees that it had taken him several days, without a minute's rest, to fulfill the guru's need. That was the one-pointed devotion he had.

There was a sadhu living at *Skandashram* who was called Sepoy Swami. (Sepoy means "soldier," and he was called so because he was a retired

army man.) He had a tendency toward military etiquette. Totally devoted to Bhagavan, he expressed his devotion by guarding Bhagavan, and felt it was his duty to be Bhagavan's guardian. Thus, whenever Bhagavan was seated at *Skandashram,* he would come with a long stick that was supposed to be his rifle, and stand in attention next to him. Every minute that Bhagavan was seated there, he would stand guard, silently, not looking at anybody else, completely immersed in meditation next to him.

One day, Perumal Swami got vexed with him and shouted, "What are you doing? Are you enacting some drama here? Get out of *Skandashram*!" This man wanted to obey, but could not go away from Bhagavan. So he stood outside *Skandashram*, guarding Bhagavan from outside, just like he had been doing from within its walls. One day, he felt that Bhagavan was not properly honored. To Sepoy Swami, his Master was the sovereign monarch of the whole universe, and he felt people were not honoring Bhagavan appropriately. His feeling of veneration led him to decide that a king must have horses. He went home, sold all his property, and bought many horses. He brought them to *Skandashram*, not knowing how to maintain them. In the course of time, one after the other, the horses all died. If you do not go into the logic of it, you will admire the devotion of poor Sepoy Swami.

Though Perumal Swami disliked Bhagavan's mother, when she passed away in 1922, it was he who, along with others, carried her body to the present site of *Ramanashram*. After putting the body down, he went into town and got all the ingredients necessary for creating her *samadhi*. However, Bhagavan, after a while, began staying in the present *Ramanashram,* which was then just a simple thatched grass shed over the

grave of his Mother. When Bhagavan began staying there, Perumal Swami did not like it.

He also intensely loathed Bhagavan's brother Niranjanananda (Chinna Swami). Slowly, the management of *Ramanashram* was being handed over to Chinna Swami, which he stoutly opposed. He went to court and filed a suit against Bhagavan and tried to pull Bhagavan into court. He even created a statue of Bhagavan, started another *Ramanashram* in town and then proclaimed it as the real *Ramanashram*! Further, he declared himself the secretary of this institution! Chinna Swami was the secretary of the original *Ramanashram*. Whenever mail arrived, there was always a tug-of-war in the town post office. Then Bhagavan solved it very simply. He said, "Let all the letters go to Perumal Swami. Whatever he wants to take let him take, and whatever he does not want, let us take. Where is the need to quarrel?"

When Perumal Swami was thus frustrated and agitated, Bhagavan sent word through Kunju Swami: "Tell Perumal Swami that he should not swerve away from spiritual sadhana." Perumal Swami did not listen, but Bhagavan never gave up on him. When he lost the court case and felt humbled, he fell ill. He sent word to Bhagavan: "Bhagavan, I want to come and apologize. I have committed a sin." The rest of the people in the *Ashram* said, "No! He is the person who went against you, Bhagavan. He should not be allowed to come inside the *Ashram*." When Bhagavan heard this, he said, "Why do you say so? He is our Perumal Swami. Let him come." When Perumal Swami came, everyone looked at him with "acid" eyes. He broke down before Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, I have committed such a terrible sin. I will surely go to hell." Bhagavan

smiled at him and said, "Perumal Swami, will I not be with you even there?" That was a turning point for Perumal Swami. He chose a small cave near Seshadri Swami *Ashram* and started living there in meditation and contemplation. Even after Bhagavan dropped the body, he felt he must have prasad of *Ramanashram*. Hence, Kunju Swami came from *Ramanashram* with rice and *rasam* for Perumal Swami twice a day. That is how Bhagavan took care of him. He may have been rough-edged, but Bhagavan took care of him. So we can be sure that he, too, was absorbed back into *Arunachala*, the divine stillness

ARUNACHALA SHIVA BECOMING VISIBLE AT SUNRISE

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Ramanatha Brahmachari

Bhagavan once said, "I am afraid only of two people—one is Ramanatha Brahmachari and the other is Mudaliar Paati." He said this because these two people were ascetics who served Bhagavan with utterly selfless devotion.

Ramanatha Brahmachari was a student studying the Vedas in the *Vedapatashala* (school of the Vedas) in town. He met Bhagavan one day and his whole being was brought into silence. His Mind and Heart opened up to Bhagavan, so he decided to be with him for as long as possible. Though the *Pataskala* provided free food and lodging to its students, young Ramanatha preferred to stay with Bhagavan. He begged for food on the streets and took that food to Bhagavan in *Virupaksha* cave. Whatever Bhagavan shared with him, he ate willingly. Such was the beauty and surrender of this ascetic.

He served Bhagavan's Mother because he was a Brahmin boy, and Bhagavan's Mother was still following her orthodox ways. Ramanatha would help wash her vessels as well as her clothes, and she would shout his name, "Ramanatha, Ramanatha," for every errand. Hearing her, Bhagavan would humorously remark, "The japa of my Mother has started again!"

One day, Bhagavan told Ramanatha that he had succeeded in realizing the Self. Ramanatha could not believe it. He wanted confirmation from Bhagavan again and again. Bhagavan reassured him many times, "Yes Ramanatha, you have realized the Self!" But Ramanatha was still incredulous. Bhagavan got up and rapped him on his head with his knuckles and repeated, "Yes Ramanatha, you are realized." This simple devotee went into ecstasy and ran out of the room, telling everyone he met, "This is the place where Bhagavan knuckled me!" He did not care that he had attained self-realization. Bhagavan's knuckling him was greater than self-realization for him!

This innocent disciple was serving other devotees, too. When a man arrived at the *Ashram* with a calf, which Bhagavan named Lakshmi, there was nobody to look after her. With panthers and tigers lurking around, Bhagavan said, "There is nobody to look after Lakshmi; else she could have been kept here." Then Ramanatha, who was only four-and-a-half feet in height, said, "Bhagavan, I will look after Lakshmi." This was the beginning of the *Ramanashram* goshala.

All the visiting devotees would come in late at night, as the train arrived at eight-thirty. In *Ramanashram*, after dinner at seven, most everyone would go to sleep by seven-thirty. Bhagavan wanted the visitors to be attended to. Nobody offered to look after them. Ramanatha said, "Bhagavan, I will look after them." Every night he would stay awake attending to the visitors. The next day, Bhagavan would beam him a big smile and affectionately say, "Oh, so you looked after them and attended to their needs? Good, good, good!"

Once, when Ramanatha was going around the hill with Bhagavan, each was asked to speak on a spiritual topic. Ramanatha, in an ecstatic state, compared Bhagavan with mythical Lord Shiva and the others with the *bhutaganas,* i.e. Shiva's attendants. Afterward, at the request of Bhagavan, he wrote it down in Tamil verses. The first verse means, "I saw the Lord of Tiruchuzhi and got fixed without returning again" meaning, "I achieved realization, no more am I the body. My Lord bestowed on me this Self-realization."

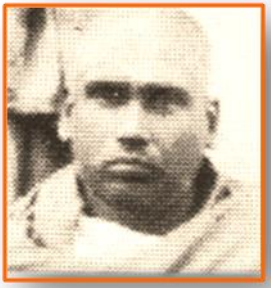
In 1946, he fell sick. He was taken to Madras, which is now called Chennai, for treatment, but the body passed away. When the news reached Bhagavan, he observed total silence, which, in 1946, was very rare. Hundreds of people were around, but he was totally absorbed. One of the devotees of Bhagavan, my own mother, loved Ramanatha Brahmachari. I once asked my mother, "Which song do you like of all the songs by Muruganar, Om Sadhu and Sivaprakasam Pillai?" My mother replied, "The song I like is the one composed by Ramanatha Brahmachari."

Devotees like Ramanatha Brahmachari show guidelines on how to follow and love a realized person, a *jnani*, and get liberation in this life itself.

FIRST KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH OF RAMANA MAHARSHI

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Gambhiram Seshayya



In Hindu culture, the first aspect of the Lord is the formless, still, un-manifested Shiva, the Father. Second is the Shakti: sound, movement, creation, form, Mother Nature, and the World. To emerge thus, *Arunachala* Shiva, the formless, "showed itself" through the transparent form of an innocent egoless man, Ramana Maharshi. For the second aspect, preservation, destiny guides people like Palani Swami, Mother Alagammal, Ramanatha Brahmachari, and others to look after Bhagavan's body and maintain his environment. The third aspect of the Lord is dissolution, *Kali*. The Destruction of what, you might ask. It is the undoing of ignorance through the teaching of the highest wisdom that removes all obstacles, including the "I am the body" notion.

To bring about this function, the grace of *Arunachala* (God) attracted two intellectuals—Gambhiram Seshayya and Sivaprakasam Pillai. In fact, according to the *Vedanta Choodamani*, a Tamil book on *Vedanta*, which Bhagavan loved to quote, one of the most important functions of a devotee is the upholding of his or her Master's teachings in comprehension, practice, and sharing with others.

Gambhiram Seshayya gracefully found himself in Bhagavan's life for this function. Bhagavan once said, "Gambhiram is not his name. Gambhiram is a title given to his family. His great grandfather was serving a king, and

because of his uprightness, was given the title '*Gambhiram*,' which means 'majestic nobility.' Therefore that became their family name." Coincidently, on the first or second day that Bhagavan went begging in Tiruvannamalai, he happened to stop in front of a house where four people were gambling and playing cards. When, as usual, he clapped his hands for alms, the house owner went in, and, shame-facedly, brought out some food for Bhagavan. This man was Gambhiram Seshayya's brother, Gambhiram Krishna Iyer, who never gambled again.

Gambhiram Seshayya was a government officer who was well-read in philosophy. In 1900 he was transferred to Tiruvannamalai, where he heard of a Brahmin boy, an ascetic, who lived in *Virupaksha* cave. Propelled by his own philosophical interests, he paid a visit to the ascetic, who was none other than Bhagavan. Just one glance from Bhagavan, and Gambhiram Seshayya was captivated. He saw before him in human form, all that he had studied in the scriptures, and a reflection of the very Truth he was seeking, his Self.

He had studied many books on yoga and philosophy—particularly those of Swami Vivekananda. He had many questions. He brought these books to Bhagavan and asked him to review them and answer his questions. And since he assumed that Bhagavan was in formal silence, he always wrote his doubts on a piece of paper. Bhagavan, after looking carefully at the scriptural texts, responded with answers in writing. Much later, Bhagavan humorously remarked, "They said I was in silence; I never took a vow of silence. I never took a vow of fasting. Nobody shared with me food, so I was without food. They said, 'Our Swami is fasting.' Nobody talked to me, so I kept quiet. And they said, 'Swami is in silence,

do not disturb the silence.'"

Gambhiram Seshayya not only put forth excellent questions, but requested Bhagavan to condense some passages that he found difficult to grasp. "Please simplify these big passages so that I can understand them," he would say. Bhagavan would do this, too. Many subjects were discussed, and everything was explained in the light and nomenclature of the Hindu scriptures. While some of these questions were based on *Self-Enquiry*, most were on different aspects of Hindu philosophy, including many forms of yoga, *sadhana*, concentration, meditation, God, World, ego, liberation, pranayama, and *ashtanga* yoga. Of these, Gambhiram Seshayya was most interested in *ashtanga* yoga.

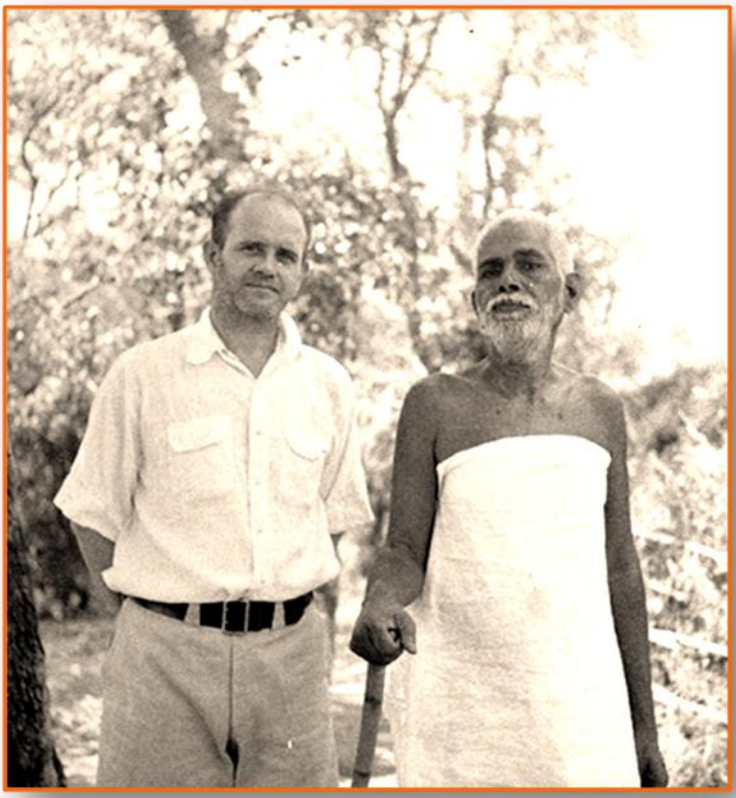
While Bhagavan did explain the intricacies of other paths, including the path of *ashtanga* yoga, he never swerved from affirming the path of wisdom as the direct one. In fact, Bhagavan has remarked that while yoga is like taming the turbulent bull of the mind by forcibly yoking it, the path of wisdom is like gently taming the bull by calming it with some grass, and then yoking it.

Gambhiram Seshayya served Bhagavan with the opportunity to study books on yoga, philosophy, and other paths, so Bhagavan would be prepared with this information. Bhagavan became like a University of Philosophy. He was to review almost all the scriptures, as he was to meet and compare notes with intellectuals like Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, a well-versed scholar in Hinduism. He was also to meet academics of other nations and religions such as Paul Brunton, Frank Humphreys, and Dr. Hafiz Sayed (the last, an authority on Islam). Gambhiram Seshayya

served as a means of helping him fulfill this function. Gambhiram Seshayya was also instrumental in taking those slips of paper and notebooks, with his questions and Bhagavan's answers, for future devotees. The information from these became the first book on the teachings of Bhagavan in Tamil, titled *Vichara Sangraham*. It was later translated in English and was first titled *Catechism of Enquiry*, which was then changed to *Self-Enquiry*.

BHAGAVAN'S STONE BED INSIDE THE CAVE HERMATAGE

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN



WALKING WITH RAMANA MAHARSHI

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Sivaprakasam Pillai

When Sivaprakasam Pillai came to Bhagavan in 1902, he was, like Gambhiram Seshayya, a government officer who had studied philosophy. Even while in college, he would practice introspection and ponder, "Who am I?" Sivaprakasam Pillai later said, "I thought it was a fleeting thought."

He visited Bhagavan at the same *Virupaksha* cave. As with Gambhiram Seshayya, just one glance of pure grace from Bhagavan, and he was totally enthralled. He could see his God and guru in Bhagavan. Being a very practical and clear thinking person, his very first question was, "Swami, who am I?" This question opened the floodgates of the teachings, which are saturating all cultures throughout humanity and continue to do so.

His approach to Bhagavan's teachings was a practice-oriented one. Sivaprakasam Pillai posed fourteen questions to Bhagavan, who wrote the answers to thirteen of them on a slate and in the sand. The answers were erased eventually. Therefore Sivaprakasam Pillai wrote the answers to those questions from memory.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "Swami, who am I? And how is salvation to be attained?"
Maharshi: "By the incessant inward query, 'who am I?' You will recognize your Self and thereby attain salvation."
Sivaprakasam Pillai: (again) "Who am I?"
Maharshi: "The real 'I', or Self, is neither the body nor the five senses, nor sense objects, nor the organs of action, nor the *prana* (the breath or vital force), nor the mind. It is not even the deep state of sleep where there is no cognition of these."

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "If I am none of these, what else am I?"
Maharshi: "After rejecting each of these and saying, 'This, I am not,' that state, which alone remains, is 'I.' That is consciousness."

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "What is the nature of that consciousness?"
Maharshi: "It is *Satchidananda*, the consciousness of bliss, in which there is not even the slightest trace of the 'I' thought. This is also called silence—silence or the atma—Self. That is that. If the trinity of the World, ego, and God are considered as separate entities, they become mere illusions—like the appearance of silver in the mother-of-pearl. God, ego, and the World are really *atmaswaroopa*, the infinite form of the Self."

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "How are we to realize that real nature?"
Maharshi: "When the things seen disappear, the true nature of the seer appears."

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "Is it not possible to realize this while still seeing external things?"
Maharshi: "No. This is because the seer and the seen are like a rope and

the appearance of a serpent. You cannot see that what exists is only the rope."

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "When will external objects vanish?"
Maharshi: "If the mind, which is the cause of all thoughts and activities, vanishes, then external objects will also vanish."

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "What is the nature of the mind?"
Maharshi: "The mind consists of only thoughts. It is a form of energy. It manifests itself as the world. When the mind sinks into the Self, then the Self is realized. When the mind focuses outwardly, the world appears, and the Self is not realized."

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "How will the mind vanish?"
Maharshi: "Through the query, 'who am I?' Though this inward probing is also a mental operation, it destroys all mental operations including the method—just as the stick with which the funeral pyre is stoked, is by itself reduced to ashes after the pyre and the corpse have been *burned*. Only then dawns the realization of the Self. The I-thought is destroyed. Breath and other signs of vitality subside. The ego and *prana* have a common source. Whatever you do, do it without egotism, i.e., without feeling doership. When a man reaches that state, even his own wife will appear to him as the Universal Mother. In true devotion, we surrender the ego to the Self."

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "Are there no other ways of destroying the mind?"
Maharshi: "There is no other adequate method except *Self-Enquiry*. If the mind is lulled by other means, it stays quiet for a little while, but then springs up like a wave and resumes its former activity."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "But when will all the *vasana*s, tendencies, and instincts, such as that of self-preservation, are subdued within us?"
Maharshi: "The more you withdraw into the Self, the more these tendencies wither and finally drop off."

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "Is it really possible to root out all these tendencies that have been soaked in our minds through many births?"
Maharshi: "Never yield room in your mind for such doubts. Instead, dive into the Self with a firm resolve. If the mind is constantly directed to the Self by *Self-Enquiry*, it is eventually dissolved and transformed into the Self. When you see any doubt, do not try to elucidate it. Instead try to recognize who it is and to whom the doubt occurs."

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "How long should one go on with this *Self-Enquiry*?"
Maharshi: "As long as there is the least trace of an impulse in your mind-citadel, it will keep on making sorties. If you eradicate each one as it comes out, the citadel will fall to you. Similarly, each time a thought rears its head, crush it with *Self-Enquiry*. Stamping out all thoughts at their source is called *vairagya* or dispassion. *Vichara* or *Self-Enquiry* continues to be necessary until the Self is realized. What is required is continuous and uninterrupted remembrance of the Self."

Sivaprakasam Pillai: "Is not this World, and what takes place in it, a result of God's will? If so, why should God will thus?"

Maharshi: "God has no purpose. He is not bound by any action, and the World's activities cannot affect him. Take the analogy of the sun. The sun rises without desire, purpose, or effort, but as soon as it rises, numerous activities take place on earth. The lens placed in its rays

produce fire, the lotus bud opens, water evaporates, and every living creature enters upon activity, maintains its activity, and finally drops it. However, the sun is not affected by any such activity, as it merely acts according to its nature by fixed laws, without any purpose. It is only a witness. So it is with God. Or take the analogy of space or the ether. Earth, Water, Fire, and Air are all in it, are modified in it, and yet none of this affects ether or space. It is the same with God. God has no desire or purpose in acts of creation, maintenance, destruction, withdrawal, and salvation, to which earthly beings are subjected. As beings reap the fruits of their action in accordance to natural laws, the responsibility is theirs, not God's. God is not bound by any actions."

Later, Sivaprakasam Pillai put forth fourteen other questions, to which also Bhagavan shared answers. These twenty-eight questions and answers make up the booklet, *Who am I?,* an essential guide to aspirants. It enables us to realize that we are the same Self, the same awareness that pervaded Sri Ramana Maharshi and still pervades all of creation as the pristine Self. The essence of the fourteen other questions is below:

That, which arises in the physical body as 'I,' is the mind. The 'I' feeling arises from the Heart or core of being. By enquiring, '*Who am I*?" the attention goes within, and is hence shuttled through transient thoughts. Perseverance in this practice gives strength to the mind to go to the source and be absorbed in the Self. Following *Sattvic* (pure) principles—eating simple nutritious food in moderate quantity and observing simple rules of good conduct—is most conducive to the development of pure qualities of the mind. This in turn helps one to pursue *Self-Enquiry*

without hindrance, and without giving room to any form in the Self. All *vasanas* (tendencies) will be dissolved.

One should firmly and unceasingly focus on the one Self. One should unswervingly put the teachings of the Master into constant practice.

Self is bliss. Whenever the mind experiences happiness as in deep sleep, *samadhi*, or when a desired object is obtained, it is due to the mind relinquishing its desire and being the blissful Self. The relinquishment is the antithesis of effort. Like the wise man that never leaves the shade, thus avoiding the scorching sun, one may always be aware absorbed in the Self and free of doership. The Self is like the sun, which is unaffected by any activity of the forms of life which it sustains. To keep the mind constantly turned inward, and to be thus as the Self, alone is *atma vichara*, or *Self-Enquiry*. If the mind subsides, all else will subside. To be and to remain in the Self or one's true nature alone, is liberation or mukti.

Sivaprakasam Pillai exemplified these teachings. He showed how an aspirant should sustain himself in the Self after *Self-Enquiry*. He adored the Master, and he assimilated whatever Bhagavan said and put it into practice. However, a devotee, when putting Bhagavan's teachings into practice, may misunderstand.

For instance, when Bhagavan extolled renunciation, Sivaprakasam Pillai assumed that Bhagavan meant *sanyasa.* He went home and shaved his head and donned only a single piece of cloth. He even discarded the sacred thread that he wore daily. Bhagavan looked at him and asked, "Why have you shaved your head? Go on, grow your hair and wear your

sacred thread." He then understood that Bhagavan did not want any public exhibition or trappings of putting his teachings into practice. Attachment to doership, the World or to its objects was to be relinquished—not displayed on the outside, but on the inside, silently, where spiritual pride would not fester.

He stayed with Bhagavan quite often at *Virupaksha* cave and also at *Skandashram*. He began to mature spiritually as a result of his proximity to the Master and imbibing his teachings. Sivaprakasam then wanted to give up his job and devote himself completely toward Self-realization. Bhagavan did not offer him permission to do so.

Sivaprakasam Pillai was an honest worker. However, three years later, when maturity had settled in, he told Bhagavan once again that he could not go to work because when he went to work, he was immersed in *Self-Enquiry* and could not attend to his office duties. Bhagavan offered him permission to resign, and asked him to go back to his village and practice *Self-Enquiry*. Sivaprakasam Pillai obeyed his Master's counsel and went to his native village.

He stayed alone in the outskirts of the village, in an old Ganesa temple or sometimes in nearby forests. He constantly practiced atma vichara or *Self-Enquiry*. During this period, his state of consciousness and behavior suddenly altered. He started laughing for no apparent reason, loudly chanted sacred hymns in Tamil, prostrated to all forms that he came across, and wore a long loin cloth with a sacred ash bag tucked into it. Bhagavan had offered him this sacred ash bag a few years earlier, asking him to smear its contents on his body. (This is the only case I have

encountered where Bhagavan had specifically instructed a devotee to smear sacred ash.) Sivaprakasam Pillai covered his entire body with sacred ash, carried a small staff, forgot caste restrictions and started frequenting the cremation ground and other areas occupied by the so-called outcasts.

In this state, he also walked all the way to a temple town nearby, and back. He accepted gruel and sour food offered to him by anyone. When he returned to his village, he returned to his normal consciousness. Thereafter, he visited Bhagavan many times in a year, each time staying for about fifteen days. Through all this time, the outer guru was giving him a push while the inner guru in Sivaprakasam Pillai pulled him inward to Self-*vichara* for long periods of time. In the state of ecstasy, Sivaprakasam Pillai composed many poems. Bhagavan appreciated and approved them. He even included some of them in the daily *parayana* or recitation in the *Ashram*.

Following are four of his poems:

From dawn to dusk I spend my day in vain talks,

Not even for a moment do I think 'Who am I?' My Lord, you have told me if you speak one word it will multiply into many words.

Ramana Deva, I am only pretending to be your devotee and not conducting myself as one.

I am a sinner who wastes most of his time listening to others' misdeeds and talking

about them.

I have many defects myself, but if others mention them, my mind boils with rage.

Thinking that there is no harm in it, I do not hesitate to utter small lies. Oh! Ramana Deva, is it not high drama to fall at your feet as if I am your devotee?

Though I have become old and suffer from various diseases, I have not destroyed the desire for women.

The ghost of my mind desires to see their beautiful faces, converse with them, and listen to their honey-like speech.

Even though I give advice to the mind, it does not subside but wanders after them.

Ramana Deva, when will this delusion end and my mind become firm?

You know that my qualities and character are poor. You also know that among the ignorant full of defects, I am the worst.

Though you know all this, you still sort me and took possession of me. Ramana Deva, how can I explain this wonder?

One devotee asked Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, Sivaprakasam Pillai was such a great ascetic. He unswervingly put your teachings into practice. Reading his poems, I wonder where I stand! If he is in this wretched state, what will happen to me?" Bhagavan responded with a beautiful reply: "When

extolling God, Adi Shankara and other sages have berated their selves and said the same thing. This is how the sages guide others and warn aspiring aspirants."

Viswanatha Swami told me that once he asked Sri Bhagavan to show him who Sivaprakasam Pillai was, though he knew that he was seated in the Hall. The Hall was crowded with devotees; perhaps it was a festive day. Bhagavan pointed his finger toward the farthest corner of the Hall and said: "There, you see! With both arms covering his bare chest and seated unobtrusively like a rustic villager. That is our Sivaprakasam Pillai. He sits here like a domesticated cat—one should see him at his office. There, he is like a wild lion. His uprightness, honesty, and hard work mark him out and cause everyone to approach him with awe and respect!"

Coming to know that Sivaprakasam Pillai had become old, sick, and was unable to come out of his village, my father who had not seen him, urged Kunju Swami to take him to his village, which was near Chidambaram.

The austere appearance of Sivaprakasam Pillai and his humility were outstanding. His body was unblemished like molten gold with spiritual maturity. While introducing Sivaprakasam Pillai to my father, Kunju Swami wholeheartedly and reverentially lauded him as the most humble, scholar-devotee who brought out Sri Bhagavan's Direct Teaching.

Sivaprakasam Pillai, in all humility and with fervent love, held both the hands of Kunju Swami and put them on his eyes and on his head. Tears flowing from his eyes, he said: "These sacred hands had the great good fortune of touching and serving the holy body of my Master. That merit I

never had in my life. You are all very blessed and infinitely greater!"

After narrating this incident, Kunju Swami said: "This is how truly great people will put themselves down to enhance the glory of others. Where are the 'others' for them? Every one is the same, single Self only!"

When Sivaprakasam Pillai was to drop the body in 1948, the news was reported to Bhagavan. Bhagavan went into a very long silence. And when the news of his passing came, Bhagavan affirmed, "Sivaprakasam *Shiva prakasam anaar,*" which means, "Sivaprakasam has merged with Shiva." Yes, this beautiful human being had returned to *Arunachala*.

VIRUPAKSHA CAVE ON ARUNACHALA

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Ratnammal

After the teenage Ramana came from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai, Bhagavan was in a state of unbroken natural *Samadhi*. While he was absorbed thus in *Pathala linga*, a dark, dank, underground niche deep inside the Tiruvannamalai temple, his body was feasted on by insects and vermin while he himself remained without food or care. Gracefully, the Divine Mother sent Ratnammal, a young dancer who was looked down upon by society. One day, Ratnammal saw some urchins throwing stones into the cave. She went inside and saw a dim figure sitting with a faint halo surrounding it. Feeling concerned as to how this ascetic could sustain himself, she brought food and fresh clothes, and left them at the entrance of the cave. Bhagavan, though, was lost in *Samadhi,* and her offerings remained untouched.

Later, Seshadri Swami discovered Bhagavan, and his body was taken out. Seshadri Swami instructed the temple priest to give milk to Bhagavan. This priest brought milk, not from the *Arunachaleshwara* shrine, but from Mother Apitakuchalambal's shrine in the Tiruvannamalai temple. This milk poured on Mother's idol, with turmeric, soap nut powder, and *ghee* was the first *Prasad* Mother gave him. Bhagavan was not even outwardly conscious; he was in deep *Samadhi*, so the priest opened his mouth and poured "Mother's milk," the first food that sustains. When Bhagavan

resumed bodily consciousness, he stayed under an *illupai* tree in the premises, rarely coming into outward consciousness.

Once, when Ratnammal was about to get ready for a dance performance, she noticed Bhagavan seated there. Turning to her mother she said, "I will not eat until we have served this ascetic some food." They tried to arouse Bhagavan, but in vain. So they opened his mouth and put food in. Sometimes he would swallow it. At other times, the food would remain unswallowed, and they would clean it up the next day. Bhagavan later on said, "This is the Universal Mother represented by Ratnammal." Bhagavan once told Nagamma, "Ratnammal was pure." To my knowledge, Bhagavan has never used such a description for anyone but Ratnammal. He explained that this was not a moral or physical purity he referred to, but to the fact that even in those days, she had the capacity to recognize the divine before her. The Universal Mother was sustaining him. When Bhagavan was to be moved from the temple to Gurumurtam, he pleaded with Ratnammal, "You need not come there, it is too far." She agreed and obeyed.

Desurammal

When Bhagavan was at *Virupaksha* cave, a lady named Akhilandammal came from a village called Desur. Bhagavan and the others began to call her Desurammal, as Akhilandammal was too long a name.

Desurammal had seen Bhagavan in 1896, when Bhagavan was in a state of *samadhi*, and the priest had poured milk into his mouth. Desurammal had witnessed it, but since Bhagavan did not open his eyes and bless her, she went away to the village.

After seven years, she came back to Tiruvannamalai. She was a very devout person who served food to the sadhus; she had fed Seshadri Swami and another Swami, Vittoba Polur. It was 1903 when she returned. She was plucking flowers at the foot of *Arunachala*. A crowd of people were going toward the banyan tree cave, which is below *Virupaksha* cave. She asked, "Where are you all going?" Someone replied, "Oh, there is an ascetic boy who does not talk, doesn't even move, but such peace, such grace"

Desurammal went toward the cave, and saw Bhagavan seated there. This is what she had to say about Bhagavan: "Even though he was unwashed and covered with dust, his body had a golden glow! On seeing this ascetic

with his body frame so lean that it exposed his bones, my Heart melted, and tears welled up within me. The young Lord then opened his eyes and graciously directed them toward me. Instantaneously, I surrendered myself totally, and took a vow to serve food to the *jnani* all my life." Bhagavan moved to *Virupaksha* cave, and she served food to him there. Bhagavan rarely would eat alone. She brought food for the others as well, including Palani Swami and Perumal Swami. Earlier they would beg for food. After this Mother, Desurammal came; there was no dearth of food at lunch for Bhagavan. She was so captivated by Bhagavan's presence that she came with food every day without fail.

Later the other two ladies, Echammal and Mudaliar Paati, started feeding Bhagavan as well. Feeling redundant, Desurammal went back to her village and started a Ramana centre in 1914. It was called *Ramanananda Madalayam*. Her devotion was so deep that she was always there, observing Bhagavan's teachings, and giving experiential expositions about them. Whenever any of the devotees of Bhagavan at *Virupaksha* cave fell sick, she would take them to Desur, and give them medical aid as well as all other care. When they were fully cured, she would escort them back to the Virupaksha cave.

Kunju Swami told me that whenever Desurammal came to *Arunachala*, in addition to whoever had been feeding Bhagavan, she would also feed them. Bhagavan was very pleased with her. Her two observations about Bhagavan were that firstly, Bhagavan was the only known saint she had fed who shared his food equally with others. The second thing that she noticed was that when there was enough food, it was shared equally not only with the men, but also with the dogs, monkeys, and birds. She

narrated a humorous incident about the monkey, Nondi. It was always given the seat next to Bhagavan. While she was serving the Master one day, Nondi snarled at her, and Bhagavan said, "Hey! She is one of us. She belongs to our clan, keep quiet!" The monkey then accepted her as one amongst them.

Kunju Swami impressed on me that for whoever was feeding him, Bhagavan did not merely express gratitude. Bhagavan shared with them the purest teaching, the teaching he knew—the one that would release them completely from bondage. One full-moon day, when Desurammal came to *Skandashram*, there was a sadhu who told Desurammal, "Today is a very sacred day, a full-moon day. Bhagavan will be getting shaved. When a *jnani*, a realized person, shaves his head on a full-moon day, he gets enormous power. Hence, today, you should ask for initiation from Bhagavan."

Bhagavan rarely gave initiation, but induced by this sage, she prostrated before him. He asked her, "What do you want, Desurammal?" "Bhagavan today is a sacred day, and you are the greatest sage." Then she repeated whatever the sadhu had said. "You have to initiate me with some *mantra*." "Oh! You want a *mantr*a," he replied. Then Bhagavan became serious, sat down, and said in Tamil, "*Unnai vidadha iru*" which means, "remain without leaving the Self." Desurammal said that he did not just say that and leave. He looked at her and transfixed her with a silent grace. Riveting his look on her for nearly an hour, he also shared with her the inner knowledge of how to remain without giving up the experience of the Self.

When Bhagavan came down the hill to *Ramanashram*, she would bring food every day. One day Bhagavan told her, "Desurammal, there is enough food here." Beseechingly she said, "Bhagavan, I want to feed you."

He replied, "Bring some of these ingredients and leave them in the kitchen. They will cook, and we will all share it." Desurammal immediately obeyed, and whenever she came, she would bring some rice or *dhal* and leave it in the kitchen.

During the last days of Bhagavan, when Bhagavan was to drop the body, Desurammal was already more than ninety years old, and very weak in health. She wanted to have *Darshan*; this Mother wanted to have a last look, so she went to him. Nobody recognized Desurammal because the whole management had changed**.** Bhagavan was in the small building, what we now call *Nirvana Room*. She was prevented from entering the *Nirvana Room*. Fortunately, Kunju Swami recognized her and told Bhagavan, who exclaimed, "Desurammal! Bring her here, bring her inside." When she went in, she wept seeing Bhagavan's physical condition and Bhagavan said, "Why do you feel sorry for this mortal body? I am always your shelter."

These words of wisdom were not only for Desurammal. For whoever turns to Bhagavan as the image of father and mother, the assurance is that he is the mirror, the mirror that reflects, affirms, and utters the irrefutable silent word of eternity, one's Self.

Echammal

There was a lady whose children and husband lived far away from Tiruvannamalai. One night she had a dream in which a young ascetic, a young boy with a loincloth and clean-shaven head, said something which she could not understand. After the dream, within a few days, she lost her husband, her son, and one of her two daughters. A few days later, the same boy appeared again in her dream and recited a Sanskrit mantra, which she could not follow. When she went for interpretations to those who supposedly knew, all they would say is, "God is blessing you."

When all was lost, she wanted to go back to the village of her childhood with her only daughter. When she was leaving, the third dream came. In the third dream, this same boy said, "Please return to the hill and disappear. You have lived your lives. Your three lives are over." For Echammal, even before she came to him, Bhagavan had already cleared her apparent three births through the dreams.

After she went to her village, her second daughter also died at the age of ten or eleven. She could no longer bear the burden of her sorrow. Some of her relatives advised her to go on a pilgrimage, a *Yatri*. Searching for solace, she left for north India on a pilgrimage. There she met sadhus, served them, and shared food with them. One of the sadhus initiated her

into *ashtanga yoga*. He shared with her a *mantra* and told her to concentrate on the tip of her nose. However, none of this worked. She still felt burdened with sorrow.

When she returned to the native village, a relative said, "At *Arunachala,* there is a young ascetic. He may not speak, but by serving him and being in his proximity, you will attain the grace." The very next day, she went to Tiruvannamalai. It was 1906, and Bhagavan was in *Virupaksha* cave. She went to have his *Darshan,* and Bhagavan looked at her for one hour. She stood with tears rolling down from her eyes in front of Bhagavan, who had tears streaming down his own face as well. Not a single word transpired between them, but after this one hour, she felt some immense power, some mysterious force, that seemed to keep her immobilized. Miraculously, there was not a drop of sorrow left in her. She felt the grace, and took a vow that she would feed this ascetic all her life.

Every day, without fail, she served Bhagavan, but she still had a little worldly attachment. She wanted to bring up a girl, so with Bhagavan's permission, she adopted a girl named Chellammal. Echammal would often send Chellammal to deliver food to Bhagavan. One day, when taking food to Bhagavan, Chellammal found a piece of printed paper with something written in Sanskrit. She took it to Bhagavan. When it was time to eat, she refused her meal saying, "No, no! Today is *Ekadash*i. I will not eat. Today is a *vrata*. It is a vow for Hindus, and my mother said none of us should eat." Bhagavan, without reacting, casually asked her, "What do you have in your hand?" She gave him the paper, which had a *sloka* in Sanskrit, from *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Translated, it meant: "When one has learned to love the company of sages—*satsang*—why follow all

these rules of discipline? When a cool southern breeze is blowing, what need is there for a fan? When you are in *satsang*, no ritualistic injunctions need to be followed." Thus explaining, he coaxed Chellammal to eat.

As time went by, Chellammal got married and had a son she named Ramana. When the child was born, Echammal sought the Master's blessings and laid him on Bhagavan's lap. Unfortunately, sometime later, Chellammal passed away. Echammal, though deeply affected, had steadied herself by the association of this sage. One day Bhagavan told her, "Just meditate." She was following the meditation of *ashtanga yoga* and told Bhagavan, "When I meditate, I see lights." Bhagavan, in response, shared with her these instructions: "The objective lights that you see are not your real goal. You should aim at realizing your Self and nothing short of it."

From that day onward, Echammal started taking to *Self-Enquiry* and meditating under Bhagavan's guidance. Nevertheless, her *vasanas* were difficult to renounce. One day, she took a vow to pluck one hundred thousand leaves from a *vilva* tree and offer them to Bhagavan's picture. She was able to pluck only fifty thousand leaves, so she complained to Bhagavan, "I wanted to complete this ritual, but I could only manage to find fifty thousand leaves." "Did you try all the trees?" asked Bhagavan. "Yes Bhagavan. I tried all the trees but I could pluck only fifty thousand." Bhagavan's face changed, "Then why don't you pluck flesh from your body and offer that instead?" Echammal thought Bhagavan was joking. She said, "How can I pinch my own body? It will hurt." Bhagavan then turned to her; "You are plucking leaves from the tree. Will it not hurt the tree?" "How could I know that?" she replied.

Bhagavan retorted, "When you knew pinching your own body is painful, why did you not recognize that the tree will be equally pained if you rob it of its leaves? Do I have to tell you that?" This transformed her completely.

Another time when Echammal brought food for Bhagavan, the *Ashram* management informed her that they did not require her services any more. Feeling deeply disappointed, she said, "Bhagavan, I have grown grey. I have given everything of mine to serve you. Is this the reward I get? Like *Arunachala*, have you, too, turned to stone? What can I do but go back?" Saying this, she went back to her home in Tiruvannamalai town. Back at the *Ashram*, they rang the bell signaling lunch time. Bhagavan was on the sofa as usual. Relaxed, all waited for five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, but he did not get up to go and eat. Bhagavan was smiling, and one of the intelligent attendants understood. He enquired at the office, and they rushed to Echammal, begging her to forgive them. When she refused to come with them, they pleaded that without her, Bhagavan would not eat. Hearing this convinced her to run back to Bhagavan immediately.

Another day, Echammal was unable to go herself, and sent food for Bhagavan through someone else. It was kept in the kitchen, and they forgot to serve it to Bhagavan. In the dining hall, it was the custom to serve everyone first and Bhagavan last. Then Bhagavan would nod his head, and the others would begin eating. As usual, everyone was served, including Bhagavan. Bhagavan was seated quietly. He did not give the customary nod, so again this intelligent attendant enquired, "Have you served Echammal's food?" They said, "No, we forgot!" Once

Echammal's food was served, he began his meal.

Toward the end of her life, Echammal was unconscious for two days. The first day, when she was struggling to breathe, Bhagavan sat for five hours like a rock on the sofa, deep in *samadhi*. Many remarked that they had very rarely seen Bhagavan sit like that. Later on, they came to know that that was the time when Echammal was struggling. According to the doctors, she went into coma after that. No doubt she was already absorbed, and Bhagavan had received her into that state.

The next day when she was to relinquish the body, the ladies wanted to test Echammal. In a loud voice, one of them said, "It appears that food has not reached Bhagavan." Suddenly Echammal opened her eyes wide. She could not speak, but with the expression of her eyes asked, "What happened?" They replied, "No, no! We were joking. The food has already gone to Bhagavan." Hearing this, with a peaceful smile, she closed her eyes and the body was dropped. When Bhagavan was informed, he made this beautiful comment, "Echammal has shuffled her old load, but my load is still remaining."

Mudaliar Paati

There was another beautiful lady named Mudaliar Paati (Paati means grandmother). She lived in a village with her son and daughter-in-law. She had been serving a *sadhu*, and he was about to die. She asked him what they should do now, and he said, "Go to *Arunachala*, there is a saint there. Serve him. Your function, your life's purpose, will be granted."

Mudaliar Paati was very old when she came to Bhagavan. She saw Bhagavan at the *Virupaksha* cave in 1910. The very first glimpse of Bhagavan revealed to her an exhilarating spiritual experience. On the spot, she took a vow, "I will offer food to Bhagavan until my last day."

Whenever she was able to, she would get money or provisions from the village. She gradually sold all her property to enable herself to serve Bhagavan. When she had nothing left, she bought sesame seeds from the market, crushed them into oil, and sold it in the market. With whatever little profit she made, she bought provisions to make food for Bhagavan and fed him.

This is why Bhagavan once said, "I'm afraid of two people—Ramanatha Brahmachari and Mudaliar Paati." What is that fear? It is not really fear;

Bhagavan was a slave to selfless service, total surrender, and unlimited devotion. According to Bhagavan, these two people came under that category.

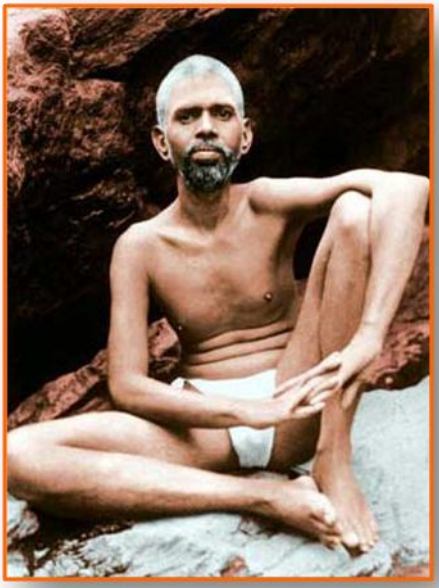
There are so many instances in Mudaliar Paatti's life that display her deep devotion. Even after coming to *Ramanashram*, she insisted on feeding Bhagavan with her own hand. She had become half blind due to old age. One day, when serving Bhagavan's food she stepped on the leaf on which his food was served. An attendant standing next to him scolded her, "Hey! You do not have eyesight, why do you come? When you cannot see Bhagavan, why do you come and disturb everyone?" Mudaliar Paati replied, "How does it matter if I can't see him? Bhagavan sees me; his grace is on me, that is enough."

Another time, when she heard that Bhagavan's health was deteriorating after the first operation, she wanted to see him. She had gone blind, but still insisted on being with Bhagavan. She was brought to the hall, and strained her eyes to see. Bhagavan consoled her, "Paatti, I'm all right, my body is all right." She was not fully satisfied. She stepped outside and stood at the gate. When Bhagavan came out, she said, "Hey, stop!" Then with her hands, from head to foot, she touched him. Then he asked, "Are you satisfied now?"

This remarkable lady stayed in Ramananagar in her last days, when she was to pass away. It was 1949. Kunju Swami, Viswanatha Swami, and Suri Nagamma were sent by Bhagavan to check on Paatti's health. They put up a hut in front of Ramananagar, a little bit away from *Ramanashram*. Bhagavan enquired about her daily until her death.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

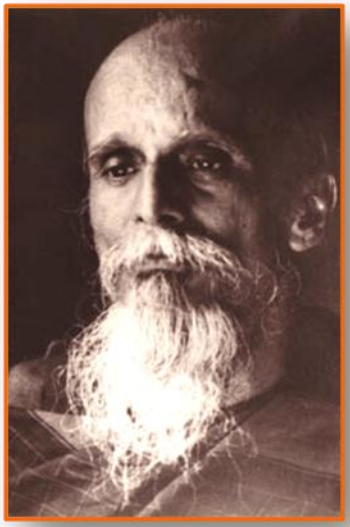
Even in that condition she continued cooking. The blind lady had lost her daughter-in-law, lost everyone, but until her last day she cooked for Bhagavan. The day she was to die, she cooked and then made sure that the meal was taken to Bhagavan. She insisted on being informed when Bhagavan had finished eating this food. When that was reported to her, she blissfully closed her eyes and dropped the body. Bhagavan shared with instructions to the others that she should be buried like a realized sadhu, as he had given in the case of Seshadri swami and his own mother. Earlier, the day when Echammal passed away, he made this remark, "Still, Mudaliar Paatti is alive." When Mudaliar Paatti passed away, Bhagavan declared, "A big responsibility has been taken off my shoulders."



BHAGAVAN SEATED OUTSIDE VIRUPAKSHA CAVE

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni



It is late nineteenth century, ancient Benares, India. A fourteen-year-old boy sits amidst a group of scholars: mathematicians, poets, a music maestro, and an astrologer, among others. The mathematicians give him a six-digit number multiplied by another six-digit number. One poet recites the last two lines of a Sanskrit verse and challenges the boy to compose the first two lines in the same meter and complete it. The other poet, meanwhile, gives him a subject to immediately compose a four-line Sanskrit verse. The astrologer places before him a complex pattern of planetary positions and asks him what the consequence will be. The musician hums a few notes of a particularly obscure raga and asks the boy to identify it. Another man rattles off a random date, like February 18, 1756, and asks what day that was. As if all this weren't enough, another man stands behind the boy and throws tiny pebbles on his back while the others throw their challenges. The boy is expected to simultaneously keep count of how many pebbles were

thrown. The boy answers all of them, instantaneously, correctly . . . brilliantly, to the tumultuous applause of an admiring audience. The boy is none other than Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, soon to become one of the foremost devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. This boy-wonder, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, soon gained acclaim all over India. ("Muni" means one who is steeped in psychic powers.) Before he was born, his parents, a pious couple, had no children. His father went to Benares and prayed at the Ganesa temple there. He had a vision that the idol of Lord Ganesa came to life and merged with him. At the very same time back in his village, his wife who was in the local Devi temple saw the idol turning to light and the light appeared to enter her. Soon afterward, a son was born to the couple, and they named him Ganapati, in gratitude to Lord Ganesa.

GROUP WITH KAVYAKANTHA SEATED TO THE LEFT OF BHAGAVAN

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

However, to their utter disappointment, the boy could not talk at all. Until the age of five, he remained mute and expressionless. Moreover, he was plagued with every possible disease, including epilepsy. In desperation, in order to cure him, they resorted to the age old practice of branding him with a red-hot, iron rod. This treatment however, had far-reaching effects. The shock unleashed the boy's latent talents, and he became exceptionally brilliant.

His retention power, his concentration, his capacity to repeat, and to remember knowledge increased manifold. By the age of nine, he had Mastered Sanskrit literature, and by the age of eleven, he had memorized all the four *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. When he was fourteen years old, Ganapati had composed a drama in Sanskrit, which even today is acclaimed as one of the best Sanskrit dramas ever.

The ancient scriptures mention that the rishis of yore did penance, and God appeared before them and granted them boons. Strongly influenced by these texts, Kavyakantha sought to achieve the same. He got married when he was eighteen years old, but his fervor to have God's Darshan became more intense. He embarked on a long pilgrimage, visiting temples as well as all the sacred rivers like the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the Godavari, doing penance or tapas wherever he went. His penance was rigorous: he remained silent and motionless for long periods and went without food.

Though he meticulously obeyed all the rules of traditional penance, God was not apparent before him. According to Hindu tradition, if one does not find God through one method of penance, there are alternate methods. With every method failing, Kavyakantha finally took the last

resort: doing penance in the five holy places of Shiva. These five holy places dedicated to Shiva represent the five elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Ether. One must visit each place in a particular order and arrive finally in the place dedicated to Fire, i.e. *Arunachala.* A devotee's tapas or penance is said to be rewarded here, and he is finally united with God (or Shiva). Kavyakantha followed the necessary rituals and reached *Arunachala* in 1904.

During the course of his penance in *Arunachaleshwara* temple, he went up the hill and saw Bhagavan sitting with eyes closed, absorbed in *Samadhi*. Consequently, Kavyakantha did not receive the glance of grace and went away, disappointed. While still pursuing his practice, he took up a job in the city. In 1907, he became dejected and felt that his life was futile. He decided to give his search for God one last try. "I am going to *Arunachala* again, which, the scriptures declare is the final destination for one's search for God. If I do not have God's *Darshan* this time, I am going to proclaim that the *Vedas*, *Upanishads,* and all the Hindu scriptures are just exaggerations of poetic minds." With this resolve and remedies exhausted, he returned to *Arunachala.*

Around *Arunachala*, there is a Shiva shrine located on each of the eight directions. Determined to perform his penance to the best of his capacity, he went south west to the *Nirudhilingam* shrine. It was surrounded by forests at that time. He took shelter in the hollow of a large, dead tree and resumed his severe penance of being silent and going without food. After the fifth or sixth day, the Divine Mother spoke to him: "Until you have a guru, you cannot achieve your goals. Your guru is up there on the hill. Surrender at his holy feet, and you will get his grace. Go now!"

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Kavyakantha leapt out of the hollow. It was one o'clock in the afternoon, and the sun was beating down hard. The Karthikai festival was on, and thousands of people thronged around the hill. Undeterred, he ran up the hill to *Virupaksha* cave and most extraordinarily, there was no one else there. Bhagavan, seated alone outside the cave, directed his glance of grace at Kavyakantha. Like many devotees before him, he was transfixed, eyes locked on one another, and he could not take his eyes off Bhagavan. Kavyakantha, an erudite scholar, had never prostrated himself before any human being. But in that moment, he found himself flat on the ground in front of this young ascetic.

He held Bhagavan's feet tightly and cried, "I have read all that has to be read. I have fully understood *Vedanta*, I have performed *japa* to my Heart's content, yet I have not, up to this time, understood what tapas really is! Therefore, I have sought refuge at your feet. Pray, enlighten me as to the nature of tapas." The word "*tapas*" in Sanskrit literally means "striving for the realization of Truth through penance and austerity." However, Bhagavan imparted its deeper meaning to Kavyakantha.

Helping him rise to his feet, Bhagavan looked into his eyes and after some time slowly replied, "If one watches from where the notion 'I' arises, the mind is absorbed into that. That is tapas." And since Kavyakantha had himself revealed that he practiced mantra *japa,* repeating mantras thousands of times every day, the Master added, "When repeating a mantra, if one watches the source from which the sound is produced, the mind is absorbed in that. That is tapas."

These revelations thrilled Kavyakantha. He finally understood how to be in touch with the Truth through a practical method. Wave after wave of ecstasy flooded through him for hours in the presence of the ascetic. At last, when he opened his eyes he asked the attendant, Palani Swami, for the ascetic's name. Though he was then called Brahmana Swami, he learned that his real name was Venkataraman. Kavyakantha took "Ramana" from his name and since he had seen God reflected in this ascetic, he named him "Bhagavan." Bhagavan in Sanskrit means God. As he had also given a revelation about tapas, which no scripture had ever explained before, according to Kavyakantha, Bhagavan was also a Vedic rishi. (Rishi means "sage" and is derived from "drashtra," which means "seer": one who has seen with the "inner eye" and not just with the mortal eyes.) But to Kavyakantha, Bhagavan was not only a rishi, but a Maharshi, or a great rishi. Therefore, the name, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi came to be.

This name, "Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi," the chanting of which has lured countless people to the silent still Truth, was given by this gifted Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. At that time he had over two hundred disciples of his own, including noble scholars like Devarata and Kapali Shastri. He wrote a letter to them saying, "I have found my guru. Henceforth it is not I, but Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi who is our guru."

The next day he went to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, please accept me." Bhagavan graciously conceded to his request and said, "Stay in the cave, which is adjacent to *Virupaksha* cave." Called Mango Tree cave, its proximity to *Virupaksha* cave allowed the guru and disciples to visit each

other every day. Bhagavan continued to share his grace and help Kavyakantha mature spiritually.

Bhagavan held Kavyakantha in high esteem and addressed him with much respect. One day Kavyakantha held Bhagavan's feet and begged, "Please do not address me respectfully, Bhagavan! I am your disciple and your child. Do not address me in such reverential terms!" Yet Bhagavan continued to do so. He then learned from his other disciples and Kavyakantha's admirers that they referred to him as Nayana. "Nayana" means father in Sanskrit. Therefore Bhagavan told Kavyakantha, "Hereafter, I will call you Nayana." Nayana accepted this because Nayana in Sanskrit also means disciple or child.

It is interesting to note that Kavyakantha was a staunch devotee of Shiva, the formless father aspect of God. He had never worshipped God in the aspect of the Mother, Shakti or form. However, from the moment the Mother showed his guru to him, he became her devotee as well. (The side of the town with the *Arunachaleshwara* temple is called the front of the hill. The stretch from Nirudhilingam to the Eshanyalingam, south-west to north-east, is the back. A little known fact about *Arunachala* is that the front is the father aspect, while the back is the mother aspect. All miracles and powers—psychic, spiritual, physical, or worldly—stem from the mother aspect. In the lives of Bhagavan's devotees, miracles and visions took place between Nirudhilingam and Eshanyalingam. With Kavyakantha too, it was at Nirudhilingam that the Mother aspect guided him to his guru.)

He wanted to express his gratitude to the Mother by composing a thousand verses in Sanskrit in her praise. He surrendered to Bhagavan and began work after seeking his permission. He chose a sacred day to complete all thousand verses. Unfortunately he fell ill and could only write only around seven hundred verses.

The night before his self-imposed deadline, he approached Bhagavan at *Virupaksha* cave with his problem. Bhagavan encouragingly reassured him, "Do not worry, I will come and sit with you." It was a wonderful sight: the young Master sitting, radiating silence, his older devotee dictating extempore verses in a torrential flow, and his disciples writing them down late into the night, around the lantern light. Genius that he was, Kavyakantha started dictating the first line of the first verse to the first disciple, the first line of the second verse to the second disciple, the first line of the third verse to the third disciple and so on. Then he proceeded without stopping to dictate the second line of the first verse to the first disciple, the second line of the second verse to the second disciple, the second line of the third verse to the third disciple . . . until at one-thirty in the morning, the thousand verses were complete. Bhagavan, who until then was sitting with eyes closed, in rock- like silence, opened his eyes and asked, "Have you taken down all that I dictated?" Kavyakantha fell at his guru's feet and cried "Yes Bhagavan, they are your verses!"

This anthology of verses is called *Umasahasranaamam*. Uma is the Divine Mother, while *Sahasranama* in Sanskrit means thousand—therefore the title can be translated as "Thousand Verses in Praise of the Divine Mother." Kavyakantha revised the first seven hundred and odd verses

many times but left untouched the verses that he dictated that wonderful night, verses which he felt came from Bhagavan.

When I went to *Ramanashram* some people, for whom I had respect, often spoke ill of Kavyakantha. They claimed that his accounts were figments of his imagination. I was influenced by their views on the genius. Even today there is a lot of literature that portrays Kavyakantha in a poor light. I approached Munagala Venkataramaia, a distinguished scholar and one of the recorders of the talks with Bhagavan. Now, Munagala had not seen Kavyakantha and was therefore neutral about him. "Why do people pull down Kavyakantha so much?" I enquired, listing out all the transgressions he is rumored to have made. "Ganesan, stop!" he exclaimed. "How did you know all this?" I revealed the names of the people who told me this. He replied, "They have given an opinion and you have received it. Are you sure it is the Truth?" I was puzzled. "How can we know which opinion is correct?" I asked. Munagala then said, "Whatever Bhagavan says is trustworthy."

I was still not satisfied. I had read a tiff that Kavyakantha was not a Self-realized soul because he had so many *sankalpas*. His detractors often quoted this too, and I was convinced by this logic. I put forth my argument to Munagala. He told me, "I asked Bhagavan the same thing—how come it is written in such and such a book that Kavyakantha was not Self-realized. Bhagavan told me, 'That is not what I said, but what the recorder must have expected me to say." Munagala then advised me, "Go by whatever Bhagavan has said, and you will be near the Truth. Do not go by opinions, particularly if they divide people—whether saints or anyone else. Do not pay heed to them. Aspirants should never be carried away by negative statements made about any sage or saint. In order to

progress, this is the first guideline to remember. What detractors say are just opinions and if we believe them, we fall victim to the mind."

It is true that Kavyakantha had very high ideals. However, they are not merely *sankalpas,* but *satya sankalpas*. A *sankalpa* is a concentrated desire of wanting to achieve something. A *satya sankalpa* is that *sankalpa* which comes to you—not that you have a desire for it. Kavyakantha had three *satya sankalpas*: His first *sankalpa* was that he wanted India to be free. Kavyakantha's second *satya sankalpa* was equal status for women in Indian society. With Christian and Muslim influences over many centuries, women were often subjugated and relegated to the kitchen. They were allowed no participation in society. However, Vedic culture stated that women must have equal rights. In the Vedic Age, many women like Vasishta's wife, Arundati, and Yajnavalkya's wife, Maitrayi, were considered *jnanis* or realized beings. Thirdly, he sought for Vedic culture to be revived.

He placed these before Bhagavan. In 1908, Kavyakantha had asked Bhagavan, "Is aspiring to the source of the I-thought sufficient for the attainment of all my aims, or is mass incantation or mantra *japa* needed?" Bhagavan replied, "Aspiring to the source of the I-thought will suffice." Though this was the initial advice Bhagavan shared with him, Kavyakantha pressed on with his argument, "What about my aims and ideals?" Bhagavan replied, "It will be better if you throw the entire burden on the Lord. He will carry it, and you will be free. He will do his part."

Munagala Venkataramaia told me, "People quote these sentences. But Bhagavan told me what happened afterward. At first, Kavyakantha could

not grasp the inner meaning of Bhagavan's counsel. After a few years, he came to Bhagavan and said, 'Bhagavan I am surrendering all my *sankalpas* at your holy feet.' There was no greater guru than Bhagavan for him."

It is interesting to see how all three of Nayana's *satya sankalpas* were, in time, fulfilled. Nayana passed away in 1936, and India gained her independence in 1947. The Chief Minister of Madras State was a devotee of Bhagavan. Therefore he wanted the national flag to be hoisted not in the state capital Madras, but at *Ramanashram*. This created a furor in the state, but the Chief Minister adamantly said, "I will go to my Master." He approached Bhagavan and insisted, "You must hoist the national flag." It is a little-known fact: to the delight of all present, Bhagavan hoisted the flag. Then he turned to my Teacher, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer and said, "Our Nayana's *sankalpa* is fulfilled."

Nayana's second *sankalpa* was also fulfilled by Bhagavan when he recognized *Maha Samadhi* for a woman, his mother. At that time it defied Hindu tradition. Now we venerate Anandamayi Ma, Mother Krishna Bai, Godavari Maatha, Shobanamma and many others. The exalted status of these women sages and saints, amongst others, was accepted by Hindu society only after the advent of the *Ramana Gita*. Now Bhagavan's words are quoted: that there is no difference between male or female. We must not forget that it was Kavyakantha, because of whom this wisdom was drawn out from Bhagavan. His second *sankalpa* found further fulfillment when *Ramanashram* appointed a woman as its manager of the School for the Vedas. This was to Kavyakantha's credit. He also contributed to her predecessor Major Chadwick's appointment, as the Vedapathashala's first manager. Being a westerner, this was unthinkable back then in India.

Nayana and his disciples plied Bhagavan with questions. Though the answers were not immediately noted down, Nayana had such a clear memory that later he condensed Bhagavan's answers into verses and recited them, saying, "This is from the third chapter of *Ramana Gita,*" or "This is the eighth verse from the second chapter in the *Ramana Gita*." He had not yet written *Ramana Gita* and people used to wonder at his claims. Then, finally one day, he sat down and wrote the entire *Ramana Gita* of three hundred verses. He wrote the questions with their answers and showed them to Bhagavan, who verified each one of them and remarked, "Perfectly correct."

Devotees of Bhagavan are universally grateful to Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni: Firstly, he was the one who recognized and shared with the Master his celebrated, sacred name. Secondly, he was the first person who persuaded our Master to start talking. Before him, Sivaprakasam Pillai, Gambhiram Seshayya, and others assumed Bhagavan was in formal silence and received Bhagavan's answers in writing. It was only to Kavyakantha that Bhagavan started giving answers orally. He was also the one who insisted that Bhagavan write a poem in Sanskrit in the arya meter. Bhagavan replied that he knew very little of Sanskrit and its meters. Kavyakantha explained the rules of the arya meter and repeated his request. A day later, Bhagavan presented to an amazed Kavyakantha, two flawless verses. Then, on the following day, he presented three more. These five verses are none other than *Arunachala Pancharatnam*, a hymn that is chanted daily in front of Bhagavan's *Samadhi.*

In the *Ramana Gita*, one of Bhagavan's answers about women is most revealing. Nayana questions Bhagavan, "Are not women equal to men?" Bhagavan answers, "What is woman or man? It is based on the body. For

the soul, there is no difference." Then Kavyakantha asks, "Then is it possible for women to Master the scriptures?" Bhagavan replied, "Without a doubt." Nayana went on, "Can women get Self-realization? Do they become *jnanis*?" "Without a doubt," the guru said. "For the soul, which has to achieve realization, there is no difference."

In 1922, when Bhagavan's mother realized Maha Samadhi, it was not Bhagavan who wanted to entomb her, glorify her, or build a temple for her. It was Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni who helped carry her body to the present *Ramanashram*. He told Bhagavan, "According to the scriptures and your words in the *Ramana Gita*, she is a realized soul. Therefore, she should be entombed with all sanctity." He administered this task, and it was around her *Samadhi* that the *Matrabhuteshwara* temple in *Ramanashram* was constructed. He even assigned the temple its name: *Matrabhuteshwara*, meaning "the Lord who has become the mother." Thus, the idea of the temple, the nucleus, around which *Ramanashram* was built, came from Kavyakantha. We therefore owe a great deal to this saint, who silently and gracefully worked in the background all the while.

Kavyakantha was a lofty man. Due to his intense penance, his kundalini rose, and, according to the scriptures, when the kundalini goes to the sahasra, the crown of the head, its power passes through the head and reaches the sun. Kavyakantha did not want this. Being Bhagavan's disciple, he wanted the energy to go to the spiritual Heart. The phenomenon of the kundalini energy reaching the brain is called *kapala bheda—kapala* is the "head" or "skull" and *bheda* is "to break." This is the highest achievement in kundalini yoga. When the pain grew unbearable, he knew this was going to happen. He ran to Bhagavan, who placed his hand on his head. Kavyakantha said, "The moment Bhagavan put his

hand on my head, it was like cool moon rays raining down on me. The pain completely subsided." Prior to this, some of Bhagavan's other devotees reported to have seen a faint vapor-like substance rising from the top of his head.

My Teacher, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, Kunju Swami, and Viswanatha Swami experienced another incident involving Bhagavan's grace upon Nayana. At one time, while doing penance in a Ganesa temple in Tiruvotiyur, near Chennai, Kavyakantha felt he was unable to progress spiritually. He prayed to Bhagavan, "Help me! Help me!" In response, he felt Bhagavan appearing before him, putting his hand on him, releasing him from his spiritual stagnation and then disappearing. Immediately Kavyakantha told his disciples about what happened. At the same time, Bhagavan at *Skandashram* collaborated, "I was lying down, and all of a sudden, my body started floating. I heard the word '*Tiruvotriyur*' and walked in the main streets. I saw a Ganesa temple and entered it. Then, suddenly, I was back at *Skandashram*."

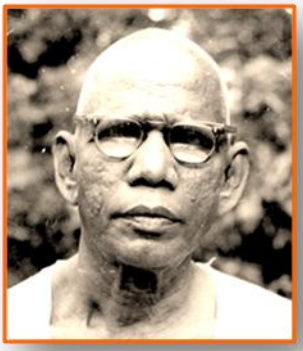
Then my Teacher, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, asked, "How did this happen, Bhagavan?" Bhagavan replied, "It is the *sankalpa* of Nayana. It was not my desire to go." He continued, "With this experience I also understood how *Siddhas*—the legendary sages and saints—would seem to travel in the astral realm. Perhaps it was the same for me. Still, it was not mine, but Kavyakantha's desire made it transpire."

One day when Bhagavan was coming down the hill along with Nayana, Sundaresa Iyer, as well as some other devotees, he suddenly stopped and said, "Nayana, look at me right now! The sun, moon, stars, and planets are revolving around my waist." The onlookers could not see the

spectacle but they did see Bhagavan's body glowing with brilliance. Overawed, the devotees prostrated in front of the Master and chanted the sacred *Purusha Suktham*, a chant sung by ancient sages, praising the Lord of the Universe, where the sun and the moon are described as the two eyes of the Lord.

Bhagavan vouchsafed that after the *kapala bheda* and *Tiruvotriyur* experiences, an electric current, *Shaktipat,* had begun to pass through Kavyakantha's body. Therefore he could not walk barefoot on the earth without getting an electric shock. He began to wear wooden slippers but would reverently take them off in his Master's presence. Bhagavan would compassionately say, "Nayana is coming. He cannot walk barefoot. Place a nonconductor, a wooden plank, for him to sit on. Give him also a woolen blanket that he can walk on without getting a shock." We must respect Bhagavan's relationship with Kavyakantha. How the Master looked upon his disciples is more important than how a fellow disciple looked upon another. A sincere saint like Bhagavan admired Nayana, and that is all aspirants and devotees of Bhagavan should consider.

Sadhu Natanananda



While Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni was a colossus, Sadhu Natanananda can be compared to the tortoise in the "tortoise and the hare" fable. An unlikely spiritual giant, he rose from being an ordinary elementary school teacher to a man of deep wisdom and realization. Sadhu Natanananda is the author of *Spiritual Instruction*, which is one of the most important books for spiritual aspirants.

While still a teacher, he had studied Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Vivekananda, and the *Vedas*. He yearned for a guru; for he understood that it was through a true guru's guidance that he could know exactly what Truth meant. While he was searching for a Master, his friends told him of a young ascetic up on *Arunachala* hill who could guide him.

Nateswara Mudaliar, as he was known then, visited Bhagavan at *Skandashram* and seated himself near him. Since he was well-versed with the scriptures, he thought the guru would talk to him. However, Bhagavan very rarely spoke unless someone asked him a question. After spending hours in silence with Bhagavan, Nateswara went home disappointed. "Perhaps he is not a saint," he thought, "I will go to other saints." He visited many other saints and sages but was disappointed

there, too, and wanted to visit Bhagavan again on his return as his friends reproached him, "Why did you give up? Go again!"

He then wrote many letters to Bhagavan, requesting his grace. He even sent a registered letter, on which he wrote, "If you are not going to give me grace, I will die without realization. In my next birth I will demand grace from you again, and you will have to be born once more just to give me realization. You might as well give it to me now!"

After this, Bhagavan appeared to him in a dream and said, "You are demanding grace from me. You must first worship the Lord seated on the bull." In his small room, there was one picture which he had hung, and it was a picture of Shiva seated on the bull. Natanananda worshipped the image for a few days but was still not happy. He went again to Tiruvannamalai and visited *Arunachaleshwara* temple. "Perhaps Bhagavan has guided me to this in the dream," he thought. This time, some people tried to dissuade him saying, "Do not go to that silent ascetic. He will not talk to you!" However, he was a stern, serious, persevering man. So much so, that even Muruganar pointed out that austerity was Natanananda's amour.

Without giving up hope, this school teacher went to Bhagavan again and pleaded, "Bhagavan I want to experience your gracious wisdom. Kindly fulfill my prayer!" Bhagavan looked at him for a full fifteen minutes. When a question was put to Bhagavan, he would usually not answer immediately. Instead he would prepare the questioner with silence and only then give the answer, so that it remained with the aspirant as direct experience. He was more interested in communing with the questioner than in the question. He gazed at Natanananda for fifteen minutes and

then said, "Is it the body in front of me which desires to obtain grace, or is it the awareness within it? If it is the awareness, is it not looking upon itself as the body and making this request? If so, let the awareness first of all recognize its nature. It will then automatically recognize God and grace. The Truth of this can be realized even now and here." Wave after wave of pure ecstasy pulsed through Natanananda, and he stayed in Bhagavan's presence for hours. He too had been blessed by Bhagavan's glance of grace. God sees God.

He once told me that even Bhagavan's glance did not permanently fulfill him, and there were some residual tendencies in him, despite being austere. Once when he was in Bhagavan's presence, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni and other scholarly devotees were sitting with Bhagavan and speaking in Sanskrit about Hindu scriptures. He felt utterly dejected that he could not follow a single word about the lofty subjects that were being discussed and began to feel sad silently. He closed his eyes, with tears streaming down his cheeks. When he opened his eyes, everyone had left and only Bhagavan was there. Bhagavan looked at him compassionately and asked, "Why are you so dejected? If you were really unfit to realize the Self in this life, you could not have come to this place at all." (This applies to everyone) Bhagavan continued, "The power that drew you here will make you realize the Self. If not today, then at some other time, it is bound to fulfill its commitment. There is no reason why you should be dejected." This sealed any form of imperfection in Sadhu Natanananda and drove out all his ignorance. With this, he, too, became a Self-realized sage.

The day he understood his realization, he went incognito. The outward symbol of his becoming Self-realized was his obscurity. He lived alone,

quite happy to be so and was immersed in the Self all the time. After Bhagavan's Maha Samadhi in 1950, and until 1967 or 1968, many did not even know if Natanananda was still alive. Though he stayed in a cottage in Tiruvannamalai, no one knew where he was. I thought, like most of the old devotees did, that he had passed away.

I had spent nine years in the *Ashram*, when suddenly one day someone said, "Do you know, Natanananda is alive?" I jumped with joy because I loved his book, *Spiritual Instruction*. I paid him a visit. He was an austere man with nothing in his room except for a few loin cloths. He blessed me and asked, "What are you doing? Are you practicing *Self-Enquiry*?" I replied, "I am not capable of doing *Self-Enquiry*. I only chant *Arunachala* Shiva, *Arunachala* Shiva, *Arunachala* Shiva, *Arunachala* . . ." His face clouded over with rage. I was taken aback because this was my very first meeting with him, and I was accustomed to people indulging me whenever they met me. Not Natanananda! He was a stern and serious man. He raged, "What a fool you are! Why do you think you have come to Bhagavan? For what function has he chosen you? It is only to make you as he! Read his Forty Verses on Reality, practice *Self-Enquiry*, be the Truth. That is why you have been chosen!" I was rapt.

He refused to come into the limelight or even stay at the *Ashram*. I found a cottage next to Mr. Osborne's house, and he stayed there until 1981. I was very fortunate that he allowed me to visit him and talk with him whenever I liked. Once, I drew him out of his reticence by asking him to give me an article for a souvenir I was bringing out for the *Ashram*. He obliged and handed it over to me. Unfortunately, I misplaced it. I assumed he would have a copy. I went to him and said, "Swami, I am sorry, but I lost your article. Please give me your copy. I will very

carefully note its contents down and then return it." He laughed at me and said, "Look around you, Ganesan. My environment gives you an idea about me. Look at my room, there is nothing here—no books, no clothing, no utensils, nothing." Puzzled, I asked, "What do you mean, Swami?" He replied, "Ganesan, you must have come to know that I have written many verses on Bhagavan. However, do you see any book here, even though they were all printed? The moment I would write my adoration about my Master either in verse or in prose, I would place it at my Master's holy feet. As far as I was concerned, my job was done. After Bhagavan dropped the body, a few people have asked me to write for them, just like you. I would comply by writing and submitting it to the management. There ended my responsibility." However, he did oblige me by writing that article again, which one can find in *Ramana Pictorial Souvenir*, published in 1967.

I once took a family which was popularizing Bhagavan's name by dance, singing, drama, and entertainment, to meet Natanananda. They were proud of the fact that they were doing the work of spreading Bhagavan's name and renown. When Natanananda met them, he was furious and cried, "You talk such nonsense, thinking you are going to spread my Master's fame! The way you can do it is by becoming the Truth yourself. Put the teachings into practice right here, right now, and that is the best way you can serve the guru. My Master *is* the teaching. Therefore, if you put his teaching into practice, you also become my Master. This can be your deepest symbol of devotion to Bhagavan." This family got frightened and never afterward went back to meet Sadhu Natanananda.

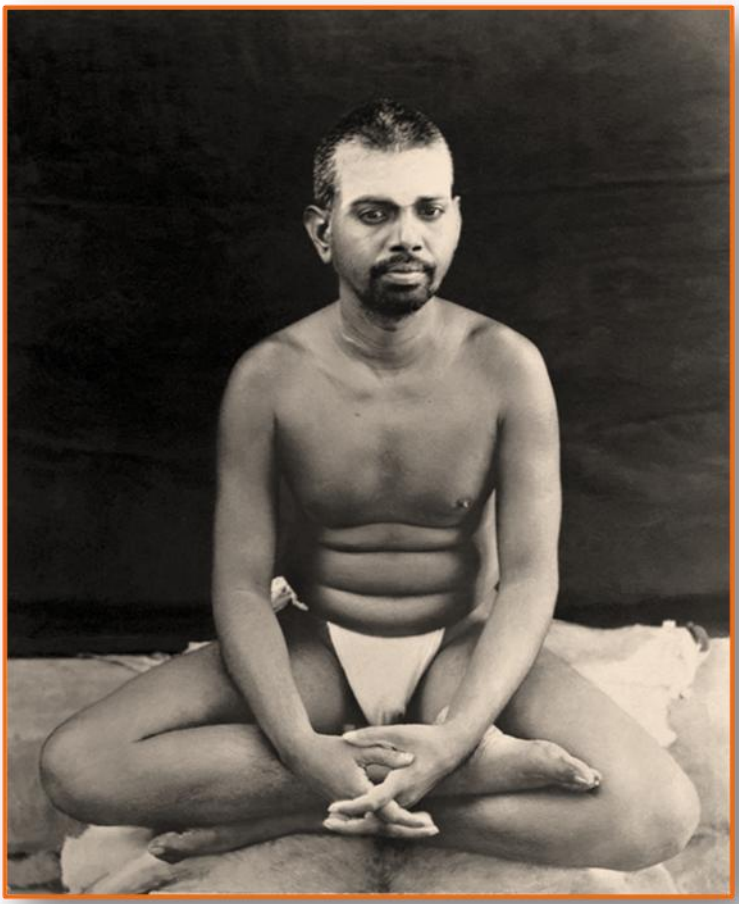
In Natanananda's last moments, Sadhu Om, Kunju Swami, a few others, and I prayed before him. In every devotee's death that I witnessed, the one common factor was that none was bothered about his or her body. Just before Natanananda dropped the body, I asked, "Swami, how do you feel?" "I am happy," he replied. Physically, he was suffering deeply. Every doctor that I took him to diagnosed him to be severely ill. Yet he said he was happy. I asked, a little surprised, "What do you mean by happy?" Natanananda replied, "Look at Bhagavan's picture, and you will understand." Those were his last words. He directed my attention to Bhagavan and then happily closed his eyes. When he died it was a privilege for me to help build the *Samadhi* for this *jnani's* body.

The examples of Nayana and Natanananda are assurances for us who put *Self-Enquiry* into practice. It is an assurance from Bhagavan himself that this is our last birth, and the true guru will take us unto himself, to be the eternal Truth. Once, a man came to see Bhagavan in *Virupaksha* cave. He stayed for a week. During that time, he composed and sang four songs in praise of Bhagavan. He said his name was Venkataraman Iyer and that he was from Satyamangalam, a small village close to Tiruvannamalai. Later, he sent a fifth song, the famous hymn, *Ramana Satguru*. When Bhagavan read them, he was struck by their beauty and ever since then, many Tamil speaking devotees of Bhagavan have been singing these. Strangely, when some of the old devotees went to Satyamangalam to meet him, nobody in the village knew anything about him. Later on, while devotees were discussing this, Devaraja Mudaliar remarked, "While at *Virupaksha* cave, Bhagavan had written five hymns in praise of *Arunachala*." To this Muruganar replied, "Father *Arunachala* wanted to express his gratitude. He came in human form as Venkataraman Iyer and sang five hymns to Bhagavan."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

One of the verses in *Ramana Satguru* means that Bhagavan has hoisted his flag of wisdom to call all beings to liberation from carnal existence. What is a billion? One followed by many zeroes. If you remove all the nonexistent zeroes that the billions of individual egos in reality are, what remains is the one. That One is the symbolism of *Arunachala:* that 'One' is Ramana, and that One is what every One of us already is. We are not what we think we are; we are One.

Bhagavan emerged to charm us into remembering our original, nonphysical existence. No one was excluded from his grace—be it man, woman, or beast. But until recently, all his devotees were Hindus. It was destiny for the teaching to also ripple across the divide of nations, cultures, and religions, edifying each One. And unfold indeed; it did, without disturbing the beliefs of the thousands who came in faith, from all corners of humanity.



RAMANA MAHARSHI IN SILENT REPOSE

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Frank Humphreys

Frank Humphreys was a British police officer and a Catholic. Transferred from England, he arrived in Bombay with high fever and had to be admitted in a hospital.

Frank Humphreys seemingly possessed psychic and occult powers. While in the hospital, he used these powers to relieve himself of the intense pain he was in. He then transported his subtle body to Vellore, a town near Tiruvannamalai where he had been posted, to meet one Narasimayya who was to teach him the local Telugu language. When he arrived in Vellore, Narasimayya introduced himself, saying, "I am your Telugu tutor." "I know," replied the Englishman. "How do you know?" asked the puzzled tutor. "I have seen you, though you have never visited Bombay. I traveled in my astral realm and met you," replied Humphreys. Now Narasimayya had tutored many Britishers, most of whom were spiritually disinclined. He presumed that this man was just crazy.

Humphreys then requested Narasimayya, "I would like to read a book on Hindu astrology in English. Can you help me?" Narasimayya presumed that this was yet another crazy question from him and ignored it. Seeing this, Humphreys continued, "Are there any mahatmas here?" (Mahatma means great soul). This last question startled Narasimayya a little but he was not fully convinced and wanted to test Humphreys. He left without

giving any reply. The next day he returned with a number of photographs of sages and saints and went to Humphreys' room. Seeing no one there, he left them on the table and went away.

When he came back, Humphreys had returned as well. Taking one photograph from the pile he asked, "Narasimayya, is this not your guru?" He was referring to a photograph of Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. Kavyakantha was Narasimayya's guru. Thrilled, Narasimayya concluded that Humphreys was genuine, or there could not have been so many coincidences. Humphreys revealed, "Last night your guru came into my dream. He sat next to me in my bed and said something in a language that I could not understand." This convinced Narasimayya. Unfortunately, Humphreys fell sick and had to be taken to a hill station, Ooty, where he stayed for a few months. When he returned he told Narasimayya, "Last night I had a dream. Since you might not believe my verbal description, I am going to draw what I saw." He then drew a hill, a cave in it, a small waterfall running, and a sadhu standing there. It was the pictorial depiction of the *Virupaksha* cave and Ramana Maharshi. Narasimayya was speechless, "This is my Master's Master! Kavyakantha's Master!"

Now completely convinced about Humphreys, he wanted to take him to Bhagavan. First, he introduced him to Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni who was then at Vellore. Kavyakantha was also surprised to see a Britisher who was twenty-one years old and already a superintendent of police. There was a Theosophical Society conference in Tiruvannamalai, in which Kavyakantha was to take part. All the three of them left for Tiruvannamalai.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Upon reaching their destination, Humphreys became restless; he wanted to see the saint whom he had seen in his dream. They went to *Virupaksha* cave and seated themselves in front of Bhagavan. Bhagavan's gaze locked on Humphreys for a long time. This is what Humphreys has recorded of his first encounter with Bhagavan**:**

"At two in the afternoon we went up the hill to see him. On reaching *Virupaksha* cave, we sat before him at his feet and said nothing. We sat there thus for a long time, and I felt lifted out of myself. For half an hour, I looked into the Maharshi's eyes, which never changed their expression of deep contemplation. I began to realize somewhat that the body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. I could feel that this Master's body was not the man; it was the instrument of God, merely a sitting motionless corpse, from which God was radiating terrifically. My own feelings were indescribable. The Maharshi is a man beyond description in his expression of dignity, gentleness, self-control, and calm strength of conviction. You can imagine nothing more beautiful than his smile. It is strange what a change it makes in one to have been in his presence."

This was a twenty-one-year-old Catholic Britisher's first experience of Bhagavan. Later, Kavyakantha suggested that he put some questions to the Master. Humphreys, being very young, enthusiastic, and wanting to serve the world, readily agreed. His very first question was, "Master, can I help the world?" Bhagavan: "Help yourself, and you will help the world." Humphreys: "I wish to help the world. Shall I not be helpful?" Bhagavan: "Yes, helping yourself, you help the world. You are in the world, you are the world. You are not different from the world. Nor is the world different from you." Humphreys, after a pause: "Master, can I perform miracles just as Sri Krishna and Jesus Christ did before?" Bhagavan: "Did

any one of them, when he performed them, feel that it was he who was performing the miracle?" Humphreys: "No, Master." This was the first hint Bhagavan shared with him suggesting that he should not be captivated by his occult powers and sense of doership.

He was unable to stay for too long in Vellore. He returned whenever he could, and traveled fifty miles in the hot summer sun on his motorcycle. When he reached *Virupaksha* cave, the first thing Bhagavan invariably asked him was, "You have not yet eaten? Are you not hungry?" Humphreys usually was hungry. Bhagavan would immediately arrange for food to be given to him. Bhagavan knew westerners ate with a spoon so he crafted a spoon made out of a coconut shell ready for him. This surprised Humphreys even more.

Once, Humphreys had finished his entire meal but was still hungry. Bhagavan remarked, "You are still feeling hungry." He then asked somebody to give him more food. Lunch over, the young Englishman was now feeling very thirsty—thanks to the burning tropical heat—but his innate British reserve prevented him from asking for anything. Knowing this, Bhagavan immediately looked at one of the other devotees and said, "Give him lemonade. He is very thirsty." All this impressed upon him that Bhagavan's love was not only that of a spiritual Master, but also that of a nurturing mother.

Many a time, he saw small children at the cave, neither talking nor playing, but just sitting peacefully. As a Britisher, he was baffled. He had never seen children sit so silently, so quietly, and for so long. The Truth was that these children could also share the spiritual peace of Bhagavan and responded in a like manner. Bhagavan knew of his inclination toward

the occult sciences and dissuaded him. "Pursue that which is superior to all the occult powers," he told him, "Your aim should be higher than this. Not only higher, it should be the highest, and the highest is to recognize that you are the Truth. All these occult powers will delude you. You should give them up!"

Bhagavan helped him wean himself off the usage of occult powers. Humphreys was a very strong man with a strong constitution. Just as he had the capacity to acquire occult powers, he also had the strength to practice his Master's teachings. Slowly, he gave up the occult sciences. When he relinquished his chosen vocation, the occult sciences, Bhagavan directed him with the teachings of *Self-Enquiry*, surrender, and taught him to go within.

His descriptions of the Master, which he recorded in a letter and sent to his friend in England, were published in the International Psychic Gazette: "The phenomena we see are curious and surprising, but the most marvelous phenomenon of all is one that we do not realize. That is that one and only one illimitable force within, which is responsible for all the phenomena we see and the act of seeing them. Do not fix your attention on all these changing things of life, death, and phenomena. Do not think of even the actual act of seeing or perceiving them, but only of that which sees all these things as that which is responsible for it all. This will seem merely impossible at first, but by degrees the result will be felt. It takes years of studying and daily practice; that is how a Master is made. Give a quarter of a day for this practice. Try to keep the mind unshakably fixed on that which sees. It is inside you; do not expect to find that that is something definite, on which the mind can be fixed easily—it will not be so.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Though it may take years to discover that, the result of this concentration will be seen in all sorts of unconscious clairvoyance, in peace of mind, in power to deal with troubles, and in the power all around, but always the unconscious power. I have given you these teachings in the same words that the Master gives to his intimate disciples. From now onward, let your whole thought in meditation be not on the act of seeing, nor on what you see, but immovably on that which sees."

What powerful instructions! Humphreys received everything after getting established in the Heart. He found it difficult to keep up with his job and pursue meditation as well. He came to Bhagavan, who advised him to stay on longer. The Master recognizes when you are completely ready; the Master cook needed to "cook" him for sometime longer so he made him stay. After a few months, he came again to Bhagavan. This time Bhagavan said, "Now you can go." Humphreys has recorded, "I went back as a better and deeper Catholic." There was no conflict in him at all. After some time, he turned away from all worldly things, entered a monastery, and became a monk. Established in the Heart, there was no Hindu, Christian, or Muslim; there was no male or female, just pure being.

Masthan Swami

Masthan Swami was a staunch Muslim. His parents observed all religious codes, rituals, and disciplines rigorously, and brought Masthan Swami up in the same manner. Even as a child of eight years, Masthan would enter into *Samadhi* (a state of repose and silence) without knowing what it was. He had the natural ability to be detached from people and things from childhood. This remarkable devotee followed all the Islamic injunctions and was very much devoted to Allah and Prophet Mohammed. His natural inclination toward the *Samadhi* experience coaxed him to read, though he was mostly uneducated. He started reading and picking up Tamil and soon studied books like *Kaivalya Navaneetam* and *Sukhar Vashistam.*

A grand Sufi mystic named Gunangudi Masthan, who lived in the nineteenth century in those areas, was a powerful influence. He wrote simple Tamil poems extolling Allah, the Prophet, Islam, and the right way of living. But though Masthan Swami participated in Islamic festivals like Moharram, his Mind and Heart were tuned to the inward Self, going into *Samadhi*, reading and singing Tayumanavar's songs. (Tayumanavar's songs were extolled by Bhagavan because they dealt purely with the Truth. Other saints have brought in Shiva and other Gods but Tayumanavar

stuck to the teaching of going into silence, and Masthan Swami was well versed in that.)

In 1914, Masthan Swami was living in Desur, a village forty miles away from Tiruvannamalai and from where Desurammal hailed. Being two of the only people in that village who shared a similar spiritual "madness," the two became friends. One day she told him, "Masthan Swami, you must meet my guru." She then brought him to *Virupaksha* cave to Bhagavan.

After this staunch and devoted follower of Islam came to see Bhagavan at *Virupaksha* cave, this is what he recounted: "He was seated like a rock; his unswerving gaze was filled with grace, compassion, and steady wisdom. I stood by his side. After giving me a look, the gate of my Heart opened, and I was also established in that state in the very first encounter. Just one look from Bhagavan and I stood like that for eight hours, absolutely without fatigue, and filled with total absorption and peace. In those days at *Virupaksha* cave, Bhagavan would open our Hearts with a single gracious look, and we would be transformed. There was no need for any questions, since, by his look, he revealed inherent divine wisdom."

What a wonderful man Masthan was! In the very first encounter he instantaneously, like all the others whom we have known about, took Bhagavan as his guru. He had already read about the qualifications and marks of a guru. He could see that seated in front of him, in human form, was not only his guru, but God as well. When he was ready to go back to his village, Bhagavan gave him a very steady look.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

When he returned, Masthan Swami experienced some conflict within himself. Until then his Master had been Prophet Mohammed. Though Allah was God, and Prophet Mohammed was his guru, here was a living guru, Ramana Maharshi**.** "Am I disloyal to my other guru, Mohammed, who is no more?" he wondered.

This was his conflict—he was filled with Bhagavan's presence, but as he was brought up in the Islamic tradition he had this feeling, "Am I brushing aside my Master Mohammed because he is no more in the body?" Fortunately he was bold enough to go to Bhagavan and confess, "Bhagavan, this is my problem. Please help me."

Bhagavan looked at him for sometime because Bhagavan was never interested in the question. Bhagavan was always more interested in the questioner. He looked at Masthan Swami for a full fifteen minutes, showering all his grace and replied, "Do you take this body to be Bhagavan? Do you think the Prophet is dead? Then is Buddha dead? Is Jesus Christ dead? Is Adi Shankara dead? Are they not guiding, hundreds of thousands of people even today? Are they not living in the Heart? A living guru means the one living in one's Heart as a guru. A living guru does not mean somebody living in a body at a given historical time, and at a given geographical space. The guru ever lives in your Heart. Heart is Allah, Heart is Mohammad, Heart is Jesus Christ, Heart is Buddha, and Heart is Bhagavan. Live in the Heart as the Heart by diving into the silent Heart."

These words were recounted to me by Viswanatha Swami. I could not grasp them immediately, so I requested Viswanatha Swami, "Please explain it so that I can understand." He said, "The guru is timeless. To

talk of the guru in time, you bring in death, birth, living, all this. There is no outer guru and inner guru. There is the guru principle, which is the Heart of every one of us." I said, "Swami, how do you say this?" He replied, "A devotee once came from Lahore. Tiruvannamalai and Lahore are more than one thousand miles apart. In the 1920s and 1930s, travel was almost impossible in India. He could stay for a month or so. He was so beautifully blessed by the Master because he had already hoisted the flag. Everyone was to be enlightened. When he was to leave he wept before Bhagavan, "How can I leave you and go, Bhagavan?" Bhagavan asked, "Where are you going? Can you go away from Bhagavan? Bhagavan is always with you, Bhagavan is in you. In fact you yourself are Bhagavan."

It is the same state of "I am" in Viswanatha and Ganesan that is Bhagavan; the living Master is always in the Heart as still awareness. This awareness that is in you and you in it, in me and in every one of us, is *Arunachala Ramanan*, God, Self, Heart, Jesus, Buddha . . . We can give it any name or no name. Love makes no claim of its own.

Masthan Swami was a multifaceted personality. By birth he was a Muslim and by profession he was a weaver. It was said of Masthan Swami that he was the Kabir of Bhagavan. He was totally devoted to the Master just as Kabir was so devoted to his Master. Masthan Swami began coming regularly to Bhagavan. He relinquished weaving as a profession and wove to make loincloths and towels for Bhagavan. Being a true ascetic, he never married. He begged in the streets of his own village. When he came to Tiruvannamalai, he often would come with Desurammal. Desurammal had money and brought lots of food because she wanted to feed Bhagavan. Masthan Swami would carry rice and *dhal* on his head and

walk the long distance from Desur happily. It was not a burden for him because he was going to meet his Master. At *Arunachala*, instead of sitting down and eating, he would go begging for alms.

Masthan had many conversations with Bhagavan. Of one such conversation, Masthan Swami recounts, "Once while I was on my way to see Bhagavan, I prayed for his grace. On arrival at *Virupaksha* cave he asked me, "Do you like saguna upasana, worship of God with form, or do you prefer *nirguna* upasana, worship of the formless God?" I replied, "I choose *nirguna* upasana." Bhagavan then shared with me this beautiful instruction, "Fix the Mind in your Heart. If you keep your attention on the source from where all thoughts arise, the Mind will subside there at the source, and reality will shine forth." Though I have come across similar teachings in other books, these words of wisdom coming from the holy voice of my guru penetrated my Heart and implanted themselves as the way for me. After this meeting with Bhagavan, I had no further doubts about this. In fact no doubts arose at all after this."

Bhagavan guided him to be established in the Heart. Many a time he went around the hill with Bhagavan. Once, Masthan was divinely intoxicated. Bhagavan asked him to sing the Sufi saint's and the Gunangudi Masthan's songs. Bhagavan enjoyed those songs. Masthan says, "I sang in the highest voice because it was my Master who had made the request."

Another interesting incident Masthan Swami relates is about Bhagavan and a large golden colored mongoose. That it was golden colored itself was unusual considering these shy creatures are grey in color. It was the *Karthikai Deepam* festival time. Hundreds of people were climbing up the hill. Running through the crowds, this mongoose went into *Virupaksha*

cave. It began searching every nook and corner of the cave. At that time Palani Swami, an attendant of Bhagavan, was not there and was taking a bath in a stream nearby. Not finding Bhagavan inside, the mongoose went outside and licked Palani Swami's feet. Then it started climbing up further toward *Skandashram* where Bhagavan was. On reaching *Skandashram*, the mongoose royally jumped onto his lap and sat gazing at Bhagavan.

Bhagavan caressed it and looked at it, pouring his grace. Though the *Ashram* was crowded with people, the attendant present was Masthan Swami. He took care that this creature didn't get hurt and didn't hurt the peacocks there. Wherever the mongoose went, he followed it, unnoticed, and after a while it disappeared. When the *Ashram* manager, Perumal Swami returned, Masthan Swami related what happened. Perumal Swami said, "You should have caught that mongoose and kept it tied down here!" Bhagavan smiled at them, "Can you catch him? Can you tie him down? He is a Siddha Purusha. *Arunachala* is home to so many Siddha Purushas. One of them wanted to come and spend some time with me. He came here. Can you ever think of catching him and tying him down here?"

During Bhagavan's lifetime, some of the serious aspirants were living in Palakothu, a grove of jack fruit trees near the *Ashram*. Sometimes they would decide to go to other towns, beg, and sing praises of Bhagavan. Whenever they went to Bhagavan to get his permission for doing so, Bhagavan would enquire, "Where are you going? Where will you stay?"

They would reply, "Bhagavan, we are not concerned about that. We are going to lead the lives of *parivrajakas*, begging for food and staying without shelter." Bhagavan would not be very happy about this until they said, "We shall inform Masthan Swami about where we plan to go." This was because Masthan Swami, once informed, would go after them, give them food, or beg for them, and make them take rest.

They would go to Porur, Desur, Chengam, or Gingee, all within a radius of thirty to forty miles. Masthan Swami would follow, or go ahead of them, wait on them, and serve them everywhere, saying "I am the devotee of devotees" in the most genuine way. They would ask him, "Masthan Swami, you serve us so well. What can we do for you?" "You can do one thing for me." he would reply, "Narrate without omitting one single word, whatever my Master spoke in my absence." This is the reward this devotee wanted.

Masthan Swami was very humble. Bhagavan himself said that except for Kunju Swami and Viswanatha Swami, the other devotees never knew who Masthan Swami was. He preferred to remain unobserved. The words *humble, devoted,* and *pious* aptly describe him.

Once a robbery took place in the old hall at *Ramanashram* while Bhagavan, Masthan Swami, and some others were present. There was no reaction from Masthan Swami though one sadhu actually took a crowbar to kill the robbers. Bhagavan stopped him and said, "We are all *sadhus*, our duty is to keep quiet; the robbers' duty is to rob. We are *sadhus*; our duty is to follow our *dharma*. Let them follow theirs."

When Masthan Swami became ill, he moved from his village to another village because he did not want to give anyone trouble. Rarely did Bhagavan go out of his way for anybody, but in this case, Bhagavan called Desurammal and said, "Wherever Masthan Swami goes; you be with him and look after him." I have rarely heard Bhagavan giving this kind of instruction for the sake of any other devotee.

Masthan Swami's last days were very beautiful. After he dropped his body, Desurammal came to Bhagavan and narrated, "Bhagavan, in his last days we thought he was in delirium. He was saying, "Nandi has descended and Shiva's celestial devotees, the bhutaganas, are dancing, saying, 'Masthan! Come, come to us.'" Akhilandammal continued, "Perhaps he was blabbering in his delirium but Bhagavan, in his last moment he stood up. It was absolutely impossible for him to stand up in that state. We were there. He stood up and then with tears in his eyes said, 'Apitakuchalambal herself has come to receive me, I am going Desurammal,' and he dropped dead."

When this was told to Bhagavan, he commented, "Maybe the Universal Mother personally came to take him. All his descriptions tally with the world of Shiva described in the Puranas. Masthan Swami was an unassuming devotee. He had a wealth of hidden spiritual experiences."

Not only did he extol Masthan Swami, but the Master thanked Desurammal as well, "It is a matter of gratification that he passed away in your care, under your supervision." He did not stop there. After this, Bhagavan picked up a copy of the Tamil book, *Tirumandiram*, which was written two thousand five hundred years ago. In it is given custom how a realized being's dead body is to be buried and not *burned*. Bhagavan

marked those passages and actually sketched out how the tomb was to be built from below, and how the body was to be brought entombed with sacred ash, camphor, and some other ingredients. Following these clear instructions, the *Samadhi* was built.

The whole village turned out that day despite a pouring rain. The local temple, even though it was a simple one, shared the temple chariot, in which God's image was carried, to carry the corpse of a Muslim. Most Hindus can feel the profundity of this. It is said that in that place that day, the rain was so heavy that the water was up to hip level. Amidst chanting, the body was carried into the *Samadhi* built according to Bhagavan's instructions. It is said that whoever goes there and offers prayers at the *Samadhi* has his wishes granted.

Let us offer our salutations to one of the most beautiful devotees of Bhagavan. Masthan Swami was the simplest soul one could meet, but Bhagavan adored him to the highest.

Masthan Swami had a disciple named Sambhandam, from whose notebook, these details were gathered. Sambhandam has written a song about his Master, Masthan Swami:

Oh! Masthan the liberated sage who lives in Desur!
You are ever a good and pure renunciate
Who remained forever like a child,
Who roamed like a ghost,
And who lived without a trace of worldly desires.
Precious gem
Who obtained the sacred grace of

Satguru Ramana, adored by all,
Praise to your fullness,
Salutations at your holy feet.

From Masthan Swami, we learn the definition of a living guru. We observed that Masthan Swami had three explosions of enlightenment. Thrice, his Heart opened up with some feelings of doubt lingering. In this process that he underwent is a lesson for us as well—never be discouraged for long.

His third process of enlightenment occurred when Bhagavan asked him if he would like to follow the way of form, or the formless way of worship. Masthan Swami chose *nirguna*—formless worship.

Bhagavan already knew that *Apitakuchalambal* would come to take him. He asked him to choose worship in form or formlessness, and Masthan Swami chose formlessness. Yet, his ultimate liberation came through form, which means one thing**,** and that is: God alone acts. We have the liberty to relinquish effort. Destiny is always in the hands of God, and it is always grace.

Vilacheri Ranga Iyer

Love has many facets: it is supreme, expressed in many dimensions, and a *jnani*, a person of wisdom, is a repository. All their actions reflect the myriad aspects of this unconditional love. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, through his relationships with his devotees, has shown us different aspects of this wonderful love. With devotees like Vilacheri Ranga Iyer, we see the guru in his aspect of loving friendship.

Even as an infant, Bhagavan had early traits of nobility: of equal sharing, of accepting responsibilities, and of making and keeping promises. As a toddler, while coming back home after playing, he would bring a couple of his playmates to drink milk from his mother. Usually children are jealous, but Bhagavan would go out of his way and bring his friends home, saying, "Come on, and let us have milk." What a strong bond of friendship and sharing this created!

One of these friends, Meenakshi, was just one and a half years old and lived in the neighboring house. After some years, Meenakshi married but did not have a very happy married life. However, all the while, she kept worshipping Bhagavan in her heart. She never came to see Bhagavan because she could not. In the 1940s, when she was bedridden with age, Bhagavan simply appeared where she was, just as he did for

Nayana. Sitting by her bedside, he touched Meenakshi. She was in a coma, but regained consciousness at his touch and cried gratefully, "My God! My Lord! Ramana, you have come to bless me!" These were her last words. This is the highest example of friendship: though they shared mother's milk way back in infancy and never met after that, Bhagavan remained a loyal friend and remembered Meenakshi in her last days.

Lakshmi was another fortunate friend of Bhagavan who shared milk with him at the age of two. She was eventually widowed and led a life tattered by pain and suffering. Bhagavan's name and recognition had spread by then. One day Bhagavan was seated in the hall surrounded by devotees, scholars, wealthy people, and VIPs. Lakshmi, thin, dark, and unrecognizable at the age of sixty, stood in front of him among two hundred people and demurely asked, "I do not know whether Bhagavan recognizes me."

"Why not?" Bhagavan replied. "Are you not Lakshmi? Did we not drink milk together?" The Master recalled his friend even after sixty years.

Bhagavan personified wisdom and was like a diamond. We value a diamond because it shines clear from every angle in which we examine its clarity. Any page taken out of Bhagavan's life and teachings sparkles with this clarity.

Many people pay attention to Bhagavan's teachings, but refuse Bhagavan in the aspect of friendship. His relationship with his devotee-friends was a true and revealing one—while they viewed him as an enlightened sage, Bhagavan viewed them as his friends from childhood.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Two of Bhagavan's prominent devotee-friends had two factors in common. They were steeped in family life and deeply attached to their worldly duties. It is inspirational to see how Bhagavan related to these people. When he first asked them to give up their family ties and take up a spiritual life, he went along with them. But when they became tired and exhausted with their worldly attachments, they were gently attracted toward spiritual Truth.

His friends came to him with complaints about their family life. In spite of the mundane nature of their problems, the young Bhagavan listened and solved them as a true friend. He did not just offer them counsel but actually took upon himself the responsibility of removing every suffering as if it were his own.

Vilacheri Ranga Iyer, also known as Rangan, lived in Tiruchuzhi, which was Bhagavan's birth place. He was Bhagavan's classmate and childhood friend. Bhagavan's family and Rangan's family moved to Madurai around the same time, and the two boys continued to be close friends until Bhagavan ran away to *Arunachala*.

It was 1903 when Rangan first came to know about Bhagavan's whereabouts in *Arunachala*. However, being tied down by family responsibilities, he could not come and see him immediately. After a few years, when Bhagavan was at *Virupaksha* cave, he finally paid him a visit. He greeted Bhagavan with an affectionate gesture of friendship—a punch! Rangan could only view Bhagavan as his friend, Venkataraman. He demanded, "Hey, Venkataraman! Even the evening before you left Madurai, we were playing football. I am supposed to be your closest friend—why did you not tell me that you were going away the next day?"

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Bhagavan replied, "Ranga, did I travel like a normal traveler with baggage and all that? It was a supreme force, which drew me that day to *Arunachala*. Where was there room for any formalities to be observed?"

Bhagavan bestowed a look, and immediately Rangan could see that he was no more just Venkataraman, his friend, his classmate, the football player, or his mate in the swimming pool.

Bhagavan had been an excellent swimmer, football player, and wrestler. People, who have seen Bhagavan then, say that Bhagavan was a six-footer and had a very strong physique. Bhagavan was very well built for a Brahmin boy. Until the age of sixteen, when Bhagavan had the ego-death experience, he never had a headache, stomach ache, or any ailment—so robust was his body. However, after his Paathala Linga experience in *Arunachala* temple, his body was worn by the neglect. Ranga could see this change in Bhagavan. The Master had already become somewhat legendary, and a few devotees had gathered there. Yet, when he came to *Virupaksha* cave, Bhagavan treated him with the same love.

Their relationship was beautiful: it was that of a fully awakened man, a sage of wisdom, and an ignorant man steeped in family sufferings, not spiritually inclined—but with a deep love for Bhagavan. The Master appreciated the depth of that friendship and would seat himself next to his friend by his bedside. Seeing him tossing and turning, weighed down by his problems, Bhagavan would pat him and ask gently, "Hey, Ranga what is bothering you?" One day Ranga told him about his troubles.

"Have you given enough to your family to live on, while you have come away here?" Bhagavan enquired. Ranga was silent, too embarrassed to

admit his inability to provide for his family. "So you have some financial problems," Bhagavan surmised. "Is it enough if you get ten thousand rupees?" This was a huge amount in those days, and it surprised Rangan to hear Bhagavan talking about money. Bhagavan pressed on, "Will it solve all your problems if you get ten thousand rupees?" Rangan remained quiet and after a few days took leave of Bhagavan and went to Madras. He managed to get a job selling Lorries and buses, and when he got his commission, it was exactly ten thousand rupees.

Once, his son was bitten by a snake, and people thought he was dead. He remembered that Bhagavan had given him sacred ash. He told his grieving wife and relatives, "Do not worry, my Bhagavan, my friend is there." He smeared the sacred ash on his son, while chanting "Ramana, Ramana, Ramana, Ramana," and the boy recovered.

Then, there was the incident when his eldest daughter became mentally imbalanced. Her husband could no longer take care of her and left her in Rangan's care. Rangan had a solution to everything: Bhagavan. He wrote a letter to him and soon received a reply from the *Ashram*, saying, "Your letter was shown to Bhagavan, and he held it for a long time. He asked us to write back that she will be all right."

Another occasion, his other daughter fell into a well, and when they got her out, she was thought to be dead. Everyone began to weep except Rangan, who had faith in his friend. He had the "cure-all" medicine—Bhagavan's sacred ash. He smeared it on her and sure enough, she was healed.

Once, Rangan's wife, Chellammal went to *Ramanashram* while Bhagavan was there. All the devotees proceeded from the *Ashram* to walk around the hill.

Chellammal left the hall with the others but came back only to go around the old hall a few times. Bhagavan was surprised. "How come you returned so quickly?" he asked.

She replied, "No, Bhagavan. All the others have left for circumambulation of *Arunachala* but I could not join them as I have a problem with my back. I thought that I will do *pradakshina* to you instead." Bhagavan arranged for an injection to be given by the *Ashram* doctor. The doctor advised Chellammal to rest in the guest house. She, however, could not resist Bhagavan's presence for even a few minutes. She managed to slowly reach Bhagavan's hall, making her husband really worried. Bhagavan just lifted his hand in blessing, and Chellammal was healed of her back pain. It never came back again.

This aspect of Bhagavan was unique because he had rarely done these things for anyone else, i.e. talk about money, give sacred ash, and raise his hand to heal. He came to these realms for a true friend. What is friendship? It is one deep facet of love. What is love? Love is wisdom—jnana—and Bhagavan embodied that. He is the knee of listening.

His friendship with Rangan was not limited only to the experiences at *Virupaksha* cave. At times while Rangan lay in bed, Bhagavan would wake him up at two in the morning and say, "Come on, let's go for a swim." This was before the *Ashram* was built. However, behind the present

Ashram is a small pool where they would go for a swim. Thus, with Rangan, Bhagavan sometimes became Venkataraman again.

In their childhood days in Madurai, Bhagavan would tease Rangan with a sharp underwater kick on the thigh. Being a very strong boy then, Bhagavan's kick would sting Ranga like an iron rod had hit him. When they went swimming now, Bhagavan playfully kicked Rangan again but this time Rangan held his foot, put it to his eyes, then on his head and said, "Bhagavan, how is it that your leg has become so soft? When you did this to me in Madurai, it used be like being hit by an iron rod. Now your foot feels like a rose petal."

Bhagavan replied, "Is it so Ranga? Maybe spirit's perfection changes even the body." Once when Rangan was going around the hill along with Bhagavan, he stepped on a thorn. Bhagavan bent over and removed the thorn himself. Rangan had not noticed Bhagavan's feet until then but after walking for a little while, he saw Bhagavan stepping on a thorn. He cried, "Bhagavan, Bhagavan! There is a thorn in your foot! Please sit down, let me remove it." Bhagavan sat down to oblige his friend. However, when Rangan took a look at Bhagavan's foot, he saw not one but innumerable thorns. Bhagavan wryly remarked, "Ranga, which thorns are you going to remove—the old ones or the new ones? Let it go." "Bhagavan, how can you walk?" Ranga protested. Bhagavan calmly gestured, "See? When a thorn goes into the foot, just rub it on the earth, and everything will be all right."

Rangan once had the opportunity to physically embrace Bhagavan. He was again amazed that the Master's skin was silky and soft as a lotus petal. When he had known him in Madurai, his skin had been very rough,

so much so that if he rubbed against somebody else, it would hurt. He asked Bhagavan in wonderment, "Bhagavan, how come the texture of your skin has changed?" Bhagavan responded with the same reply, "Spiritual perfection changes everything."

Another time, as a friend, he took the liberty to ask the guru, "Bhagavan, why is it that your head shakes all the time and why do you need a stick to walk?" Bhagavan confided in his friend, "Ranga, this is not because of old age. When I came to Tiruvannamalai after the ego-death experience and took shelter at the foot of *Arunachala*, this head started shaking." "Why?" Rangan enquired, looking puzzled. Bhagavan replied, "Can you imagine a violent, wild, mad elephant entering a small thatched shed? What would happen to the hut is what happened to the body. It will go to pieces." This is how the immensity of his spiritual experience had affected his body.

Rangan once consulted an astrologer, who said he would have insurmountable problems for one year. He wrote to Bhagavan, telling him of what the astrologer said. Bhagavan at once asked his devotee to write back to him to come and stay with him. This was the only instance we know of where Bhagavan did something like this. The moment Rangan arrived, Bhagavan said, "Do not remove yourself any time from me. Be with me all the time."

A friend from Madras, India, now called Chennai, came to stay with them for a couple of months. The day he was supposed to leave, Rangan offered to go with him to the railway station. Bhagavan gave strict instructions to Rangan: "Ranga, take him to the station, put him on the train, and come straight back to me. Do not go anywhere else, do not

spend the night in town—just come back and stay with me." Finally, after a few months had passed, the day came when Bhagavan told Rangan he could go back. When he did so, he found that all his problems were solved.

Rangan revealed some fascinating stories about Bhagavan's childhood. Bhagavan's father was a lawyer and had many important legal papers stored in a loft at home. One time when they were playing together in Madurai, Bhagavan decided to pull out those papers and make paper boats with them to sail in the temple pool along with his friends. Though his father loved him very much, he was understandably livid when he found out. He ordered his wife, Alagammal, "Undress him, shave his head, make him wear just a loin cloth, and drive him out of the house." Many years later, when Rangan met Bhagavan at *Virupaksha* cave, he said, "Venkataraman, do you remember your father predicted your ascetic state many years ago?"

When Bhagavan was at *Skandashram*, Rangan would visit quite often. One day he saw Bhagavan was lying in a room, so he left the room, closing the door behind him. To his astonishment, he saw Bhagavan talking to somebody outside the room, when he had seen him lying down in the other room a second ago. He ran and opened the room door and saw Bhagavan lying there with closed eyes. He told Bhagavan what he saw. Bhagavan brushed it off humorously saying, "You should have caught that thief you saw outside, so that we could have dealt with him!"

Once Ranga asked, "Bhagavan, you attained enlightenment while you were still in Madurai, didn't you?" Bhagavan replied, "When I was studying, *Arunachala* embraced me most powerfully, though apparently I

was unaware. It is his grace that he revealed himself to me. I felt like my whole body was burning. From that moment on, I was in *Samadhi*. Though I continued to play and talk with you, I was in *Samadhi* all the while." Bhagavan revealed this only to Rangan.

One day Rangan noticed that one of Bhagavan's teeth and his gums were very dark. "Bhagavan, you used to have a very healthy body and good teeth," Rangan remarked. Bhagavan said rather nonchalantly, "Yes, but when I was here alone, a person gave me poison and asked me to swallow it. I did so and it did not kill me, but it disfigured my gums and my teeth." Bhagavan was given poison three times, and strangely, this has happened to many sages. (Yogi Ramsuratkumar, too, was given poison twice. It is immensely sad that Masters suffer all this because of us, and they do not even mention it. This incident in Bhagavan's life came to light through Rangan, as Bhagavan had confided in his friend.)

It was not just friendship, but also his teachings that Bhagavan shared with Rangan. Rangan often felt that he could not stand up to the demands of spiritual teachings because he was entangled with his worries about his family, money, and his worldly problems. Bhagavan would say, "Throw your thoughts out. You will enjoy freedom only in a state where there are no thoughts." Unfortunately, Rangan found it difficult to follow this counsel. He felt it was impossible for him to progress spiritually, and asked, "How many times will I be born to get jnana?" Bhagavan shared a beautiful answer: "In reality, there are no factors like time and distance. In one hour we dream that many days and years have passed by. In a movie don't you see mere shadows being transformed into vast seas, mountains, and buildings? The world is not outside you—all happens

within the Self; like in the movie show. The small world that is in the mind appears as the big world outside."

Rangan once again complained at a later time, "Bhagavan, your grace is not on me." Bhagavan smiled graciously and replied, "Ranga, you are speaking like one who is standing neck-deep in the floodwaters of the Ganges, complaining that he is thirsty and saying that he wants water from the tap of his house to be brought to quench his thirst!"

In Kumbakonam, in South India, there is a huge religious festival that is held every twelve years. Millions of people throng to this festival and Rangan wrote to Bhagavan that he and his entire family were going to attend it. Yet, on the day of the festivities, he unexpectedly paid Bhagavan a visit.

Bhagavan, a little surprised, asked him, "What are you doing here?" While everyone else is going to Kumbakonam for the festival, "why have you come here?" With the deepest devotion, Rangan replied, "I came here because I recognize that the God here is greater than the God at Kumbakonam."

After a few days' stay, it was time to depart. Rangan was overcome with the pain of separation from Bhagavan and wept bitterly. This is how Bhagavan consoled him: "Ranga, you are imagining that you came from Kumbakonam and are now going to Madurai. In reality, you are where you always were, that is, in the same place now, with me. Being with me, you are in a state of jubilation, but when you reach the state of the Self by your own struggle, you will realize that there is nothing special in me. You will recognize that you too are that Self." Sometimes Bhagavan

would say, "I am where there are no words." Rangan as a friend once asked, "Then why do you talk?" "Out of compassion," was the Master's reply.

Once, G. Ramaswami Pillai, another devotee, lost a key. He came to Bhagavan and said, "I have lost the key." Bhagavan's reply was, "The key is where it always was. It is not lost; only your memory is lost. *Atma* is always everywhere; the Self is always everywhere but due to ignorance or ajnana, we spend all our time searching for it."

After coming to the present *Ramanashram*, Rangan saw many imperfections in the guests there. Remarking on this, he said, "How is it, Bhagavan, that your devotees have growing egos even though they are living around you?" Bhagavan replied, "How else can the ego be destroyed? It has to come out through an individual and therefore, this is only a cleansing process—not a growing process."

Another time Rangan asked Bhagavan, "Why do you always extol this stone-filled hill as God?" Bhagavan said, "Do you think *Arunachala* is merely a heap of boulders? Many holy people and yogis live here even now, in caves. *Arunachala* is God, it is Shiva, it is Self--that Self, which is your Heart."

There is a humorous friendly banter that took place between Rangan and Bhagavan. Rangan asked Bhagavan, "Have you got anything to be achieved in life?" Bhagavan said, "Everything is achieved. There is nothing which is left out." "Which means what, Bhagavan?" his friend enquired. "I can be anything I like." Rangan had come with his grown-up daughter so he said, "Can I bring a girl and get her married to you?" Of

course! Bhagavan retorted. Later Bhagavan smilingly said, "For twenty years I was afraid whenever Rangan would come, that he would bring a girl and get me married! I was quite literally afraid of Rangan!"

Rangan was soon steeped in troubles again: his wife was sick, his daughters were not married, he lost his job, and he could not pay the mortgage for his house. Bhagavan said, "Come and stay with me." This time Bhagavan was very stern, because Rangan would keep complaining.

"Bhagavan, you are answering others' questions, and you are not even talking to me. How friendly we have been! I am lamenting over my problems, and you do not even show the slightest compassion to me." This was Rangan's constant grouse. Bhagavan remained like a rock. For nearly a month or two, day and night, this continued: Rangan's constant lamentations were met by Bhagavan's stoic silence. One summer night Rangan could not bear it anymore. He fell at Bhagavan's feet and cried, "I am not going to let go. You have to answer me. I am suffering! Help! You do not even look at my face! Please!" Bhagavan helped him to his feet and pointed toward the sky. In Tiruvannamalai on a clear, summer night, the stars shone brightly like diamonds strewn all over the sky. He proceeded to give him a deep teaching in the following dialogue:

Bhagavan: "Look up, see the smallest star there in our universe. The sun is a large star, and compared to it, our earth is very small. However, compared to that small star there, our sun is very small. Do you understand?"
Rangan: "Yes, Bhagavan."

Bhagavan: "So when compared to that star, if even the sun is so small, how small is the earth?"
Rangan: "Very small, Bhagavan."

Bhagavan: "When compared to that star, how big is Asia?"
Rangan: "Very small, Bhagavan."
Bhagavan: "When compared to that star, what is India like?"
Rangan: "Very small, Bhagavan; a very tiny dot."

Bhagavan: "When compared to that star, how small is *Arunachala*?"
Rangan: "A very tiny dot, Bhagavan."
Bhagavan: "When compared to that star, how about *Ramanashram*?"
Rangan: "A very, very, very tiny dot, Bhagavan."

Bhagavan: "Compared to that star what are you?"

This proved to be an eye-opener for Rangan.

"All the time you think about you, the tiniest spot." Bhagavan concluded.

This immediately opened the floodgates of Ranga's Heart; he prostrated before Bhagavan and wept profusely. With Bhagavan's grace, he experienced the ecstasy of enlightenment.

Rangan could not sleep the next day. While he was lying next to Bhagavan, the Master asked him to go home. When he went back, he discovered that all his problems had been solved. Bhagavan compassionate and merciful as he was, had been a true friend and did not leave him in the lurch. Not only did his worldly troubles dissolve, but he

was also blessed with spiritual awakening. When a sage attracts a devotee to himself, in many cases he attracts the devotee's entire family with his love and wisdom. In Rangan's case, too, his mother, wife, and brothers were caught in the net of Bhagavan's love and were completely devoted to him.

Rangan had a brother who had also been Bhagavan's classmate. Though his name was Mani, he was nicknamed 'Pokkiri' Mani (Pokkiri means "rogue" in Tamil). He was a tough, hefty man who intimidated people wherever he went. No one dared to pick a fight with him and would give in to his every whim. His mother was deeply devoted to Bhagavan, even though she had seen him as a child. When she saw Bhagavan at *Virupaksha* cave, she was totally transformed. Unfortunately, her son did not share her spiritual aspirations.

Once, while traveling to Tirupathi, the train passed through Tiruvannamalai. Mani's mother begged him, "Let us get down here and see our Venkataraman!" "I do not believe in all these fake *sadhus*. I won't come," he rasped. He took her to Tirupathi, but on the way back she begged again, "I can't proceed further. I must see my Venkataraman!" Pokkiri Mani finally complied. "I will take you there just out of pity, but do not expect me to prostrate or talk politely before him. I will be the same 'Rogue' Mani. I do not respect these 'spiritual' people. In fact, if you will not have any objection, I will just screw his ears, pull him back to Madurai, and leave him with his mother. Renunciation at this tender age? What utter nonsense!"

At *Virupaksha* cave, Rangan's mother prostrated before Bhagavan, while his brother stood there obstinately. Bhagavan just bestowed a look and the next moment his body was flat in front of Bhagavan! He did not know what hit him. After sometime he got up and looked at Bhagavan. This time he was a changed man—something had happened. His mother asked, "Bhagavan do you know who he is? Do you recognize him?"

"Ah! Why not! He is our Pokkiri Mani." Bhagavan replied.

The transformation was so profound that Mani swung to the other extreme: he became a greater devotee than Rangan. He took Bhagavan as the Lord himself and had such reverence.

On one occasion, his entire family was initiated into a mantra by the Shankaracharya. However, Mani refused to follow them and said, "I will not receive initiation from human beings. You may say that they are holy people, but I will get initiated only by God and my God is Ramana Maharshi." He caught the next train to Tiruvannamalai and told Bhagavan, "All our family members have gone to the Shankaracharya to be initiated by a mantra. I told them that I will get direct initiation only from Bhagavan, and hence I have come to you." Bhagavan began to laugh. Looking at Bhagavan's response, Mani said, "This won't do, I will not go away from here until you give me a mantra." Bhagavan still remained quiet and smiled but Mani was adamant. Finally, Bhagavan looked at him and said, "Shiva, Shiva."

From that moment on, he constantly chanted the holy name, "Shiva, Shiva" and was completely transformed. His physical body suffered from tuberculosis, and he came to Bhagavan, chanting his mantra every minute of the day. His family members soon observed that this erstwhile rogue now had a face that shone with luster.

When he was about to die, he told them, "I must have my God's Darshan." He was brought to the present *Ramanashram* where he told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I am going to leave this body. Therefore, let this body have your blessings." Bhagavan was always amused with this "Rogue" Mani—he did not know what he was going to do next. He got down on the floor and rolled around Bhagavan's seat three times and said, "Now the journey of this body is over." He went home chanting "Shiva, Shiva, Shiva, Shiva," and just before he dropped his body, he told his grieving wife, "Do not worry. I am not leaving you; I will come back and take you with me after forty days." His wife died after exactly forty days.

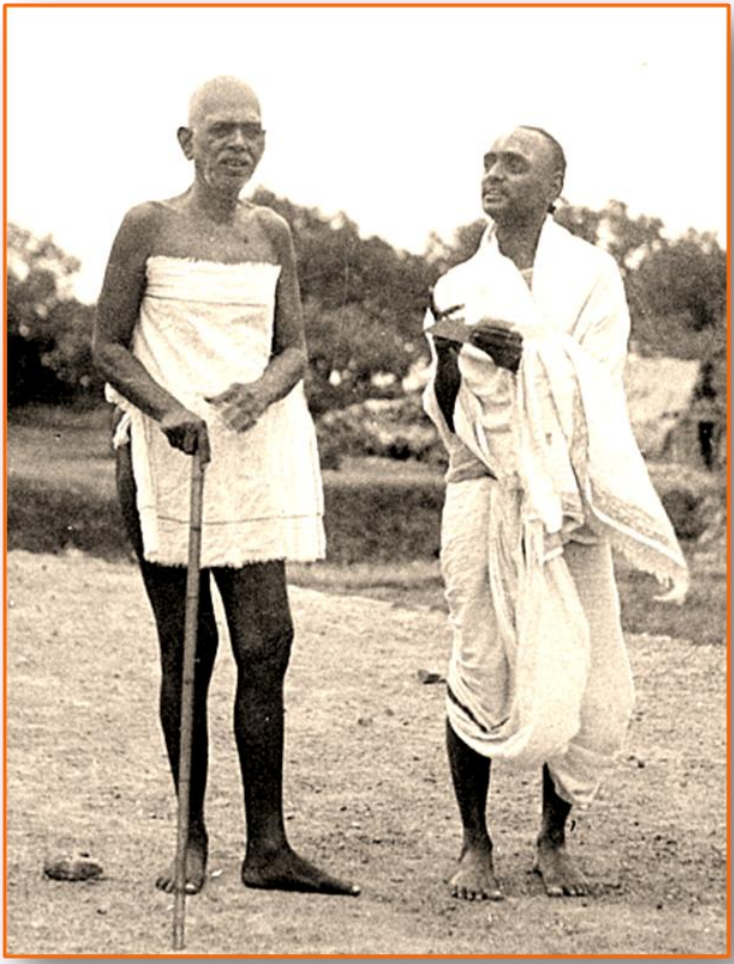
The moment the grace of the guru falls on you, everything is done through you. That is the difference—and a colossal one—in "by," which is by the ego, and "through," which is through grace.

Saab Jaan

Another special friend in Bhagavan's life is Saab Jaan, a Muslim classmate of Bhagavan. I had the opportunity to meet him and get a direct experience of his devotion to the Master. He lived in Neyveli where my brother Sundaram was working. I was thrilled to receive a message one day from Sundaram saying, "My coworker says that his father was with Bhagavan." I immediately left for Neyveli. Saab Jaan studied with Bhagavan from the fourth grade to the sixth grade and also played football with him. He was now ninety years old and blind. However, when I went over to his house he told his son, "My classmate, Venkataraman, is coming today. He is coming to see me." When I greeted him, he called me, "Venkataraman," even though his son repeatedly corrected him, saying, "This is Ganesan. Father, this is Ganesan."

"Yes Venkataraman, come," Saab Jaan continued. He touched me, embraced me, made me sit next to him, and tearfully said, "This is how my friend Venkataraman allowed me to touch him, and make me sit next to him, and feed me. He has come to take me, to bless me. My friend is a true friend." I was touched by his love and devotion for Bhagavan. I spoke to him only a little, but after I left, he told his son, "My Venkataraman is a true friend. He has come to bid me goodbye." He passed away after two days.

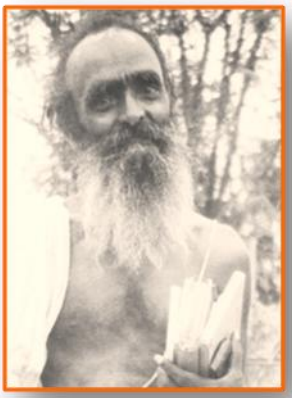
AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN



BHAGAVAN WITH TKS

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

T. K. Sundaresa Iyer



Every second we spend hearing or reading about elder devotees of Bhagavan, we naturally feel into and walk in their footsteps. And we move closer to that same *Arunachala* (Self) in who all are reabsorbed. Hearing about them from old devotees like Viswanatha Swami, Kunju Swami, Annamalai Swami, and others, dissolved me into states of silent ecstasy. To experience this ecstasy, all we need to do is to listen to Bhagavan: "You shift your attention from unreality to reality. Unreality is the body-mind complex and the world." Let us shift our attention from the unreality of thoughts to the reality of living in the immortal presence demonstrated by these devotees.

In the Hindu culture and tradition, we are all familiar with the term *guru*, its meaning and significance. Nevertheless, a few may not recognize the significance of an *upaguru*. Aspirants owe equal respect to the *upaguru*, the one who points you to the guru. The *upaguru* may be a book, a tree, or a friend; it does not matter. The *upaguru* according to Hindu scriptures is placed equally along with the guru. We are as indebted to the *upaguru* as we are to the guru.

I happened to have two upagurus. My first *upaguru* is my mother. My first memory is of the time when I was one and a half years old. I was in the

crib, and my mother was singing a lullaby—a Ramana lullaby. Every day, whenever she wanted to make me sleep, she sang the Ramana lullaby. When I close my eyes and pay attention to my Heart, even now, I can hear my mother singing that lullaby. She sowed the seeds of devotion to my Master. When I was a crawling baby, she would seat me in front of Bhagavan. When I grew up, she would tell me every day, "Go and prostrate before Bhagavan. Look at his eyes and receive his blessings." When I began school, and would share any episode with her, she would say, "Go and tell Bhagavan." If I had a new pen, my mother would say, "Go and show it to Bhagavan, place it in his hand, and receive it back." Until she died, this loving mother's one commandment to me was, "Bhagavan is enough for you. You need nothing else."

My second *upaguru* is my Teacher, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer. We would call him TKS. TKS was an elementary school teacher. His humility was exceptional and his simplicity, extraordinary. He was my teacher in the sixth grade and paid a lot of attention to me. Every day he would come to *Ramanashram*. He took particular interest in me. He would call out, "Ganesa, come here, a holy man has come. Prostrate before him." Or "Ganesa come here, a lady saint has come, prostrate before her." or "This Swamiji has come from the Shankaracharya Mutt, prostrate before him."

He would prostrate and command me do so as well, so much so that some people in *Ramanashram* would object to this and say, "TKS is a crazy man, and he is making Ganesan crazy, too. He makes him prostrate before eccentric people, saying that they are all holy saints and sages." I believe it is the extraordinary grace of my Master Bhagavan which guided me to TKS, my teacher.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Later, when I grew up, it was he who introduced me to the sages and saints in India, either in the body or without the body. It was he who directed me to Swami Ramdas. TKS had a vision that Swami Ramdas would guide my entire life. Swami Ramdas saw that his spiritual consort, Mother Krishna Bai was going to be my guide all my life. It was TKS who guided me there.

There were a few living saints, like Tiruchy Swami; even when he was almost unknown, TKS would make me prostrate before him. When Yogi Ramsuratkumar was absolutely unknown in Tiruvannamalai, we would sit in silence with him for hours. One day TKS said, "Ganesa, here is a Siddha Purusha, give him some food, he is hungry." I would run to the kitchen and bring food and offer it to him.

The process with which the spiritual Heart opens up is that, which my Master Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi described: "It is like a lotus bud, in which the petals must open. Only when the petals open can you have spiritual experiences." Reading scriptures or practicing spiritual disciplines cannot force open these petals. No yoga can open it. Only the look, the proximity, and the blessings of holy people who have already trodden the path works; just by sharing one look they can make one petal open in your Heart. This is not just a euphemism. For me, each petal was opened by the contact with a particular Master. Once I asked TKS, "When we have Bhagavan as our teacher, why are you directing me to saints?"

He shared with me this beautiful clarification: "Bhagavan is the vast ocean. He is the cosmic consciousness, and all the sages and saintly people are like rivers. Where do you stand, Ganesan? I want you to be at

least a drop of water. You come to know yourself to be a drop of water only when you recognize the lovingness of rivers, rivulets, and streams that actually take you to the ocean. The ultimate end of all movement of water, our scriptures say, is to reach the vast ocean from where it comes. It is a cycle. To be a part of the ocean you must become a drop of water. How will you become a drop of water, unless you recognize the flow of water in the form of rivers? A drop of water will not be able to see an ocean."

This teacher taught me humility, silence, and the greatness of sages and devout people. Without recognizing the greatness of saintly people, humility will not come, because one will be dominated by the worldly mind. It was he who revealed to me for the first time that *Arunachala* is Ramana and Ramana is *Arunachala*, the Self.

TKS came to Bhagavan in 1903, when Bhagavan was at *Virupaksha* cave. He was twelve years old. One of his relatives told him, "Lord *Arunachala* himself is seated in a human form in *Virupaksha* cave." In those days, Bhagavan was mostly in silence. Rarely would he utter a word or two. When TKS came, Bhagavan, who had his eyes closed, opened them and gave him a divine gaze.

Later on, TKS told me that "it was not a human body that I saw. It was a living statue of burnished gold. Bhagavan bestowed with me a look. There were about ten people around him singing Tamil songs when Bhagavan very compassionately looked at me and asked, 'Won't you sing a song for me?' It was a surprise for everyone else because Bhagavan was mostly in silence and rarely asked for anything." The thrilled TKS sang a

song by the saint Sundarar, one of the sixty three saints about whom Bhagavan had read in *Periapuranam*.

The translation of the song is:
No other support do I have, except your holy feet Oh! Lord, by holding onto them I shall win your grace. Ancient sages have sung your praises. Oh! Lord, grant me the boon that my tongue should constantly repeat your sacred name even if my mind strays away.

When TKS finished, Bhagavan was very happy. He then said, "Yes, yes, that is what should be." This became the first upadesa for this twelve-year-old boy. All his life, until his last moment, he carried with him three or four books containing hundreds of Tamil songs composed by saints and sages. This first upadesa was his guiding light. Everyday this boy would go to *Virupaksha* cave and spend time with Bhagavan.

In the course of time, he became a teacher. Inside his mind he began to have doubts about his spiritual development. One day he felt, "Why should I go and be with this saint? I am not improving at all. There is no perceptible change in me." For three months he did not go to Bhagavan. One night he woke up and saw his pillow wet with tears. When he woke up, he felt, "Oh, I miss my guru!" Early in the morning he ran up to the hill. Bhagavan, who was then staying in *Skandashram*, right then stepped out and waited for TKS. When TKS saw Bhagavan in the distance, he could not control his emotions. He ran crying, fell at his feet, and drenched them with his tears and said, "Bhagavan, forgive me!" Bhagavan lifted him up and said, "This is the hundredth day." Bhagavan had been counting. "It is hundred days since you came. What happened to you?"

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

TKS replied, "Bhagavan, I am sorry I have not come. I have done a foolish thing, but Bhagavan, I did not see any improvement within me, and I did not feel any benefit by coming and sitting with you." Bhagavan said, "Well, that is all right. You did not see any benefit, but did you not feel the loss?" Recollecting this, TKS told me, "We go to Bhagavan not to have any benefit from him. Without him we have no life whatsoever. We should not miss the opportunity of having this bliss within our Heart, otherwise we will miss that."

TKS became an elementary school teacher. Every day he would take a very small quantity of sugar, candy, or puffed rice, because he was poor. One day, he did not have even that much. He went empty handed and fell at the feet of Bhagavan, crying, "Bhagavan, I am so unhappy. I do not have any money so I could not bring you any offering." Bhagavan smiled and said, "Why, you brought the most important thing. Everything else is unimportant." TKS was puzzled. "You brought yourself!" declared Bhagavan.

The case in point here is that you should never exclude yourself from the spiritual journey. It is very easy to extol the guru and his teachings. In the process you should never exclude yourself—you are second to none. As the days passed, he often had doubts that would come up. Once he asked Bhagavan, "What is that one thing, Bhagavan, knowing which, all doubts are resolved?" Bhagavan replied, "Know the doubter; if the doubter be held, the doubts will not arise." Recognize for certain that all are *jnani*s, all are realized beings. Only a few are aware of this fact. Therefore, doubts arise. Doubts must be uprooted. This means that the doubter must be uprooted. When the doubter ceases to exist, there will be no doubts arising. Here the doubter means the mind." TKS asked, "What is the

method, Bhagavan?" Bhagavan answered sharply, "Enquire 'Who am I?' This investigation alone will remove and uproot the doubter mind and thus establish one in the Self, the transcendental state."

On another occasion TKS had another doubt. He was a pundit, a traditional man, who had read many scriptures. Thus, the six chakras, the psychic centers, kundalini, etc. fascinated TKS. He asked Bhagavan about them, and Bhagavan shared a beautiful answer, "The Self alone is to be realized. Kundalini Shakti, visions of God, occult powers, and their spell-binding displays are all in the Self. Those who speak of these and indulge in these have not realized the Self. Self is in the Heart and is the Heart itself. All other forms of manifestations are in the brain. The brain itself gets its power from the Heart. Remaining in the Heart is realizing the Self. Instead of doing that, to be attracted by brain-oriented forms of disciplines and methods is a sheer waste of time. Is it not foolish to hold onto so many efforts, so many disciplines that are said to be necessary for eradicating the nonexistent ignorance?"

In 1920, Bhagavan introduced TKS to Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, who was living in the Mango Tree cave. Everyday TKS would visit Bhagavan, so Bhagavan told him, "Go to Nayana. Learn the Rig Veda and other scriptures." When TKS met Nayana, he was spellbound by his brilliance, his aura, and his tremendous achievements in traditional knowledge. He submitted himself as a student and started learning the Rig Veda and other scriptures. Everyday both Nayana and TKS would go to Bhagavan, and Bhagavan would give them guidance, but TKS, at that tender age, was overwhelmed by the magnitude of Nayana's erudition. One day he expressed this, but Nayana corrected him. He said, "Sundaresa, without Sri Bhagavan's grace, the intricacies of the scriptures are beyond one's

power of understanding. One word from Bhagavan makes everything clear." He then understood what tremendous respect Nayana had for Bhagavan.

It was TKS who shared with me the incidents about Kavyakantha. One day, when Bhagavan was coming down the hill with Nayana, TKS and a few others, Bhagavan suddenly stopped and said, "Nayana, right now around my waist, the sun, moon, stars and planets are going around." All of them fell at the feet of Bhagavan, and Nayana started chanting *Purusha Suktham*, an ancient scriptural text extolling the universal being.

When Kavyakantha had his psychic experience of kundalini, and felt as if his skull was going to break open, it was TKS who informed Bhagavan, who immediately touched Kavyakantha's head. Kavyakantha said, "It felt just like the moon showering its cool rays all over my body, especially my Heart."

TKS was also present when Nayana completed a thousand verses of *Umasahasranaamam*. Bhagavan asked him to come along and told TKS, "Nayana has to complete three hundred verses within this night, and before sunrise, the work must be completed." When the thousand verses were completed, Bhagavan opened his eyes and asked, "Have you taken down everything I dictated?" It was Nayana who had been dictating them, but Bhagavan said, "Have you taken down everything I dictated?" TKS was one of the people writing everything down. It was he who told me about this incident. Through him, we know that Nayana was a genius who would correct, verify, and modify all his compositions umpteen times. Yet, these three hundred and odd verses, about which Bhagavan

said, "Have you taken down everything I dictated?" he never touched even once.

Kavyakantha had about two hundred scholarly devotees. To all of them he said, "I am not your guru, and hence, from today onward Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is the guru of us all." Sometime after Bhagavan had come to the present *Ashram*, these scholars, well placed in the world, felt that the future of *Ramanashram* was slowly looking bright. They felt that if Nayana ultimately became the manager of *Ramanashram,* it would portend well for the *Ashram*'s future. There was another group, though, who wanted Bhagavan's brother, Niranjanananda Swami, to become the secretary.

One day, Nayana and his devotees went to the hall and Nayana's devotees appealed to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, we all feel that Nayana should become the secretary." Bhagavan, after a long silence, instead of replying to the devotees, turned to Nayana, "Nayana, why should we indulge in such matters? Let him suffer, let him embrace this management and suffer." In Tamil, he used the words "*Avane kattintu alaratum,*" which means "Let him embrace this and cry."

Nayana immediately understood this. He got up and prostrated before Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, your desire will be done." Nayana then declared, "Bhagavan, from now on, Chinna Swami will be the *manager*." When he took leave, the other devotees also came out. Nayana told TKS, "From today onward, all of us must give unconditional support to Chinna Swami to manage the *Ashram*." TKS took this very seriously.

By that time, Nayana had already started a huge society with over ten thousand members to work for the independence of India. They intended to chant mantras all over India. TKS was the general secretary, and Nayana was the president. But when Nayana said, "You will extend full support to Chinna Swami," TKS started working in the *Ashram* office.

TKS, being a deeply spiritual man, plus being a scholar, was also called a pundit since he had studied the *Vedas*. He knew three languages: Sanskrit, Tamil, and English. Though he was not qualified academically, he was to be respected as a scholar in his own right. He was therefore entrusted with the *Ashram* correspondence. He took that opportunity to have spiritual contact with Bhagavan. Any spiritual letter that came, he would take to Bhagavan, show that letter, and ask for his suggestions. Bhagavan would explain what was required and he would write it, come back again and show it to Bhagavan. He said that was the only reason why he patiently bore the abuses and insults mounted on him by almost every member of the management group.

Bhagavan had already composed many verses and essays like *Who am I* and *Self-Enquiry*. Some of the scholarly devotees wanted everything to be collected and brought out as the "*Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*." They collected all the Tamil works of Bhagavan and it was in the press, but a preface needed to be written. Muruganar and Natanananda were both Tamil scholars, but they backed out, saying, "How can we write prefaces to Bhagavan's original writings?" There was hesitation in the *Ashram*, and the preface was thus pending. One day, TKS came very late at night from the town. When he entered the hall, Bhagavan told him,

"They are all hesitating, so why don't you write the preface?" He was shocked, but he knew that whatever came out from Bhagavan was the Truth and a commandment. He said, "Bhagavan, how can I write? But if your grace is there, what cannot be done?"

Then Bhagavan said, giving him pencil and paper, "Sit down there. You write this preface." He sat down, looked at Bhagavan, and then his writing flowed. When he completed it, he placed it at Bhagavan's holy feet, and Bhagavan read it. Since Bhagavan had read it, he started to leave, but Bhagavan called him back, "Come." Bhagavan had made one change; only one word was changed. The last sentence of the preface was, "It is hoped that Sri Bhagavan's grace, in the form of these collected works, will give liberation and bliss to all aspirants who take these collected works into their Heart." Bhagavan changed "it is hoped" to "it is certain." The Tamil word is *nambugiren*, 'it is hoped.' Bhagavan changed it into *thinnam*. *Thinnam* in Tamil means 'absolutely certain.' After Bhagavan's correction, the preface ended with this assurance: "It is absolutely certain that Sri Bhagavan's grace in the form of this collected work will give liberation and bliss to all aspirants who take these collected works into their Heart." (Right here and now, there are many who are being guided by this book, C*ollected Works of Bhagavan*, either in the original Tamil or in translations. My friend, and guide, Arthur Osborne, would swear by *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*.)

The collected works were originally only in Tamil. Arthur Osborne felt that it should be translated into English and made available all over the world. He had already found a publisher in London. But only a few verses had been translated from Tamil to English. There was much work to be done, but nobody was assisting Arthur Osborne. It was my teacher,

TKS, who sat along with Arthur Osborne and helped him. When Arthur Osborne went home, TKS would dictate to me, I would type it and give it later to Arthur Osborne. The collected works in English were thus, entirely typed by me. I share this without a tinge of arrogance, but with sublime ecstasy.

In 1963 there was a German mystic, Lucy Cornelson, who studied Tamil while staying in Germany, because she wanted to translate Bhagavan's collected works from original Tamil to German. She translated it and wanted a verification of it, so she came to the *Ashram* but nobody helped her. Again it was TKS who told me, "She is a mystic, prostrate before her." (Lucy became Lucy Ma for me. She became a German mother for me. Thanks to TKS I have got so many mothers—French mothers, German mothers, American mothers, and British mothers!) The collected works were translated into German with the help of TKS. He was an erudite scholar and the epitome of simplicity. Many people did not know of TKS because he was so unobtrusive.

Once, when I was typing a long passage dictated by TKS in the office, Duncan Greenless, a westerner devoted to Bhagavan's teaching came in. "What are you typing? May I read it?" I said, "Yes, of course you can read it." It was a beautiful passage of Bhagavan's teachings. He said, "Can you tell me who wrote this?" I said, "My teacher TKS." "Do you have any more of this?" he asked. I replied, "I have got six or seven files." Duncan Greenless pleaded with me, "Will you please give me these files? I will take them and edit them." This book that Duncan Greenless edited most beautifully is *At the Feet of Bhagavan*. When Greenless brought the manuscript, he asked me, "What title can we give it?" I suggested that it be called *At the Feet of Bhagavan*. TKS was very

happy and said, "Go and place it at the feet of Bhagavan." I took it and placed it in Bhagavan's *Samadhi* shrine.

I spent hours with TKS. Most of the time, he would be silent. He would take me around the hill or up the hill to *Skandashram*. Sometimes, when he spoke, he would say things of tremendous interest. He once told me, "Ganesan, when I was with Bhagavan, Bhagavan told me, 'These Siddha Purushas living in Tiruvannamalai, India, and all over the world, they all come to *Arunachala* to go around the hill, and they come in the form of light.'" Bhagavan had shared with TKS and the others that he had seen this light and told them, "If you have true devotion, you can also see them." TKS said, "Many of us old devotees have seen that light moving around *Arunachala*." Bhagavan said, "Yes. Have a longing, but do not expect, do not put a time frame, do not even say it must be done, and do not have arrogance. Have complete, prayerful humility, and it will be revealed."

I would like to share with you that I have seen this light not once, but three times. The first time I was alone, and the second time I was with a Japanese group. I was sharing with them that this light could be seen; they sincerely asked me, "Can we also see it?" I looked and it was there, all of them saw it, and all of them prostrated before it. About a year ago, I took a devout young couple, Hema and Nochur Venkataraman, around the hill. They had many questions, and when I told them about this moving light, they said, "Can we also see it?" I said, "It is not in your hands or in my hands. Just pray." Suddenly one of them cried, "Anna, look!" and it was there.

One day, some Vedic scholars, along with TKS, were going around the hill, chanting the *Sama Veda*. They suddenly saw four or five tigers seated in the middle of the road. Petrified, they stopped chanting. For fifteen minutes, the tigers looked at them and then got up and disappeared. Bhagavan was at *Skandashram,* and they ran to him and told him what had occurred with them. Bhagavan was not interested in that. All he said was, "Why did you stop chanting the *Vedas*? They were Siddha Purushas, eager to listen to your chants. You should have continued chanting the *Vedas*." This was shared with me by TKS.

TKS told me that inside the mystical *Arunachala*, there are vast realms. He said that Bhagavan had awarded this inner vision to him. Bhagavan had visions inside the hill and had seen all this thrice and come out. TKS said he had also had that experience. I would like to reveal that I have also had this experience of being inside the mountain of silence. Have faith, trust the Mystery, have devotion, be humble, and surrender. If a person is elder to you even by a day, prostrate to him or to her, and then humility will come, and you will enjoy this spiritual freedom. Prostrating to another person is not enslavement. It is freedom, blissful spiritual freedom.

Bhagavan was very kind. Once, Chinna Swami had a quarrel with TKS because TKS had gone and prostrated before a saintly lady. "When Bhagavan is here, why did you go and prostrate before another?" shouted Chinna Swami. TKS was upset and did not have his food. Early in the morning, when he arrived, Bhagavan was making *idlis* in the kitchen and saw his disturbed face. He said, "Come on, sit down, and eat some *idlis*." TKS replied, "Bhagavan, I have to rush to the school, I have classes." "Hey, the cat is out! Today is Sunday, how can you have school? Come

on, sit down." Bhagavan brought a leaf and put it there. "I have made some special *sambar*." Bhagavan sat next to him and piled up the *idlis*. TKS said, "I had never eaten so many idlis in my life!" He was a poor man; at home, or otherwise, he would get two *idlis* to eat. That day Bhagavan served him nearly twelve *idlis* with *sambar*, all the while telling him stories.

In the earlier days of his *Ashram* life, Bhagavan would dry his towel on a rope between two trees. There was a sparrow's nest with three or four eggs there. While Bhagavan was taking out the towel one day, one egg fell down and cracked. Bhagavan felt regretful; he took it up, put a wet cloth around it and said, "I hope *Arunachala* will save me from this sin." He put it back and every few hours he would come and change the wet cloth. After a few days he saw that the crack had healed and said, "*Arunachala* has saved me, now the mother will be very happy. She will hatch it." The mother bird hatched the egg and Bhagavan took it and showed TKS and the others, saying, "See how beautiful this is."

There is an old Hindu custom where they hoist a yellow flag to declare that anyone who comes in will be fed unconditionally, at any time of the day or night. Once, they wanted to hoist it in *Ramanashram,* and TKS was sent to Bhagavan to seek permission. "Bhagavan, we would like to hoist a food flag." Bhagavan replied, "What is the use of feeding the body? There should be a 'Self flag' fluttering there. Anyone who enters can have a glimpse of the Self. It should be given unconditionally." As is well known, Bhagavan was available twenty-four hours, day and night, to offer his Darshan.

At the age of thirty-six, in 1933, TKS still felt incomplete, so he prayed to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, show me your real form." Bhagavan said, "Sit down there," and directed his glance of grace. When TKS's Heart was opened, he closed his eyes and was in ecstasy. Bhagavan told him, "Whatever you want to see, see now."

TKS's chosen form of God was Rama, so from the Heart he asked to see Rama. For two hours, he had the Darshan of Rama. Rama, crowned, seated on the throne with his wife Sita, and surrounded by his brothers and Hanuradhan, the monkey devotee at his holy feet. When he came out of ecstasy, Bhagavan asked, "What did you see?" and TKS shared the description of what he had seen. Bhagavan said, "Go and bring *Dakshinamoorthy Ashtothram*." (*Ashtothram* means one hundred and eight names). "In it, *Dakshinamoorthy* is extolled. Read the fifth verse. In it, one of the names given to *Dakshinamoorthy* is *Yogi Patabiramaya Namaha*, which means *Dakshinamoorthy* is Rama. It is said that Rama's capital city, Ayodhya, is described as having eight corners and nine gates. *Arunachala* has eight corners and nine gates; *Arunachala* is Ayodhya and Rama is *Arunachala*. He is *Dakshinamoorthy* and *Arunachala*." TKS said, "I wanted a God, a scripture and a devata, a God in form to be worshipped. Bhagavan became my universal God, his collected works became my scripture, and Rama was my devata; Bhagavan granted me that Darshan also."

I had been gainfully employed only twice. I had sent my first salary to my two upagurus—my mother and TKS. When TKS was to die, he told me that the people with whom he was staying in Ramana Nagar were very poor, and hence to help them with some money he shared. I was

surprised as to where that money had come from and he said, "What you sent me years back is still kept in a cover. Please make use of that."
I then asked him, "How did you compose the *mantra*: *Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaaya*?"

TKS was kind enough to share the following: "From my early childhood, I was deeply devoted to Lord Krishna. Our family members—generations after generation—were initiated into the *mantra*: *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudeva*. *Vasudeva* is another name for Sri Krishna. Hence, I read *Bhagavad Gita* and *Srimad Bhagavatam* with great interest and delight, repeatedly too. I longed to have the vision of Sri Krishna.

"One day, one line from *Bhagavad Gita*: *Jnani tu Atmaiva me Matam*, meaning, 'Jnani is my own Self,' went deep into my heart. I thought, while I have at hand Bhagavan Ramana, who is himself Vasudeva, why should I worship and long to have the vision of Sri Krishna, separately? Thus, I contemplated: 'I want one single *mantra*, a single worship (God) and a single scripture, so that there would be no conflict of loyalties.'

"Suddenly, it dawned within my heart: *Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaaya*. Without a gap, my heart continued sounding it. I ran to Bhagavan and told him of the advent of the sacred *mantra*. He bestowed the *mantra* with his full approval.

"Later, 'I counted the letters in the new *mantra*. It was twelve. The old *mantra* too contained only twelve letters. I was delighted.'"

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Coming to know that Bhagavan offered his full approval for the *mantra*, *Ashram* management accepted it so fully that they even altered their original "logo," which had the words *Sri Ramanashram* beneath the symbol of "OM." Now, *Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaaya* adorns its "logo."

Before coming and settling down permanently at the *Ashram*, I was in two different firms on two occasions. The first month's salary that I received in each business firm, at different times, I had divided into two and sent to my two *upagurus*—my mother and my teacher TKS.

Those were the last days of my revered teacher. He was very seriously ill and bedridden in a house opposite to the *Ashram*. I was visiting him every day. It was his last day.

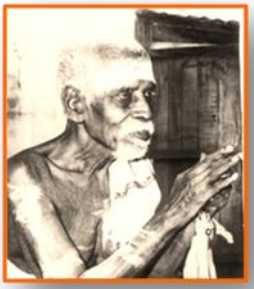
He said: "Ganesa! These people who look after me are very poor people. So, please utilize the amount in this envelope for my funeral expenses. I want you to carry my body, chanting: "*Arunachala Shiva*," all through to the cremation ground."

I was all the time crying. Yet, I did ask him: "How did you have so much money?" He smiled graciously, and said: "You remember, twice you had sent me your first month's salary for my daily expenses. I did not spend it; it was so dear to my heart. Now, you yourself spend it on my last journey—back to *Arunachala*!"

He gave me a pat on my head and said: "This is my blessing to you! See! I am giving you my 'all!'" Can anything else in the world equal the beauty and splendor of that single touch of Wisdom!

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Venkatesa Shastri



Legendary holy people like Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Lord Krishna, Mohammad and Bhagavan left us their teachings only so that we become the same natural state of being that they are established in. The fact is that whoever listens to or reads the teaching should intend to be that—not through an act of change, but just "to be."

A significant teaching in *Who am I* is detachment or desirelessness. This is not different from wisdom. Desirelessness is refraining from turning the mind out toward any object. Wisdom means the appearance of no object. In other words, not seeking anything is detachment or desirelessness; not leaving the Self (no-seeking) is wisdom.

One of Bhagavan's ardent devotees, a simple humble man, in a very natural and remarkable way united these two together in his life—absolute detachment and shining wisdom. He was none other than Venkatesa Shastri, or "Shastri Mama," as we would fondly call him. (Shastra means scriptures, and the family that has mastered the *Vedas* is given the surname, "Shastri." Mama means "uncle" in Tamil.) He lived in the world, but was untouched by it. Soaked in wisdom at all times, he showed that there is no contradiction between work and wisdom.

Shastri Mama was Bhagavan's distant cousin. His mother passed away when he was very young and his father married a second time. Though

his stepmother often tortured and ill-treated him, he suffered her atrocities silently. When he was three years old, she twisted his hand and thrust it into the oven fire. His fingers were permanently deformed but he bore the scar of the horrific incident uncomplainingly.

His father, unable to mend his wife's ways, took him further south to Cochin, in Kerala, where he thought his son would be happier. He enrolled him in a school of Ayurveda, which also taught astrology. Fortunately, the mentor of that boarding school was the King of Cochin, who himself was an impressive astrologer and Ayurveda doctor. Shastri Mama was exceptionally brilliant. Within a year, he had mastered thousands of Sanskrit verses, which were to be learned over fifteen years. The king was impressed by this boy's genius and decided to mentor him personally. He took his protégée back with him to his palace and told him, "Ordinary astrology is not your subject. I am going to teach you the highest form of astrology, which is called *prashna*." The literal meaning of the word *prashna* is "question." In ordinary astrology, when a child is born, a horoscope is cast based on the planetary alignments at the time of his physical birth.

The physical horoscope is referred to throughout the child's life and an intellectual interpretation of planetary alignments predicts the questioner's future. On the other hand, a person who has mastered *prashna* does not need the physical horoscope; instead he mentally draws the birth chart based on mathematical calculation using the time of birth, the name, the direction, in which the questioner is facing, the place from where he hails, his father's name, his mother's name, the first letter of the sentence of the question, and the first word of the question, etc. He then taps into his well of higher intuitive knowledge and waits for an answer.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

The predictions come from within. Needless to say, they are accurate because they come from the intuition, the inner understanding.

When Shastri Mama had completed his course, as per Hindu custom, he was obliged to give his teacher *guru dakshina*: an offering to his teacher in gratitude for the knowledge imparted by him. The King of Cochin was very proud of him, but knew that Venkatesa Shastri was too poor to give him anything. He said, "I am going to ask you for *guru dakshina*." "Whatever you want, my Master, please let me know," his disciple replied. The king gave him a picture of Lord Subramania, the second son of Shiva. Subramania is the God of wisdom, silence, and absolute detachment. "Worship him, and he will guide you all your life. This is the *guru dakshina* I want from you," the king said.

He took his teacher's gift as his blessings and went back to his village. He became a renowned and prosperous astrologer, whose predictions were correct.

One day, one of his uncles brought him a picture of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. Shastri Mama placed the picture with reverence in his *pooja* room, next to Lord Subramania's picture. One day when meditating, he opened his eyes and saw the picture of Bhagavan transfiguring into the Lord's picture and the Lord's picture turning into Bhagavan's image. Unsure whether it was a dream or vision, he observed this transfiguration for nearly half-an-hour.

He felt that perhaps his teacher had meant that he must have Lord Subramania in human form to be his guide all his life. In 1917, he went to visit Bhagavan at *Skandashram* and met Bhagavan's mother there. As soon

as he arrived, Mother Alagammal recognized him as her relative and Bhagavan too concurred, "Yes, I know, he is Subbu's son."

Before meeting Bhagavan, most of his devotees had only heard his name and had no idea of his spiritual stature. Therefore none had any preconceived notions of his significance, but would all realize it in their first meeting with him. Similarly, when Shastri Mama saw Bhagavan, he realized he had found his Lord and guru—the Lord of renunciation, wisdom, and silence—because Bhagavan had not yet spoken a single word to him. After a few days, he felt it was futile to live in an ever-changing world and decided to live with his Master. But according to Hindu custom, if an elderly relative is present, one must take guidance from him or her.

He went to Bhagavan's mother and said, "I want to renounce the world and stay with Bhagavan." "How can you do that?" she exclaimed. "We have decided on a girl for you right from your childhood days, and she is waiting for you. You must honor this commitment and marry her! How can you come away here?" Shastri glanced at Bhagavan. Bhagavan beamed a smile of approval, and from this Shastri understood that it was Bhagavan's commandment that he gets married. Therefore, he went back to his village, married the girl—her name was Sala—and lived very happily for a few years as a successful astrologer.

The following is an example of his Mastery of *prashna*: After his marriage, he spent much of his time in his *pooja* room. Once when he had a visitor, Sala informed him, "Nagappa Chettiar has come." Without even getting up, Shastri replied, "He has come suspecting his servant. He has lost his diamond ring and suspects that his servant has stolen it. Tell him he should not suspect anyone. While he was washing his clothes in his courtyard, his diamond ring slipped from his finger and now lies underneath the banana tree there." This is the precision with which he worked, and sure enough, even the police came to him for assistance in tracking down criminals!

After some time, a son was born to them. He drew his son's horoscope, and to his terrible shock, he realized that his son was destined to die in his teenage years. The horoscope also said that he would not have another son. He did not tell his wife this, but overcome with grief, he sought refuge in Bhagavan at *Ramanashram*. While Bhagavan was going up the hill, Shastri Mama followed him and told him about his son's horoscope and its dire prediction. After some distance, Bhagavan turned to him and said, "You have been in Kerala, in the far south. In Cochin you must have noticed plenty of jackfruits." A jackfruit is a tropical fruit bigger than a watermelon and its uniqueness lies in the fact that the fruit comes out of the trunk of the tree, and not from the branches. At the time of bearing fruit, many shoots spring out, but only a few survive while the rest whither and drop away. The tree finally bears only ten to fifteen fruits. Bhagavan continued, "To give room for the bigger and healthier fruits, the other shoots—almost fifty or sixty of them around one big fruit—drop off by their selves."

Shastri Mama immediately understood that Bhagavan was not going to rescue his son. He prostrated before Bhagavan and went back to his village. Before leaving, he held Bhagavan's feet, wept, and said, "What is the refuge for me? Give me courage!" Bhagavan then shared with him the verse *Hridaya kuhara madhye,* which he had composed in *Virupaksha* Cave: "In the inner core of the Heart cave, what is . . . is pure awareness, which as I-I, the Still Self. Dive deeply inward to be in that state of steadfast inherence in the Self by persistent *Self-Enquiry* or by utter surrender, thereby staying established ever in the silent Heart."

Hearing this, Shastri Mama was established in the complete trust and faith that he had two courses—which were in fact complementary—to do *Self-Enquiry* and to completely surrender. To do *Self-Enquiry,* one must completely surrender, and to surrender, one must do *Self-Enquiry*.

On his return he told Sala and his son, "I have decided to go and live with my Master, but I will not do that leaving you in the lurch. I will earn enough for you both to live comfortably. I will provide for you and then go. My decision is final."

His wife, though a simple villager and an illiterate woman, gave a prudent reply, "If you are going to a place, giving up all of this, then that world must be greater than this. Why don't you take me with you? Why do you want to leave me in a lesser place? If you are going to a greater place, then take me there." "What about our son? I thought you will bring him up." Shastri Mama asked, surprised. "I will leave him with my younger brother, and I will be with you," she devoutly said. In Hindu families, relatives gladly step in to help, and such responsibilities are not considered burdens.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Shastri Mama warned her: "I am going there as a beggar. I will not pursue my profession in astrology and won't earn money. I am going to live with my Master, completely without desire, absolutely detached, and aspiring wisdom. I will do whatever my Master says and don't even know how I'm going to get food or shelter." Resolute, she insisted, "Whether you experience pain or pleasure, success or failure, achievement or non-achievement, I'd like to share it with you." According to Hindu laws, a wife has the right to demand this share from her husband. Shastri Mama could refuse her proposal no more, as she was prepared to undergo any form of austerities with him.

They reached *Ramanashram,* and since in those days women could not stay at the *Ashram*, Chinna Swami, Bhagavan's younger brother and manager, told Shastri Mama, "You do *pooja* in the shrine of the Mother and let your wife stay with my son, Venkatoo's family, who live in the town. Let her serve and be with Bhagavan's sister and Venkatoo's wife, while you serve here." Shastri Mama communicated this to Bhagavan.

Bhagavan kept quiet for some time and then turned to him saying, "Attend to the purpose, for which you came." Shastri Mama understood what Bhagavan meant. His function was not to do *pooja* and work for food. The reason, for which he came, was to give up everything, be without desire, and discover wisdom—after all—desirelessness and wisdom are the same. He took his wife with him to Adi Annamalai, a remote village halfway around the hill and went to live in a shelter there.

Every morning the couple would walk around the hill to spend the day with Bhagavan, with no thought of food from the *Ashram*. In the evening they would complete their circumambulation of the hill and return to the

shelter. People in the village began to notice this simple couple and took pity on them. They had no vessels, no rice, or lentils to cook. So, the kind villagers would bring bananas, groundnuts, peanuts, as well as some roots and beg them to eat; they supported them this way for many years.

Being in Bhagavan's presence every moment, austerity became deeply rooted in Shastri Mama and Sala. Both lived on groundnuts and bananas, or whatever the compassionate villagers placed before them. Though the *Ashram* served delicious food, they were not tempted. They had forgotten what it was like to eat rice, wheat, pulses, as well as everything in the staple Indian diet and yet they were completely happy.

Whenever Bhagavan wanted some explanations from the *Vedas*, in Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni's and Jagadisa Shastri's absence, he would take Shastri Mama's help. Shastri Mama, who was also a gifted poet, would give him the answers in Sanskrit verses. One day Bhagavan asked him, "You give such beautiful answers; does Sala recognize the content of these verses?" "Bhagavan, she is a villager, she is almost illiterate. No, she does not know the content because I don't share this with her," was the reply. "No, this is not right. You should raise her to your level. Does she not know the local language, Tamil?" "Yes, Bhagavan, she knows." "Then whatever you write for me in Sanskrit, translate it into simple Tamil, which she can understand. You will teach her. This is the secret of Indian grihasta *dharma* or family life. Whatever you equally enjoy together is not meant to be merely physical or mental, but spiritual too."

In my childhood I knew that Shastri Mama had written many songs based on Bhagavan's instructions because my mother would sing them to me. The verses were simple but beautiful:

Kalkandu vangiduvir guru para kalkandu vangiduvir
Kalkandu vangiduvir guru para kalkandu vangiduvir
Guru Padam piduten avar iru padam toludiduvar
Kalkandu vangiduvir guru para kalkandu vangiduvir

Kalkandu means "sugar candy." When translated, the verse means: "Get freely this sugar candy, which comes from the holy feet of the Master. This sugar candy is the nectar of wisdom, and it pours forth from the holy feet of the Master. By falling at the feet of the Master, get this nectar, which is always available to you." As children we were very fond of this song because we loved sugar candy!

Shastri Mama's son, Balu, would come to Tiruvannamalai every five years to be with his parents. Shastri Mama had not told Sala that their son was going to pass away early, but still taught her how to be detached. This boy was a little older than Sundaram and me. During one of his visits, we even had a group photograph taken: Bhagavan, Shastri Mama, Sala, my parents, Sundaram, Mani, my younger brother, Bhagavan's sister, Balu, and I were present. This photograph can be found in the *Ashram's* archives.

During Bhagavan's illness, Shastri Mama and Sala Mami performed a special *pooja* or *japa* called *Mrityunjaya japa* along with some pundits. "Mrityu" means "death" and "jaya" means "victory" and therefore this translates as "victory over death." According to Hindu ritual, if the mantra is chanted several thousand times, a person who is endowed with early death can be saved.

Bhagavan seldom agreed or disagreed with his devotees; he just cooperated with them. The chanting would be done in the School for the *Vedas*, in front of a pot of water. Chanting is said to charge the water with the powerful vibrations of the *japa,* and it would then be given to the afflicted person to drink. Bhagavan would wait outside and drink from it graciously. One day Shastri Mama wondered why an illumined Master like Bhagavan was drinking this water. Bhagavan looked at him, then looked at the sun and chanted a line from the Taitriya Upanishad, *Saye chaya kushi ye chadavidya sa ye kaha*. He then pointed to the right side of the chest and said, "Whoever resides in this person here and whoever resides in that sun is one."

With this he understood that Bhagavan was not taken in by these mantras but cooperated with his disciples for their peace of mind, so they could feel they were doing a service for their Master's well-being.

By the time he had been with Bhagavan until his last days, Shastri Mama had become well-established in the Self. He was already a Master of austerity and absolute desirelessness and needed to be blessed with complete wisdom. This too was accomplished when Bhagavan bestowed on him the divine look, *Darshan*. Later, Shastri Mama said that in that look, he conveyed that Shastri must share this with Sala, too. Therefore he went home, embodying Bhagavan's look, and shared the Darshan with her, and both husband and wife were realized.

I had the good fortune of moving closely with them, particularly with Sala Mami. She would talk very easily with me, and we often had free-flowing conversations. When all my relatives were worried that I was not married (though my parents never forced me or even insisted that I

should get married), Sala Mami sat me down one day and said, "What are you going to get by getting married? Even this one body is a burden—what is the use of getting another body? And it is an absolute fallacy that this body can give you pleasure. The pleasure, the happiness comes from within, from the surrender of the body. In sleep you are very happy because then there is no awareness of the body. Why do you want to have one more body to take care of, thinking that it is going to give you pleasure?"

This wise lady helped me be established in the Self because, honestly, I did not think I had the strength or the courage to tread this path. These are the great saints who have given me the strength to do so. This is the advantage of satsang: unless in satsang, one has to strive to develop affirmation and detachment. This detachment or vairagya cannot be forced; it has to develop naturally and become instinctive, like hunger or thirst. In the same way all spiritual disciplines must become second nature and develop on their own. This can best be done in satsang. This is the reason that sages have repeatedly stressed being in *satsang* (company of Truth).

Sometime after Bhagavan dropped the body, Balu, who was studying in a far-off village, completed his schooling. My grandfather, Chinna Swami, asked him to be brought to the *Ashram*. Once, Shastri Mama had told Chinna Swami that his son was going to die. However, my grandfather would only consider these assertions as rubbish and say, "I will see to it that he prospers. He will be all right at *Arunachala*." Chinna Swami got him a job in the district office in town. After some time he expressed a wish to have his parents live with him, so Chinna Swami asked Shastri Mama and Sala Mami to do so.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Shastri Mama knew the exact date and time when his son was going to pass away, and it was only a few months away. Three days before the fatal day, Balu was down with a raging fever and died at exactly the predicted time. This is what Shastri Mama himself told me: "I thought Sala would not be able to bear this, so I didn't tell her of his imminent death. On the contrary, the way she received her own son's death is remarkable. She is greater than me—she did not shed even a single tear. Instead, she consoled me saying, "He has gone back to *Arunachala*. We are so fortunate that he came here and relinquished his body to be united with *Arunachala*."

After his death they lived in front of the *Ashram*, in a cottage. My father, Venkatoo, requested Shastri Mama, "Why don't you come and help me in managing the *Ashram*?" Shastri Mama, now a man of deep wisdom, knew that he had to give back to his guru, and hence, undertook the *pooja* in Bhagavan's shrine. This is how I got to know him. For some reason, he was fascinated by me. From the moment I moved to the *Ashram*, he paid special attention to me. He would tell me things like, "For us, Bhagavan is God, Bhagavan's form is Truth, and Bhagavan's name is Truth." I would ask him what he meant by that. He said, "Do you recognize who Bhagavan is? Bhagavan is *Arivunmaivnishtan*—he is truly a Self-realized being; *Atmavithvan*—established ever in the Heart, in the "I am" and *Arivalpunamsitran*—he has already won over the dictates of the five senses through inner wisdom."

I asked him, "What should I do? How can I serve?" "Venerate him and share his name and reputation. Share the teachings with other people so that they can discover this inner joy and this inner wisdom" he said, adding "And what should you adore him as? *Arivangiavam*. Do you recognize who he is? He is a flame of wisdom. Tell the world Ramana is not just a body, not just an individual. He is pure wisdom. He is *Arivankulisattaan*. *Kulisattaan* means "thunderbolt," the most powerful weapon that destroys the enemy—ignorance. Our Bhagavan is that thunderbolt that will destroy all forms of ignorance. He is *Kalakalam*—the conqueror of the time-space concept and *Savinaimaiveeranan*—a colossal hero who has conquered death." Bhagavan has written these words in the *Collected Works of Bhagavan*.

Shastri Mama would tell me these things about Bhagavan and bring me into the presence of Bhagavan. By this time, Shastri Mama had taken up a job at the *Ashram*. He was an assistant to Kittu and Appuchi, who were young priests. They would instruct him to fetch things for them, and he would run their errands. It pained me deeply that this realized mahatma was assisting two priests who were younger than him, uncomplainingly, while they did not even recognize his spiritual stature!

One of the first instances of Shastri Mama's guidance came to me when I was reading a book on miracles of a living saint. I could not put the book down, nor could I sleep the entire night. I felt I must meet this Master and that I too must possess the power of performing miracles. After the day's *pooja*, while I stood in front of the old office about thirty feet away, Shastri Mama suddenly said, "Ganesa, stop! Stay there!" I obeyed him. "I order you not to have any thoughts," he commanded. He then held out a bunch of grapes and said, "Now tell me how many grapes are in this

bunch." "Thirteen," I replied. "Come here and count them," he commanded again.

My estimation had turned out to be accurate. "How did you say . . . thirteen?" he asked. "I don't know." I looked puzzled. "Don't say that. You cannot get away by saying that. Tell me how you thought there were thirteen grapes?" he pressed. This time I kept quiet. "You know I told you to stay without thoughts." he said. "Why did you not say fifteen or ten or eleven? How did you say exactly thirteen? When you were without thoughts, I had already counted them—thirteen--and then I put that thought into your mind. A miracle is nothing but a stronger mind occupying a weaker mind. Never get distracted by a miracle."

I was amazed. I had never spoken to him about the book. He said, "I am not saying this without support." He quoted from one of Bhagavan's verses, which says, "To enquire into and abide as the Self, which is the everpresent reality, is alone the true attainment, or the greatest siddhi. All other siddhis or occult powers are equivalent to powers enjoyed in the dream state. When the sleeper awakes, are the dream powers real? Can those who stay in the state of Self, thereby casting off all forms of unreality, ever be deluded by indulging in the siddhis?" Thus this noble Master, Shastri Mama, wiped out from my system, any inclination toward siddhis or occult powers.

Another incident of a very personal nature transpired between us. By the time Anuradha came to the *Ashram* in 1983, Shastri Mama was completely blind. He would spend the entire day in Bhagavan's shrine and come to my office every evening and spend two hours with me. Anuradha had come straight from America to Tiruvannamalai in a state

of deep depression. The next day was *Deepam*—the lighting of the flame on the top of the hill.

Anuradha and I were not friends at that time, and she walked into the room to ask me something. Shastri Mama, immediately enquired, "Who has come inside?" "A girl from America," I replied. From that day onward, he would call her "girl from America." He said, "Tell her to relinquish all forms of thinking. Whatever she is now thinking; ask her to drop it, instantly."

"Why do you have these soothsayers in your room?" she exclaimed angrily.

"Talk to me," Shastri Mama calmly said. "Why do you confront Ganesan?"She said, "Bhagavan has said that if one gives up their life, thinking of *Arunachala*, then one will attain *Arunachala*. *Arunachala* will occupy their very being." "Do you mean to say that at the time of death, you have control over your thinking? If that is possible, come on; stay here for one minute without thought, with *Arunachala* as your Heart. See whether it is possible." Shastri Mama challenged her. After a few seconds she admitted, "No. Thoughts are coming to me in plenty. I am unable to be in *Arunachala*."

"Hence, remember it is not within your hands. It is not just the last thought that will save you. No cleverness works in real spirituality. You should live in Truth (Self), with *Arunachala* and inside *Arunachala* all your life. Then at the time of death, you will trust that it is true."

During Shastri Mama's last days, he fell from his cot and broke his hip. Hugo Maier helped so many devotees in their last days by attending to them and giving them homeopathic medicines. When he examined Shastri Mama he said, "He is too old to undergo any surgery."

"Why do you say that?" I asked. "If he undergoes surgery, gangrene may set in. It will be excruciatingly painful, and he will die," he replied. I was taken aback. Shastri Mama only said, "Why pay attention to the body? It is going to die anyhow. How does it matter whether it goes in pain or not? I am not the body." "In what state are you Mama?" I asked. "I am absolutely in 'I Am' state, in absolute peace, in absolute bliss" was the reply. Thus a man in excruciating pain, ignoring the body's existence was in ecstasy in the presence of his Master, Bhagavan.

I intuitively felt that his last days had arrived. I took Anuradha along to have a *Darshan* of the wonderful saint. I held his holy feet and requested, "Please bless me, Mama." He humbly replied, "Only Bhagavan gives blessings." "No. You must put your hand on our heads and bless us," I insisted. He finally agreed. I asked him if we could do anything for him. "Ask the girl from America to sing Bhagavan's songs," he answered. Then he put his hands on his chest, palms together, with tears flowing, while Anuradha and I sang Bhagavan's songs. Then he said, "After singing, you can go." The song we sang was *Arunachala Pancharatnam*, in Tamil:

Ocean of nectar, full of grace, engulfing the universe, universal splendor, Oh! Arunachala the Supreme Itself, be thou the sun and open the lotus of my Heart in bliss.

Oh! Arunachala in thee the picture of the universe is formed has its stay and is dissolved. This is the sublime Truth. Thou art the Inner Self who dances in the Heart as I-I. Heart is thy name, Oh! My Lord!

He, who turns inward with untroubled mind to search where the consciousness of 'I' arises, realizes the Self and rests in thee, Oh! Arunachala, like a river when it joins the ocean.

Abandoning the outer world, with mind and breath control to meditate on thee within, the yogi sees the light, Oh! Arunachala and finds his delight in thee.

He who dedicates his mind to thee and seeing thee always beholds the universe as Thy figure. He, who at all times glorifies thee and loves thee as none other than the Self, he is the Master without rival, being one with Arunachala and lasts in thy bliss.

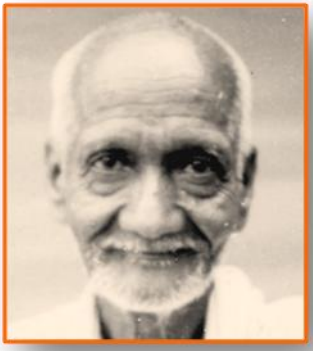
Shastri Mama was the most profound and yet the simplest man with whom I have interacted. In the *Vedas* it is said that the ultimate Truth is smaller than the atom and bigger than all the cosmos put together. This was so true of Shastri Mama, who seemed nondescript. It is he who chose Ananda Ramana, my present home, and guided me. When I could never even dream of leaving the *Ashram*, I needed that circumstance just to help a devotee in the West. Another Westerner sent money and said, "Take this house in your name legally; but morally I will be the owner."

I could not do anything without consulting Shastri Mama. He was blind at that time, yet he said, "Take me to that land." I took him around every inch of the land and he finally said, "This is your place, you are going to stay here. Authentic *sadhus* and aspirants will stay with you." On the same day, he shared another piece of guidance: "Trust Anuradha. She will

support you all your life. Trust her, help her, and be with her." It is from here that my friendship with Anuradha began. In 1995 when I left the *Ashram*, I mentally paid my first salutation to Mother Krishna Bai and then to Shastri Mama. Shastri Mama's example has shown us that we need not give up any of our commitments to the world outwardly, to have this wisdom, because wisdom is always inherent. Desirelessness falls away from within. For instance, there is nothing wrong with enjoying ice-cream. Absolute detachment cannot be dictated by anyone—not even your body.

Inner desirelessness is wisdom. What is perfect wisdom? It is non-dual silence, the inner peace, and absolute awareness that is devoid of bodily entanglements, phenomena and attributes. We experience this because that is our true state. Realizing this state is our destiny, because by being so, we are paying the highest recompense to our Self, Heart, and to *Arunachala*, God. It is not a conditioning; after all, thoughts are conditions, while thoughtlessness is not; it is an immaculate state of utter freedom and stillness. It is into this state of freedom that many of the old devotees coaxed me to become established, free of the death of forms.

Raja Iyer



Raja Iyer was known as the Postmaster. He was a very simple man. I would not say that he was a spiritual sage, but he was definitely a religious man. He was devoted to singing *bhajans* and other devotional songs; such was his approach to life. He came to Bhagavan in 1911 when Bhagavan was in *Virupaksha* cave. By nature, he was a nomad who wandered from town to town, wherever his feet took him. He was a strange man who stayed with Bhagavan whenever he came to see both Bhagavan and Mother's elder sister. Even as early as 1911, this woman discerned Bhagavan's greatness. It was her custom to make sweets and take them to *Virupaksha* cave to offer to Bhagavan. Whenever Raja Iyer was there, he would tell her, "I will take it to Bhagavan," and so she would send the sweets through him.

When Raja Iyer first met Bhagavan and shared these sweets, he could not comprehend anything of the spiritual teaching of Bhagavan; however, he did appreciate what he heard. He said, "I liked the harmony of the evening hours at *Virupaksha* cave; the aromatic breeze of the Holy hill, and the stillness emanating from Bhagavan are indescribable. I would enjoy drenching myself in all these natural beauties. Added to this, whatever was brought to Bhagavan would be shared equally with the others." Since Raja Iyer was a nomad, he could not on occasion get

enough food, so whenever he came to Bhagavan, Bhagavan would keep some sweets and other food items' knowing Raja Iyer enjoyed eating. So any time he went to *Virupaksha* cave or Skandashram, he always would get something to eat. Raja Iyer commented, "I am not at all ashamed to confess that I went to Bhagavan only to eat sweets."

When he was wandering in this manner in 1927, he came to a small city called Reddipalayam. By this time Bhagavan had already come down the hill to *Ramanashram*. In those days, there was no electricity, and hence, a devotee of Bhagavan arranged for a *punkha* or an improvised fan. This consisted of a long cloth attached to a cardboard. By pulling the long rope attached to the fan, the cloth would circulate cool air. One night, Bhagavan appeared in Raja Iyer's dream. Bhagavan was seated in the hall under the *punkha.* When Raja Iyer entered into the hall, Bhagavan said, "Come and pull this *punkha*." So, in his dream, he pulled the *punkha,* and Bhagavan enjoyed the cool breeze.

A few days later, Raja Iyer went to Tiruvannamalai. When he entered the hall, he saw exactly the same *punkha* that he had seen in his dream! He prostrated before Bhagavan, and Bhagavan said, "Raja, go and pull the *punkha*." So Raja Iyer did what he was told. Five minutes later, Bhagavan called out to him and said, "Raja, it is enough!" Raja Iyer felt a great sense of responsibility and understood that Bhagavan wanted him to serve. Bhagavan had never before asked anyone to either pull the *punkha* or stop it. Bhagavan seldom actually told anyone to do anything, so Raja Iyer took this as a sign that Bhagavan wanted Raja Iyer to serve him; therefore he came to *Ramanashram* permanently.

I would like to share an incident that took place long before this, when Bhagavan was at Skandashram. One day, when Raja Iyer was going toward Skandashram, Echammal was also going in that direction, carrying food to Bhagavan. At the same time, a group of devotees were climbing down from Skandashram, looking terribly disappointed. Echammal looked at the expression on their faces and asked, "What happened?" The group replied, "We went to see Ramana Maharshi but we could not find him." Echammal exclaimed, "What? You could not find him?" They replied, "No, we couldn't." Then Echammal further asked, "Was nobody there?" The group said, "There was only one person. He was arranging some stones and patching up a wall. Other than him, there was nobody else." Echammal said, "Did you ask him where Bhagavan was?" They replied, "Yes, he said Bhagavan had gone up the hill." Echammal and Raja Iyer were perplexed and therefore asked, "What did the person look like?" The group answered, "He was wearing a loin cloth and had a cloth wrapped around his head." To this, Echammal and Raja Iyer asked, "What about his complexion?" They replied, "He was very fair." Both Echammal and Raja Iyer understood that the person was none other than Bhagavan!

Echammal and Raja Iyer told the group, "Come, we will take you to Bhagavan." By the time they reached Skandashram, Bhagavan had completed whatever work he had set out to do and returned to his usual place. He was sitting so serenely that when the group entered and saw him, they immediately said, "This is not the man. It was somebody else." At this, Bhagavan laughed and said, "No, it was me!" Echammal then confronted Bhagavan in the presence of Raja Iyer: "Bhagavan, why did you say that Bhagavan had gone up the hill? These people were so

disappointed!" Bhagavan asked Echammal, "Do you want me to put a placard on my forehead saying that I am Bhagavan?" Raja Iyer would amuse me with this story. Bhagavan had admitted that he was Bhagavan when he asked whether he should place a placard on his forehead indicating that he was Bhagavan.

When Raja Iyer started staying in the present *Ramanashram*, he would very often be invited to sing *bhajans*. There are different kinds of *bhajans*. For example, on the birthday of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, bhajans are sung throughout the night. Sometimes, an oil lamp is lit and placed in the middle of the room. People go round the lamp as the *bhajans* are sung. Raja Iyer was once invited to participate in a bhajan on the occasion of Lord Rama's birthday—*Sriramanavami*. He communicated this to Bhagavan, saying, "Bhagavan, they have invited me, and so I will go there." Usually Bhagavan would nod his head to indicate his approval, but on that day he didn't do so.

Chinna Swami, my grandfather, came into the hall and said, "Somebody has sent a lot of money, but with the specific request that Sri Rama's birthday be celebrated in *Ramanashram* in the same manner in which it is celebrated in his village." Bhagavan looked at Raja Iyer and said, "See, you will stay and do the *bhajan* here." So that day Bhagavan asked Raja Iyer to perform the *bhajan*. The *bhajans* would last for six or seven hours in the night. I have personally seen Raja Iyer sing and dance that long. Raja Iyer would become ecstatic when singing these songs about God. Bhagavan, too, enjoyed the *bhajans* in his own way. Bhagavan did not participate physically in the bhajans by singing and dancing, but he would comment in Tamil, "*Paitiyam*, they are all mad people!" Then he added

very significantly, "How I wish everyone was mad in that sense!"

Raja Iyer had to stay in *Ramanashram* until 1935. My grandfather Chinna Swami said, "You can neither stay inside the *Ashram* nor eat here unless you do some kind of work." Raja Iyer went to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, listen to what Chinna Swami is saying." Bhagavan suggested, "Raja, why don't you make idlis in the morning?" Rice cakes are what were made in the *Ashram* every morning, as it is even today. Raja Iyer said, "Bhagavan, I do not know how to make idly." Bhagavan said, "I will teach you." Making idlis is not easy because it involves a lot of work. The rice and dhal had to be ground the previous evening, and it had to be done manually since there was no electricity. That evening Bhagavan said, "Raja, come," and taught him. Bhagavan himself ground the rice and dhal for many, many days with Raja Iyer.

The next morning Raja Iyer told Bhagavan nervously, "Bhagavan, I do not know how to steam the idlis." Bhagavan volunteered, "I will come and help you, Raja." So Bhagavan helped Raja Iyer and showed him, "This is how you cover it up until the idlis are done." To Raja Iyer's dismay, he found that all the idlis were crumbled. So he dashed to the hall and said desperately, "Bhagavan, all the idlis are crumbled, and I do not know what to do. I am very nervous." Bhagavan asked him, "Before making these idlis, I told you that you will make an offering to the fire. Did you make a pledge that you will offer the first set of idlis to the fire?" Raja Iyer admitted, "Bhagavan, I forgot to do it." Bhagavan said, "Go and do that. Tell the fire that the first set of idlis will be offered to it." Raja Iyer told me he continued to make this offering forever, even after Bhagavan passed away. He continued making the idlis even in the late

seventies, and the first offering was always to the fire.

This was the Raja Iyer who would visit Bhagavan at Skandashram and *Virupaksha* cave because he was fond of eating. He loved eating so much that he would go into the kitchen and eats anything, whether cooked or raw. One day, a devotee complained to Bhagavan, saying, "Bhagavan, what is all this? The man is uncontrollable; he eats whatever he wants!" Bhagavan smilingly said, "You are complaining about Raja." The devotee said, "Yes, Bhagavan, because it is not according to the rules of the *Ashram*." Bhagavan questioned, "Are you sure that it is a mistake on the part of Raja Iyer?" The devotee said, "Yes, Bhagavan." Bhagavan continued, "Can you be clearer? Why do you also not go into the kitchen and eat like that?" The devotee answered, "No, Bhagavan, I just cannot."

Bhagavan told the devotee, "It is not his constant eating that is bothering you, but the fact that you are not able to go inside and eat as often." Bhagavan in this manner had taught the devotee that there are no others. Our opinion about others is based upon our own shortcomings. The devotee was unable to eat as much as he wanted because he was afraid of Chinna Swami, and therefore he was complaining. But Raja Iyer was not afraid of Chinna Swami. Raja Iyer told me that he received many corporal punishments from Chinna Swami, but this did not deter him from going into the kitchen and eating. Bhagavan then advised the devotee, "There are no others; whatever you see outside is your own reflection, your own mind, which was creating all this."

In 1937, the *Ramanashram* post office was started, and Raja Iyer was made the first postmaster. The post office was near the cow shed. On the first

day of its operation, Raja Iyer asked Bhagavan to come to the post office. When Bhagavan came, Raja Iyer gave him the seal and requested him to put the seal on all the letters received. He requested that Bhagavan come again in the evening, so that all the letters that were being dispatched could also receive the seal from Bhagavan. So, on the first day in *Ramanashram* post office, all the letters were blessed by Bhagavan since he put the seal on all of them!

There is a famous temple in Tiruvannamalai called *Pachaiamman* that the villagers frequented. In his early days, Bhagavan too had stayed there. Raja Iyer was so devoted to Bhagavan that when Bhagavan had sarcoma, he felt that the vermillion powder from the Mother's shrine could cure Bhagavan. This was the intense belief of all the villagers and of Raja Iyer. So, Raja Iyer performed a puja in the temple in the name of Bhagavan and took the *prasad* to Bhagavan. Doctors had given strict instructions that no one was to be allowed inside Bhagavan's room. Bhagavan was inside the room with the doctors and a few other people. Raja Iyer lamented to himself: "I am unable to give this to my Bhagavan! If only he takes this *prasad*, he will be cured!"

A few days later, someone suddenly called Raja Iyer and said, "Bhagavan is calling you." Raja Iyer, who was constantly carrying the *prasad* in his pocket, was surprised. When he went to see Bhagavan, Bhagavan looked at him and enquired, "Raja, do you have anything to give me?" Raja Iyer remembered the *prasad* and said, "Bhagavan, this is the *prasad* from Pachaiamman temple. I prayed that you get cured, Bhagavan. Please take this *prasad*." Bhagavan smeared some of the *prasad* on his forehead and said, "Give it to all!" He also said, "This Pachaiamman Goddess is very

powerful, and this *prasad* has real power." Raja Iyer told me that Bhagavan knew that every devotee could feel the love which Bhagavan had for him, and this love, he knew how to communicate unfailingly.

Raja Iyer would look after the Westerners. This is how I became close to Raja Iyer. When I came to *Ramanashram* in 1960, until 1972 or so, Raja Iyer instructed me on how to conduct myself in the presence of Westerners and how to take care of them. Bhagavan would appreciate the way Raja Iyer performed his duty.

Hugo Maier and I thought that since Raja Iyer was so passionate about food, he would suffer a lot in his last days. We thought that he would constantly demand something to eat. But an extraordinary thing happened: I saw with my own eyes that one week before he passed away, he suddenly stopped eating. Two days before his end, he said, "I will drink only water." It is not that he had any kind of disease; he just died of old age. In my own experience, I have only seen two people die of old age, where the body simply shrinks. The other person was also a devotee of Bhagavan, and this person too was conscious and happy until the last breath.

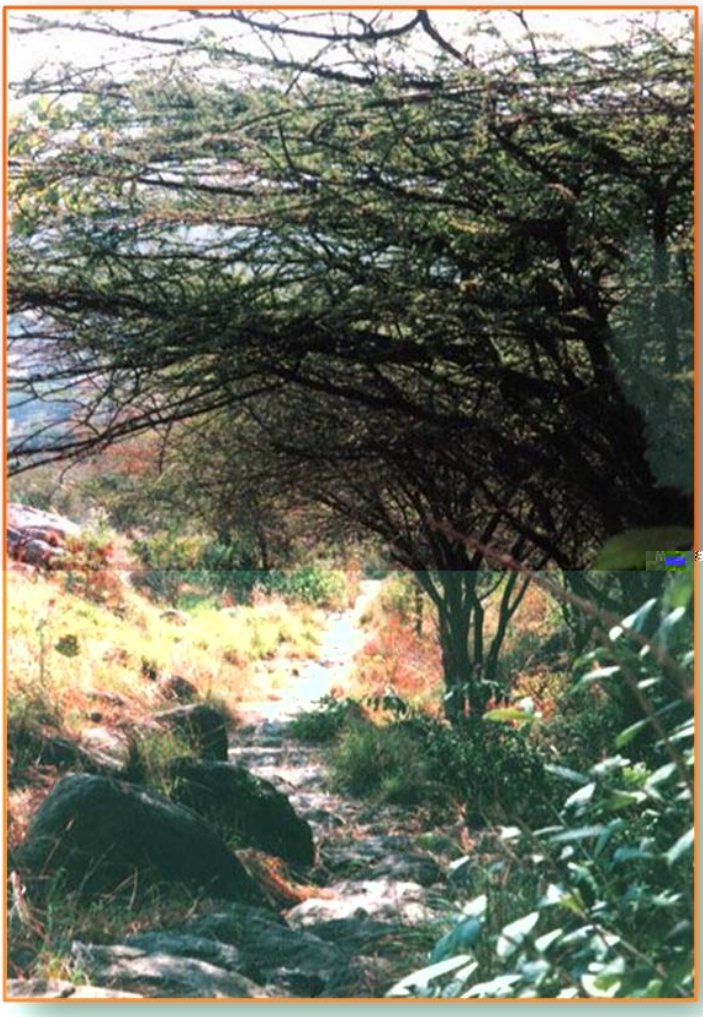
On the day he passed away, I went and touched his feet. I also said, "Raja Iyer, please bless me." He replied, "No, that is only Bhagavan's duty." He continued, "Bhagavan is here. Take his blessing." However, I insisted, "I will take Bhagavan's blessing, but you, too, bless me."

I then told him, "Raja Iyer, you know me very well. I will always do my best. If you have any desire, please tell me. I will fulfill it. You know that I will do so." Raja Iyer replied, "Ganesan, I have no desire. I have no thought at all. No thought comes to me. Look! Bhagavan is here! Bhagavan is here!" He kept repeating it over and over again. Finally he said, "I am in bliss, absolute bliss. See! Bhagavan is here." His final words were, "Bhagavan is calling me!"

I tell my close friends, like Anuradha, that Bhagavan took Raja Iyer not by post but by telegram (telepathy). I am happy I can recall these two beautiful people; Ramaswami Pillai and Raja Iyer. Although not well known, they were extraordinarily people, and I was blessed to receive their full grace. What we think about people need not necessarily be true. We may label them good, bad, or indifferent. It is more important to understand how the Master evaluates them. The final release of these two people, Ramaswami Pillai and Raja Iyer, shows their spiritual significance.

PROOF-READING WITH RABBIT

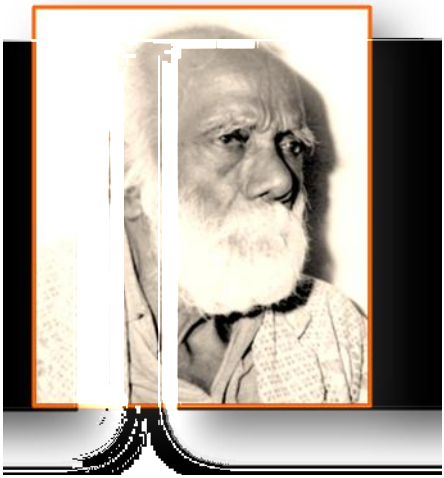
AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN



ROCK PATH TO SKANDASHRAM

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

G. Ramaswami Pillai



There are certain old devotees who may not seem that well-known, important, or significant, only because they chose to remain in the background. But in their relationship with Bhagavan, and in their understanding and practice of the teachings of Bhagavan, they are very significant. Although some of them were not very popular, and alas, to some extent were even disliked by others. Their relationship with Bhagavan was as supreme as his relationship with other, better known devotees.

Ramaswami Pillai came from a family of carnivores. However, even as a child, he could not bring himself to eat meat, and so he became a vegetarian. Seeing this, the rest of his family became vegetarians, too. He studied the *Bible* thoroughly, and read the Buddha's teachings. He once told me, "I have been to the mosque many times and offered prayers just like Muslims do. When they said 'Allah,' I coug ermM 'Gf 8e

Bhagavan and said, "Here is a great sage living in *Arunachala*." Of the forty students in the class, Ramaswami Pillai was the only one to be so magnetized by the picture that after class, he paid a visit to his teacher and asked, "Sir, may I have a picture of that saint?" The teacher was only too glad to give him a picture of Bhagavan. Recollecting this, Ramaswami Pillai told me, "Before I went to Bhagavan, Bhagavan came to my room." Many people, who have had a similar experience, have said, "Before I could go to my Master, my Master came to me."

After receiving this picture of Bhagavan, Ramaswami Pillai had a strong urge to meet Bhagavan. So he soon made his way to Tiruvannamalai, where he found Bhagavan in *Virupaksha* cave, seated on a rock. Ramaswami Pillai said his very first *Darshan* made him ponder, "Here sits the single, sovereign monarch of the universe, a *maharaja*, a *chakravarty*." This feeling did not come to him on the first instance alone. He said, "Every time I looked at him, no matter how many times a day, after all those years until Bhagavan passed away, I felt that here is the single sovereign monarch of the universe." This was his impression of, and approach to, Bhagavan.

By then, Bhagavan had already composed *Aksharamanamaalai*, a hymn with one hundred and eight verses. It took the young Ramaswami Pillai a little more than an hour to learn the verses by heart. From then on, even as a schoolboy, he chanted the verses constantly.

Ramaswami Pillai's second visit was when he was in college. Bhagavan had by then moved to Skandashram. That day when he visited the Master along with his friend, Bhagavan was going around the hill. He was taking

the forest route that winds around the base of the hill. As Ramaswami Pillai and his friend followed Bhagavan through the thick woods, he felt that Bhagavan was like a monarch marching ahead, with his army following him.

The *giripradakshina* had such an impact on him that the very next day he wanted to do it again, but this time alone. On the forest path, he lost his way and did not know what to do. When he turned, he found the *Ashram* dog, Kamala, behind him. Kamala, realizing that Ramaswami Pillai was lost, started walking in front, leading him through the forest. Wherever Ramaswami Pillai rested, she too lay down. Whenever he stood up, she resumed walking; she did not leave his side for a minute. In this manner she led him until he was in town, and then disappeared. When Ramaswami Pillai returned to Skandashram, he found Kamala already there! While the dog had been leading him, Ramaswami Pillai's feeling had been that this was not just a mere dog; it was Bhagavan himself who had come in this form. When he returned to Skandashram, he looked at Bhagavan, and Bhagavan provided him a very beautiful smile. At that moment, Ramaswami Pillai said, "I was more than convinced that Bhagavan would guide me through the unknown paths of life." That was his first real experience in the presence of Bhagavan.

Ramaswami Pillai started visiting Bhagavan quite often. On one such visit, he yearned to witness a miracle performed by Bhagavan. One day, in the evening, when Ramaswami Pillai had gone into town, somebody gave him a coconut and some broken rice. He brought these things to Bhagavan. Bhagavan said, "We can make a very nice porridge out of this. Find out if we have some sugar candy or sugar."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Ramaswami Pillai was thrilled that Bhagavan, who very rarely asked for anything, had asked for sugar candy. During the time Bhagavan was in Skandashram, there were only a few earthen pots used for storage. Finding all the pots empty, Ramaswami Pillai started shedding tears because he could not offer sugar candy to Bhagavan. He felt like running to town for sugar candy, but it was dark, and raining torrentially; the rocks were sure to be slippery. He didn't want to tell Bhagavan that there was no sugar candy, so he quietly went toward the entrance and waited for the rain to stop so that he could run to town and buy some. Suddenly, he heard a knock on the door. It was a young man, thoroughly drenched. He came inside, and from a cloth bag, took out some sugar candy and a bunch of bananas. Ramaswami Pillai said, "I already knew something extraordinary was happening." I was excited and was bold enough to go to Bhagavan.

Bhagavan looking at me, said, "See! The sugar candy has come. Make some porridge. As for the side dish, we now have bananas as well. Come! Let us have a feast today."

Ramaswami Pillai tearfully shared with me that Bhagavan of his own accord said, "This is my second meal in a day, for three hundred and sixty five days." None of them present would have noticed this if Bhagavan hadn't announced it. Ramaswami Pillai said, "Never can I forget that day. Bhagavan had it so indelibly imprinted on my mind."

Ramaswami Pillai said, "Bhagavan was a pure *jnani,* always in a state of perfect awareness. There was no need for me to crave for a miracle. Miracles seemingly happened in his presence. Bhagavan's presence was

magnetic. Just as iron filings are automatically attracted to a magnet, so too miracles were always happening in his presence, without him even noticing it."

He told Bhagavan, "I longed for a miracle and this happened. How did it happen?" Bhagavan replied, "This happened because of s*annidhi vishesham*—the power of presence, of awareness. There is no interlude of thought or desire involved in this s*annidhi vishesham."*

When Bhagavan's mother passed away, Ramaswami Pillai helped not only in bringing down the body from the mountain, but also in the burial. He was a hard worker, and gave up everything else in life to stay with Bhagavan right from the Skandashram days. He painstakingly planted all the big coconut trees that we see today in *Ramanashram*. Bhagavan**,** too, got involved in all the activities of the devotees. Bhagavan had already given Ramaswami Pillai the teaching of *Who am I?* And he continued chanting *Arunachala Shiva* while engaged in gardening or cleaning the *Ashram* premises.

Ramaswami Pillai established the custom of cleanliness in the *Ashram* that you see today. He would be working for almost twenty-four hours a day, engaged either in gardening, or just sweeping, or even digging a pit.

Nobody wanted to live away from Bhagavan. There was only one cycle in the *Ashram*; so when the office staff needed certain things from town, Ramaswami Pillai was usually the only one who would offer to go on the errand. Thus, he came to be known more as "Cycle Swami" rather than Ramaswami Pillai.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

One day, I asked him, "You were always away from Bhagavan's presence; you were always working in the garden. How did you like it?" He replied, "Why Ganesan, from a distance, I could see Bhagavan's form, and I was always chanting his name. Bhagavan was always in my heart. Bhagavan was perfection itself and because of his perfection, when we looked at him or chanted his name, the perfection came to us. As he was always in a state of bliss, so too were we in a state of bliss."

In support of his statement, he quoted from tradition saying, "Ganesan, understand that in our scriptures, this is called *guru turiya*. *Turiya* is the *samadhi* state—the fourth state transcending the three states of waking, dreaming, and sleeping. When you are working very hard and looking at the Master or chanting his name, he transports you to this state, which is not to your credit; it is because of his grace on you**,** and hence it is called *guru turiya*. The *samadhi* state that we get established in is because of his blessings."

Thus, though others seldom saw Ramaswami Pillai, Bhagavan and he were working together telepathically almost all the time. Bhagavan was continuously blessing him with his presence and Ramaswami Pillai was always chanting Bhagavan's name while doing his work. One day however, he had misgivings about his progress. He wondered if it was a mistake not to actively participate in any of the other activities of the *Ashram*, such as chanting, *puja,* and festivities. So he asked, "Bhagavan am I doing the right thing?" Bhagavan replied, "Do *Self-Enquiry*. It embraces all other activities."

Even while he was working in the garden or going to town by cycle, he was unconsciously doing *Self-Enquiry*. Whenever I met him at the *Ashram* after 1960, he would advise me very fervently, "Do not get involved in any of these *pujas* and other activities. They will not take you anywhere. Do only *Self-Enquiry*."

A few years before he passed away, he would talk to my friends, like Anuradha, and say, "We must have a room or a hall where only *Self-Enquiry* is done."

Once, on losing his keys, he went to Bhagavan saying, "My keys are lost, Bhagavan." Bhagavan smiled and said, "The keys are not lost; they are where they are. You have forgotten where you have left them." Then, as he often did, Bhagavan supplemented what he had said with his teachings: "It is just like the Self. It is always where it is. We forget it and take so many paths searching for it, saying, 'I am not able to find the Self; I don't know what the Self is, or where it lies.' We are searching for it even though it is always here. The Self is not lost, it is only forgotten." With the help of anecdotes, Ramaswami Pillai would give me Bhagavan's teachings.

Those who have been to *Ramanashram* and *Skandashram* must have seen the smooth, rock-paved path connecting the two. It was laid single-handedly by Ramaswami Pillai. I want to share with you a humorous incident. In an English version of Bhagavan's biography, there is mention of this path: "A path paved with smooth rocks was laid from *Ramanashram* to *Skandashram* single-handedly by a devotee." Later, it was translated in a French edition as: "It was laid by a man who had only one hand." Ramaswami Pillai would say, "See! I have two hands, but this

French book says I have only one hand, and yet I laid the path with it!"

Wherever Bhagavan walked, Ramaswami Pillai would silently spread sand evenly, like velvet. Every day, even in the hot noon sun, he would go and even out the paths that Bhagavan would regularly walk on. He was so unassuming that many people neither recognized him nor knew anything about him. One day, while Bhagavan was going up the hill from *Ramanashram*, he scraped himself against a rock. Bhagavan was unmindful of it, but one of the attendants noticed it and told Ramaswami Pillai. From the next day onward, Ramaswami Pillai started taking greater care to even out a soft path for Bhagavan.

Rarely would Ramaswami Pillai go into the hall where Bhagavan sat. He would normally prostrate before Bhagavan early in the morning and leave for his long, grueling day of work. He had a unique sense of humor. One day when he came into the hall, he found two groups of traditional Hindus having an animated discussion. One group affirmed that according to the scriptures, Shiva, the male God, reigns supreme. The other group asserted that Shiva's wife, *Shakti*, is supreme. (*Shakti* means form and power. As a matter of fact, one section of the scriptures says that even *Shiva* gets his power from *Shakti*.) The two groups kept arguing in Bhagavan's presence while Bhagavan looked on unsmilingly. Bhagavan's interest was aroused when he saw Ramaswami Pillai because he was such a humorous and frank person. When Ramaswami Pillai learned what the argument was about, he said, "Oh! That is very simple. The female group is strongest because," he said, quoting in English, "*He* is contained in *She*. So she is the most powerful. What is the problem?" So the entire *Shakti* group clapped and exclaimed, "Ah! We have won!"

But Ramaswami Pillai continued, "Wait! Wait! Wait! He can remain independently as He. But *She* cannot remain independently as *She*. He has to be there; otherwise *She* can't exist." The Shiva propagators applauded and exclaimed, "Oh! We have won!" Bhagavan laughed uproariously, admiring Ramaswami Pillai's sense of humor. Whenever Ramaswami Pillai came into the hall, Bhagavan would take great interest. Bhagavan liked unpretentiousness, and this was Ramaswami Pillai's greatest quality.

With all his humor, Ramaswami Pillai used to din into my ears, "You must do *Self-Enquiry*." In the presence of Bhagavan we could feel that the mind was only a shadow, a shadow of the Self. The ego, the mind, is only a shadow of the Self—an unwanted accretion, a state of ignorance." Then he would say humorously, "Nothing will be lost by its destruction. This falseness has to be and can certainly be dissolved by steady enquiry into one's Self. Such *Self-Enquiry* itself is the grace of the *Satguru*. All other efforts are definitely a waste of time."

As we saw earlier, from the very first day he met Bhagavan, he had started memorizing Bhagavan's written works and verses. As the days went by, Bhagavan wrote many more verses. All the verses were mainly four-line verses. In the evenings, chanting was done in two groups. One group would chant the first two lines and the other group would sing the next two.

Ramaswami Pillai was a very excited man. The *parayana* (chanting) was set to a particular *raga* or tune, and everyone was expected to follow it. However, Ramaswami Pillai would suddenly take off on a tangent and then start "shouting" the *parayana* in a totally different tune. This created

a lot of problems for the people in the *parayana* group, and so they approached Bhagavan, as they always did, with their problems. They complained, "Bhagavan, this Ramaswami Pillai does not follow the group. He goes off on a tangent. We are not able to solve this problem, and this is a big problem for us." Bhagavan replied, "What is the problem? He has got such a stentorian voice. So let him sing on one side of the group and all of you sing on the other side." Ramaswami Pillai continued to "shout" out his own tune and the members of the other group stuck to the tune of the *parayana*!

During his last days, since Ramaswami Pillai had lost all his teeth, he could not eat the *Ashram* food. He would eat only Bombay *halwa* made out of wheat and sugar. Since it was soft, like jelly, he could easily swallow it. The *halwa* provided him energy, since it contained both wheat and sugar. I would provide him with the sweet. He was staying inside the *Ashram,* and I assigned him a room with an attached bathroom; I also appointed an attendant to look after his needs.

On one occasion, a yoga guru by name Desikachari came from Chennai, along with his group of teachers. He is a reputed yoga teacher and teaches me yoga and *prana yama.* I had invited him to *Ramanashram*. Anuradha and I took the group round the *Ashram,* and we also took them to *Skandashram*.

On the way, I was telling Desikachari that the road we were walking on was laid by a single man who was now more than one hundred years old. Desikachari's father had lived to be a hundred years old, and Desikachari would gloat over this fact. Anuradha confronted him saying, "You used

to say that your father lived to be one hundred years old. We have a man who is living now and is more than a hundred years old." On coming back from *Skandashram*, Desikachari asked me, "Could I meet the hundred-year-old man?"

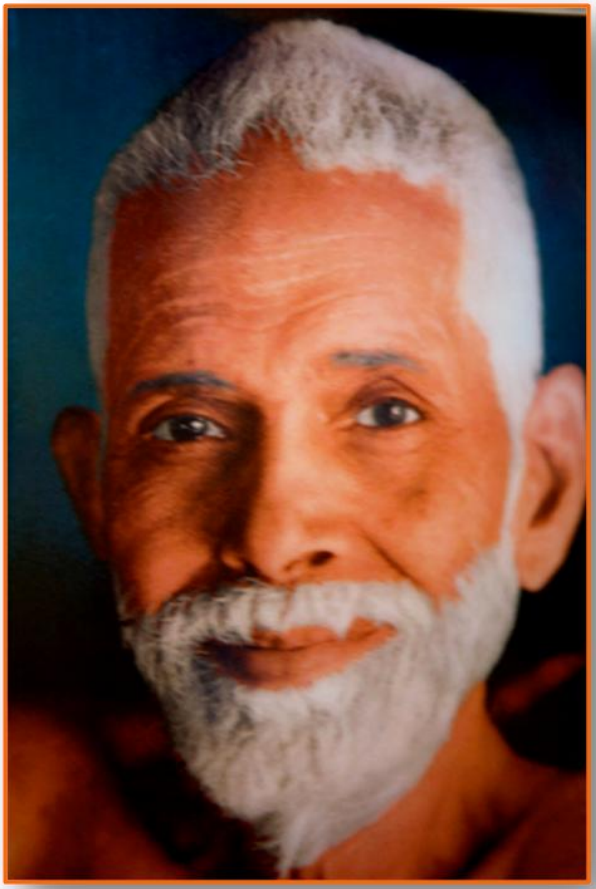
I took him to Ramaswami Pillai's room; as always, he was excited when he saw me. "Ganesan!" he said, "Come! Come!" It was time to have his *halva* so he clasped his hand around my neck and started feeding me the *halva*. When I put out my hand, he gave it a pat and said, "You are my child; you are asking me by holding out your hand! Come here." Thus saying, he started feeding me. This happened in 1995. I was not a child, but he was feeding me! Desikachari enjoyed the scene and then said, "You used to say that he does *parayana* and has a beautiful voice. Could we hear him sing some songs?" I said, "Ramaswami Pillai, they want to hear you sing. So sing some song of Bhagavan." At this, he got very angry and declared, "What do you mean by some song of Bhagavan? For me, there is only one song and that is Bhagavan's *Arunachala Shiva*."

He sang in his beautiful voice. When he came to the tenth verse, he started panting. I immediately said, "Ramaswami Pillai! Stop! That is enough." "Oh! You want me to stop? Yes, I will stop," he responded. It was three-thirty in the afternoon when we took leave of him, and as soon as I disappeared from the scene, he started singing *Arunachala Shiva* again. His attendant later said that he sang until five o'clock in the evening. Then he told the attendant, "Sit me up on my bed." He continued singing *Arunachala Shiva* with full consciousness until he dropped the body. I was not present at the time, but the next day, we laid him to rest. I made the arrangements and interred him, since that is what he had

wanted. After it was over, the President said, "Hand me the keys." That was the day I left *Ramanashram*.

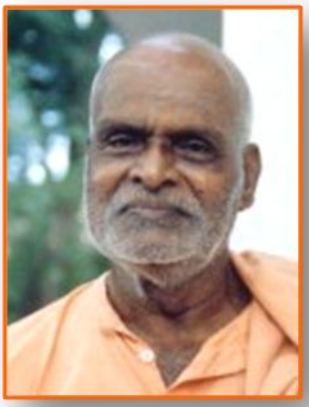
You will remember that Mother Krishna Bai asked me if I had attended fifty devotees. "But Mother, under your command I have even taken them to the crematorium." "Any one left?" she asked me at the time, and I replied, "Yes, two people are left." "And who are they?" she enquired. "Kunjuswami and Ramaswami Pillai," I replied. I then requested, "Please bless me." She said, "You have some more work to do. I will bless you. I will give you this final state, but you have some more work to do." I did not understand what she meant at that time, but it soon became very clear. In 1992, Kunjuswami passed away, and in 1995, Ramaswami Pillai passed away. I was asked to give the keys after interring Ramaswami Pillai. I recall that I was neither upset nor angry at the request because I at once saw Mother Krishna Bai saying, "Your work here is complete, now you can hand it over."

Ramaswami Pillai, a very sturdy rock, arrived at *Arunachala*. I love him because Bhagavan loved him, and he loved Bhagavan. He served not only in the *Ashram,* but also every devotee of Bhagavan. The path to *Skandashram* will remain for hundreds and hundreds of years, and every rock will talk about Ramaswami Pillai. Whether we human beings are grateful to him or not for the service done by him, every coconut tree in *Ramanashram* will remain grateful to him and never forget him. I pay homage to Ramaswami Pillai.



AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Kunju Swami



The Upanishads say, "One will get into the state of awareness or *atmanishta* only when the *Self* calls. The awareness itself has to call you." Whenever I meet a devotee, either in *Ramanashram* or outside, I always ask, "How did you come to spiritual life? What made you turn to this?" The sole function behind the question is to make them aware that they have been called. Even if this became a physical reality through the chance reading of a book, or suggestions from a friend, the Truth is these things happen because we have been called.

The main function of studying the lives of sages and saints and the early devotees of Bhagavan is to examine how each one of them had a turning point, a conversion.

Kunju Swami was one such remarkable saint. *Kunju* means "baby" in Malayalam, and he was so precious to his parents, they named him Kunju. He was chosen by God, just as, be assured, God or awareness or Self has chosen each of us. Do not exclude yourself, because if this were

not true, you would not be reading and digesting this.

Kunju Swami resided in joy, cheerfulness, friendliness, happiness; in fact, no one has seen him in any other state. Any devotee who met Kunju Swami could never forget him. He was born in a so-called lower caste family. According to the caste system in India, people from lower castes were ostracized from society. On his birth, when his horoscope was cast, the astrologer predicted that this child was divine, and advised that special care be given to him. The parents paid heed to this counsel, and out of their five or six children, gave him the most attention.

Kunju Swami was very fond of his father, and accompanied him wherever he went. He would often go with him to bathe in a small pool. By the time he was three years old and was able to understand things, he would observe Brahmins and *sannyasins*, standing waist-deep in water and doing *japa* of *mantras*. "Father, may we also chant a *mantra* like them? Why don't you teach me one?" he asked eagerly.

His father shook his head, "No, we are considered outcasts. *Mantras* are meant for Brahmins—the highest caste—and *sannyasins*. We cannot repeat them." The little boy was utterly dejected, and secretly shed tears at this prejudice. That night Lord Shiva appeared to him in a dream and said, "My child, I am initiating you into a mantra. Chant *Om Namah Shivaya*."

The boy started chanting this as soon as he woke up. After a few days when he was again carried to the pool, he saw people taking sacred ash from a small cloth bag and smearing it on themselves. He told his father

excitedly, "Father, I would also like to have a *sacred ash* bag like that!"

"No, my child, we are all outcasts. We are not supposed to wear *sacred ash* or carry those *sacred ash* bags," his father replied. Kunju Swami once more was really upset on hearing this.

Lord Shiva appeared to him in a dream again that night, showed him a tree and said, "My child, go to that tree and underneath you will find some coins. Take them and buy a bag of *sacred ash*."

The next day he rushed to the spot, found three quarter *annas* (the Indian currency then), and showed them to his father, telling him what happened. "Then it is Shiva's commandment," his father said. "Go to the shop and buy that bag." Kunju Swami happily obeyed.

After a year, he (then a five-year-old boy) felt he must have a rosary. Hindus, particularly *sannyasins*, use a rosary made of *rudraksha* (natural seeds found only in Nepal) beads and consider it very sacred. He was afraid to tell his father, for fear of being told he could not have it because they were considered outcasts. He fervently prayed to Shiva, "Please give one to me."

One day, while returning with a friend after a bath in the pool, his friend suddenly remembered that he had some work and had to go back. Kunju Swami continued walking alone and suddenly noticed a strange sight—a lotus in full bloom on the street. He bent to pick it up, and in the lotus flower, there was a *rudraksha* bead necklace held together with a golden thread! This time he ran back excitedly to his house and showed it to his

father. His father was very happy, and, understanding that this child was special, he put it around Kunju Swami's neck with his own hands.

By the age of ten, this boy was totally absorbed in his devotion to Shiva. His father took him to the next village to listen to the stories of Shiva, called *Thiruvilayadal Puranam*. *Thiruvilayadal* means "play" in Tamil and these stories related everything the Lord did, including how he played with devotees and blessed them. Kunju listened to them intently, soaking in every word.

On returning home, his father would ask him to tell his mother what he had heard**,** and the boy could repeat the stories verbatim. His family was flabbergasted at his extraordinary memory. His father gathered the villagers the next day and the boy stunned them with his recital. Soon the other villagers would take him along to attend spiritual discourses, and he began to perform the role of a human tape recorder! Even more astounding is that he could recall speeches not only in his mother tongue, Malayalam, but in *any* language, including Tamil and Sanskrit.

His father became increasingly concerned with the miraculous occurrences that surrounded Kunju's life. He felt that he must be properly trained, and therefore took him to one Swami who had come to their village. The Swami, called Kuppandi Swami, ridiculed these *siddhis* and told Kunju, "Do not indulge in them. They are not going to help you. This is not the purpose for which the Lord came to you in your dream, gave you all this and called you."

The boy fell at the Swami's feet and begged, "Please guide me."

Kuppandi Swami, who was a Master of several arts such as magic, astrology, medicine, and *Vedanta*, acceded. He told the child, "Choose any one art and I will teach it to you."

"Swami, you choose for me," the child humbly replied.

The teacher said, "I won't choose for you. You must be involved." They finally wrote the subjects down on chits of paper and drew lots. The child drew *Vedanta* and that became his subject of instruction. To me, this is confirmation that the Lord completely animates you. Only, one must have trusting faith to recognize it.

The Swami started teaching him *Kaivalya Navanita*, which means "the churned butter of emancipation." Knowledge is like yogurt. When we churn it enough, we get butter. Therefore anything that we read, including the scriptures, when it is understood and faithfully put into practice, gives us the real "butter," or the Truth, through direct experience. That is spiritual practice. Bhagavan was very fond of this book. Kunju Swami meticulously studied it, and because of his phenomenal re-call, could learn twenty verses on the very first day. Kuppandi Swami did not know about the "human tape recorder" and said, "You will study them at home, and when you come tomorrow, you must recite them to me. Only then will I teach you the rest." Though he had already memorized the verses, Kunju obediently left without saying anything.

Within five days he had memorized the entire book, but his father said, "This is not enough. You must know the meaning." Kunju went back to

Kuppandi Swami and was taught the meanings. When Kuppandi Swami had to leave, he entrusted Kunju to another Swami who was well-versed in *Yoga Vasishta*. His new teacher taught him this and advised, "It is not enough that you memorize and understand it. You will practice it, too."

Therefore he began putting these teachings into practice; yet he did not feel fulfilled. After a few years, Kuppandi Swami returned from his pilgrimage and found Kunju in a depressed state. "Why are you like this?" He questioned Kunju.

"Swami, whatever I practice is not giving me satisfaction. I have read in the scriptures and in our *Puranas* that in the ancient *Vedic* period there were many *Maharishis*, who could, with just one look, share an experience of Self-realization. Are there not any such *Maharishis* now?" Kunju inquired.

Kuppandi Swami said, "Yes, there is one such sage, now. His name is Ramana Maharshi." The moment Kunju heard the name *Ramana Maharshi*, he went into a state of ecstasy. After a few minutes he collected himself and asked, "Swami, have you seen this Ramana Maharshi?" "Yes, I went to *Arunachala* and saw him," the teacher replied. "I would like to go there," Kunju stated.

Kuppandi Swami was a highly advanced teacher and had hundreds of devotees. He had a premonition that after two years he would get into *jiva samadhi,* entombment while still alive, and that Kunju should close his tomb. Hence, he told Kunju, "Please wait until then. I have chosen you to do this because you have got the blessings of Lord Shiva. Until then, I

will be teaching you."

Kunju anxiously waited for those two years to go by. During that period, one of his friends from the next village, Ramakrishnan, came to see him. He told his friend, "You go to Ramana Maharshi and see him first. I will give you directions to get there." Finally, the day for Kuppandi Swami to enter into *jiva samadhi* arrived. Thousands thronged the site in anticipation of the miracle that awaited them. The pit was dug and the teacher told Kunju to place the slab over the tomb. "How will I know when to put it in place?" Kunju asked. "I will be in *samadhi* and you will see that my head will suddenly start to shake. That will be your clue, and then you can put the slab on the tomb," Kuppandi Swami instructed. "When will I see that?" Kunju asked. "It will happen half-an-hour after I enter *samadhi*," his teacher replied. Half-an-hour passed; then one hour, one-and-a-half hours, two hours, and yet nothing happened. Suddenly Kuppandi Swami arose from the coffin and ran out with Kunju in tow. After running for almost a mile, Kuppandi Swami stopped under a tree. Kunju fell at his feet**.** "Swami, what happened?" "I don't know! I am not trying to cheat anyone. Something has gone wrong, which means I will do some more *sadhana.* I will go on a pilgrimage, and I will not come back. You go to Ramana Maharshi. I bless you**,** my child." Thus the teacher parted with his disciple.

The Swami's failure to enter *jiva samadhi* became sensational news. Soon, the excitement died down, and Kunju was heartbroken that his *upaguru* had failed and gone away. His father took pity on him and said, "Son, you have been with Kuppandi Swami. Have you ever owed any money to anyone?" "Yes father, I owe someone

five rupees," he replied. "Here, take this money and return it." His father pressed five rupees into his palm. Kunju felt that it was Lord Shiva himself giving him the money to go to Tiruvannamalai.

By this time, around January 1920, Kunju was very popular in his village, as well as in the surrounding ones. Aspiring to avoid the idle curiosity of people, he waited until night so he could slip away. He ran to the railway station and waited there, but missed the train. He hid himself and caught the next train to Katpadi. On reaching Katpadi, he learned that he had again missed the train to Tiruvannamalai. The next train was at six in the evening, and he had to wait the entire day. At five in the evening, when he went to buy a ticket, he was told that a bubonic plague had broken out in Tiruvannamalai and therefore nobody was allowed to get off there. Dejected, he asked a man standing next to him, "What do I do? I want to go to Tiruvannamalai." "Tirukoilur is the next station after Tiruvannamalai. Why don't you get a ticket to Tirukoilur, and when the train reaches Tiruvannamalai, jump from the train. That is the way," the stranger advised.

They were to arrive at Tiruvannamalai station at nine-thirty p.m. Kunju Swami was a law-abiding and a truthful young man, and was apprehensive about breaking the rule of getting off at the forbidden station. Suddenly, the man seated next to him held his hand and said, "I am getting down at Tiruvannamalai. You must also get off," and pulled him along. The two men slipped away into the night.

Later on, when Kunju Swami recounted how the whole thing worked out, he said, "Had I not missed the morning train, I would not have been able to slip into Tiruvannamalai. Everything was perfect: I did not want

to break the rules, but somebody (who else could it have been, except my Bhagavan?) held my hand and compelled me to get down. I followed him into town, to an open temple porch where we both fell asleep. When I woke up early the next morning, the man who helped me was gone."

Kunju Swami was directed by the passersby to climb up the hill to reach Bhagavan. There were three paths made of stones, and he did not know which to take. This is symbolic for all aspirants: when we want to reach that to which we aspire, we encounter doubts, problems, and obstacles. However, if we are steadfast in our faith, this, too, will be resolved by the Truth itself. What we need is perseverance, one-pointedness, and faith.

On reaching *Skandashram*, Kunju Swami saw Bhagavan sitting, and three people prostrating before him. One of them was his own friend, Ramakrishnan. The other two were Perumal Swami and Swami Akhandananda. "This is the way I will pay my homage," he realized.

He, too, paid his tribute to Bhagavan and waited, because he had read in the *Kavalya Navanita* and *Jnana Vasishta* that the guru gives an *upadesa,* and he will speak first; until then one must not speak to him. At that time Bhagavan turned to a lady who was weeping profusely and asked her, "Why are you weeping? You are weeping because you lost one son but another son has now come." The lady was none other than Bhagavan's mother, Alagammal. Much later, Kunju Swami learned that a man called Annamalai Swami had died that morning due to the plague, and Bhagavan's mother was very fond of him. He was of much service to her and to the others at *Skandashram*.

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He had stayed with Bhagavan for eighteen days when the Master asked him one day, "What are you doing?" "I am doing the *panchakshari* mantra, *Om Namah Shivaya,*" Kunju Swami replied. "Continue doing that," Bhagavan said, approvingly.

Kunju Swami followed this for eighteen days, and he felt that in Bhagavan's presence he had experienced the Self. He felt he should not be a burden to the *Ashram*, and along with Ramakrishnan, decided that they had now realized the Self, and so would go back home and live there in this state of bliss. However, when they went home, the bliss slowly started fading and they were back to their original states. They realized that they must go back to the physical presence of Bhagavan.

When Kunju Swami left for his first journey to Tiruvannamalai, he had done so without telling his parents, but this time he took their blessings to get his guru's blessings. In India, we have deep conviction in serving the guru, being in close proximity to him or her, and awaiting their instructions. When Kunju Swami and Ramakrishnan went to *Skandashram,* they, too, longed to serve their Master. Perumal Swami**,** who was Bhagavan's personal attendant, said, "I will go on a pilgrimage. Both of you take over my duty." Perumal Swami's duty was to massage Bhagavan's feet and bathe him. Kunju Swami was delighted that his prayers were being answered and resolved that come what may, never to leave his Master, and to do the service his Master entrusted to him. Sure enough, he did not give up this service to his Master until his last day.

He asked Bhagavan, "Why was it that when I went back to my village, I lost the state of bliss and became unhappy again? And my other question

is what should I do to get over my confusion and thereby gain clarity?" Bhagavan listened to his questions with a smile and replied, "You have studied *Kaivalya Navanita.* One of the verses says that if one enquires into and comes to see the individual Self and thus transcends it to its substratum eternal Self, he becomes the substratum, or Self. Remaining always as the Self, there will be no more births and deaths."

"How can I know my Self?" Kunju Swami asked. "First re-cognize who you are," the guru answered. Kunju Swami inquired, "How can I re-cognize who I am?" "See from where thoughts arise," Bhagavan said. "But how is this to be done?" Kunju Swami pressed. Bhagavan replied, "Turn your mind inward and be the Heart." He then reverted to his natural state of silence, his gracious look fixed on Kunju Swami, and at that very moment, his agitation and confusion ceased. He experienced a peace and bliss he had never experienced before.

Kunju Swami asked yet again, "How and why did I lose the experience of bliss when I went back to my village?" Bhagavan quoted again from the *Kaivalya Navanita* and said, "The experience of the Self as a glimpse can occur in the presence of the guru, but it may not last. Doubts will rise again and again. In order to clear them, the disciple should continue to study, contemplate, and practice. Studying or listening is *sravana,* contemplation is *manana,* and then practicing it is *nidhidyasana. Sravana, manana,* and *nidhidyasana* should be done until the distinction between the known, the knower, and the knowing no longer arises. Practice includes surrender. There should be no difference, no 'other' at all."

After Bhagavan had explained this to Kunju Swami, he decided to stay in his presence and to carry out the practices he prescribed. He found that if any doubt arose in his mind, it would be cleared by merely listening to Bhagavan's answers to others' questions. He rarely had a question to ask.

The day in *Skandashram* used to begin at 4 AM. Bhagavan's mother would get up and sing devotional songs. At five, Bhagavan would come out, and all devotees would sing *Aksharamanamaalai*. Either a man called Sama Iyer would cook**,** or Echammal would bring food and at eight; everybody would eat their breakfast. The rest of the time was spent meditating or reading *Ribhu Gita* or the *Kaivalya Navanita.* Bhagavan would remain mostly in silence.

Every single day was a holy day at *Skandashram*. Bhagavan introduced Kunju Swami to Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. Kunju Swami had actually witnessed Kavyakantha's *kapala bheda*. A hot vapor emanated from Kavyakantha's head and he placed Kunju Swami's hand there. He had found it very hot. Bhagavan told Kunju Swami, "He had told us about this experience. But who could I have told?" Then someone asked, "Bhagavan, did you have this experience also?" Bhagavan just grunted—neither accepting nor denying the fact.

Nayana described Bhagavan's spiritual status to Kunju Swami as being that of a *Sahaja Nishta*. He explained that according to the scriptures, all spiritual aspirants eventually grow from either power (*Shakti)* or peace. Many sages like Meera, Adi Shankara, and Swami Vivekananda, developed power and used this to go out, write books, and speak. Bhagavan alone was one who was rooted in peace; he never assumed

doership in any powers. And that is the mark of *Sahaja Nishta*: to remain as you are.

Kunju Swami said that Bhagavan was very ordinary with him, but most of the time**,** Bhagavan would simply go into *samadhi,* from which it was very difficult for him to come out. Hence, three or four people would blow conches in Bhagavan's ears. Finally, after this had been done for a long time, Bhagavan would emerge from his *samadhi.* This practice was continued until sometime after Bhagavan moved to *Ramanashram*.

The scriptures state that there are two means of influencing the mind: by blowing a conch, and by ringing a bell. The conch brings out the subdued mind. Ringing a bell and feeling its sound takes the mind within. This is why temples and churches have bells; it is not merely a ritual, but is also a means to calm and "interiorize" the mind.

When Bhagavan's mother passed away, Kunju Swami was present. He brought the body to *Virupaksha* Cave, and along with Bhagavan, Nayana and some others, saw to it that Mother's body was buried properly. A thatched shed was erected and Bhagavan's brother, Niranjanananda Swami, and Dandapani Swami stayed there. Sometimes they would get together ingredients for *dosa* and send word to Kunju Swami to stay over and eat *dosas* with them the next morning. *Dosas* were considered a luxury in *Skandashram.* They would want to send some for Bhagavan as well. Kunju Swami woke up at three in the morning, joined them, and began to wash the vessels. A person wrapped in a cloth stood behind him and said, "Is there any food for an *athithi*?" (*Athithi* means "a wandering guest"). Kunju Swami turned around and saw that it was none other than

Bhagavan joking with him. Kunju Swami respectfully replied, "Bhagavan, you have come at the right time. We are making *dosas*, please stay here."

There was another lady who would begin her daily routine after Bhagavan's *Darshan*. When she came to know that Bhagavan had come to the present *Ramanashram*, which was only a thatched shed at that time, she insisted, "Stay here. I want to cook for you morning and evening and feed you all the time." Bhagavan complied. The next day somebody else said, "We want to cook for you." Soon people started asking him to stay there. Seeing every action as perfect, Bhagavan took it as *Arunachala*'s commandment to stay in *Ramanashram*.

Ramana Maharshi was up on the hill until 1922. After his mother passed away, her body was buried in one part of the forest in the southern side of the hill, where they raised a small thatched shed. My grandfather, Chinna Swami, who was very attached to his mother, stayed in the shrine with Dandapani Swami**,** doing *pooja* the Hindu way. Bhagavan was at *Skandashram* with Kunju Swami, Ramakrishna Swami, Perumal Swami, Ramanatha Brahmachari, Ramaswami Pillai, and a few others. Whenever he came down to the thatched shed, people from the town would find out and rush to *Ramanashram* with ingredients and fuel to cook, so they could feed Bhagavan. In Sanskrit this is called *bhiksha,* and means "giving of alms," but its literal meaning is "giving a feast." The gathered devotees, after sharing the feast with him, would request Bhagavan to go around the hill with them. Bhagavan used to walk around the hill the entire night.

After his coming down to the Mother's *Samadhi*, Bhagavan had intended

to go back to *Skandashram,* but the devotees from town continued to give him *bhiksha* for two or three days, and he could not return. Kunju Swami and Ramakrishna Swami, who were at *Skandashram*, began to bewail Bhagavan's long absence. "We came here for Bhagavan—not just to guard a building up on the hill," they thought sullenly. They would therefore sneak away down the hill to be with Bhagavan. The Master noticed this, and one day said, "Let us all go around the hill." Both of them went around the hill and returned to *Skandashram* early next morning, while Bhagavan and a few others came back to *Ramanashram*. After an hour or so, Kunju Swami and Ramakrishna Swami came running back and cried, "Bhagavan, thieves have entered *Skandashram* and robbed everything! Whatever was left there, it's all gone!" Bhagavan coolly replied, "That's good. Now nobody need guard that building; you can also come and stay here."

This is how *Ramanashram* began to develop slowly. It began as a mere thatched shed, with a low platform, on which Bhagavan would lie, and six or seven devotees who would lie down near him on a mat made of coconut leaves. Kunju Swami used to say that those were the most superb days, because then they could be close to their guru while he shared pearls of wisdom with them all through the night.

On the flip side, of course, there were many days when they did not have food to eat. Bhagavan's brilliance had just begun to spread. Many did not know of his existence and did not bring him anything to eat. Bhagavan was in his thirties or forties while Kunju Swami and Ramakrishna Swami were youths of twenty or twenty-five. They were all energetic workers but went hungry.

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Bhagavan would tell them, "We will celebrate this day." According to Hindu custom, one has to observe a complete fast every eleventh day of the month, called *Ekadashi*. *Ekadashi* in Sanskrit means "eleventh." It would be compensated the next day called *Dwadasi* or "twelfth," when one can eat to one's Heart's content. Whenever they did not have any food, Bhagavan would amuse them by saying, "Today we will celebrate *Ekadashi*" and sometimes, after a day or two, some devotees would bring ample food. Then Bhagavan would say, "Today we will celebrate *Dwadasi*."

On some days there would be only enough rice to feed ten people. Bhagavan would encourage them by taking them to the forest. He knew of all the varieties of green vegetables and asked the disciples to harvest them while he told them about their medicinal properties, their taste, and how to cook them. In South India, rice is eaten as the main preparation, and vegetables are eaten as side dish. Bhagavan would say, "Why should rice always be the main dish? Today we will have spinach as the main dish and eat rice on the side!"

Kunju Swami said that they never felt tired even if they didn't have their creature comforts. Bhagavan inculcated in them his own equanimity. Like most highly advanced beings, Bhagavan was never mindful of whether there was enough to eat or not. But the beauty about Bhagavan was that he provided his disciples that state of *titiksha,* too. His faithful disciples never felt the difference between *Ekadashi* and *Dwadasi*, except when Bhagavan expressed those humorous remarks, which delighted all in the *Ashram*.

Kunju Swami told me that Bhagavan came away from Madurai as a sixteen-year-old boy straight out of school. He could not have had a chance to acquire too many skills, yet he was specially gifted. He knew how to make beautiful garlands with flowers and make plates out of dry leaves. He also had culinary skills and could cook a vast variety of food. Kunju Swami often wondered where Bhagavan had learned this. Other people sometimes forget even the few things they know—but Bhagavan seemed to recall everything.

When people began to give *bhiksha*, they would give five rupees in those days and some rice, *dhal,* and vegetables. Their only condition was that Bhagavan had to walk around the hill with the person who had given him *bhiksha* that day. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed this, including the seven or eight guests at the *Ashram*. To them, accompanying Bhagavan on the circumambulation of *Arunachala* meant walking along with God. Kunju Swami once said to me, "We did not feel that we were walking with one of our friends or a saint, but with the supreme God himself, walking with two legs, two hands, and a head."

Once when people had come with *bhiksha* on five consecutive days, Kunju Swami tried to stop the next person because Bhagavan had barely slept for five days. Bhagavan just looked at him sternly to indicate that he must not tell anyone that he had been awake for five days so he could go around the hill with that devotee. Finally, when seven days had passed, Kunju Swami could bear it no longer. He went to Bhagavan and protested, "Bhagavan, you have not slept at all. Don't you need rest? Why do you prevent me from disallowing people?" Bhagavan gave him a gracious look and said, "What is sleep? Sleep is only to give rest to the

mind. Only if the mind exists, do you need to give it rest. Where is the mind? Of course I understand that if these eyelids are open for twenty four hours at a stretch, they get strained, and the eyes ache. If one remains with his eyes closed for some time, this too is taken care of. Therefore, where is the problem?"

The old hall, which is now used for meditation in *Ramanashram,* was built in 1926. Kunju Swami was very happy because Bhagavan could be given a couch, though Bhagavan did not like it. Bhagavan said, "I prefer to sleep on the rock." When the disciples placed a new velvet cushion on it, Bhagavan said, "This velvet cushion is pleasurable and enjoyable only to you. It is a bed of thorns to me. I prefer to sit on the rock." Even so, Kunju Swami said he was very happy that Bhagavan could have some comfort on the couch. Here too, the devotees would sleep in the same hall as Bhagavan.

There were a few dogs at *Ramanashram* and Kunju Swami admitted that none of them were fond of the animals because they were a nuisance. The hall where they slept was also the kitchen, the dining room, and the audience hall, and these dogs would live there**,** too. Bhagavan knew of their discomfiture with the canines. Bhagavan would have the dogs sleep below his bed**,** and at night take them for a walk and then bring them back. "Get under the bed! The others will get angry if you stay outside. Go in!" Bhagavan would instruct them.

Bhagavan would work along with all his devotees. All the *Ashram* chores, including gardening, chopping vegetables, cooking, cleaning, and even masonry (until Annamalai Swami took over it later) were done by

Bhagavan too. He would bring rocks, and mix water and mud for mortar to build walls. When the Master accompanied his disciples in their work, they felt rejuvenated and happy. It was in 1940 that Bhagavan again became more and more withdrawn and silent.

One day when Bhagavan was seated in the midst of his disciples, he suddenly got up and strode quickly toward the hill. Kunju Swami said, "I was very curious. Bhagavan usually never did anything unpredictable. Whenever he did, on rare occasions, there was some significance behind it." Kunju Swami was waiting for Bhagavan to instruct him to come, but the guru went alone. From a distance he could see Bhagavan surrounded by monkeys. After half an hour or so, Bhagavan came back with his eyes swollen from shedding tears. "We were alarmed and asked what happened," Kunju Swami narrated.

Bhagavan replied, "These monkeys have been searching for me at *Skandashram*. When I left, they searched all over the hill, putting their lives in peril. Monkeys live in kingdoms, and if they wandered into another territory, they could be killed by rival monkeys. These monkeys have come with their children at risk and are begging me to come back to *Skandashram* because they miss me there. It took me a long time to persuade them. I explained my situation and asked them to go back. I gave them my assurance that they will get back safely."

Whenever Kunju Swami narrated this anecdote, he would weep copiously because he would bring before us Bhagavan's poignant unity with the animal kingdom, including monkeys.

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Bhagavan would ask, "What is the difference between animals, birds, and us? Birds wear the bird body, animals wear the animal body, and we wear the human body. We all wear different bodies like different shirts, but in reality we are all the same being." Kunju Swami loved animals and noticed Bhagavan's relationship with them. Therefore he was the source of all stories of the Master's relationship with animals and birds.

If you go to *Ramanashram*, you will see four tombs for four animals. Bhagavan treated animals just like he treated human beings; there was absolutely no difference. Just as he revealed liberation for his mother, so he conferred *mukti* to a deer, a dog, a crow, and to a cow, and these are only the known instances. Moreover, when Bhagavan was at *Skandashram*, (Kunju Swami told me that he had seen this for himself) as soon as a baby monkey was born, the entire group of monkeys would come to Bhagavan and place it on his lap, with the blood and all. Bhagavan would wash it and return it to the mother. This is indeed a remarkable phenomenon because usually if a human being were to so much as touch a baby monkey, the whole herd would reject the newborn.

He also cared for the delivery of the *Ashram* pups. Squirrels used to complain to Bhagavan, who would often mediate between them if they quarreled. He even would attend to cats whenever they were ill. There was one cat that had a disease in his eye. Bhagavan kept a towel with him in the summer and would wipe its eye clean with it, to the chagrin of his attendant. Bhagavan respected his feelings, too, so he just kept the cloth and later washed it himself. Bhagavan was equally compassionate to all: therefore he not only attended to the cat, but without getting angry, was mindful of his attendant's feelings also.

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Snakes and peacocks would frequently find their way to *Ramanashram*. The Maharshi shared with us an example of his compassion, even in his last moments. Bhagavan was to drop the body at 8:47 p.m., and at 7:30 p.m. he asked to be helped into *padmasana asana*. After five minutes he opened his eyes and said, "He is hungry, feed him." A white peacock was making sounds outside. Those were the last words he had spoken. In India animals and birds are usually referred to in the neutral gender, as "it." But Bhagavan attributed human qualities to animals by calling them "he" or "she."

Bhagavan's compassion with animals and birds cannot even be called extraordinary, because he treated everything alike. It is because we perceive the difference between the animal kingdom and mankind that we glorify Bhagavan's love for animals. Bhagavan was not paying any special attention to them—he was paying the same attention to them.

Bhagavan rarely asked for anything. Once, a stranger approached him. Bhagavan looked at him and asked, "Next time, will you please bring me some cashew nuts?" Everybody was flabbergasted. Bhagavan was a shy person and usually did not talk to strangers. Here, most extraordinarily, he was not only volunteering to talk to a stranger, but also almost begging him to bring something for him. And how did he know there was going to be a "next time?"

Soon, everyone knew the reason. It was that the squirrels, fifty or sixty of them, would not eat peanuts or anything else; they would eat only cashew nuts. The *Ashram* management would say, "They are only squirrels. If they are hungry**,** they will eat everything. We can feed them peanuts." But

they never touched the peanuts. Six or seven squirrels stood in front of Bhagavan and there they were cajoling him. That is what Bhagavan said, "They were cajoling me and asking me where their food was."

World War II was going on at the time and cashew nut production had been nationalized, making cashews unavailable in the market. There were no cashews in the *Ashram* kitchen and the store had only a little, which the cooks wanted to save for their cooking. Bhagavan sent for cashews four times but they said, "No, these cashew nuts are for making sweets, we won't give them." Finally, Bhagavan's extraordinary influence procured cashews through the visitor. Bhagavan could often be seen breaking the cashew nuts into small pieces and keeping them in a small box. The only thing he asked for was cashews for the squirrels.

Dandapani Swami would cook and Bhagavan assisted him. Every morning Dandapani Swami brought a type of spinach, which had to be ground or else it could not be eaten. Bhagavan would grind it and this eventually caused blisters on the fingers of his right hand. Bhagavan, of course, did not mind it, but it irked Kunju Swami. He approached Dandapani Swami and said, "Do not bring that spinach from now on." "I am the cook; do not interfere in my job," Dandapani Swami shot back. Kunju Swami went to Bhagavan and complained, "Bhagavan, I have told Dandapani Swami not to bring this spinach, but he insists on bringing it, and this has caused you blisters. I will not eat if you grind it!"

Nothing changed the next day so Kunju Swami refused to eat. Bhagavan noticed this and said, "What freedom do I have, when I will obey whatever anyone says. If I do not obey them, they say that they will not

eat. Where is my freedom?" Kunju Swami was deeply hurt. Yet Bhagavan continued taunting him with "Kunju, may I get up? I have eaten now." Or "May I enter?" Or "May I read this book? If I read this without your permission you will not eat." Or "May I go out? I want to take a walk on the hill. May I, or will you not eat?"

This plunged Kunju Swami into depression. After experiencing this for three days, he told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I am going to Tirupathi. My train leaves at six-thirty." Tirupathi is a pilgrimage center in Andhra Pradesh, nearly a hundred miles from Tiruvannamalai. After lunch Bhagavan suddenly said, "I am going around the hill, let us all go." Ramakrishna Swami told Kunju Swami, "Your train is at six-thirty. We will all go around *Arunachala* with Bhagavan. When we approach the town you can catch your train." Kunju Swami agreed and decided to take the opportunity to walk around the hill. But on that day, Bhagavan deliberately walked very slowly—so slowly that by the time they reached the outskirts of the city, the train had already left. Bhagavan said, "See, Kunju, your train is moving—go and get on!"

Then he consoled Kunju Swami, "You cannot even eat this *Ashram* food: you find the *sambar* and *rasam* so spicy that you dilute them. In Andhra, everything is made with chilies, how can you eat there?" Kunju Swami prostrated at Bhagavan's feet. He confessed, "I served Bhagavan day and night, and became a little proud of my proximity to him. I had begun to think that I was superior to all because I have been close to Bhagavan, and that I am his best devotee and servant. Bhagavan just played a *leela* and weaned me in his own natural, most beautiful way."

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Ramakrishna Swami had a younger brother called Vasu, who was studying in college, four hundred miles from Tiruvannamalai. He got a letter from his family that Vasu was following a *hatha yogi*, who had taught him the practice of concentrating between the eyebrows and he was so steadfast in doing this that he had almost turned mad. He was not able to eat or sleep and was in a pitiable condition. He would not listen to his family. Ramakrishna Swami told Bhagavan**,** who knew all the family members, "Bhagavan, if I go, he will not listen to me." Then Bhagavan said, "Kunju, you go and tell him about 'the teaching.'" Ramakrishna Swami had five rupees to give Kunju Swami. It was enough to buy a train ticket, but not enough for food. They didn't know how to tell this to Bhagavan. Finally, Kunju Swami said, "It doesn't matter. Bhagavan has asked me to go, so I will go. It is all right, even if I remain hungry." His train was at six-thirty in the evening. At three o' clock that day a visitor brought *pooris,* or fried bread, with him. Bhagavan used to eat one or two if they were small, or one, if they were of a bigger size.

Bhagavan practiced equal sharing: if there was only one *poori* and many people to share it with, he would just take small pinches of it and distribute them equally to everyone. But on this day when *poori* was served to him in the hall, he did not stop with one. The visitors gave Bhagavan two *pooris* and waited; then three and waited expectantly; then four, then five, then six; only then did Bhagavan say: "Enough." Everybody was surprised that Bhagavan had accepted six *pooris* when he would eat only one. He then slowly and neatly packed five *pooris* and called Kunju Swami, who had not told him of his problem. The Master compassionately asked, "You have got only money for travel but what will you eat? Take this to eat on the way." Kunju was so stirred that

whenever he would narrate his relationship with Bhagavan; he would cry and bring us to tears, too. Bhagavan's tender and loving ways were so beautiful.

Kunju Swami was quite noble, too. Over the next two days he ate only four *pooris* and kept one as *Prasad* because Bhagavan himself had packed it. He took this *Prasad* to Ramakrishna's family and fed it to Vasu first. He took a little time to divert him from his path of *hatha yoga* to Bhagavan's *Self-Enquiry*. When he had stayed for a few days and ensured that there was improvement, he returned to the *Ashram* and reported this to Bhagavan. Before he could return, a letter had already reached the *Ashram* saying that Vasu had relinquished all *hatha yoga* practices, and was now in meditation as prescribed by Bhagavan. He afterward joined the army and became an officer of high rank. I met Vasu when he had retired from the army. He was a tall, hefty six-footer with a very simple heart, thanks to that little *Prasad* of *poori* and, of course, the *Self-Enquiry*.

Kunju Swami used to narrate many stories. There was a man called Kandaswami in Tiruvannamalai who was a murderer and abhorred by all. One day he fell gravely ill and people drove him out from the town. His only shelter was a temple porch in front of *Ramanashram*. He stayed there and sent word to Bhagavan that he was hungry. Bhagavan made gruel and sent it over every day.

Before we proceed with the story, it must be shown that Bhagavan rarely ever commented disparagingly about any person. Whenever Bhagavan received news that a devotee had passed away, he commented on what a great man or woman that person was. Even if the said person had

hundreds of faults and only a few good qualities, Bhagavan dwelt primarily on the positive traits. When his devotees heard that Kandaswami had died, they decided to challenge Bhagavan to find at least one good quality in this abysmally assumed wicked man. They informed Bhagavan of his death. "Oh! Kandaswami has passed away," Bhagavan exclaimed. "He used to keep his body and clothes very clean, even though he did not use soap or soap nut powder. He used to bathe and clean his *dhoti* for hours together and keep it spotlessly clean." "Bhagavan, we are all defeated," they said in unison. "What happened?" "We thought we would challenge you, but we have failed before you, Bhagavan," they replied.

Kunju Swami gave us a few other instances of Bhagavan's humor. When letters would arrive, they would be taken to Bhagavan in the hall and the devotees would observe Bhagavan's face as he read them. From his smile and his expressions they would know if there was something interesting in the letter. Once Bhagavan held a post card in his hand and then just kept it aside, but his smile gave him away. Kunju Swami ventured to ask, "Bhagavan, I know that you have read something interesting in that post card. Will you please share it with us?" There were six or seven people present.

Bhagavan said with a smile, "All the so-called worldly people have attachment to the body as long as they live but these *sannyasins*, these monks, who are supposed to have renounced the world, are attached to their bodies even after they die." The listeners did not understand. Bhagavan continued, "This post card is from a *sanyasi* who is eighty years old. He has appealed for funds saying, "I may

die any day and I will be placed in a *samadhi,* which has to be built well, hence please send donations."

In another instance, in the 1930s, when Bhagavan was about fifty years old, an old man of nearly ninety-five came to Bhagavan. He looked very pious and prostrated several times before Bhagavan, shedding tears all the while. He said, "Bhagavan, I have only one prayer." Bhagavan rarely asked what it was. He only looked at him. The old man said, "Bhagavan, you should live for a hundred years. I should see that you should live for a hundred years." Everybody was moved with his prayer, which was almost like a blessing that Bhagavan live for a hundred years. Bhagavan hid his smile, and after an hour, when this old man went away, Kunju Swami, being mischievous himself, knew that Bhagavan had something witty to respond to this. He went near Bhagavan and asked, "Bhagavan, I noticed, you smiled. What was the reason?" Bhagavan, amused, said, "You are all moved, aren't you, that he asked that I should live for a hundred years? Do you know what that means? That he has to live a hundred and forty years, because he said "I want to see you live for hundred years."

Kunju Swami found that when people from different branches of philosophy asked him questions, he, Kunju Swami, could not give them answers. Many people from Tamil Nadu followed the path of *Saiva Siddhanta* and plied him with questions. There was a *mutt* where they held classes on *Saiva Siddhanta,* so he decided to go there and learn it. He went to Bhagavan and informed him, "Bhagavan**,** I am going to this place to learn *Saiva Siddhanta*." "Oh! Why?" Bhagavan asked. Kunju Swami replied, "When people come here, they have so many questions. I do not know *Saiva Siddhanta*—if I do then I can answer their queries."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

"Oh! That is very good! So you are going to learn *Saiva Siddhanta* so that others' questions can be answered. Suppose someone comes with questions on *Advaita Vedanta*, what will you do? You will go and learn *Advaita Vedanta*, and if someone comes and talks to you in Sanskrit, what will you do? You will go and learn Sanskrit. If Westerners come to you, speaking in English, how will you answer them? Then will you go and learn English, too?"

By that time Kunju Swami knew that Bhagavan was pulling his leg. Then he said, "Bhagavan, please pardon me. I am not going anywhere. Please teach me. It is only with love that I want to help the others." Bhagavan then gave him a gracious look as well as the teaching: "If you learn to remain in the Heart as the 'I Am,' to any questions that are put to you, the answers will emerge like an echo from within, and they will be the correct answers. Learn to remain within your Heart as 'I Am.'"

In another incident, there was a group of people trying to disturb the *Ashram* management. Kunju Swami happened to enter the old hall, and since everyone stood there, Kunju Swami too stood there. Bhagavan looked at him, "What business have you got here? Why have you joined these people?" Kunju Swami did not know what to say; he had not come to join them. Bhagavan asked again, "For what purpose did you come?" "Bhagavan, I came for getting your grace," Kunju Swami meekly replied. The Master rebuked him, "Then you attend to that. Why are you standing here?" That day Bhagavan shared with him the lesson that we must attend only to the intention, for which we have all come. It is to recognize the transcendental Truth. It is not just for Kunju Swami that Bhagavan said this, but for everyone. This is Bhagavan's direct teaching,

and as Kunju Swami confirmed to me, a sound and practical one—that we not interfere in others' affairs.

In 1932, after serving Bhagavan personally, day and night, for twelve years, Kunju Swami had a big urge to practice *Self-Enquiry* by keeping himself aloof from the *Ashram*. He had trained a young boy on how to attend to Bhagavan. Kunju Swami waited for the day to tell Bhagavan that he was retiring from service and that he would be staying in Palakothu, in the next compound (where Annamalai Swami stayed afterward). He was hesitant, as he did not know how to break the news to his Master.

While still in this dilemma, one day he entered the hall when he heard Bhagavan explaining to others that real service to him did not mean attending to his physical needs but practicing his teachings. Once before he had said, "It is no use in saying, 'I have been of personal service to the guru.' One should abide by the teaching of the guru every day."

On another occasion also Bhagavan had said, "The best service to the guru is engaging in *Self-Enquiry*, meditation, and other spiritual practices, with the purity of body, speech, and mind." He kept chancing upon Bhagavan saying this, morning and evening, for several days. He had been hesitating to tell Bhagavan of his plans, but Bhagavan himself had taken a clue and given him an answer.

Another day when he entered Bhagavan's hall, Bhagavan was quoting from the *Kaivalya Navanita*, wherein the disciple asks the guru how he can repay him for the grace he has received from him. The guru replies, "The

highest return the disciple can render to the guru is to remain fixed in the Self without being disturbed by obstacles, obstructions, and outward distractions."

This finally emboldened Kunju Swami. He prostrated before Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, I want to go and live in Palakothu and pursue *Self-Enquiry*, my *sadhana*." Bhagavan was delighted and exclaimed, "Oh, good!" With a smile he said, "It is enough if the mind is kept one-pointed in *vichara, dhyana, japa,* and *parayana*." *Vichara* is *Self-Enquiry*, *dhyana* is meditation, *japa* is incantation, and *parayana* is repeatedly singing the works of the Master, without aspiring to anything else. Then again he prostrated before Bhagavan and pleaded, "Bhagavan, please bless me. I am going to be alone, away from you. Guide me."

Bhagavan then said the most beautiful thing; he looked at him graciously and spoke, "Make *Self-Enquiry* your final aim, but also practice meditation, *japa,* and *parayana*. Relentlessly practice them alternately, and if you tire of meditation, take to *japa;* if you tire of *japa,* take to *Self-Enquiry*; if you tire of that, do *parayana,* i.e., the chanting of verses. Do not have a gap between them. Do not allow the mind to sway from your task. Practice this faithfully, and in the end you will be established in *Self-Enquiry* and will find culmination in Self-realization." This is an assurance, not just to Kunju Swami but to every listener of this profound statement by the Master. Be assured, *Self-Enquiry* will establish you in the nonphysical Truth you already are.

Kunju Swami lived in a small hut in Palakothu and did not earn, or beg for money. Whatever provisions he had, were exhausted and there was

no food to eat. Bhagavan would visit Palakothu after lunch and go to a small pool, where he would take a walk. He would invariably meet Kunju Swami and ask, "How are you? What are you doing? Are you doing your meditation? Are you doing your *Self-Enquiry*?" Kunju Swami never told him of his plight, feeling that it was quite petty to tell his Master of his physical problems. Did he not already know?

On the third day when Bhagavan was in the hall, one Goundar, a wealthy devotee, came and prostrated before him. He was Kunju Swami's friend, so Bhagavan said, "Oh, you have come to see your friend." He replied, "Yes Bhagavan. I was exhausted yesterday after a whole day's work and was fast asleep. You visited me in my dream and said, 'You are sleeping peacefully while your friend is hungry for the last three days. Is it proper on your part to sleep like this?' Therefore, I immediately got up and caught a train to come here." "Go and see your friend," Bhagavan goaded him. When he met Kunju Swami he realized that his friend had, in fact, not eaten for three days and there was nothing in his humble abode. He shared some money with Kunju Swami, asked him to bring provisions, and then fed him. He then had to go back, but vowed in Bhagavan's presence, "Bhagavan, I will not allow him to go without food. I will send him five rupees every month." In those days, five rupees was more than one needs. Kunju Swami said, "I had nothing—no utensils, nothing. Another friend saw this, and he immediately bought me a stove and provisions."

In later years, Goundar built a house for Kunju Swami opposite the *Ashram*. Kunju Swami used to tearfully say, "When you have surrendered to the Master, i.e., to the Truth, do not try to exert yourself by even

making a prayer. He recognizes everything. It will happen in its time."

During his stay in Palakothu, *Ramanashram* had grown rapidly and many visitors would gather at the *Ashram*. Kunju Swami needed to speak to Bhagavan every day, even if it was only one sentence. However, with Bhagavan becoming so busy, this was becoming increasingly difficult. Kunju Swami said mischievously, "I am a very clever man. Every evening we had *parayana,* Tamil verses composed by Bhagavan from the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*. I used to deliberately miss one line while singing and Bhagavan would say, 'Hey, Kunju**,** you have missed that line,' or I would mispronounce a word and he would say, 'No, no, Kunju, it is not like that. Pronounce it properly.' I would be so happy that he spoke to me. Every day, whenever I wanted Bhagavan to talk to me, I knew the trick."

The C*ollected Works of Ramana Maharshi* in Tamil was released in the form of a book. Unfortunately, many *sadhus* could not afford to buy it from the *Ashram*. Thus Bhagavan arranged with a devotee to write it all down in a notebook and hand it over to Kunju Swami. A small printed picture of Bhagavan was pasted there in it. Now, the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* also had to have a picture of *Arunachala,* but Kunju Swami could not get hold of one. While he was still thinking about it, Bhagavan called out to him, "Kunju, bring your notebook." He then drew a picture of *Arunachala* in it. Kunju Swami has left this notebook with Anuradha as a legacy; it contains a lot of Bhagavan's handwriting and the picture drawn by Bhagavan. She has now handed this precious treasure over to the *Ashram* archives.

Bhagavan used to correct all proofs of his books himself. He would demand for two sets of proofs. One he would correct and send to the press, and the other he kept with himself. There would often be so many errors that the same proof would be sent to the press four or five times. Bhagavan carefully kept a copy of every proof, and would finally bind four or five copies and distribute them. He kept for himself the proof with the maximum errors, while he distributed the better ones to Kunju Swami and others who could not afford to buy his books. This is how kind and solicitous Bhagavan was.

Once Kunju Swami felt he could not continuously meditate or pursue *Self-Enquiry* and stay in the Self. He confessed to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I am not able to do this. The flow gets interrupted." Bhagavan said, "Why? It is very easy. Before you go to sleep, meditate and go into the Self. When you fall asleep, your whole sleep is a meditation of staying in the Self. The moment you wake up in the morning, again go into meditation for a few minutes and remain as the Self. Throughout the waking state, the undercurrent of remaining in the Self will be there, even though you will be working, arguing, and quarreling. This substratum will always keep you in the Self." Kunju Swami said, "This is the most beautiful and practical teaching I have received from him."

(For your information, I am a very sound sleeper and sometimes for some reason, if I woke up, I was aware of meditation still going on. Whatever I chanted silently, before going asleep, continued to resonate within me after I woke up. Of course in the waking state, in whatever activity I do, the attention on the Self, the *jnapti,* is always there. It is attention, paying attention to attention.)

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During Bhagavan's last days, there were troubles in the management of the *Ashram*. The devotees did not know how to continue with their activities, so along with Kunju Swami, they approached Bhagavan with their issue. Bhagavan only told him, "How is the management being carried out now? Do you think it is you, or somebody else that is managing it? There is a *Higher Power*, which is managing all this. The same *Higher Power* will continue to manage."

In his last days, Kunju Swami was rather weak. Anuradha and I requested him to move to the *Ashram*. He started teaching Anuradha Sri Bhagavan's *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* in Tamil and also the way it's chanting—*Parayana*—was done in Bhagavan's presence. He had her sing some verses of Bhagavan a few times at the Shrine of Sri Bhagavan. Inspired by that, many others learned Bhagavan's *Collected Works*. Thus, Tamil *Parayana* was restarted at the *Ashram*. To inspire the next generation doing *Parayana,* he sat along with us, almost until his last days.

He would enthrall us with stories of the Master, and whatever I have shared with you, too, is *Prasad* from Kunju Swami. It is Kunju Swami who has given us a wealth of information, all the reminiscences about other devotees, about Bhagavan's relationship with them, his beautiful relationship with monkeys, animals, men, trees, plants, with the Hill, with the rocks, and with the sands! We are all deeply grateful to Kunju Swami.

I can never forget his solicitude to me. I had given Kunju Swami Chadwick's old room. He said, "Ganesan, come and stay with me in the next room." Even though I was a grown-up and held a responsible

position in the *Ashram*, he looked after me like I was a little child. He was so kind.

During Kunju Swami's last days, I appointed two assistants to look after him, as he experienced a lot of physical pains. These assistants did their duty very well, but sometimes they would make blunders. Kunju Swami never complained. One day I asked him, "Kunju Swami, are they all looking after you properly?" "They are looking after me very well. In fact, today I wanted to call you and tell you that I wanted to break some good news to humanity." Puzzled at his words, I asked, "Swami, what are you talking about?" "Do you know these muscular pains can be cured with a massage using honey?" replied Kunju Swami. "I still don't understand, Swami." "I thought I was going to give some breakthrough news to the medical world." "Still, Swami, I do not understand."

I learned later that there was a jar of honey kept next to the brown oil, which was to be massaged onto Kunju Swami's body to relieve his muscular pain. The assistant mistook the honey for the oil and had been massaging Kunju Swami's body with it. It obviously did not prove useful, but all Kunju Swami said was, "I wanted to make a breakthrough, but it did not work." He used to get his point across indirectly, without complaining, despite being in so much pain.

In his last days, he was almost bedridden; he could not even sit up. Anuradha, a few others, and I would visit him and try to amuse him. We used to ask him to tell us something about Bhagavan's verses and he would come alive. Anuradha's son, Sankar, had finished school and was soon to leave for America to study medicine. He was very fond of Kunju

Swami because he had almost been brought up by him. He knew that when he returned from America the next time, Kunju Swami would no longer be among us. This deeply saddened him. Kunju Swami wanted to cheer him up, while we tried to amuse him. I put a question to Kunju Swami, "In Bhagavan's Tamil translation of Sankara's works, which song do you like?" Kunju Swami steadied himself and looked at me, "Swami, I like the song where it is said, 'I am the Self, I am awareness,' and Anuradha likes the song where it is said, 'you are the Self, you are that.' Whose side are you going to be on?" Then he added, "Let her sing first." The first song she sang was *I am that* (*Hastamalaka Stottara*). Then she sang *Guru Stuti,* which says "You are that." I asked Kunju Swami, "Swami, which parties do you belong to? Do you belong to 'I am that' or 'you are that'?" Kunju Swami smiled at us, "What is the difference between 'you' and 'I'? In 'you are that,' the important word is 'are,' not 'you' or 'that.' Both get merged in the 'are.' In 'I am that,' the important word is 'am' not 'I' or the 'that.'"

He passed away a few days after listening to those beautiful songs. That night he asked his attendants to remove the cushions from his wooden bed and help him sit in *padmasana.* "I am going to meditate," he declared. He remained in deep meditation while his attendants slept. After two hours when they awoke and touched him, his body was cold. He had passed away, just doing *Self-Enquiry*. His Heart will always be in *Arunachala*, at the feet of the *Satguru* Ramana.

KUNJU SWAMI WITH V. GANESAN

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

The Heart's Emergence

The boy called Venkataraman in Tiruchuzhi came in response to *Arunachala*'s call at the age of sixteen, and stayed in and around the *Arunachaleshwara* temple. Others, too, were with Bhagavan to support him in the recording and dissemination of a divine Masterpiece, the revelation of the irrefutable Truth of nonphysical existence in satsang, silence, and Darshan.

This recognition and emergence of the Truth unfolded slowly through Bhagavan's interactions, while in *Virupaksha* cave, with Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, Gambhiram Seshayya, Sivaprakasam Pillai, Frank Humphreys, and the others. The revelation of the sublime Truth, for which the term, *Arunachala,* is a divine representation of the omniscient silent state of "I Am," is externalized and symbolized as the unmovable hill, and experienced internally as the silent still Self. Bhagavan himself has sung that the "I Am" is the substratum and Heart of each one of us. In later years, he addressed *Arunachala* saying, "*Arunachala,* your name is Heart itself." Bhagavan's function is to reveal this Truth in all walks of life: that the "I Am" state within and without each one of us is the true ever present immortal Self. The first phase of this process took place between 1896 and 1922.

In 1922, Bhagavan came down from *Skandashram* to stay in what is today's *Ramanashram*. With this starts the second phase, the emergence.

What was the significance of Bhagavan coming down the hill to *Ramanashram*? One obvious reason was that his mother, who, at liberation in his hands in *Skandashram* in 1922, had to be buried at the foot of the hill, since it could not be done on the hill. Therefore the entire entourage had to come down, too. There is a symbolism to this; the Vedas categorically state that the highest Truth is unattainable unless extraordinary penance is performed. But here, the highest Truth, the recognition that each one of us is the "I Am" state, was destined to unfold throughout humanity in its rightful place. It was to be available to all, without any conditions. Destiny had called Bhagavan gracefully to reveal it.

Many years later, when Bhagavan was asked why he came down from *Skandashram* to the present *Ramanashram*, he said, "The same *Higher Power*, which drew me from Madurai to *Arunachala*, brought me from *Skandashram* to the present *Ramanashram*." He always emphasized the *Higher Power*. Until then, the whole Hindu spiritual world stood on the two pillars of guru and disciple or God and devotee. Bhagavan, a spiritual pioneer, fused this fundamental concept of two separate entities into one, the One Truth, which is all consuming, the all inclusive Heart sky. In his hymn *Arunachala Pancharatnam* he says, "*Arunachala*, you are the sublime Truth, from which the whole universe emerges, on which it has its stay, and into which it dissolves." Another time, Bhagavan said, "Everyone ultimately has to realize *Arunachala*." Meaning, everyone is to ultimately reach the silent still Truth as one Self.

What is the meaning of the emergence? It means a paradigm shift from the mortal to being immortal. In 1922, when the Mother fell ill, Bhagavan

put his hands on her chest and her head and recognized her liberation. This was the nucleus. It started like a droplet that would soon develop into a deluge of Self-realization. What is Self-realization? An individual who identifies the Self with the body, as mortal, and then recognizes that they are immortal and formless spirit without boundaries is the illumination. Bhagavan's own story is that his idea of being a mortal body died at the age of sixteen, but he woke up to the Truth and state of "I Am." It was grace, conversion, and resurrection. Through Mother's example, Bhagavan celebrated that it is possible for every one of us to reach liberation from the carnal idea. The Mother woke up to the Truth and it is to glorify this, that there is the *Matrabhuteshwara* temple now in the *Ramanashram* compound. When we see through the traditional cultural rituals, we realize that it is so beautiful because here is a shrine for the divine Truth of "I Am."

It is only after 1922, when more devotees began to gather, that the emphasis was given to the teaching of *Self-Enquiry*. Bhagavan's *Self-Enquiry* is neither technique nor theory. It is the direct sublime Truth, which many are not able to grasp or recognize immediately. As the Hindu scriptures say, "The fire is already in the charcoal. It is covered with ash, and you will only brush it away to reveal the burning fire." Similarly, the state of "I Am" is covered with the ignorance of mortality and its storyline. The endeavor is to remove the mortal idea and discover the eternal still "I Am," the eternal substratum or Truth. There is no need to create the Truth; it already exists. Bhagavan once said, "There is no gradation to Self-realization, but there is gradation in giving up notions of non- Truth or mortality, which conceals Self-realization." *Arunachala*, the silent Heart-Self, is here to clean away the ash of

ignorance, because as the Hindu scriptures state, *Arunachala* is a symbol of *jnana* or wisdom.

EARLIEST KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH OF RAMANASHRAM

SRI BHAGAVAN WITH CHINNA SWAMI ON THE HILL

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

SRI NIRANJANANANDA SWAMI (Chinna Swami)

The devotee who was instrumental in facilitating the "struggle" aspect of Self-realization was Bhagavan's own brother, Niranjanananda Swami, whom Bhagavan called "Pichai." He came to Bhagavan in 1917 when he was up on the hill. Viswanatha Swami calls him "one of the biggest Hearts that opened from *Arunachala* to reveal Bhagavan's message."

What struggle? The spiritual struggle is between the false idea that one is exclusively the body and doer, and the revelation that one is not incarnated in a mortal body. The body is simply an apparition in the boundless Heart sky.

In all Hindu mythology, whenever God appeared on earth as an avatar like Rama or Krishna, on many occasions they came with brothers. In Rama and Krishna's case, it was Lakshmana and Balarama, respectively. Even saints like Jnaneshwar Maharaj and Ramakrishna Paramahamsa had brothers. Jesus had James as his brother. These brothers were important in the function of spreading virtue and goodness, and therefore played an important role in the divine drama. Likewise, Bhagavan's brother was accepted by him unconditionally. Bhagavan kept Niranjanananda Swami by his side until he realized Mahanirvana. It is important that when we

look at the brothers of great saints, we see them with an unbiased mind. This is because they played a role in the broader divine plan.

Bhagavan had two brothers and one sister. The elder brother was called Nagaswami, his younger brother, Nagasundaram, and his younger sister was named Alamelu. When their father, Sundaram Iyer, passed away, the family was split up. Nagaswami and Venkataraman came to Madurai, whereas their mother, Alagammal, took Nagasundaram and Alamelu to her brother-in-law's house in another city. At the age of sixteen, Bhagavan had the ego-death experience and was called to *Arunachala*, Tiruvannamalai. In 1902, the family traced Bhagavan to *Arunachala*. Nagasundaram came to see his elder brother. As an ascetic young man at that time, Bhagavan was known as Brahmana Swami. He lived up on the hill in Sadguru Swami, a cave right below *Virupaksha* cave. When Nagasundaram witnessed his elder brother in ascetic attire and in total silence, he embraced him and wept. Bhagavan remained in silence, and Nagasundaram felt that he should stay with him and serve. But Bhagavan knew that Nagasundaram had many worldly commitments, and even though he offered to stay, Bhagavan did not reply. A disappointed Nagasundaram returned to his native home.

We do not have too many details about Nagasundaram's boyhood or later years. However, we do know that a series of ill-fated incidents started taking place in his life. He was married and got a job as a clerk. His eldest brother, Nagaswami, died suddenly when he was twenty years old. Within a short span, they lost everything, and their ancestral property was auctioned off. Nagasundaram lost his wife suddenly, leaving behind a little boy (my father, T. N. Venkataraman). Nagasundaram's only source

of comfort was his mother, Alagammal, but she too had gone away to *Arunachala* to stay with Bhagavan. These incidents shocked him and drove him to a state of surrender, submission, and service. He gave up whatever he was left with, including his son, whom he left with his sister. At that time, his mother sent word to Nagasundaram to come and live with her and Bhagavan. Thus, he left for *Arunachala* and Bhagavan accepted him, perhaps due to his mother's influence. Mother Alagammal told her ascetic son, "My third son Nagasundaram is not an intellectual. He is a little rough and tough and it is very hard for him to reside in the material world. You take care of him." Bhagavan obeyed her.

Later, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer said to me that once there was an altercation in the management and Nagasundaram was involved in it. Bhagavan often muttered under his breath while going up the hill, "What can I do? I have given her my word." Ramachandra Iyer could not understand and asked, "Bhagavan, what are you saying?" Bhagavan replied, "When my brother came here, my mother took an assurance from me that I will not leave him and that I will protect him and keep him here with me. What can I do?"

When Nagasundaram came to *Skandashram*, having been beaten by life's trials, he became an ascetic, too. He took to austere living and begged in the streets of Tiruvannamalai for food. By that time, Ramana Maharshi had written *Who am I* and *Five Hymns to Arunachala*. These were the prevalent books, on which many devotees meditated or sang from.

Nagasundaram contemplated, studied, and lived a reclusive life. Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni had already named Brahmana Swami as

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. When he met Nagasundaram, Bhagavan's brother, he could see that Bhagavan was paying attention to him. He, too, therefore wanted to assist in helping him. "Why don't you take the traditional step of taking *sanyasa* and donning the ochre robe?" He suggested. Nayana also assigned him the name Niranjanananda Swami. The name means "an imperishable one." Given the complicated name, everybody started calling him Chinna Swami, Junior Swami, as Bhagavan, his elder brother, was the senior Swami.

When Mother Alagammal dropped the body, Chinna Swami was among those who carried the body down the hill and brought it to the thorny, bushy place, which is now *Ramanashram*. With help from the others, he buried her body in the *samadhi*. Kavyakantha insisted that he must perform *pooja* for it. As was customary, a *lingam* was placed over her body. But while this is usually taken off after some time, they let it remain there. Kavyakantha said, "You must perform *pooja* with all rituals because this is not just a tomb. It is a temple of immortality since Bhagavan has liberated your mother and she is no more an ordinary bodily person. She is at one with God." Kavyakantha named the temple "Matrabhuteshwara," which means "God in the form of Mother." In this way, Chinna Swami was influenced to take to worship and stayed there doing *pooja* every day, while Bhagavan stayed on at *Skandashram*.

One day, Chinna Swami sent word to Bhagavan that he was going to make *dosas* the next day. It was considered a delicacy and he said he would bring it to *Skandashram*. Early the next morning, Chinna Swami heard a sweet voice saying "Is there any food for an *athithi*?" *Athithi* means a wayfarer or a guest. It was none other than Bhagavan's voice,

identifying himself as a guest. The Mother's shrine was the nucleus for the present *Ramanashram,* and Bhagavan stayed there, never as the owner, but as a guest until his last day. It was always someone else who managed the *Ashram*. In 1929, after Seshadri Swami passed away, some lawyers told Bhagavan that there were a lot of litigations that had to be managed. Therefore, they advised that someone should be officially appointed as the sole manager of the *Ashram*. Everyone wanted Nayana to don this mantle but Bhagavan turned to Nayana and said, "It seems Pichai wants to do this. Let him become the manager and take the burden on himself." Kavyakantha told all his devotees, "It is Bhagavan's injunction and we should support it." From that day on Kavyakantha's disciples always supported Chinna Swami in his role as manager. In 1930, Bhagavan was asked to execute a will, which stated that the family of Niranjanananda Swami would manage the material aspects of the *Ashram* and that it would not have any spiritual successor to Bhagavan.

Chinna Swami was austere, strict, efficient, and an unrelenting disciplinarian. By 1938, he needed assistance in the *Ashram*. He sent word to his son, my father, and the whole family to join him. I was two years old when my father brought me to *Ramanashram*. Chinna Swami was just as strict with his son, my father. He never favored him--so much so, that my father was disappointed with him. Similarly, Chinna Swami rubbed many people the wrong way with his blunt manner, but, as many devotees say, those stories must be looked at impartially and in context.

It is important that we see both sides of the character of this man. It is to be noticed that the records of all those who were offended by Chinna Swami's disciplinary action and complained, conveniently omitted their

last sentences. I actually interviewed these complainants, including Muruganar, Ramaswami Pillai, Chadwick, Viswanatha Swami, Annamalai Swami, Kunju Swami, Devaraja Mudaliar, Suri Nagamma, and Munagala Venkataramaia among the long list of Chinna Swami's victims. They unanimously agreed, "Chinna Swami's harshness did affect us and at that moment our egos were deeply hurt. There is no doubt about it. But in later years we understood that it was divine providence and that unless he had treated us like that, we would have continued to be immersed in management activities and would not have pursued our spiritual aspiration."

Muruganar also told me, "Chinna Swami repeatedly slighted me and even refused me food at the *Ashram*. I had to go out on the streets and beg for my food. The reason for Chinna Swami's refusal was that he wanted me to continue performing *pooja* in the Mother's shrine and also assist him with the correspondence in the office. I did not do that, so I had to leave. But Ganesan, I assure you that my going away granted me two spiritual boons. Now I tell you honestly, but for Chinna Swami, I might have still been doing *pooja* in *Ramanashram* even today and assisting in writing letters." "What are those two boons?" I asked him. "I could get the proximity and presence of Bhagavan at any time, day and night. Had I been committed to management work, I could not have had that. The second boon was that I was so ecstatic, that I wanted to write poems. I wrote forty thousand verses on Bhagavan and Bhagavan's teaching. These were written in silence and seclusion. With external activity this might not have happened. Chinna Swami was a vital instrument in my gaining these two boons."

One of the kitchen assistants told me that Chinna Swami was used by Bhagavan as a washerman's stone only to clear the devotees' "dirt," their *vasanas,* and cause them to devote all their attention to spiritual *sadhana*. To fulfill this role, Chinna Swami perpetually received a dreadful reputation.

Balarama Reddiar told me, "Though there were seemingly shortcomings in Chinna Swami's management, it is a fact witnessed by me repeatedly, that Bhagavan supported him. When I once complained to Bhagavan about Chinna Swami, he instantly corrected me, and I steadily stood by that correction all my life at the *Ashram*. Bhagavan curtly asked me, "Have you come all this way to sort out lapses in the *Ashram* management? Attend to the business, for which you came. Find out 'whom' from inside raises these complaints. Leave the rest to the *Higher Power*. Be still."

Viswanatha Swami explained to me why all the senior devotees went to Palakothu. He was saying, "We do that so that we may pursue our *sadhana*. Bhagavan approved of that. He would ask us, "In which way you are going to build your hut?" And also Bhagavan would suggest to us, "Go to these streets to beg." That enabled us to be with Bhagavan all the rest of the time. What we are today was possible because of our coming away from the institution. Bhagavan approved of it." Viswanatha Swami was the worst affected. Once he was ill and without food for three days. Coming to know of it, Santamma took him to the dining hall, through the kitchen, and made him sit on the first row, from where Bhagavan was quite visible. Food was served, and when all were about to eat, Chinna Swami came, pulled Viswanatha Swami by the hand and sent him out.

Bhagavan was witnessing all this and did not say anything nor object to it. However, it was Viswanatha Swami who assisted Chinna Swami in his last days, when Chinna Swami was bedridden.

Surprised, I asked him, "How could you do that after being so deeply hurt and insulted?" He replied, "When I was in Dindigul, Bhagavan appeared to me in a dream and asked me to come to *Ramanashram*. I immediately left for the *Ashram*. It was 1952, and Bhagavan had already dropped his body. I had no idea why Bhagavan asked me to come. Chinna Swami was terminally ill, and there was nobody to attend him. I felt that this was the purpose for which Bhagavan had asked me to come. I waited on him day and night, nursing and bathing him. One day Chinna Swami held my hands and asked for forgiveness." Chinna Swami spent his last two days looking at Bhagavan's picture, all the time chanting "Ramana, Ramana." At the time of his death, he stretched out his arms with his eyes closed, his face serene, happy, and luminous. Viswanatha Swami said, "Bhagavan has absorbed him in the Heart Sky of *Arunachala*."

In 1966, I was given the sole responsibility of completing the construction of Sri Bhagavan's *Samadhi* Shrine. Suddenly, there erupted many problems obstructing its completion. Almost insoluble situations were encountered. I was deeply worried.

One day, Mrs.Teleyarkhan patted me on my back and asked, "Why are you worried, Ganesan?" She also said that all these problems could be solved. Pleasantly surprised, I asked her, "How?" She replied, "Last night, Sri Bhagavan appeared to me in a dream and commanded me: 'Go. Tell

Ganesan to take up the construction of Chinna Swami's *Samadhi* also, simultaneously. Everything will be all right." I was thrilled!

The fact was that Chinna Swami's *Samadhi* construction was ignored and left uncared for. I arranged for taking up the proper construction of the Samadhi building of Chinna Swami, along with that of Sri Bhagavan. The completion of both Sri Bhagavan's and Chinna Swami's *samadhis* was successfully carried out. The consecration ceremony, *Kumbhabhishekam*, was performed in 1967, to all the three Shrines of the Mother, Sri Bhagavan, and Chinna Swami.

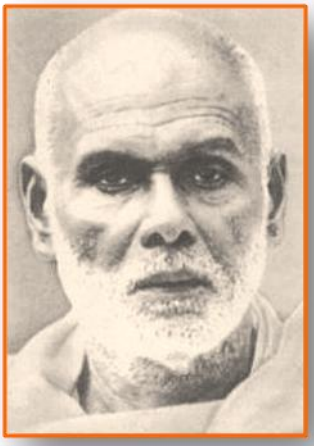
I will record here, in this connection, another absorbingly interesting incident. When completed, I felt Chinna Swami's *Samadhi* should have a tablet. The stone tablet could not be done locally and would have to be engraved in Bangalore. I wrote the inscription for the stone tablet in English: Sri Niranjanananda Swami, Date of Death: 29-01-1953. When I received the engraved tablet, I was surprised and thrilled! It read:

Sri Niranjanananda Swami Absorbed in Arunachala 29-01-1953

Let us pay our homage by quoting the holy words of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi adoring his Heart-guru *Arunachala*:

Oh! Arunachala, in you the picture of the universe is formed, has its stay and is dissolved. This is the sublime Truth. You are the inner Self who dances in the Heart as I-I. Oh! Lord, Heart is your name.

Narayana Guru



There is a profound beauty in the sequence of how things openly unfolded so gracefully in Bhagavan's presence. This was an obvious divine play that unraveled itself gracefully. By participating in it, we realize that it is not merely external. This pattern begins to enjoin us too. This is the beauty of being in satsang with a sage or learning about their life. It brings one's attention back to the here and now.

Bhagavan stayed at *Skandashram,* higher up on the hill, between 1916 and 1922, during which time serious spiritual aspirants slowly started streaming in. It was in this period that Bhagavan, with a single glance of grace (Darshan), was able to establish each one in *Arunachala*, the spiritual Heart. During this time there lived a saint in Kerala called Narayana Guru, who was so renowned that even Mahatma Gandhi thought it a privilege to spend a few moments with him. This sage rarely went anywhere. In fact, other saints came to him to pay respects. Yet he visited Bhagavan at *Skandashram* along with his disciples, where Bhagavan cordially received him and invited him to share lunch. Narayana Guru replied gladly, "Oh yes! I will share the Maharshi's *Prasad.*"

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Bhagavan then bestowed his glance of grace on Narayana Guru, and for a long time they both sat and shared ecstatic silence. When it was time for him to leave, Narayana Guru, absorbed in Bhagavan's state of *sahaja Samadhi,* prayed to him, "Let this state be bestowed on me also." Bhagavan graciously granted this wish. Right there, he wrote five verses in Sanskrit extolling the state of the *Sahaja Nishta.* When he went back to Kerala, he was so captivated with Bhagavan that he wrote another five verses—the first was called *Nirvriti Panchakam,* and the second, *Municharya Panchakam.*

When descending the hill along with his disciples, Narayana Guru was in ecstasy. He turned to his disciples and declared joyfully, "Maharshi is a *raja sarpam*, a king cobra." In the Hindu religious and spiritual parlance, saints are often referred to as sarpam or cobras. Narayana Guru, a saint himself, did not categorize Bhagavan as yet another cobra; instead he gave Bhagavan the exalted status of "king cobra." This Truth emanated from his Heart. He summoned two of his disciples, one a wealthy man and the other an erudite scholar, and said these beautiful words:

"Maharshi's spiritual state is such that even a single glance from him is enough to liberate anyone. Now he remains unknown to the world, like a lamp hidden in a pot. He should be recognized, so that this spiritual treasure is plundered by many aspirants. You both should stay here for six months and make necessary arrangements for food and accommodation for visiting pilgrims, thus letting many visit the Maharshi every day and benefit spiritually. Allow Maharshi's awakening to be known in the circles of scholars and earnest aspirants by going to them and speaking about the awakening."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

On his return, Narayana Guru fell ill, and coming to know of that, Bhagavan sent Kunju Swami with a lemon, saying, "Go and give this to him." Narayana Guru received it gratefully, put it on his eyes, head, and chest**,** and was in tears that Bhagavan had sent this *Prasad* for him. Whenever he had a visitor from Tamil Nadu, he would ask, "Have you had Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's *Darshan*?" If the answer was no, he would raise his voice and say, "Why did you come here? You must go back and have *Darshan* there. He is the *raja sarpam,* king cobra. We are all ordinary snakes. Why did you come, leaving the *raja sarpam*?" Bhagavan offered Kunju Swami not only the lemon, but knowing that Narayana Guru was to attain *mahasamadhi*, he also gave instructions about how Narayana Guru's body should be preserved. Narayana Guru was a *jnani*, a realized saint, and Bhagavan wanted his tomb to be built accordingly. Kunju Swami was to give Bhagavan a report on whether the *Samadhi* was built satisfactorily. When the news of Narayana Guru's death reached Bhagavan, he said, "Narayana Guru is a *purna,* a fully blossomed one."

SKANDASHRAM

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

B. V. Narasimha Swami

B. V. Narasimha Swami wrote *Self-realization* and *The Life and Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*. This was the first book on Bhagavan's life, and B. V. Narasimha Swami was unique because he was the first person to dedicate himself to write Bhagavan's biography in English. He gathered information that ran into two thousand pages and skillfully cut it down to a concise and readable form, spanning two hundred and fifty pages. It was published in 1930. It was after reading *Self-realization, The Life and Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi* that Paul Brunton, Bhikshu Prabhavananda, Swami Madhava Thirtha, Suddhananda Bharati, Swami Shivananda, Swami Ramdas, and an array of spiritual giants of their time recognized Ramana Maharshi and came to him. Many give the credit of Bhagavan's widespread recognition to Paul Brunton, but they do not know that it was this book that drew Brunton to Bhagavan.

B. V. Narasimha Swami was a brilliant lawyer in Salem, ninety miles from *Arunachala*. He was a very famous politician, a great orator, and writer with a razor-sharp intellect that drove straight into the heart of a subject and extracted its Truth. It is thanks to his questioning mind that we now have this brilliant book, which attracted an audience of communicators. This select group of communicators was and is a modern gateway for *Advaita Vedanta* in the west.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

God's divine play (*leela*), however, is unpredictable and a Mystery. When he was at the zenith of prosperity, name and fame, a massive family tragedy furnished a rude shock. His two grown-up children drowned in the well in his very own yard, right before his eyes. All he could do was watch helplessly, without being able to save them. Unable to bear his grief, he resigned from the War Council and gave up his political career. He disappointed many leaders in India, because the presence of talented individuals like him was needed for India's freedom struggle. He came to know of Ramana Maharshi and headed straight to *Ramanashram*. On seeing Bhagavan, he fell at his feet. With a single glance, Bhagavan accepted him, directed him to a cave, and asked him to meditate.

As a good disciple, he unquestioningly abided by his Master's instruction. He spent three years in seclusion, in complete contemplation and meditation. However, he realized that there was something which was drastically needed: a book on Bhagavan's life, which nobody knew of. "I must bring out the biography of Bhagavan, a living sage. Nobody knows about his life except through rare accounts, which may even be factually incorrect." His incisive intellect was to deliver the Truth correctly to the world. This was a demanding responsibility, because even though he had not vowed silence, Bhagavan did not talk much, and even more rarely about himself.

B. V. Narasimha Swami sought Bhagavan's permission and Bhagavan graciously consented. He started the process of asking Bhagavan questions. Bhagavan did not always respond because sometimes he did not feel like talking. However, B. V. Narasimha Swami was persistent. He doggedly followed Bhagavan wherever he went; even slept next to

Bhagavan at night. Whenever he asked a question, his whole attention would be focused on receiving an answer. He has recorded, that sometimes it would take days, a week, or even more, to get one simple answer from Bhagavan. But he remained relentless. His persistent determination is what made him unique, and that is why even the mention of his name draws so much reverence from every old devotee of Bhagavan.

He not only questioned Bhagavan—it was his nature to elicit details straight from the source. Therefore he traveled to Tiruchuzhi, Madurai, and Dindigul to speak to Bhagavan's associates and kin. Whenever he received any information about Bhagavan's relative or friend in some village, he would go there immediately. He would pry them with questions too; however, perfectionist that he was, he would verify every fact with Bhagavan. Therefore, everything written in the book is accurate and the Truth.

One of the most important things that old devotees told me was that we owe the vivid account of Bhagavan's ego-death experience at Madurai to B. V. Narasimha Swami. His incessant questioning drew from Bhagavan every minute detail of the experience, when he was a sixteen-year-old boy. Bhagavan said there was no time and space in his transformation, which made him a sage of steady wisdom. B. V. Narasimha Swami condensed these details and presented the final draft to Bhagavan, who approved it and titled the book, *Self-realization*.

Once this was done, Narasimha Swami put up a hut next to his cave for cooking. He wanted other sadhakas to build similar huts, and helped them. He also trained them in a simple way of cooking to save them time and money, which allowed each *sadhu* to spend the maximum time in Bhagavan's presence. Through his meticulous *sadhana,* he set an example of how the Master's teaching was followed. It was he who formed the nearby Palakothu community.

When this was over, he developed a natural tendency, a *vasana,* toward singing *bhajans* and dancing emotionally for God. He kept pleading with Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, this is my nature. Will you please guide me? I would like to sing *bhajans* and follow the devotional path." Bhagavan kept postponing his reply, but he did not give in. Finally, Bhagavan advised him, "Go toward the north-west of India to pursue your path of devotion." B. V. Narasimha Swami left *Arunachala* and went toward Bombay, in the west. During his travels he met many saints on the devotional path but was totally disappointed with all of them. Even a great sage like Upasani Baba tried to help him, but he was not satisfied. However, it was Upasani Baba who finally told him to go to Shirdi.

He obeyed and went to the tomb of Shirdi Sai Baba who had passed away ten years earlier. At night (and this is done to this day), devotees gather to sing *bhajans* with devotion. When he stood in front of Sai Baba's *Samadhi*, the saint's inspiration came to him from within, "Child, I am your guru. Stay here and write my biography." Therefore, he started meeting those people who lived with Sai Baba and compiled a six-volume biography of the celebrated sage. On its completion, Baba told him, "Spread my name and spread this teaching." He then came to Madras

and started a Sai Baba center. He built a temple there and Shirdi Sai Baba's name was spread by B. V. Narasimha Swami all over India.

When I came to *Ramanashram* in 1960, I was pained to hear that such a remarkable man had left Bhagavan and gone somewhere else. One day I asked T. P. Ramachandra Iyer, another old devotee, "Why did Narasimha Swami leave Bhagavan and go elsewhere?" T. P. Ramachandra Iyer replied, "I am happy you put this question to me because I was hesitating to share with others a fact I know." In late 1955 or early 1956, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer boarded the train in Tiruvannamalai to go to Vellore in the first class compartment on *Ashram* work. He was surprised to find B. V. Narasimha Swami, too, seated in the first class compartment, with a broken leg in a huge bandage. Like every old devotee who held B. V. Narasimha Swami in the highest esteem, he was thrilled to see him.

"I raised the same question before B. V. Narasimha Swami that you put to me, Ganesan. I asked him, 'Why did you leave Bhagavan and go?' T. P. Ramachandra Iyer revealed what B. V. Narasimha Swami told him, 'Bhagavan specifically directed me to do so.' When we both were alone, I was pestering him as usual that my intention is to sing *bhajans*. Taking pity on me, he said, 'Go to Shirdi.' He told me in unmistakable terms that I should bring out the biography of Shirdi Sai Baba. He added that I should make Sai Baba known all over India. It was Bhagavan who said this, so I agreed. It was Bhagavan's graciousness and compassion that he wanted such aspirations of mine to be shuttled through another saint, instead of getting involved in mere display of emotional dancing and singing."

"I did not go straight to Shirdi, though Bhagavan asked me to go," he added. "I admit my folly in not truly obeying Bhagavan's commandment. I went to other living saints, strongly questioning how Sai Baba could guide me, now that he was dead. This is the mind coming into play. All my efforts to be with the living saints in due course deeply disappointed me. Finally, it was at Shirdi that Sai Baba revealed himself as my guru, took me into his fold, blessed me with grace, and guided me to the Truth. For directing me to Sai Baba, I am eternally grateful to Bhagavan. I did not reveal this Truth of being guided by Bhagavan to go to Sai Baba, as I felt people would not understand the spiritual content of the entire episode. This is the Truth." T. P. Ramachandra Iyer recounted that there were tears in his eyes.

Even when I was in college, I would visit the Sai Baba shrine, because behind it was B. V. Narasimha Swami's shrine. *Pooja* is offered there, and even now, above it hangs a big picture of Bhagavan. Since it was Bhagavan who directed B. V. Narasimha Swami to go to Sai Baba, I would prostrate before Sai Baba's shrine, receive his blessings, and then prostrate before B. V. Narasimha Swami, who was so instrumental in initiating Bhagavan's message to the world.

RAMANASHRAM ENTRANCE

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Suddhananda Bharati

Suddhananda Bharati was a Sanskrit scholar and *hatha yogi*. He spent thirty years in pure silence, during the last five of which he traveled all of India, visiting many saints because he wanted to see the Truth face to face as in *Darshan*. Yet, he did not have the direct experience of the non physical Truth as extolled in the *Vedas*. In that hour of suffering, he chanced upon the book *Self-realization* and came to know about Bhagavan Ramana at *Arunachala*. That night, at midnight, he had a vision of Bhagavan in his Heart. He arrived at *Ramanashram* and went into the Mother's shrine, which then was just a hut. He saw Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni and then heard a sweet voice, saying, "Let Bharati come in." It was Bhagavan. Before entering the *Ashram*, the *Siddha Purusha*, Seshadri Swami, met him at the foot of the hill and said, "Go, go, go, go, Suddhanandam! Get going until you go deep inside." Later, the same saint urged him, "Run, run, Suddhanandam! Ramana awaits you! Go inside!" Suddhananda took one look into Bhagavan and surrendered, falling at the Guru's feet.

This is how Suddhananda Bharati describes his first glimpse of Bhagavan: "I saw no human form. I felt dazed, effulgence enveloped me, and Bhagavan dissolved me into silence. Bhagavan implanted grace in me and my eyes involuntarily closed themselves. I felt I was entering into the inner cave of my Heart. An hour passed like a moment, and when I opened my eyes, I noticed that Bhagavan Ramana's lotus eyes were

riveted on me. A prompting from within said, "Now you have felt it. The cave is open. The 'I Am' is the Truth." After many years of intense *sadhana,* now, here at the holy feet of Ramana Maharshi, I experienced the Truth as my own inner reality for the first time. I caught hold of his holy feet and shed tears of joy remembering the sacred words of Saint Manickavasaga: "Today you have risen in my Heart as a sun, destroying all forms of darkness. I am swimming in ecstasy."

Bhagavan guided him to be in silence again and live in *Virupaksha* cave. Later, Bhagavan used to say, "Bharati can survive many days without food, or even just live on a few neem leaves and a few peanut kernels." But this advanced yogi also had a strong urge to visit another saint, Sri Aurobindo, in Pondicherry. By this time, Suddhananda Bharati, a writer himself, was also inspired by B. V. Narasimha Swami's book, *Self-realization,* to write a biography of Bhagavan in Tamil.

He pleaded with Bhagavan insistently, "I feel like going to Sri Aurobindo. Please, please, guide me." "Go," Bhagavan said. Bharati spent twenty five years in the care of Sri Aurobindo, where he wrote the Tamil biography of Bhagavan called *Sri Ramana Vijayam*, meaning "The Advent of Sri Ramana." The Tamil-speaking population in India came to Bhagavan after reading *Ramana Vijayam*. Bharati subsequently went on to write many other biographies and became a well known writer.

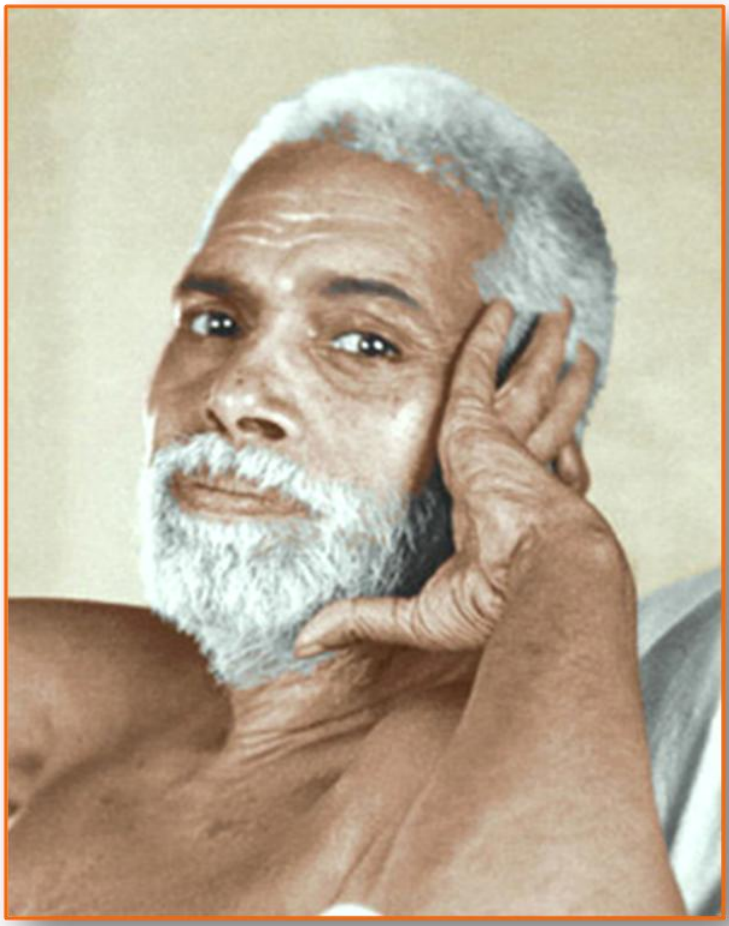
He came to *Ramanashram* in 1970 to write the biography of Annamalai Swami. I received him and served him for a few days. Before leaving, he invited me to stay at his *Ashram* in Madras (Chennai). I accepted his offer and found him to be most kind and affectionate. One day, he asked me

to seat myself next to him and shared with me something very important for all of us.

He said, "Ganesan, I saw you managing the *Ramanashram* very efficiently and also bringing out the 'Mountain Path' admirably. People will praise your managing capacities. I, too, am willing to give away this *Ashram* to you. I will do it right now if you are willing. But remember, even vast volumes of possessions will not help you erase and annihilate the possessor. I see clearly with my inner eye that your spiritual fulfillment is waiting at your door step. Do not fall into the trap of any possessions or any management thrust on you. You are ever free. Be the Self, plunge within, be the dust of the holy feet of Bhagavan who is now your Heart. He is the universal Heart; the kingdom of God is within your infinite Self. Repose in the Heart. That is the Truth."

He further added, "Do not make the same error that I did. I focused on the glory of writing hundreds of books, building an *Ashram,* and chasing after fame. Ganesan, do not do that. Stand by Bhagavan and obey him always. I have admitted my error only to two people in my life: Muruganar and now, you. I once tearfully advised Muruganar, 'Do not leave Bhagavan, your Heart. Do not make the same error.' Ganesan, do not be tempted by any other Master's teachings or any other institutions. Remain at *Arunachala* as dust at Bhagavan's holy feet."

"O' ARUNACHALA, IN YOU THE PICTURE OF THE UNIVERSE IS FORMED, HAS ITS STAY AND IS DISSOLVED. THIS IS THE SUBLIME TRUTH. YOU ARE THE INNER SELF WHO DANCES IN THE HEART AS I-I. O' LORD, HEART IS YOUR NAME."



DARSHAN, GOD SEES GOD

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Krishna Bhikshu

Venkata Krishnayya was a Sanskrit and Telugu scholar. He was popularly known as Krishna Bhikshu, meaning "Krishna the mendicant." As a child, he went to his uncle's house where he saw a picture of Ramana Maharshi and was irresistibly drawn to it. His uncle had been with Bhagavan in *Virupaksha* cave and was one of the first questioners in *Sri Ramana Gita*. Therefore, he also had a copy of *Sri Ramana Gita,* which Krishna Bhikshu read with keen interest, even at that young age.

When he was studying in the Law College in Madras, he happened to meet Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni at a friend's abode. He observed Kavyakantha's oratory skills, humility, and erudite scholarliness, and was immediately drawn to him. On that day Kavyakantha was extolling and adoring Ramana Maharshi, his *guru,* so beautifully that Krishna Bhikshu wondered that if this man was so great, how much greater his *guru* should be! This encounter instilled in him a yearning to go to *Ramanashram*.

He finally arrived in *Ramanashram* with a friend and saw that Bhagavan was simplicity itself. An atmosphere of homeliness surrounded Ramana Maharshi. He asked the Master, "Please give me spiritual guidance. But before that, let me tell you what I currently practice. I do the *Gayatri Japa* and *Pranayama*, but some of the breathing exercises upset my health.

Please guide me."

Bhagavan's words to him were: "Stop everything. Always have a non-dual outlook." Krishna Bhikshu did not understand the full meaning of this at that time, but he visited Bhagavan again in 1930. At that time Bhagavan was available at all times. Devotees would sit around listening to Bhagavan tell stories, answer questions, joke, and laugh. Krishna Bhikshu told me that those were the golden days in his life.

There was a time when B. V. Narasimha Swami, having completed the draft of his book, forwarded it to Krishna Bhikshu for his suggestions. Bhagavan smiled when he saw Suddhananda Bharati, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, and B. V. Narasimha Swami, because all three were together in the political field. Now, giving up politics, they were together in the spiritual field. Bhagavan laughed about how three were once more coming together, this time, for the spiritual reasons. Inspired by B. V. Narasimha Swami's work, Krishna Bhikshu felt that he too should write a biography in Telugu, his mother tongue. He did so within a month, basing his material on B. V. Narasimha Swami's *Self-realization*.

His relationship with Bhagavan was unique. "Bhagavan was a very great and fatherly man. I trusted him totally. I meticulously followed his guidance, as I was sure that I was in the safe hands of Bhagavan. I had no cares. I just loved him with the whole of my being. I lived my life by his side, eating in the same room, sleeping in the same hall, chatting and joking, but all the time being tied fast by his immense love and attention. Day and night, I felt that he was watching over me, keeping me on the lap of his exquisite awareness, and letting me grow in spiritual stature by

his sincere interest in me," he affectionately recalled.

One day when Bhagavan was chopping vegetables in the *Ashram* kitchen, Krishna Bhikshu asked his permission to help. He took up the knife thrice, but each time Bhagavan insisted that he put it down. When Krishna Bhikshu protested, Bhagavan asked him, "Do you cut vegetables at home?" "No, I do not need to do it at home," he replied. Bhagavan smiled and shot back, "Well, are you not at home here?" This simply meant that, while doing arduous *sadhana*, one should give up the idea of doership in activity, and abide as the greater Self—then you are always at home, in the Heart, in the state of "I Am."

On another occasion, Krishna Bhikshu appealed to Bhagavan, saying, "Bhagavan, formerly whenever I thought of you, your form would appear before my eyes, but now it does not happen. What am I to do?" "You can remember my name and repeat it," Bhagavan advised. "Name is superior to form and in due course even the importance of the name will disappear. Continue your spiritual pursuit and then pure 'I Am' alone will resplendently be your Heart, of its own accord." While Bhagavan was not rejecting the efficacy of name or form, at the same time, he was proclaiming the importance of the eternal Truth of "I Am."

After Bhagavan dropped the body, like all the old devotees, Krishna Bhikshu left the *Ashram* and wandered from one city to the other, staying with some friends who generously offered their hospitality. When I came to the *Ashram* and began calling back all the old devotees, someone suddenly suggested, "How about Krishna Bhikshu?" On hearing the name, I thought he was a Buddhist monk and must have passed away

during Bhagavan's lifetime. Then I learned that he was related to Munagala Venkataramaiya's daughter, Kamakshi. I wrote to her, got his address, and invited him to *Ramanashram*. When he arrived, he humbly admitted, "Ganesan, I do not have any money." "That is immaterial, sir, please stay here," I replied.

His integrity was truly awe inspiring. He used to receive a money order of twenty-seven rupees every month, sent by some kind friend. He insisted on giving twenty rupees to the *Ashram* and kept seven rupees for himself. My regard for him grew by leaps and bounds. This austere man was a jewel in the *Ramanashram* crown, but many people took no notice of him because of his simple appearance. Yet this exalted man wrote Bhagavan's biography (*Sri Ramana Leela*—'The Play of Ramana') and lived with the Master from 1928 onward.

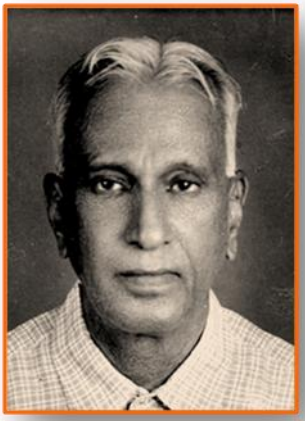
At one time, the trustees' board of the *Ashram* management was about to pass a resolution that the permanent guests of the *Ashram* must pay a minimum of thirty rupees if they were not doing any service at the *Ashram*. Krishna Bhikshu came to me and sadly said, "I am leaving the *Ashram*, Ganesan." "Sir, why are you leaving?" I asked in surprise. "I cannot afford that amount." Appalled at this injustice, I marched straight to the trustees and gave them a piece of my mind. "What is this nonsense? He is a genuine gem in the *Ashram*!" I exclaimed! That divine courage led them to cancel that resolution. Krishna Bhikshu shook my hands and embraced me. I will never forget that sweet embrace.

He fell ill at *Ramanashram* and decided to leave, saying, "My friend is a doctor. I will go. He will treat me." As he left, he embraced and blessed me. I never thought that this was the last I would see of him. Later on, I received the news of his passing. Describing his last days, his doctor friend wrote to me that Krishna Bhikshu had been fully conscious and continuously chanted "Ramana, Ramana, Ramana, Ramana . . ." at the final moment of the body dropping away. No grief, just relief.

This big heart melted into Bhagavan's infinite grace back to formless *Arunachala*, for time and space are no constraints for the One Heart, *Arunachala*. We saw another instance of this in Devaraja Mudaliar's case when a journalist had asked him, why he had come away to Kancheepuram from *Arunachala*. Mudaliar had replied, "This distance appears only to you. As far as I'm concerned, I am always in *Arunachala* and Bhagavan is in my Heart, transcending time and space."

There is an important point I'd like to make about B. V. Narasimha Swami and Suddhananda Bharati. Though they were great devotees, they insisted that Bhagavan allow them to go away. Krishna Bhikshu, on the other hand, decided to stick with him. B. V. Narasimha Swami aspired for the devotional path to God by singing *bhajans,* and Suddhananda Bharati wanted to do so through yoga. As a true *guru*, Bhagavan channeled their aspirations by guiding them to the right teachers at the right time. He directed them both to other saints; Shirdi Sai Baba and Sri Aurobindo, respectively. All are the same One.

Devaraja Mudaliar



Once, a stranger stood in front of Bhagavan in the old hall. Bhagavan instantly recognized him and introduced him to everyone, saying, "He came twenty years ago when we were staying up on the hill." Muruganar told me this and I immediately asked him, "Does this mean that Bhagavan had a phenomenal memory?"

Muruganar countered this with another question, "Does a mirror make an effort to reflect an image? In the presence of a *jnani*—a realized person—everything is automatically revealed. There is no time delay or any other process in an interaction a *jnani* has with a person." He added, "Bhagavan, being a *jnani,* could effortlessly recognize whoever stood before him." Then he hurriedly told me, "Do not mistake this for thought-reading or clairvoyance. These belong to the realm of the mind. A realized sage is beyond the mind; he is in the spiritual state. That perfect spiritual state may include the apparitions of body and the mind, not vice-versa." Bhagavan himself once said, "A *jnani* is like a mirror: whatever is placed before it will be reflected exactly as it is." This bestowed in me clarity, and these accounts are a reflection of Bhagavan's teachings.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Every devotee engaged with Bhagavan, played a different role by the dictates of their nature**,** and Bhagavan responded similarly. For instance, Muruganar saw Bhagavan as Lord Shiva and Bhagavan treated him like saint Manickavachakar, a surrendered poet-devotee of Lord Shiva who lived several centuries ago. Major Chadwick looked upon Bhagavan as the Mother, Professor G. V. Subbaramayya could treat Bhagavan as the Father, and my own grandfather Chinna Swami saw guru and God in Bhagavan. At the same time, there was no difference in Bhagavan's loving embrace for each devotee. Sun shines of its own accord.

In a similar vein, there was a devotee with a unique personality. His approach to Bhagavan was like that of a child, or a baby crawling toward his parents, pure innocence. He was A. Devaraja Mudaliar, the "A" standing for Arcot, the place where he hailed from. At the core of his heart and also when he addressed Bhagavan or wrote letters to him, he always called Bhagavan *Ammaiappa*—a Tamil word for "*mother and father*." Mudaliar styled himself as *Ramana Sei*, the child of Ramana. Bhagavan too, treated him like a baby. Some of the senior devotees did not approve of Devaraja Mudaliar because of his childish though innocent approach.

Yet, Mudaliar was an embodiment of surrender. Bhagavan has said, "There are two ways to realize the Truth: ask "*Who am I?*" and trace the "I," the ego, to its source, the Self, and allow it to dissolve. The second way is to surrender the "me" that is the ego to the Supreme, which is the state of "I Am" within you." Mudaliar's life also exemplifies another teaching of Bhagavan, which says, "The devotee's effort and the Guru's grace are synonymous and simultaneous. There is no time lag there." Synchronicity requires no doership in the form of effort, as it is

commonly defined. It is relinquishment and acceptance.

Devaraja Mudaliar was associated with Bhagavan for almost fifty years. It was an association that is perhaps longer than any of the other devotees enjoyed. In 1900, four years after Bhagavan came to *Arunachala*, hundreds of people came to Tiruvannamalai on the festival of *Karthikai Deepam*. Devaraja Mudaliar was among those present. Yet, Bhagavan's grace was upon him, and out of the hundreds of people there, it was Mudaliar who let go to this young Swami, all his life.

By 1914, when he visited *Arunachala* again, he had already become a reputed lawyer in Chitoor. Bhagavan was now living in *Virupaksha* cave. Traveling in those days was very tedious. But driven by his devotion, Mudaliar came to Tiruvannamalai again in 1917, when Bhagavan was in *Skandashram*. He experienced Bhagavan's graciousness and felt that he should surrender and offer his prayers to him. He returned fully convinced that here was a Master to whom he should pray. He prayed inwardly and never orally. (This is the relinquishment the devotee has to make: the Guru's grace waits to bless us, as we surrender.)

Between 1918 and 1922, he could not visit Bhagavan due to professional pressures. In 1922, he traveled again to Tiruvannamalai, and Bhagavan was now in *Ramanashram*, which at the time, Mudaliar said, consisted of a few humble huts. He prostrated before Bhagavan, while another gallant devotee, Ramaswami Pillai, was singing *Tiruppughazh*, a Tamil song, in a stentorian voice that overtook the steady sound of torrential rain outside. At lunch time, there were four or five people present, and Bhagavan turned to Mudaliar and said, "We follow a particular pattern of eating

here. If you are used to something different, you are free to eat it." Mudaliar had brought with him *chapattis* made with wheat. Bhagavan's attention melted him. He joined in and enjoyed a meal with the others, forgetting the *chapattis*.

He started coming to Bhagavan more regularly and posing more and more questions. One of the important things that he shared with me was that he had been an atheist. He never believed in a God, disliked going to temples, and had a deep disdain for rituals. In contrast, all the other devotees were devoutly religious, visited temples and talked about God. In 1922, he put his views before Bhagavan. The Master said, "It is all right. There is nothing wrong with that. God is always within you; turn your mind inward and meditate on Awareness. That is sufficient."

I had the privilege of keeping company with this stately but very simple man. He once told me, "The uniqueness of our Bhagavan is that he accepted everyone as they were." "The other gurus," he said, "expect one to reform**,** or they do it themselves, and only then do they accept you." He told me about an incident when he sang a song one day of a poet-devotee of Lord Muruga. The song narrates how Lord Muruga finally reformed the singer and saved him. Mudaliar replaced Lord Muruga's name with Bhagavan's and began chanting it. Muruganar, who was present, immediately chided him, "You think highly of this poem but I do not agree with you. It does not represent the real acceptance of our Bhagavan or his munificence. Bhagavan never waits. He instantly accepts whoever comes into his presence. There is no need, no gap, and no form of expectation."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

From 1920 onward, he started visiting Bhagavan more often and mentally offered prayers for his family for relief from other problems he had. He explained to me, "You have every right to pray to your God or guru, but without any condition attached. It may be fulfilled, it may not be fulfilled. Your mind should not agitate either happily when it is fulfilled or unhappily when it is not fulfilled." Bhagavan once told him, "Your duty is to surrender and then just be. Whether I fulfill it or not is not your concern." In India it is difficult to get a daughter married, but Mudaliar prayed, and his daughter's marriage was performed without any obstacles.

In 1930, his wife, whom he dearly loved, fell seriously ill. He rushed to Bhagavan and prayed repeatedly for her recovery. She passed away in 1933, giving him a great shock, but he never got angry or disappointed with Bhagavan. He said, "That was also Bhagavan's blessing to me, Ganesan, because after that shock, my mind and my attention turned completely toward the spiritual quest. I saw powerfully the futility of worldly attachments and relationships." After his wife's passing, he came to *Ramanashram* and sat before his Master, emerged in graceful ecstasy. Here again, *Darshan* is the relinquishment of doership of the devotee, simultaneously with the grace of the guru.

At lunch time, he was invited as usual but expressed he had an allergy. His cousin, Dr. Guruswami Mudaliar, a respected doctor in Chennai, had told him that there was no medicine for the allergy; prevention was possible by avoiding rice altogether. On that day, Bhagavan asked, "Where is Devaraja Mudaliar?" Someone told Mudaliar that Bhagavan had called for him. He went to Bhagavan and the Master instructed him

with a powerful look, "Sit here." Mudaliar quietly obeyed. Rice is served in abundance in *Ramanashram* and as it was being served to him right then, he hesitated and looked at Bhagavan. The guru suggested eating and immediately Mudaliar began to eat, finishing all the rice. He later told me, "I obeyed my Master's command. That 'incurable' allergy was instantly gone."

No one at the *Ashram* knew who Mudaliar was because so many different people came there every day. Bhagavan asked the residents, "Do you recognize who he is?" All of them shook their heads. "Oh, you do not recognize Devaraja Mudaliar!" Bhagavan exclaimed. "He has often come to visit us. How different he would look in those days! He would wear a European suit, and now how simple he looks." Devaraja Mudaliar tearfully narrated this to me saying, "Look at the guru's attention on me. He accepts you as you are, whether you are in a European suit or in ordinary clothes, whether you are a believer in God, or pursuing a particular spiritual practice; these are immaterial to him. The devotee is much more important to the guru than what the devotee believes or does."

From 1933 onward, Mudaliar started going to Bhagavan even more frequently. In Mudaliar's own words, "It is very important to continue to have contact with Truth, whether it is a person, a teaching, an institution, a temple, or a church for spiritual strengthening. This continuum, without a gap, is imperative."

In 1936, the *Ashram* management was in an embarrassing predicament. A lawsuit was filed in the local magistrate court against Bhagavan, Chinna Swami, and most of the residents. Chinna Swami rushed to Sundaram

Chettiar, a retired high court judge who was also Bhagavan's devotee, and sought his guidance. Out of all the reputed lawyers in Tiruvannamalai and other areas, the judge suggested the name of none other than Devaraja Mudaliar, who was in Chitoor, a hundred miles away. When Devaraja Mudaliar narrated this to me, there were tears in his eyes as he said, "Look at the Master's grace."

According to the Indian Penal Code, when one is summoned by the court, one is required to appear before it; it seemed impossible to avoid this humiliating situation. But Devaraja Mudaliar managed to get the case dismissed in the initial stages, so no one needed go to court at all. The complainant took his appeal to a higher court, but there too, Mudaliar managed to get the case dismissed.

There seems to be a higher insight behind Bhagavan recognizing Mudaliar for this. He was now to become one to disseminate *Arunachala*'s teaching of "I Am" throughout humankind and then write a book. Therefore, it was not enough that the guru accepted him; the management, including Chinna Swami, accepted him too. This incident helped Mudaliar reconcile with his critics.

In 1939, Mudaliar felt the attraction of Bhagavan's grace to be so powerful that he wanted to quit his profession and be permanently seated at these holy feet of his Master. (Isn't it a baby's desire to be cuddled by the mother and the father?) No one in those days was allowed a room to himself in the *Ashram*, except for Major Chadwick and Yogi Ramiah. Many had tried, but the management refused saying, "We do not want it to be a residential *Ashram*. We want it to be small, with limited residential

facilities." Mudaliar said, "Bhagavan influenced me in my heart to write to Chinna Swami, asking for permission to build a hut inside the *Ashram*. The reply comes quickly in the affirmative."

It took two years to construct a hut and leave from Chitoor. In 1941, he came to stay permanently in *Ramanashram*. Upon arriving and thereafter he was with the Master daily. Yet, Mudaliar had a deep desire to have Bhagavan's holy feet step into his room.

Bhagavan laid out a simple stipulation, "I will come to your room, but no fanfare, do not invite anyone, and do not make it a big deal." Again, Mudaliar narrated this to me with moistened eyes. Bhagavan stepped inside his room and blessed him. Mudaliar said, "This event signified the fulfillment of my own spiritual emancipation. It was not just a visit." He added, "Ganesan, do not take this lightly. Every movement between Bhagavan and me was very significant."

Bhagavan did not speak English and in the 1940s, after the publication of Paul Brunton's book, many aspirants from the west started showing up. Interpreters were required to help them converse with Bhagavan. Devaraja Mudaliar, Munagala Venkataramaia, and many others played the role of translators. Once, Bhagavan made a remark, which was not only for Mudaliar, but other devotees as well. "All others interpret when I talk, only Devaraja Mudaliar translates exactly what I say." (Even though they did not like Mudaliar much, they still paid him this compliment.) What follows are some of the most important aspects of Bhagavan's teachings that Devaraja Mudaliar shared with me.

In his own experience, in 1936, while seated in the hall in the presence of Bhagavan, Mudaliar strongly felt that Bhagavan would like him to be a vegetarian. Though Bhagavan did not actually say this to him, he sensed it. However, he also remembered that he had anemia, for which Dr. Guruswami Mudaliar had advised him to eat plenty of meat, eggs, and liver soup. Mudaliar was frank enough to admit, "I was also very fond of non-vegetarian food and here, seated in front of my guru, this strong urge comes that Bhagavan wants me to eat vegetables, fruits and nuts." When he had this dilemma about eating etiquette, he went up the hill to Bhagavan and told him, "Bhagavan, I feel your influence on me to be a vegetarian but this is my medical condition." Bhagavan smiled and told him, "Vegetarian food contains all that is necessary for health and strength." Mudaliar was very happy to hear this and he replied, "I have courage now, Bhagavan, to embark on this eating experiment. I know I could live even on thin air if you said it would be enough to support me." By sheer grace, he said his health did not suffer at all from the change in diet nor did he experience any craving for his old diet afterward.

The other precious teaching that Mudaliar has given us is the answer to the age-old confusion of every spiritual aspirant about destiny and free will. Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, and other eastern religions generally believe in destiny. You are now a woman because you were destined to be a woman, not because you have chosen it. That is destiny. Whether you are wealthy or poor is destiny. But if everything is destined, then why should we do any spiritual *sadhana* at all? This was a dialogue between Mudaliar and Bhagavan one day:

Devaraja Mudaliar: "I can understand, Bhagavan, that the external factors in a man's life such as his nationality, family, profession, marriage, death etc. are all predestined according to his *karma*. But can it be that his entire life down to the minutest detail is already predetermined? Now for instance, Bhagavan, I have put this fan in my hand down on the floor. Is this also already predestined?"

Bhagavan (very firmly): "Certainly. Whatever this body is to do and whatever experiences it has to pass through is already determined when it comes into existence."

Mudaliar did not stop. He put forth further questions.

Devaraja Mudaliar: "What becomes then of man's freedom and responsibility for his actions?"

Bhagavan (looking graciously at Mudaliar): "The only freedom man has, is to strive for and acquire *jnana*, i.e. wisdom, which will enable him not to identify himself with the body. Man is free to free himself from body identification and that is the only freedom he has. Identified with the body, man has no freedom from destiny at all. The body will go through all actions already enjoined to it to be done." (Just a thought that "I do not identify with the body" is not enough, because it is merely another thought. This is why we embrace *sadhana*: to relinquish our identification with the body, we must practice wisdom, *jnana,* by being in repose and at peace.)

Devotees and aspirants often talked about the importance of the hill, *Arunachala,* and circumambulation of *Arunachala*, i.e. going around the hill, and staying at the hill itself. At various times, he asked Bhagavan the significance of going around the hill. Bhagavan once said, "Going around the hill is very good for everybody. It does not even matter whether one has faith in this *pradakshina* or not. Just as the fire will burn all who touch it, whether they believe in it or not, so does the hill that will do only good to all those who go around it."

Once Mudaliar was pestering Bhagavan on the same issue, and Bhagavan smilingly said, "Why are you so concerned with all these questions about the efficacy of going around the hill? Whatever else you may or may not get, you will at least have the benefit of physical exercise." Mudaliar scrupulously started doing circumambulation of *Arunachala* regularly and every time he went, he took Bhagavan's consent. The Master's way of giving his consent was to ask, "Who else is going with you?" Mudaliar would say the name of his companions, if any. Once, while responding to the same question, he said, "Today Bhagavan is accompanying me, nobody else." Bhagavan beamed a broad smile and blessed him.

As for staying at *Arunachala*, Bhagavan had translated from *Arunachala Mahatmyam* a Sanskrit verse, which says: "Lord Shiva bestowed a commandment stating**,** 'I ordain that residence within three *yojanas* (thirty miles) of the hill shall, by itself, suffice to burn off all defects and even render union with the Supreme in the absence of any form of initiation.'" Bhagavan, while extolling this verse had said, "Anyone or anything that is found in, on, and around *Arunachala* is gracefully aware of the silence and

stillness and gets liberated without any need for any form of religious or spiritual practices." Mudaliar, as usual, persistently questioned Bhagavan, "How can the criminals, nonbelievers, animals, birds, trees, and stones found here get liberation?" Bhagavan graciously replied, "Who are we to say anything, much less to question it? It is the decision declared by the Privy Council." During the British regime, which had colonized much of the world, the Privy Council was the highest court of appeal in London. Bhagavan punned on the word using legal terms, because Mudaliar was a lawyer. Devaraja Mudaliar said, "I am a lawyer, so that this Truth could go deep into my heart, Bhagavan used the term *Privy Council* for Lord Shiva."

He felt that he was simple and was incapable of progressing spiritually. Therefore, on many occasions he appealed to Bhagavan, "You should save me. I cannot save myself." One day Mudaliar sang a Tamil song, in which the poet laments that he was not like the tenacious young monkey that could hold on to its mother's stomach tightly, but rather like a puny kitten that must be carried by the neck in its mother's jaws. The poet prayed, therefore, that God should take care of him. Mudaliar told Bhagavan, "My case is exactly the same. You must take pity on me, hold me by the neck and see that I do not fall and get lost."

Bhagavan was emphatic when he replied, "That is impossible. It is advantageous to both for you to be your best, as well as for the guru to help." Bhagavan insisted that the endeavor of the disciple is the grace of the guru. There is no lag and no difference. He stressed that the devotee's endeavor and guru's grace are synonymous. The devotee's effort is one of acceptance and surrender.

Mudaliar's greatest contribution is from the period of 1945 to 1947, when he noted in a diary everything that transpired in Bhagavan's presence, published by the *Ashram*, as *Day by Day with Bhagavan.* I have seen the "Diary" covered in a few notebooks. They all had Bhagavan's handwriting strewn in a few places on a small number of pages as corrections; but they were of a minimal nature only. While one finds in *Talks with Ramana Maharshi,* Bhagavan referring to traditional Sanskrit texts, in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, one rejoices in Bhagavan profusely quoting ancient Tamil devotional texts.

In the later fifties and early sixties, it was my pleasure to prod Mudaliar to write down all the stories and incidents that he had narrated to me in a book form. He was kind enough to offer consent without hesitation and the result was his book of reminiscences of Bhagavan, entitled*: My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana.* What I have written on Mudaliar can be found in this interesting book.

Between 1956 and 1958, after I graduated from college, I stayed for two years in the *Ashram*. I was trying to get a job because my family was not financially wealthy, and I was the first graduate in my family. People like Major Chadwick, as well as Mrs. Talyearkhan were helping me find a job. Meanwhile, as I lived in the *Ashram*, working in the office and typing, Bhagavan showered me with his grace. He compelled me to talk to all the mature devotees, even though I did not have a spiritual intent at that time. Major Chadwick and Mudaliar obliged me by telling me about life with Bhagavan. When they narrated these stories, I requested them to write them down. These are the first two books of the reminiscences of Bhagavan that preceded a cascade of more reminiscences to come. I now

had these manuscripts**,** and after 1958, I left for my postgraduate studies to Chennai and had these beautiful reminiscences printed.

When I came to *Ramanashram* in 1960, there were not many old devotees still living there, other than Major Chadwick, Devaraja Mudaliar, Ramaswami Pillai, and Kunju Swami. Mrs. Talyearkhan and S. S. Cohen stayed outside the *Ashram*. I used to spend a long time with Chadwick, Kunju Swami, and Mudaliar, delighting in stories about Bhagavan and yearning to listen more. I once spent hours listening to Devaraja Mudaliar's narrations about his associations with Bhagavan. It was music to my ears and also a part of my *sadhana* to listen to stories of his relationship with the Guru.

Mudaliar told me, "Bhagavan rarely expressed strong views on ethical or worldly matters, save two exceptions. One was his disapproval of impure food**,** and the other was his dislike for pretentious renunciation: donning the ochre robe, shaving the head, taking on another name, and taking *sanyasa* for show."

During this time, he also narrated to me the difference between faith and belief. "Belief is just a thought. Faith is not a thought, it is complete surrender; there is no question of accepting or rejecting." Mudaliar was not the average man in society. He belonged to the elite. The British government even honored him with the title of *Rao Bahadur*, which means "the most important man in society." He was a reputed lawyer with a superior intellect. Yet, he surrendered everything to Bhagavan. He said, "Spiritual surrender means we will not only surrender by word, but the 'me' has to surrender to the silent state of 'I Am.'" And he quoted

how Bhagavan accepted the "me," the "good-for-nothing me."

He was neatly dressed, very pleasant, polite, and by no means got angry. Once, I asked him, "How is it that you are always happy and pleasant?" In response, he shared with me three teachings:

"Be light. By no means, feel heavyhearted at any time. Jesus Christ said, 'Be a light unto your Self.' That's it. Do not involve yourself in complications. Look at me, how happy I am. Do not make anything an issue. Remembering the past creates issues. Likewise, worrying about and projecting the future creates issues. Refrain as far as possible from brooding over the past and the future. Remain in the Now as the Now. The 'Now' is Bhagavan."

He added, "God is within the infinite you. Who looks through your eyes when you look through your eyes? Who hears? Who eats? Who digests? Who makes you go to sleep? This love, which Bhagavan called the *Higher Power*, is God. This inner peace is truly who you really are. Abide in silence, abide in the simple 'I am.' Happy always is."

The third thing was, "Bhagavan is Truth. Do not try to define the Stillness, for the mind cannot. Nobody has ever done it. If you surrender your so-called 'me, my, mine' to the present 'now', then Truth will reveal itself in and as your Heart sky. You will recognize it inherently, spiritually. I bless you, Ganesan."

In 1964 or 1965, he had to leave the *Ashram* in his last days because his family wanted him to live with them. I arranged a farewell festivity to be

given in recognition of him, in which all the devotees participated.

He moved to Kancheepuram with his children and chanted Bhagavan's name continually. I directed a newspaper correspondent, who had come to interview the *Ashram* residents to Mudaliar, telling him about this gem of a devotee in Kancheepuram. One of the questions this journalist put to Devaraja Mudaliar was: "It was you who elicited from Bhagavan that residing in *Arunachala*, even a stone, a bird, or a tree is liberated. Why are you then staying away from *Arunachala* in Kancheepuram?" That same correspondent told me later that Mudaliar replied, "That is what you say. Did I say I am ever away from *Arunachala*? Now that I am in Kancheepuram, is it any different for me? Bhagavan is always with me, and I am always in *Arunachala*. Wherever the 'I Am' feeling is, there is *Arunachala*." This elder was already inadvertently spreading the teaching of "I Am."

His relatives told me his last days were most peaceful. Until his last conscious moment he kept chanting, "Ramana Ramana." I had once asked him why he kept chanting Ramana and he said, "I asked Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I sometimes chant your name without even thinking about you. Is it all right? Do I get marks for this? Personally I think I ought to, maybe not many, but at least one or two? Is it not so, Bhagavan?" Bhagavan laughed and replied, "Yes, you will get marks for this." I continue to say "Ramana Ramana" and have full faith that as he told me, he will give me marks for doing so in the final examination."

Bhagavan, the divine presence, did enjoin him as he chanted "Ramana Ramana." It is not just a *mantra*, a repetition, or a ritual. Remembrance is

the very divine presence. When you chant "Ramana," you are already established in the "I Am," the immediate Pure Presence.

DAYBREAK AT ARUNACHALA

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Sri Vishwanatha Swami

One night in Tiruchuzhi, when a baby boy was born to Azhagammal, the blind midwife shouted, "Azhagu! It is a boy! Rejoice, my fair lady! Be happy! I saw a brilliant light. Azhagu, rejoice!"

Bhagavan's mother's brother lived in Dindigul. His wife died soon after giving birth to a son. Bhagavan's parents brought the orphaned child, Ramaswami, to their home and raised him with much affection and care. Just before Bhagavan was born, Mother Azhagammal told the midwife, "I am very excited, I want this to be a girl!" She was therefore disappointed when Bhagavan was born. Intuitively, the blind midwife exclaimed, "Rejoice, my fair lady, I saw a brilliant light!"

In his later years, Ramaswami became a lawyer known for his upright character. He was also a strict disciplinarian who was held in high regard because of his service to society. One of his sons was Vishwanathan, a close devotee of Bhagavan. Like all his brothers, Vishwanathan was brilliant and was gifted with a sharp intellect. He, too, was deeply involved in India's freedom movement. In 1921, when still in college, he was arrested for opposing the British government. The university examinations were soon, so his father bailed him out. But instead of

going to his house in Dindigul, he got off at Tiruvannamalai to meet his uncle, Venkataraman, who was now known as Ramana Maharshi.

This is how he describes his very first encounter with Bhagavan's glance of grace: "Bhagavan was standing in an open space in front of *Skandashram*. When I first laid eyes on him, I saw in him something quite arresting, which clearly distinguished him from all the others I have seen. He seemed to live apart from the physical frame, as though quite detached from it. His look and smile had a remarkable spiritual charm. When he spoke, his words seemed to come out of an abyss. One could see immaculate purity and nonattachment in him and in his movements. I sensed something very refined, lofty, and sacred about him. In his vicinity, the mind's distractions were overpowered by an austere and potent calm. In his presence the unique bliss of peace was directly experienced. This I would call *Ramana Lahari*—the blissful atmosphere of Sri Ramana. In this ecstasy of grace, one loses one's sense of separate individuality, and there remains something shared, grand, which pervades all and devours all. This indeed is the spirit of *Arunachala* that swallows up the whole universe in its gracious effulgence." It is no wonder that after this experience of ecstasy, Vishwanathan stayed on for a few days. Bhagavan's mother, Azhagammal, and Bhagavan's brother, Chinna Swami, were also present. They knew Vishwanathan from his childhood days and were aware that he was a Sanskrit scholar even at that tender age. So they asked him to recite some holy Sanskrit verses.

When the recitation was over, Bhagavan slowly turned his attention toward Vishwanathan and said: "You have learned all this; this was not so in my case. Before I came here, I knew nothing, I learned not a thing.

Some mysterious power took possession of me and induced a thorough transformation. Whoever knew then that this would happen to me! Your father, who intended in his boyhood to go to the Himalayas to perform *tapas*, became the head of a large family, and I, who knew nothing, have been drawn and kept here for good. When I left home in my seventeenth year I was like a speck swept away by a tremendous flood. I knew neither my body nor the world, whether it was day or night. It was difficult even to open my eyes; my eyelids seemed to be glued down. My body became a mere skeleton. Visitors pitied my plight because they were not aware of how blissful I was. It was years later that I came across the term *Brahman*, when I happened to look into some of the books on *Vedanta,* which were brought to me. I was amused and asked myself, "Is this the experience known as *Brahman*?"

Vishwanathan had to leave. As he bade farewell with a heavy heart, Bhagavan handed him a copy of *Sri Ramana Gita*. It contains Bhagavan's answers to questions put by Kavyakantha and his disciples, and is invaluable to every aspirant. While giving it to him, Bhagavan said, "Give it to your father and ask him to read it." Vishwanathan studied it thoroughly in Dindigul. He was immersed in studying it. This moved Vishwanathan so deeply that he decided to give up the world, and go and stay at the holy feet of Bhagavan.

In January 1923, he went back to Tiruvannamalai. Bhagavan had already descended the hill to the present *Ramanashram*, which then was only two thatched sheds. Vishwanathan did not leave any note in Dindigul, and when he presented himself, Bhagavan's first question was, "Did you leave any letter or tell your parents?" Vishwanathan shook his head. "Why did you not do it? Now write a letter to your parents that you are

here safe and sound," Bhagavan instructed.

Bhagavan permitted him to stay and Vishwanathan discovered that his intensity and presence were so strong that he did not need any formal practice. But still, he studied Bhagavan's works thoroughly, and worked in the *Ashram* in Bhagavan's inspirational presence. The more he studied Bhagavan's work, the stronger his conviction became that the mere presence, the mere proximity and the spiritually uplifting company of Bhagavan was more than enough. His conviction grew even stronger when he read one of Bhagavan's verses in *The Supplement to Forty Verses on Reality*, "When one associates oneself with the company of a sage, there is no need for religious and spiritual practices, just as there is no need for a fan when the cool southern breeze blows."

Yet, after a few days, Bhagavan asked him what mode of spiritual practice he was ready to take up. Vishwanathan said that from childhood he was drawn to the *Gayatri mantra*, one of the holiest Hindu *mantras*, and that he had been chanting it. Bhagavan replied, "That is very good, but you must practice it sincerely, every day at a particular time, totally attuning yourself with it."

Bhagavan took Vishwanathan behind *Ramanashram*, to a small hillock with a small, naturally formed cave. If one sits there, one can view *Arunachala* on the eastern and western sides, without the discomfort of the burning sun. Bhagavan told him, "There is a particular time when you will do the *japa*. I will come and inspect your practice, so be very Self-disciplined about it."

Viswanatha Swami actually took me to that cave, and I was elated because he said, "Bhagavan did come and check; those were not merely words." However, being completely engrossed in his *japa,* Vishwanathan was not aware that Bhagavan checked on him not once, but more than a few times, and was satisfied that he was capable of fulfilling his commitment.

Vishwanathan lived with Bhagavan from 1923 to 1927, doing arduous practice. This was the period of effulgence, of selfless effort. The guru bestows his grace when the disciple sincerely makes an effort to practice the spiritual paradigm and that was this period. Vishwanathan was not sure how far he had progressed, so he asked Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, how can I rise above my present animal instincts? My own efforts have proven futile and I am convinced that only a superior power can transform me." Bhagavan replied with great compassion, "Yes, you are right. It is by awakening a power higher and mightier than the senses and the mind, that these can be subdued. If you awaken and nurture the growth of that *Higher Power* within you, everything else will unfold mystically. One should sustain the peace of meditation as Self abidance uninterruptedly. Moderation in food and similar restraints taken up studiously and judiciously will be helpful in maintaining inner poise." Bhagavan added, "Vishwanathan, do not mingle with people who come here. Do not waste time socializing, talking with people and also getting attached personally. Keep your talking to the minimum." Viswanatha Swami devoutly adhered to Bhagavan's words, so much so that whenever he spoke, his voice was almost inaudible. He restricted all his movements to going to the town to beg for food. Later, some old devotees told me that Viswanatha Swami was known for his soft-spoken demeanor and

restrained movement.

I want to share a very interesting incident at this important stage of his life, which Viswanatha Swami described to me. After four months, a letter arrived from Dindigul stating that Viswanatha Swami's father was coming for a visit. Viswanatha Swami showed this letter to Bhagavan, who with total compassion said, "Viswanatha, your family is also coming. Go to the railway station, receive them, but do not talk to your father without my presence. Receive them and drop them in the town. They have arranged for a house to stay in but you go back to your cave and keep doing your *japa*. I will send word for you, but even then, do not talk to your father. Come and prostrate not to me, but to your father and stand in silence. I will look after the rest." Vishwanatha's father, Ramaswami, did not know Bhagavan's spiritual stature. He knew him as Venkataraman, a runaway relative who had taken to ascetic life. At that time, the old hall at *Ramanashram* was being built, so Bhagavan and the others moved to a stone dwelling across the road. When Viswanatha Swami's father came there and met Bhagavan face-to-face, he could sense the spiritual influence. The next moment, he prostrated before him in absolute awe and devotion.

Then Bhagavan sent word to Viswanatha and as advised, he came and prostrated before his father and stood next to him with folded hands and bent head. Ramaswami was very angry. He turned to Viswanatha and then said, "All this is enough. Now pack up and come with me. That is why we have come… to take you back to Dindigul." A stony silence pervaded the room. Bhagavan looked at Ramaswami and said, "Vishwanathan has taken to the path of surrender and Self-purification."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Ramaswami was not fully satisfied so Bhagavan reasoned with him, "Allow Viswanatha to stay here. It will do him good." This word worked like magic and the father melted. He looked at Bhagavan and his paternal instincts influenced him to plead with Bhagavan, "If Bhagavan would take the responsibility of Vishwanatha's spiritual fulfillment; I will have no objection in leaving him here. This is a challenge." There was complete silence again. Viswanatha never expected this and everyone looked at Bhagavan. Bhagavan compassionately turned and he made this declaration in public: "Yes, I will take the entire responsibility of Vishwanatha's spiritual growth." In Chinna Swami's case, Bhagavan committed in private to his mother that he would take Chinna Swami's responsibility, but with Viswanatha Swami, he declared this in public. However, these are not two isolated instances. When we sincerely dedicate ourselves to practice, it is Bhagavan's assurance, even now, that he will take the entire responsibility of each one's spiritual fulfillment. Remember Bhagavan's holy words: "The effort of the aspirant and the grace of the guru are synonymous and simultaneous." Our part is only to enjoin the synchronicity. Trust it.

Viswanatha Swami was extremely happy—his arduous practice had begun. Bhagavan took him along during his walks and explained to him the verses that he had composed on *jnana* (wisdom) and *bhakti* (devotion). Bhagavan took complete care of him. Viswanatha Swami later told me that being alone with Bhagavan, and the words of the Guru exclusively explained to him are the greatest boons that he received from Bhagavan. One day when Bhagavan and Viswanatha Swami were cutting vegetables, Bhagavan told him, "You should be capable of making use of even dust. At the same time, you should also be able to reject the entire

cosmos as nothing but mere dust."

The relationship between the guru and disciple was growing, and Bhagavan perhaps felt that Viswanatha needed a firm rooting in scriptural studies. Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni was staying up on the hill, and in 1927, Bhagavan sent him up to Kavyakantha to study scriptures. Even when Kavyakantha came down in 1929 to stay in Palakothu, Bhagavan specifically told Viswanatha, "Nayana is staying in the hut in Palakothu. Go and stay with him twenty-four hours a day, serve him, and learn from him." Everyday Bhagavan visited that hut. He would always enquire, "Nayana… how is Viswanatha?"

The guru showed him the teacher and this encouraged Viswanatha. His study of Sanskrit scriptures helped him to spontaneously create verses. He wrote five verses and placed them at Bhagavan's feet. Bhagavan read them and said approvingly, "They are very good. Why don't you continue to write? But show them to Nayana and get them corrected." Both Viswanatha and Kavyakantha worked hand in hand and put together the one hundred and eight names of Sri Bhagavan, called *Sri Ramana Ashtottara*. The beauty of this prayer is that its perfume will never fade away, as it is the aroma emanating from one's own Heart. It came from the Hearts of Vishwanathan and Nayana, and was approved by Bhagavan, the Heart. It is a treatise, a sacred flower that Viswanatha placed at the feet of Bhagavan. He told me, "I was fortunate enough to place this at the holy feet of Sri Bhagavan."

Vishwanatha Swami continued his practice and the years rolled by. For the one who lives the Truth, they live in and as the eternal 'Now', time

doesn't matter because time is illusion, and Viswanatha Swami was still in timeless ecstasy.

He got a rude shock when Bhagavan's health failed and he had to be operated on. This caused him deep pain so he went to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, permit me to serve you day and night and to be with you."

Bhagavan turned to him and said, "You have some work to do." Saying this, he politely declined Viswanatha Swami's request. On Bhagavan's last day, there were only a few people, including myself, inside his room. Outside, Bhagavan's devotees were chanting *Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva*, the Heart-melting verses composed by Bhagavan on his Father *Arunachala*, the Self. Bhagavan had already requested the attendants to help him sit up. The louder the chorus became, the more tears of ecstasy rolled down from Bhagavan's eyes.

Viswanatha Swami was witnessing the exalted spiritual splendor that was unfolding. He felt, at that moment, that a gracious look from Bhagavan was falling on him. He saw a lightning flash within himself and felt that the core of his Heart was opened. He felt Bhagavan was imparting grace in his Heart and was overwhelmed with ecstasy. The next moment he saw Bhagavan smile and give a nod of approval, as if to say that what Viswanatha Swami had experienced was the real shared state of Oneness. Bhagavan had awakened spiritual realization in the son in accordance with his word to the son's father, Ramaswami. This is how Viswanatha Swami recounted that moment of ecstasy: "Having received that grace, the climax of my own spiritual experiences in the proximity of Bhagavan

took place during those last moments. As I stood in that small room, everything became shadowy, enveloped by an invisible, pure awareness, the one and only everpresent reality. There was not the least feeling of separation from Bhagavan or the least vestige of sorrow on his physical death. Instead there was a positive ecstasy and elation of spirit, which was nothing but the natural state of the Self."

After Bhagavan attained *Mahanirvana*, Viswanatha Swami received a call from Dindigul that his mother was ailing and bedridden. There was nobody to attend her. She was also a scholar, with a small notebook always in at hand. Viswanatha Swami went home and saw that there was nobody to even serve her food. He attended to her day and night, nursed, cooked, and bathed her, and was with her for months. During this time he remembered what Bhagavan said: "You have work to do." Before she passed away, his mother opened her notebook, in which the one hundred and eight names of Bhagavan was written by Bhagavan himself in his small, beautiful handwriting, and she was doing the recitation every day. In her last moments she said, "Viswanatha, I bless you," and shared that notebook.

When he was at Dindigul, he had a dream, where Bhagavan appeared to him and asked him to come to *Ramanashram*. When he went there, he found that Chinna Swami was ailing, and for the next six months, attended him day and night. When Chinna Swami died in 1953, Vishwanatha Swami disappeared.

I came to *Ramanashram* in 1960. My sincere aspiration was to serve the older devotees who were not physically there anymore. When I arrived,

there were only eight or nine devotees, like Chadwick, Devaraja Mudaliar, one or two servants, and office staff. All the other devotees had left the *Ashram,* including Muruganar, for valid reasons, of course. The lady-saint, Mother Krishna Bai, guided me, "Go and call them back . . . that is your *sadhana*." I made sincere efforts to find out where they were. I succeeded in a few cases. Knowing Viswanatha Swami's greatness, I kept searching for him, but he kept eluding me. I could not find his whereabouts. One day I was walking on the streets of Chennai and an old friend of mine in great joy met me and voluntarily told me, "Ganesh *Anna*! I am so happy because I am just returning from a meeting with Viswanatha Swami." My joy knew no bounds. "Viswanatha Swami is here?" I asked incredulously. My friend provided me the address, and I immediately went there. He was living in his brother's rented house. When I walked in, he was in the kitchen cooking for the family. I prostrated before him right there in the kitchen. I cried, "Swami! Is cooking your job? Is not your place in the abode of Bhagavan? Is not *Ramanashram* your home?" I begged him to come back to *Ramanashram* and he did.

Serving Viswanatha Swami was one of the most fulfilling functions in my life. Viswanatha Swami's presence there actually enhanced the aroma of *Ramanashram*. Slowly other devotees came back. In those days, before the large hall was built, Bhagavan's *Samadhi* was merely a thatched shed with an open space in front. I used to sleep there on the floor on a mat. On some nights I would feel the poke of a walking stick. I would wake up to find Vishwanatha Swami standing there silently beckoning me to follow him. He would have me walk in silence all the time, to the cemetery near Yamalingam, two kilometers away from the *Ashram* on the *pradakshina* road. We both would sit on a raised platform, behind which all the dead

bodies are buried or *burned*. He would draw my attention to the hill, and we would sit in silence for two or three hours, and then walk back. This happened a few times, with no talking, and it was later that I understood this man's insight. It is next to Yamalingam that my abode, "*Ananda Ramana,*" is now situated. These walks to Yamalingam took place in the 1970s. In 1986, this house was given to me and I moved there in 1995, to stay permanently. Just as Bhagavan cared for Viswanatha Swami, Viswanatha Swami, whom I cared for, took care of me and my spiritual practice. It is thus, that the beautiful chain of grace continues to link us to the Truth that is everpresent, Bhagavan.

Viswanatha Swami was a symbol of utter simplicity, and that is why I refer to him as "the profound man of simplicity." When I was young, many visitors who were emotionally upset or mentally imbalanced would come to the *Ashram*, and I did not know how to handle them. Viswanatha Swami would volunteer to take care of them. On many occasions he would take them individually up the hill, around it or to the temple, talking to them softly and seeing their problems dissolve. A perfect way of imparting the nature of Truth is by transcending the limitations of mind and body.

When I had just read the *Bible*, I was talking to a friend about it. I did not like the story of Moses where he touched a rock with his staff and water flowed out from the bottom of the rock. I said, "At least they could have written that Moses touched the ground and then water flowed out. How can water come out of a rock?" As I was saying this, a hand took hold of my arm and led me straight to *Skandashram*. It was Viswanatha Swami. He took me there where a natural spring flowed and put my hand

underneath, between two rocks and made me feel the water oozing out from there. Then he said, "Bhagavan took me here, put my hand beneath the rocks, and showed me the water. Bhagavan touched this rock, and this water flows perennially."

He solemnly added, "Never doubt a sage's statements or actions. How can you doubt that Moses was not endowed with that grace by God to bring water from that rock? Be careful, Ganesan." This corrected my spiritual thinking, because he brought my mind back to the Heart. If you again go to the mind, the intellect, you will continue to doubt how water can come out of a rock. Even now, if you go to *Skandashram*, though it has been hidden, you can put your hand and feel the spring coming right from the bottom of the rock and not from the sand. Moreover, below it lays a flat rock.

Arthur Osborne managed the journal, *Mountain Path,* single-handedly for six years. I was the managing editor when he suddenly passed away in 1970. I did not know what to do. Mrs. Osborne came forward, saying, "Ganesan, do not worry. I will take it over." For two years she shouldered that responsibility, but because of ill health and other problems she begged me to find someone better equipped to handle the responsibility. She brought bundles of unedited articles and put them on my table. I was completely perplexed. The next day Viswanatha Swami walked into my office and beckoned me. He spoke very sparingly. He took me to the forest behind the *Ashram*, brought me back, and then took me to his room. He smiled at me and said, "Bhagavan has instructed me to help you. I will take over the editorship. Honestly, Ganesan, I do not know the subtle art of editing but it should not bother

you. I will learn it. Send all those unedited articles to Professor K. Swaminathan who is an expert editor. He edits with red ink. When the edited articles come in, I will study them and learn." Being a realized person, he picked it up in no time at all. Professor Swaminathan himself, the great editor of a leading newspaper in India, said, "Viswanatha Swami's editing is wonderful."

In 1979, both Viswanatha Swami and I planned that in 1980, Bhagavan's birth centenary, we need to work together and bring out those issues dealing exclusively with the Direct Teachings of Bhagavan. Unfortunately, Viswanatha Swami had a sun stroke. He came to my office and said, "I am ill. Come to my room." I followed him into his room, where his behavior was alarmingly abnormal. He kept standing and sitting restlessly, like a clockwork toy. I was shocked and upset, not knowing what to do.

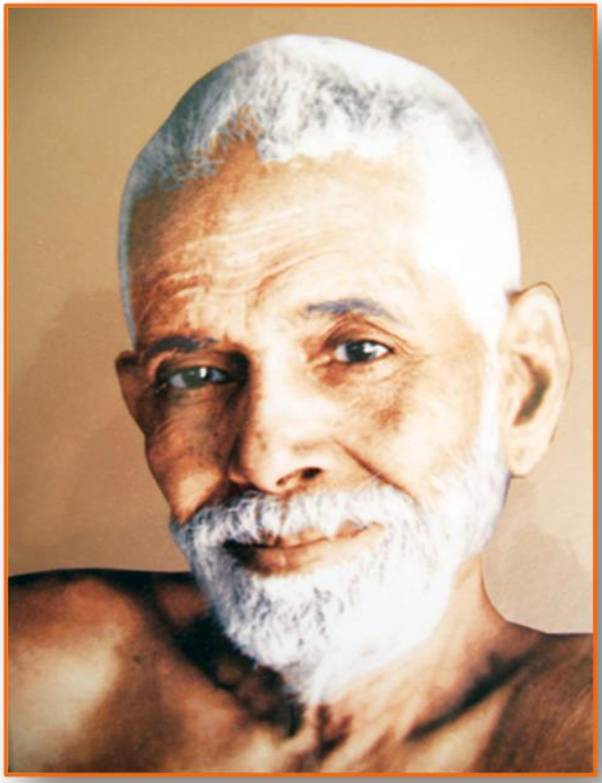
"Do not pay attention to my body. I am inwardly in a blissful state. Attend to the inward state of mine," he counseled. "Give a telegram to my brother. I will not give you trouble to nurse me for long. The second day I will drop my body. Bury me in the simplest way, as you do. I want no rituals. But come in the evening at four 'o clock, I have a message for you." I went at the appointed time.

In that seeming restless state of standing and sitting, he again told me, "Do not pay attention to the body. Listen to what I am saying." This is Viswanatha Swami's message, and it has been guiding me very powerfully: "That spirit, that Heart was unaffected, the body was affected, perhaps mind also, but the clarity of Heart is speaking through

me. Though there is so much of confusion, turbulence, and misery in manifestation, all of that belongs to the realm of the mind, the ignorant mind getting split as object and subject. All experiences of life are relative, i.e., related to the experiencer who is nothing but a shadow, having no intrinsic reality of his own. The reality in every person is the ultimate pure existence, which is the pure state of 'I Am,' the awareness absolute, which does not split into subject and object. It is the only thing that matters. If the ego and all its experiences are dismissed as passing shadows, the everpresent ultimate reality alone is Self-evident. If one even intellectually is convinced of this Truth, one will gain detachment and mental peace. We should, now and then, stop for a while, stand aloof, and experience this immutable and immaculate awareness-absolute, the still 'I Am,' which alone matters, which alone is, despite the manifestation of endless variety of seeming experiences. The Buddha, Jesus Christ, Adi Shankara, and Bhagavan Ramana are a few standing monuments affirming the reality which is our very own being. The very sight of these pillars of Truth reminds us of this reality and brings us the peace that passes the mind's understanding. Only the finite mind, the 'me,' has to be relinquished to merge and dissolve in the present infinite reality, the 'I Am.' I bless you, Ganesan."

I prostrated before him, one of the devotees that came to *Arunachala* to support and spread Bhagavan's message of sharing the experience of 'I Am' throughout humanity. It is not enough if we just read some books, and get convinced intellectually by the statements in them. We must transcend sensual experience as these teachings reveal actual states of peace and stillness and in relationship with one another.

"See all beings, recognizing their Self, as that One, which is forever the 'I Am.'" Viswanatha Swami told me that this inner meaning is most important. As Jesus' last commandment said, "Love one another as I have loved you."



SRI BHAGAVAN

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Annamalai Swami

Chellaperumal was a very simple man, not an academic or an intellectual person. But the Maharshi helped him flower into a stately spiritual person. Chellaperumal's horoscope predicted that he would not lead a life with a family but become an ascetic. (The norm of the old days was to raise children and see them happily married.) The boy was not sent to school because his father feared that if he could study, he would go on to learn the *Vedanta* and prove the predictions right. Instead, he took the boy with him to the paddy fields and made sure he was beside him all the time. This went on for some time, with Chellaperumal following his father to the fields, as in India it was considered respectful to walk behind the elders.

Once, Chellaperumal was drawn to a group of *sadhus,* clad in ochre robes. One of the elders in the group gave him a book on spiritual science, which he began reading immediately in spite of no formal education. This continued without the knowledge of his father. There was one lady in the village whose husband was an officer. Everyone was welcome in her house. Her pious attitude drew Chellaperumal to her house where

she forwarded to him a few books in Tamil, like *Kaivalya Navaneetam*. The boy with no knowledge of *Vedanta* or spiritual sciences just began reading naturally. Something from within him understood it naturally and the lady encouraged him.

He began sharing what he had read with the illiterate neighbors. All of this was without his father's knowledge. Soon, the number of listeners began to grow and the lady requested Chellaperumal to move into her house. In the six years that followed he began adhering to some of the traditional religious practices. It was a "golden period" for Chellaperumal. His father was stunned at the sudden change in his son, yet would not encourage it. The thirst for growing and learning took the teenager, Chellaperumal, to Chidambaram, where he took to *sanyasa.* He voluntarily became an ascetic.

When he returned to his village, people began noticing something unique in this boy. An elder in the village and a follower of Ramalinga Swamigal advised Chellaperumal to begin some charitable work, which he did in his own small way. His mind was keen on helping the needy while still continuing his traditional practices.

The news of Kanchi Shan's arrival in the next village brought joy to Chellaperumal. He begged the great one to guide him in his spiritual efforts. The Shankaracharya blessed him with the *mantra, Shivaya Namaha,* which was to be chanted a million times. Chellaperumal understood that it was the Grace of God that could prepare and guide the innocent.

One day, a holy man passing through the village met Chellaperumal and

gave him a book in Tamil, in which were some verses of instructions and a picture of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. One look at the picture of Bhagavan and Chellaperumal recognized that this was his Guru. He told his friends that he had finally found his teacher and wanted to leave for Tiruvannamalai. The villagers funded him for his journey and bade him a tearful goodbye. En route he met Kanchi Shankaracharya and told him of his intention. The great one blessed him with some holy ashes and a few pieces of silver and told him that he was on a worthy errand. Chellaperumal later learned that this same Kanchi Shankaracharya had also sent Paul Brunton to meet Bhagavan.

On arriving at Tiruvannamalai, Chellaperumal was asked to see the holy man, Seshadri Swami, in a temple. About forty or more people were gathering outside to get a glimpse of the Holy man. But Chellaperumal just walked in, prostrated before him, and offered him a sweet. Seshadri Swami then blessed the offering and shared it with all the people outside. Seshadri Swami then asked Chellaperumal, "You fool! Why did you come to *Arunachala*? Why have you come to Tiruvannamalai? What is there to come to?" Chellaperumal, in a state of shock, was wondering why the *Mahatma* was abusing him. Fortunately, one *sadhu* there explained to Chellaperumal that he is a *Siddha,* and the meaning and effect of his words is auspicious. He is so happy that you have come to Tiruvannamalai. When he calls you a fool and asks you, "Why have you come to *Arunachala*?" it means what a great man you are that you have come to *Arunachala*. And whatever purpose you have come with, will be fulfilled. After this dialogue with the *sadhu,* Chellaperumal was convinced that he was on the right sojourn.

It was the year 1928 when the twenty-one-year-old Chellaperumal entered *Ramanashram*. There he saw Bhagavan walk down the hill, wash his feet, and enter the hall. Chellaperumal was ecstatic! He vividly recalled seeing this same scene in a dream, and it was now here! He offered a small packet of raisins to Bhagavan and prostrated to him, his heart profuse with love and tears streaming down his face, such was his love and devotion to Bhagavan. When he stood up, he saw Bhagavan partaking of the raisins. Chellaperumal had a feeling that it was Lord Shiva himself accepting the offering. Bhagavan then focused his Glance of Grace on Chellaperumal for the next fifteen minutes. Later when asked what his experience was, Chellaperumal said: "I felt a wonderful coolness pervade my body. I was immersing myself in a cool pool after being outside in the hot sun."

Chinna Swami, the manager of *Ramanashram,* offered him the job of being Bhagavan's attendant. Chellaperumal's joy grew beyond bounds! Not only would he be near Bhagavan, but also he had the exclusive opportunity of serving him, too! One day he asked Bhagavan for Divine guidance—*Upadesa*-- and the Maharshi replied: "Go! Go inward. Always hold on to the Self. Identifying with the body and the mind causes misery. Dive deep into the Heart, the source of being and peace. Be established thus, always in your being." Thereafter, Bhagavan began addressing Chellaperumal as Annamalai Swami. Annamalai Swami recounted, "The very next day after I came to Bhagavan, he casually mentioned that I reminded him of a man called Annamalai Swami, an attendant of his at *Skandashram,* who passed away in 1920. Bhagavan started to use this name as a nickname for me. When the other devotees heard this, they followed suit. Within a few days, my new identity was

firmly established. Soon the name, Chellaperumal, was almost forgotten."

This Annamalai Swami told me: "At that time, I did not know the significance of those words. The rest of my life is based on this very first *upadesa*. I did not know, I did not grasp the main implication of this *upadesa*. My tendencies came up. I started noticing others around Bhagavan were all gossiping and I did not like that. The power of my latent tendencies made me feel that while Bhagavan is great, people around him are going to distract me, so I will not be here. I will go and do my spiritual practices elsewhere." He walked away from the *Ashram*. He walked aimlessly for about twenty miles, not knowing what to do or where to go. He tried begging for food in almost two hundred houses but nobody gave him even a morsel! In his pathetic condition he was told that he was being foolish to suffer and was asked to go back to Tiruvannamalai, back to *Ramanashram*. The moment Annamalai Swami decided to return to Bhagavan, amazingly, a hotel owner shared a meal! He boarded a train back to Tiruvannamalai without a ticket. But the ticket collector chose to ignore him among the forty odd passengers in the compartment.

Reaching the *Ashram*, he asked for forgiveness. And the ever compassionate Bhagavan told him in these words: "How can you escape? You have work to do here. If you try to leave without doing the jobs destined for you, where can you run away? Stay here." Annamalai Swami again fell at Bhagavan's feet and said "Bhagavan, whatever you speak to me, I will do. I will not leave your place." Then it was Bhagavan who chose his work of his own accord and said: "Your work is to supervise construction." Bhagavan did not stop there. The next day when

Annamalai Swami was serving Bhagavan, he turned to him and spoke, "Annamalai Swami, near the water pool, a wall is being built. Go and see what work the mason is doing." He thought Bhagavan wanted information so he went to the mason and asked him what he was doing. The mason said, "I am building this wall." He came and reported the same to Bhagavan, "The mason told me that he is building a wall." Bhagavan again told him, "Go and see what he is doing." Thus, Bhagavan sent him back five times, and all five times Annamalai Swami returned with the same answer, that the mason was building a wall. The sixth time the mason got so annoyed that he shouted at him, "Are you a fool? Are you an idiot? How many times I have to tell you the same thing?" Then Annamalai Swami woke up: "Why does Bhagavan repeatedly send me to the mason? Perhaps he wants me to supervise!" It was only then that he grasped those holy words of Bhagavan and stayed there. He also understood the avalanche of service that he was to undertake.

The work seemed almost impossible for this simple man. He stood each day in the sun, drenched in sweat from the heat of the live mortar being ground for construction. People around him would ridicule him, chide him, and even insult him. But Bhagavan's Divine guidance was, "Annamalai Swami, you are not the body, you are not the mind, you are the pure consciousness, the still Self, all pervading. Be aware of this all the time, even while you are working." This brought a lot of relief to Annamalai Swami, who understood that his destiny was to be washed away. Every one unknowingly creates their own destiny, which can be washed away by themselves and nobody else, however sympathetic they might be. Annamalai Swami held on steadfastly to Bhagavan's Divine

guidance, fighting between destiny and Grace. He was not affected by the criticism around him.

As the days went by, with Bhagavan's blessing, guidance, and support, the *Ashram* began to see many construction projects in place. A sturdy wall of stones was built to prevent floods from the hills coming into the *Ashram* grounds. A store room was next, and then Bhagavan's bathing room, a large dining hall and kitchen, the School for the *Vedas,* a huge Cowshed, and even a *samadhi,* cenotaph, for Bhagavan's pets: Valli the deer, Jackie the dog, and a crow. The simple Annamalai Swami had done such an amazing job that Bhagavan used to humorously tell him that whenever he walked toward Bhagavan it felt like the buildings were walking toward him!

With criticism and lack of cooperation from everyone else around, Annamalai Swami stood like a rock, completing the work assigned to him by Bhagavan. His consolation was Bhagavan's Divine words: "You are not the body, you are not the mind. You are pure consciousness, the Self, all pervasive. Be aware of this all the time, even while you are working." After all of these things were built, Bhagavan one day looked at Annamalai Swami and said, "You are now a free man, because all of your *karmas* are finished."

However, standing in the sun for hours each day and the mental anguish of the insults thrown at him started showing on his health. Seeing this, Yogi Ramiah, another devotee of Bhagavan, requested Bhagavan to allow Annamalai Swami some rest. And Bhagavan granted him rest! He embraced Annamalai Swami. The year 1938 saw the life of Annamalai

Swami transform from destiny to grace. Grace had put an end to mortal destiny.

Later, Annamalai Swami related the story of Bhagavan's embrace: Madhava Swami and Annamalai Swami were assigned to give the Maharshi an oil massage and help the Maharshi with his bath. One day, Madhava Swami was curious to know why people enjoyed consuming marijuana and what the experience was like, at which Bhagavan laughed out loud and replied that it was just a habit. He then came to Annamalai Swami and held him tight in an embrace and called out, "*Ananda! Ananda!* …" What felt like a brief hug actually lasted for two whole minutes. Annamalai Swami tells us what happened next in his own words: "After the first few seconds, I completely lost all awareness of my body and the world. Initially, there was a feeling of happiness and bliss, but this soon gave way to a state in which there were no feelings and no experiences. I did not lose consciousness. I just ceased to be aware of anything that was going on around me. I remained in the state for about fifteen minutes. When I resumed my usual worldly consciousness, I was standing alone in the bathroom. Madhava Swami and Bhagavan had long since departed for breakfast. I had not seen them open the door or leave, nor had I heard the breakfast bell. This experience completely changed my life. As soon as I recovered my normal consciousness I knew that my working life at the *Ramanashram* had come to an end. I knew that henceforth I would be living outside the *Ashram* and spending most of my time in meditation."

The next day, Annamalai Swami told Bhagavan of his desire to leave *Ramanashram* and live in Palakothu, about two hundred yards away, to

which the Maharshi consented. He did not have any food or money, but he kept Bhagavan updated on every minute detail of his every day. Bhagavan would visit, guiding him on the spiritual path. Then a time came when Maharshi felt that Annamalai Swami should establish himself totally in the Self. He was advised not to move from his place, not even to go to the road. He was only free to walk at the foot of the hill. Bhagavan encouraged him to collect the herbs from the forest and cook them to eat with rice, something unlikely of the Maharshi, who rarely offered any instructions, even to his own brother. According to the Hindu scriptures, there were two types of living, either like a honey bee going in search of flowers, or like the python, which does not move and swallows the animal venturing near it. Bhagavan advised the latter and saw that everything was provided for Annamalai Swami.

In the 1940s, Bhagavan requisitioned the services of Annamalai Swami to construct the *Ashram* Dispensary. This was the last building work Annamalai Swami rendered for the *Ashram*. The true significance of Bhagavan calling Annamalai Swami back was to polish the rough edges in completing his spiritual maturity. He attributed it to Bhagavan's total compassion. Though there were many incidents of such "roughing of the edges," he would always pick up the following instance, whenever I took my friends to him. "Child Ganesa was holding on to me one day when I was supervising the construction of the Dispensary. That day, Bhagavan came and sat on a big rock nearby. Ganesa ran up to Bhagavan and sat leaning on his feet. When I saw this, as Bhagavan's old attendant, *vasanas* came up. You see, all the attendants of Bhagavan had been instructed not to allow anyone to touch Bhagavan's body. So, I went and tried to stop Ganesa from leaning on Bhagavan's feet. Bhagavan held him back

between his legs and told me, "What is it to you? Go and attend to your business." That instantly made me aware that one of Bhagavan's most important instructions is: "Attend to the business for which you came."

Established in the Self, Annamalai Swami started teaching *Self-Enquiry*. It was the time when there was prevalent a misnomer that *Self-Enquiry* was for the intellectuals and scholars; the lay people did not have the capacity or alertness to focus their attention on the Self for *Self-Enquiry*. He taught the common village folks thus: "If you keep the light on, all the time darkness can never enter your room. Even if you open the door and invite the darkness to come in, it cannot enter. Darkness is just the absence of light. In the same way, the mind is a Self-inflicted area of ignorance, in which the clear divine light of the Self has been deliberately shut off. Go back to your own Self." Annamalai Swami was very categorical: "If you have some interest in the path of *Self-Enquiry*, you should follow it, even if you feel that you are not very good at it. If you want to do *Self-Enquiry* effectively and properly, you should stick to that practice alone. Other methods may be good in their own right way, but they are not good as preparations for *Self-Enquiry*. If you are serious about becoming a good violin player, take lessons from a good teacher and practice as much as you can. If you encounter some difficulties, you do not switch to clarinet for a few months. You stay with your chosen instrument and keep practicing until you get it right. The best preparation for *Self-Enquiry* is *Self-Enquiry* practice only."

I held Annamalai Swami in high esteem. During my evening walks in the forest with Kunju Swami, along with a few other devotees, including Anuradha, we used to drop by Annamalai Swami's *Ashram*. He would

make for us good ginger tea that we enjoyed. We would literally bask in his pristine presence. Annamalai Swami had the habit of ruffling my well-combed hair and placing his forehead to my head every time I met him. To the curiosity of Anuradha, Annamalai Swami explained why he did that to me, quite repeatedly, too: "In 1938, Venkatoo's (my father) family was brought to Tiruvannamalai. This Ganesa, his second son, was a toddler. He had a peculiar habit when he was taken to Bhagavan's Hall. He would climb down from Bhagavan's sister's lap, crawl toward Bhagavan's sofa, and try to climb up. Bhagavan's attendant, Krishnaswami, would stop him and place him back on Bhagavan's sister's lap, saying, 'Do not try to establish any special family relationship here.' One day, Bhagavan had sent Krishnaswami on some errand. This baby Ganesan very quickly crawled up to the sofa and climbed on it. So that he could not fall, Bhagavan with his left leg pressed the baby hard into the sofa, and placing his right leg on his crown, ruffled his hair. My Master's holy foot was there, Anuradha. I put my head where my Master's holy foot touched!"

In 1995, I resigned and retired from the *Ramanashram* management and from its activities. I went to meet Annamalai Swami at his *Ashram* to inform him of the turn of events and to seek his blessings. Annamalai Swami embraced me and said: "Today, you have made my heart very happy. This is the best service you can do for Bhagavan. Until then we had been friends, but now we are spiritual brothers. My blessings are with you." He then put his head against my head and embraced me. He presented me with a few saplings of the *Iruvashi* tree (an herbal plant called *mirua)*, saying that Bhagavan had instructed him to pluck the flowers and leaves of this herbal tree, make a paste, mix it with rice, and

eat it. These trees still flower in my garden at *Ananda Ramana,* in Tiruvannamalai.

In the later years, devotees from the West who went to this Herculean super- builder did not return unrewarded. I conclude this chapter with these words: just as intellectual calm and clarity is important for wisdom, melting of the heart is the next step. Intellectual clarity is important to destroy the destiny, but if you want to flower into wisdom, melting of the cold heart is necessary. Surrender the idea of "me" as done by Annamalai Swami. At every step Annamalai Swami obeyed his Master, which is a lesson in surrender. Accept your lot. Have faith. Melting is not crying or rolling on the floor. Intentionally, willingly, and with graceful ease, one should surrender the "me." And what a joy it is.

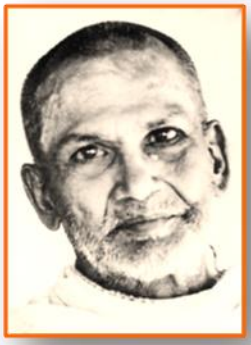
V. GANESAN WITH ANNAMALAI SWAMI

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

BHAGAVAN WITH ANNAMALAI SWAMI

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Muruganar



History has recorded the illustrious lives of saints like Jnanasambandar, Meera Bai, and Aandal, whose time on earth culminated in their being absorbed into a flame and merging with the Lord. However, one of Bhagavan's devotees, a remarkable poet-saint, began his spiritual life with the *Darshan* of a huge flame in his very first meeting with his Guru in 1923 at *Ramanashram*. In subsequent days, whenever he looked at Bhagavan, he saw a subjective luminosity surrounding the holy form.

This devotee was none other than Muruganar, the Tamil poet who was held in the highest esteem by the Tamil community. As a renowned Tamil teacher and scholar, he actively served in a committee of Tamil scholars who were engaged in the tremendous task of preparing volumes of the first Tamil lexicon. Muruganar was deeply devoted to Lord Shiva. He spent much of his time reading *Thiruvachakam*, a poetic outpouring of ecstasy experienced by the saint and Shiva-*bhaktha*, Manickavachakar, who lived seven hundred years ago. Whenever he read it, he would yearn for the same ecstasy and fulfillment that Manickavachakar felt in his Shiva-*bhakti*. It was around this time that his father-in-law presented him with two books written by Bhagavan: *Who am I* and *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam*, the former a work about *jnana marga,* and the latter; an outpouring of devotional songs drenched in

bhakti. He read them many times over and soon learned from his friends that Bhagavan was in a state of constant wisdom that was unheard of in recent times. Muruganar felt a deep longing to visit this saint, receive his blessings in the form of divine ecstasy, and serve him.

He therefore left for Tiruvannamalai and as soon as he reached the *Arunachala* temple, he wrote eleven extempore verses in praise of Bhagavan, addressing Sri Ramana as Shiva. He then went to *Ramanashram*, which in September 1923 was still only a few thatched sheds. Just as auspicious events are heralded by signs, just before he went in, Bhagavan himself came out.

This is how Muruganar described his first *Darshan*: "When I looked at the entrance I saw a brilliant light, a *jyothi*, a huge flame, which blinded my eyes. Ecstatically I tried to read out the verses I had written, but profuse tears prevented this. Then from the flame emerged a human form, Bhagavan. He asked that I hand over the paper I was holding to him. Then, he started reading the poems aloud. After a while, I returned to normal consciousness. With devotion welling up and in all joy and gratitude, I looked up at Bhagavan. Those gracious eyes of Bhagavan pierced through me, opening me instantaneously into a state of bliss that I had never experienced before." Muruganar was choked with emotion when he narrated this to me. It was a spiritual experience for me that day. "Instantly," he added, "Bhagavan became my God, my Master. I was wholly convinced that Bhagavan was a manifestation of Lord Shiva himself. And as my new owner, he made my eye and my mind his own. In the same way that wax melts on encountering fire, on seeing Bhagavan, my mind dissolved and lost its separate form. Like a calf that

has found its mother, my heart rejoiced at his holy feet. Devotion surged in me like an ocean that has seen the full moon."

For serious aspirants, it is a Truth to be rejoiced over, that the divine consummation between the Guru and the illustrious disciple was sealed and sanctified by the Lord. While in the case of other sages, the consummation into the flame was the ultimate result, for Muruganar, it marked the instantaneous consummation of his spiritual life; it was not a gradual process.

He worked in Chennai as a teacher to support his mother, and therefore had to go back to work. After three months, he returned. When he looked at Bhagavan, he again had the subjective vision of luminosity enveloping his form. By this time, Muruganar was completely embraced in the field of Bhagavan's grace. But he still had to travel between *Arunachala* and Chennai because of his responsibilities. Muruganar once told me that he was torn between his devotion to his Master and his affection for his mother.

It was literally quite difficult for him to catch the train back to Chennai, lost, as he was, in his state of ecstasy! Sometimes, with tears of bliss streaming down his face, he would walk literally backward the three miles to the station and roam about on the platform. The train would arrive and depart, with him being blissfully unaware of it. On being told by a porter or the station Master that the train had left, he would come back to Bhagavan, still sobbing ecstatically! When Bhagavan saw this was happening repeatedly, he asked Kunju Swami or Viswanatha Swami to accompany Muruganar, with specific instructions, "Put him on the

train and return to the *Ashram* only after the train leaves."

Muruganar's mother passed away in 1924. He performed the last rites, took some portion of the ashes in an urn, and came to Bhagavan. When Bhagavan saw the distressed Muruganar, he enquired, "How were you able to complete the last rites in this state?" Muruganar broke down on hearing this, so touched was he by his Master's solicitude. Someone mentioned that the ashes were kept in an urn outside. Bhagavan then directed Muruganar to take the ashes to Agni Thirtam, a pond near *Ramanashram*, and dissolve them there. Muruganar wept as he told me what a compassionate Master Bhagavan was. He resigned from his job and cut off all worldly ties and came to Bhagavan in 1926, totally surrendering himself. And what was Bhagavan's response? Bhagavan welcomed him wholeheartedly, and from then onward a new chapter in Muruganar's life began.

One day he composed an extempore verse in his Master's presence and placed it before him. Bhagavan read it and said, "This reads just like *Thiruvachakam*. Continue writing like Manickavachakar," and bestowed Muruganar with a deep look. Later, Muruganar recalled, "That look of Bhagavan unleashed ecstatic poetry in my Heart. From then on, hundreds and hundreds of poems began to gush forth. I would place them before Bhagavan, and he would edit them."

Muruganar even tried to assist the *Ashram* management in its day to day activities. He tried his best to accomplish his worldly tasks successfully, but his whole attention was turned inward toward practice. He felt he was not fit to do any worldly work and wondered if he should just leave

the *Ashram* and live independently. When he expressed this to Bhagavan, he encouraged him to move to nearby Palakothu. From then on, Muruganar spent most of his time at Bhagavan's feet, freed from worldly duties and leading an austere life, with no money and no food.

"I think I should beg for food," he suggested to Bhagavan one day. Bhagavan offered his consent in the most beautiful and natural way. In Muruganar's case, he did not say, "All right, go and beg." Instead, he gave him the names of the streets where he should and should not be a beggar!

Muruganar was in a state of ecstasy. He would beg for food and then bring it to Palakothu. Being very fastidious, he would go to the pool in Palakothu, tie the food in a cloth, tie it to a tree, and go about washing his hands and feet elaborately. On many occasions, monkeys stole his food, and he went hungry. Yet, he never complained; on the contrary, he was in joy.

Bhagavan's presence inspired the poet in him. He composed hundreds of verses along the lines of *Thiruvachakam*, as Bhagavan had incited him to do so. These poems were collected by other devotees and a private publication called *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* was brought out. *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* means *Prayers and Praises in the Presence of Sri Ramana*. The beauty of this book is that it has one thousand eight hundred and fifty extempore verses, seen, edited, and titled by Bhagavan.

What is the importance of this book? Muruganar himself declares, "Know that the function and purport of the *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* is to abide at the feet of the bounteous Guru, Ramana, so that the darkness, the delusion of egoism may cease, being dispelled by the illumination of Lord Ramana's Grace."

When Muruganar came to Bhagavan, he had not read any Vedantic text and therefore his mind was not conditioned by contradictory, pedantic thoughts. He was more receptive to Bhagavan's teachings and was able to imbibe them more easily, particularly the direct teachings of Bhagavan—*Atma Vichara* or *Self-Enquiry*. Whenever devotees put questions to Bhagavan and he answered them, Muruganar would return to his hut and write down those answers as poems. Those questions and answers ran into hundreds of verses and were collected and printed as *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, "Garland of Guru's Sayings." Here, too, every verse was edited, titled, and approved by Bhagavan. Both of these books have been translated into English.

What is the substance of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*? One of the verses explains it:

Give up the thought that this frail body is you; pursue the Self, within which is eternal bliss. This body, which you think you are, is not true, is not you. The real you, is within you as the Truth. Pursue it. Do Self-Enquiry and find it.

Muruganar went on to write many excellent works like *Ramana Deva Malai, Sri Ramana Charana Pallandu, Sri Ramana Anubhuti,* and *Sri Ramana Jnana Bhodam*. The spiritual function behind all his books can be

categorized under three headings: "Prayers and Praises," "Pure and Direct Teaching," and "Inner Ecstasy of Spiritual Experience." It was to accomplish these that our beloved Bhagavan blessed him with poetry—on the brilliance of Bhagavan and his direct teaching. As Muruganar said, "I had no other thought while writing these books. Bhagavan being the Truth, he occupied my Heart such that I wrote only on Ramana, my ecstatic devotion to him, or the affirmation of his direct teaching."

Bhagavan gave his stamp of approval on Muruganar's state of ecstasy, and the expression of it. When his first book *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* was released, it was met with much opposition and criticism. So much so, that it was banned from circulation. The reason this book was so vehemently opposed by other old devotees of Bhagavan was a verse in the book, which said: "Directing his supreme grace with a single intense glance, Bhagavan Ramana rooted out my ego and bestowed on me, in exchange, his own state of supreme bliss." This was an extempore verse, perhaps written by Bhagavan with Muruganar as the channel. However, it created a furor because the other devotees thought it was Muruganar's egoism that made him proudly claim that he was equal to Bhagavan.

One day, when seated in the hall in Bhagavan's presence, Viswanatha Swami observed Muruganar gazing at Bhagavan in absolute ecstasy, so lost in devotion, almost as though he were devouring Bhagavan's love. This deeply moved Viswanatha Swami, who thought, "He has met with so much disappointment**,** and yet he is able to transcend it by looking at Bhagavan and getting lost in his devotion." Without realizing what he was doing, he began to repeat Muruganar's poetic name, *Mugavapuri Murugan,* under his breath. Bhagavan heard him and turned to him,

saying, "Viswanatha! What is the use of repeating his name so many times? Why don't you compose a verse with those two words?" Obeying Bhagavan's command, Viswanatha Swami took a piece of paper and tried to compose a verse with those two words. But however much he tried; he could not write more than those two words and was caught in a predicament. After several attempts, he finally gave up and placed the sheet of paper with those words before Bhagavan and left the hall. When he returned, he found that Bhagavan had completed the whole verse and had written "Viswanatha" under it, even though he had contributed almost nothing to it.

Bhagavan wrote the verse as though it was Muruganar speaking :

Arunachala Ramanan, the one who resides in the Heart lotus of all Smiled at my ego and destroyed it completely with a single glance of grace. He thus showered his blessings on me, Mugavapuri Murugan, to enable me to enlighten the entire world with my work "Ramana Sannidhi Murai", which *is comparable to "Thiruvachakam."*

This verse is very important because it was written by Bhagavan himself. Unasked, Sri Bhagavan has declared in this verse and revealed that his real name was, is, and ever will be the silence of *Arunachala Ramana*. Then Bhagavan assures us that he ever resides in and as each one of us, equally, in the Heart. His glance of grace, so peacefully in communion, even from his picture, has the power to dissolve the ego idea. Bhagavan goes on to reveal that the sole function of his advent in our midst is to re-establish enlightenment throughout humanity and not just on chosen disciples. This verse is proof of this and therefore is very important.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Muruganar, in his very first encounter with Bhagavan, received his glance of grace and had an ecstatic spiritual experience. However, as sincere aspirants, we must bear in mind that this ecstasy takes time to stabilize. When this verse was written, Bhagavan again granted him a look, which established him into a state where hundreds of verses started flowing forth endlessly. Muruganar yearned to be in that inherent ecstatic state all the time. He prayed silently that in addition to the time he was spending with his Master, he would have a personal audience with him, so he could be permanently established in divine bliss. However, he did not reveal his innermost longing to anyone, including Bhagavan.

But does Bhagavan need to be told? In those days in the *Ashram*, a group of devotees would go into the forest to pluck leaves from a particular tree, to make leaf-plates. One morning, a group was planning to go to the forest. Bhagavan shot Muruganar a significant look. Muruganar understood its purport and hurriedly followed Bhagavan out of the hall. The group started to follow, but Bhagavan took him so quickly into the woody interiors of the forest that the others were left far behind. Bhagavan sat on a big log and signaled Muruganar to sit beside him. No words were exchanged between them. Bhagavan then imparted him a piercing *Darshan* and he was established in a state of inner peace and happiness. When Muruganar opened his eyes, dusk had fallen and he found himself alone. He had been in ecstasy for several hours. From then on, Muruganar remained in that state of inner bliss and quietude.

We are grateful to Muruganar. Gratitude is really the presence of God; it's welling up is his blessing. Therefore we are grateful to all the old devotees for pioneering the way for us, for encouraging us to be confident that we are on the right path, for revealing to us that every look from Bhagavan is very potent and truly spiritual, and for assuring that *Arunachala* is absorbing us. In order to pay homage to Muruganar, let us drink in some of the verses he wrote in ecstasy:

Having egotistically identified myself with the filthy body as "I am," I had slipped down into a desolate state. Now having been awakened by him Who is pure, divine, gracious Wisdom, I have attained the supreme life of silent, natural consciousness And I am ever flourishing As the perfect, pure Self. His look with grace is cool But words are the ego; Sadguru Ramana revered by yogis, I have realized, is fire Supreme. My Lord has established me at his feet The glory, of which cannot be thought of by the mind. The science of Self-experience, which surged forth when the rising ego was destroyed, Has filled my Heart. Having blossomed me as bliss by the light of the fully blossomed glance of his grace, Guru, Ramana made me, the fool, Flourish and live as the Buddha. The impurities of my mind having being destroyed, I live devoid of bondage having merged in the state of Self, The Blazing Light of Reality.

The purification, the silent wisdom, the holy hill, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, and our Heart and Self, are all the same. To wake us up to this immortal Truth, Bhagavan said, "Turn within, plunge within, and dive inward." Muruganar was a unique facet as he was not a traditional spiritual man, but a scholar. He came to Bhagavan's holy feet and was completely transformed by Bhagavan's divine presence like unto himself. This is why Muruganar says, "I have realized Lord Ramana to be fire supreme."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

From ancient times, sages and saints in all their devotion and wisdom have written thousands of poems extolling Gods and Goddesses in varied meters and styles in the Tamil language. Perhaps for the first time, in Muruganar, we have one single poet who had put down forty thousand verses in different meters, in chaste Tamil, but on one single Master, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. This is a spiritual wonder that is unique to Muruganar.

We respect this poet-saint because he elicited the Direct Teaching from Bhagavan. But for his efforts, we would not have the Direct Teachings in three remarkable treatises, which can be considered the modern *Upanishad* on *Self-Enquiry* and on *Self-realization*. These three works are *Ulladu Narpadu*, Forty verses on Reality and its supplement, also in forty verses, called *Anubandam, Upadesa Saarum*, thirty verses in S*piritual Instruction*, and lastly a poem on wisdom, *Atma Vidya Keertanam*. All three guide us, not on disciplining ourselves, but on how to experience Reality, the reality of limitless Self. This is a verse from the poems on Self-Knowledge and Wisdom:

What is the use of going into everything else, except the Self? What else is there to know for anyone? When Self itself is known, On realizing in oneself, the Self, Which is the Self-effulging home the myriads of Self the light of Self will clearly shine within. This is indeed the true display of Grace, This is indeed the ego's death, This is indeed the unfolding of Bliss Supreme.

These three treatises will guide future aspirants, and Muruganar opened the way for this. We are very grateful to him for bringing out from Bhagavan, his Direct Teachings in the form of cryptic statements.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

The genesis of these three treatises is very interesting: Before Muruganar came to Bhagavan in 1926, Bhagavan had written many stray verses, which had not even been collected and preserved. With Muruganar's natural inclination toward poetry, he researched Bhagavan's poems and found twenty-one stray verses. He collected them and found that they were not of a particular theme and therefore sat with Bhagavan, analyzing those verses. The theme that he chose was reality and how to re-cognize it. He was intent on this, because, living with Bhagavan and leading a life of pure spirituality, he understood the importance of living the Truth. He wanted Bhagavan to write about reality, practical ways to actually be the Truth and not to just talk about it. Some verses did not go with the theme, so he omitted them and asked Bhagavan to write fresh replacement verses from his own experience. This went on for twenty days.

Tamil literature usually restricts poetry on a single theme to forty verses and therefore Muruganar encouraged Bhagavan to comply with this norm. Bhagavan himself titled the collection as *Reality in Forty Verses*. While editing this work, Muruganar wanted to preserve some verses that had been omitted and requested Bhagavan to write more. Muruganar made an anthology of another forty verses, the supplement to the *Reality in Forty Verses,* and named it *The Direct Truth, Forty Verses on Reality.*

On another occasion, Muruganar was in the middle of a spontaneous flow of writing poems on the play of Gods and Goddesses, where each of those Gods was only Ramana. On completing seventy verses, he found that he was stuck where Lord Shiva gives spiritual instructions to the evolved sages performing penance in the forest. Since he adored

Bhagavan as Shiva Himself, he felt that Bhagavan should give those *Upadesas* to those sages. He pleaded with Bhagavan, "You are Shiva Himself. Here I am, stuck and unable to go on. Give me the next thirty verses as Lord Shiva's teaching to the accomplished sages." Bhagavan wrote the Thirty Verses, the step-by-step guide as how to be Truth. This is why it is called the *Thirty Verses in Spiritual Experience.*

Someone once complimented Muruganar on *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* saying, "This is the best work you have done, Muruganar." Then Muruganar, with tears in his eyes replied, "In India, the *Mahabharata* is considered as one of the epics because it contains Lord Krishna's direct teaching in the form of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Similarly, if you people consider *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* as my best work, it is because these Thirty Verses by Bhagavan are embedded in it."

On another occasion, a reputed poet who lived one hundred and fifty years ago had written a few verses saying that the hardest task for man in the world is God-realization. Muruganar was very upset with this. "It should be the easiest. How can God-realization be the most difficult?" He reasoned. He began writing in Bhagavan's presence, "Self-knowledge is the easiest thing there is." However, he could not go further because he did not know how to put it convincingly. He left the sheet of paper on Bhagavan's sofa and walked off. When he came back, Bhagavan had written a few poems on Self-knowledge, which was a description of Bhagavan's own state of experience, so it should be easy for every one of us. And if we examine Bhagavan's relationship with Muruganar, it will be found that Self-realization is indeed the easiest to attain.

For Muruganar, there was no God except Bhagavan, no Truth or no path except *Self-Enquiry,* and no other function in life other than abiding in the Self—in the Silence. The crowning brilliance in his life was not just his books and bringing out the Truth from Bhagavan—it was the fact that he actually lived every word that he wrote.

Impressed with his poetic skills, kings coveted him and asked him to grace their courts, offering him pleasures and comforts. Yet he chose to be a beggar in the streets of Tiruvannamalai and to be in Bhagavan's shadow, to live the Truth. Why did he live such a life? His life demonstrated how to have confidence in this path of *Self-Enquiry* and Direct Wisdom.

Muruganar is considered noble because he has shown all of us, through his own example, that every one of us is the immortal Truth. Since we are mostly in the *Maya* of doubt and ignorance, we think that treatises like the *Bible, Tao Te Ching,* and *Bhagavad Gita* are necessary. These teachings are already there, but we do not put them into practice. Thus, Muruganar lived the whole teaching every day, every hour, every minute. He was with Bhagavan all the time, so much so that he earned the nickname, "Shadow of Bhagavan."

The relationship between Muruganar and Bhagavan is the practical demonstration of the *guru–shishya* relationship that is extolled in Hindu scriptures. All Hindu texts are written in question-and-answer format, with the disciple asking the question and the Guru giving the answer, even on ethical issues. We will soon see how beautifully the Guru-disciple relationship is brought out in the Hindu culture when we

examine the rest of Muruganar's life.

Muruganar openly communicated with Bhagavan all the time. Bhagavan was not a well-read person, whereas Muruganar had read almost all Tamil literature. Sometimes when Bhagavan was alone with him, he would ask Muruganar to give him the essence of a book. One day Muruganar was in ecstasy, and he started sharing with Bhagavan the essence of some great books. Many books were discussed on that day with Bhagavan, who was a good listener. Then he turned to Muruganar and said, "Ultimately, the essence of all these books is one Truth. There is just one destination, but the routes and road maps are all very different. In spite of all the various paths, scriptures, texts, descriptions, examples, and illustrations, the sole essence is one single Truth."

Muruganar was so thrilled that he eagerly responded, "Yes Bhagavan it is true! Now I feel that reading these books was a waste of time."

Bhagavan hastened to correct him, saying, "You should not look at it that way. It is because we have read all these books that we have understood that their essence is one Truth. Had we not read all these books, the mind would have kept tempting us with the thought that there is a new revelation in some other book or guru. Therefore, reading also has its function." "It is the same for rituals and *poojas*," he added. "There are multifarious rituals and *poojas*, and the function of doing them all is to recognize that there exists one simple Truth. The rituals and *poojas* themselves are not that important for Self-realization."

Another day, when Muruganar entered the hall, he saw in front of Bhagavan an array of garlanded books, with *pooja* that had been offered to them, on the occasion of *Sarasvati Pooja*. Muruganar prostrated before Bhagavan and expressed a mischievous smile. Bhagavan hardly ever used words; instead he just looked questioningly at Muruganar, as if to ask what he was smiling about. Muruganar said, "Bhagavan, I am very amused that the very Truth is seated here—" he gestured toward Bhagavan, "—and these books are merely the chaff. People have worshipped the chaff instead of the essence." Being a poet, he offered this example, "Bhagavan, imagine that the best of sugarcane was squeezed to give the best sugarcane juice and even that is crystallized to make sugar. A human being is then made out of it. You are the sugarcane, and these books are like sugarcane waste. People are paying respects to that instead of to you." Muruganar smiled, as did Bhagavan.

Muruganar and Bhagavan had such a close relationship that Bhagavan would wait for him to arrive. The moment Muruganar would walk in, Bhagavan would pose a question to him even before he could prostrate. All Muruganar's senses and attention were always fully attuned to Bhagavan and his words. He would receive the question from Bhagavan and start answering while prostrating, lifting his head up like a chameleon. The devotees of Bhagavan would call this "lizard-talking." Muruganar himself told me that sometimes this would go on for a long time, and he would not even realize that he was still lying down. Viswanatha Swami would be amused with Muruganar and asked him to at least stop his "lizard-talk" when he came to the old hall. Muruganar recounted, "I knew that people were amused, but at the time of prostration, I was so absorbed in giving answers to Bhagavan that I

would not be aware that I was lying on the floor. When I would lie down, my voice would not be clear, and Bhagavan would strain himself to listen to me. None of this mattered because, for me, nothing existed except my one-pointed devotion to Bhagavan and answering him."

Sometimes when he would be seated in front of Bhagavan, poetry would flow forth. Bhagavan would go up the hill or to the cowshed. When he would come back, Muruganar would still be seated, engrossed in his writing. Bhagavan would ask him a question and wait for an answer. He would stand next to Muruganar, who was completely oblivious to his Guru's presence. He would keep writing busily and even answer his questions without realizing he was talking to Bhagavan. The others would be shocked, because according to Hindu tradition it was a sign of disrespect for a disciple to be seated while his Guru stood before him. Moreover, Bhagavan could not comfortably stand for long after the *Paathala Linga* experience.

Muruganar tried to assist the management in *Ramanashram* because it insisted that anyone living there or eating there had to contribute some service. He tried his best, but failed because he was so absorbed in his practice. Therefore, he finally had to move next door to Palakothu, in someone else's verandah**,** and beg for food to sustain his body. Bhagavan poured pure Grace on Muruganar all the time, but at the same time, never interfered in the management of the *Ashram*.

On many days, the faculty of writing poems was so strong that he would forget he had not eaten and that it was time to go to beg. One day, he had gone without food the entire day and hadn't even realized it. It was

Mahashivratri on that day, when all Hindus completely fast for twenty-four hours. He went to Bhagavan the next day, who gestured to him to accompany him around the hill. Muruganar followed him with grand enthusiasm, but was quickly fatigued because he was hungry, having been without food for two whole days and slowly trudging for eight miles with Bhagavan. Here I want to highlight the beautiful Guru-disciple relationship. After covering some distance, Bhagavan noticed Muruganar's tired face and enquired compassionately, "Did you not eat yesterday? Were you fasting because it was *Shivaratri*?" It was then that Muruganar remembered that the previous day had been *Shivaratri*.

"Yes, Bhagavan, I hadn't eaten," he replied.

After the circumambulation around the hill, Bhagavan called an attendant to follow him. He asked Muruganar to follow, too, and have a full meal at *Ramanashram*. He also appointed one of his attendants to go into the kitchen and supervise the serving of food to ensure that Muruganar would have a good meal there. When Muruganar narrated this to me, he shed tears of emotion on recollecting the solicitude of the Master.

However, this solicitude was an isolated incident. There are many instances when the opposite also took place. One day, Sub-registrar Narayana Iyer told me (and it has been written in an article published by the *Ashram*), that he and another devotee, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer, wanted an explanation from Bhagavan of the sixth verse of Bhagavan's *Eight Verses on Arunachala*. When they entered the hall with the book open, they saw Muruganar prostrating before Bhagavan and taking leave

to go into the town to beg. One of the attendants reported to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, we just ground a jackfruit to make a dessert, which we served during lunch. Muruganar donated us the money for the *Bhiksha* because it is his mother's anniversary, but we feel terrible that Muruganar has to go to the town to beg." Bhagavan's expression changed and he replied coolly, "Yes. Whose responsibility is it to invite Muruganar to stay and eat with us? It is the duty of the authorities." Muruganar went. The intention here is not to point out the harshness of the management**,** but to illustrate how Bhagavan was solely concerned with Muruganar's spiritual emancipation. Whether he had eaten or not, or whether physical comforts were there or not, was immaterial. Bhagavan's whole attention was focused on seeing that he led an austere life established in the Truth.

Muruganar lived the teaching—Self-Knowledge through *Self-Enquiry*—and showed us that he was just like us, yet it was possible for him to lead a pure life totally dedicated to the teaching. And the Master shared all his Grace with him.

There are a few more incidents to show us the closeness of Muruganar with Bhagavan. There was not only a harsh discipline, but humor too, in their relationship. Muruganar and Bhagavan would cut vegetables in the morning along with the other *sadhus*. One day they were chopping spinach, and Bhagavan was very careful to cut the root and separate the leaves from the stems. He cooked each part differently and made sure that nothing was thrown away. Bhagavan started talking about his days up on the hill, particularly about an ascetic lady who lived there, too. She was called *Keerai Paatti,* or "Spinach Granny," because she would collect

spinach and cook it. Bhagavan narrated how knowledgeable she was about every herb on the hill, knowing its name, content, and benefit. When Bhagavan had finished, he observed that Muruganar's cutting was shabby. Bhagavan wryly observed, "Your skill in chopping spinach is as striking as your success in running your household." Muruganar had run away from home and this barb hurt him a little. He then wrote a poem and placed it before Bhagavan, who was very amused reading it. All the onlookers curiously asked Bhagavan what he was smiling at. Bhagavan read out the poem that went:

Oh! Ramana! You are an extraordinarily efficient person Yes! Why don't you then marry an equally efficient young maiden, Set up a house, why should you be wandering around As a mendicant in a loin cloth Begging food When you could have easily set up an ideal household?

Bhagavan laughed heartily and the others joined him in his mirth.

Once, herbal oil was being made at the *Ashram*. When it was ready, it had to be filtered by pouring it on a cloth spread across a large vessel. Bhagavan held the cloth and asked Muruganar to pour the oil into it with a ladle. Bhagavan was talking about these herbs, some of which could even make one disappear, and re-appear at another destination. Muruganar continued to pour it and did not notice that it had begun to overflow, so rapt was he by Bhagavan's stories. Bhagavan was attentive and efficient, so he chided him saying, "Stop! What are you doing? You are spilling the oil. You are so careless!" Then to pacify him, he added cajolingly, "Come now, take all that oil and smear it on your head. Who will give you such good, costly herbal oil? Go on and put it on your

scalp." Muruganar's attention was still riveted on Bhagavan, and instead of taking the oil in his hands, he scraped up mud from the ground. Bhagavan quickly said, "Hey, stop! I asked you only to put oil on your scalp, not the mud!" This is the Guru-disciple relationship: the Guru's Grace is not only to awaken the highest wisdom, but also the responsibility to oversee the welfare of the devotees also.

Muruganar had left his wife, Meenakshi, in 1926 in Chennai to join the *Ashram*. Meenakshi was an uneducated but wonderful lady, who had no means of supporting herself. Not knowing how to tackle the world, she stayed with her father for some time, and then came to Tiruvannamalai and begged Muruganar to live with her. Whenever this happened Muruganar would disappear into the hill, and it would be a tough task for Bhagavan to find him. He would send four people after him for three whole days to bring him back! Finally Bhagavan pleaded with Muruganar to comply with Meenakshi. Muruganar was so stubborn that he ran away into the hill once more. Thus Bhagavan found another way to soothe Meenakshi. He took special care of Meenakshi. When I met her, she told me of many instances of her direct experiences with Bhagavan. I requested her to put them all in writing, which she did in Tamil, in a notebook that now adorns the shelves of the *Ashram*. Some books and articles are taken from Meenakshi's experiences written in that notebook. There was one incident which was particularly touching:

During the course of Bhagavan's bid to teach Meenakshi to just be happy, he asked, "Meenakshi what can I do for you?" Meenakshi showed him her *sari,* which was torn. "Bhagavan, look at my *sari*! What do I want? I want clothes and food to eat, which have been denied to

me because my husband is not taking me back." Bhagavan was so moved that he said, "Meenakshi, I assure you that all your life, there will not be a dearth of these two things—clothes and food." Bhagavan did not stop with just this verbal assurance. He sent Kunju Swami to Ishana Mutt, begging in the town for a *sari*. The Master, who was in a loin cloth, and had not asked anyone anything for himself, begged for a *sari* for another man's wife and offered it to her with the repeated assurance, "Meenakshi, you will be happy. You will be served clothes and food all your life."

When she narrated this in 1960, I started taking care of her. I would send her two *saris* every year. She was a very worldly person and could not stay in *Ramanashram*. She preferred to stay in Chennai, so I arranged for her to be given food in seven houses. When I came to know that Meenakshi was on her death bed, I came to Chennai to spend some time with her. She blessed me profusely. I asked her, "Meenakshi Ma, how are you?" Her stomach was swollen. She said, "I am very happy." I could not believe her. She added, "Bhagavan is with me all the time and has fulfilled his assurance to me through you. I have no dearth of clothes or food. Ganesa, Bhagavan is God Himself." Meenakshi could not have a happy life as Muruganar's wife, but she was always happy until her last moments as Bhagavan's pet child. It was a privilege for me to interact with her and be of some service to her.

During Bhagavan's last days, Muruganar would compose a poem every day, ending with, "Bhagavan, you should live a hundred years." Muruganar trained a devotee, Padma Venkataraman, to sing this every evening in Bhagavan's presence. She told me one day, "Muruganar was

very particular about correct pronunciation and using his exact words." One day she sang the words *jnana bhandara nayaka,* which in Tamil means "the custodian of the treasury of wisdom." While singing with emotion, she involuntarily sang *bhokisham,* which also means "treasury" instead of *bhandara*. As soon as the singing was over, Bhagavan told an attendant, "Go and ask her if Muruganar used that particular word." Bhagavan even knew Muruganar's vocabulary so well—he knew he would not use the word *bhokisham*. The relationship between the Guru and the disciple is such that they are the same Heart of being.

All the devotees were distraught because Bhagavan was going to drop the body. They wondered what they would do without him physically before them. Therefore, under Muruganar's leadership they sent a mission to Bhagavan to ask him for a message. Did Bhagavan not know what they were asking for? His last words were, "Put my teachings into practice." It was Muruganar who elicited from Bhagavan the direct teachings of *Self-Enquiry* and wisdom, and it was he who brought out Bhagavan's last message of putting his teachings into practice. Muruganar has sung so much about "I am not the body," yet when Bhagavan dropped the body, he could not contain his grief.

Since 1956, I had also grown quite close to Muruganar. I had completed my graduation and remained for two years in the *Ashram*. I observed Muruganar, Devaraja Mudaliar, Munagala Venkataramaia, and a few other old devotees like Sub-registrar, Narayana Iyer, and was taken in by their pure living. When I came back in 1960, this helped me dedicate myself to the original old devotees. I could begin to understand the depth of their understanding. Muruganar was still begging, though he

did not go to the town; he would come just before lunch time to the *Ramanashram*, extend his upper cloth in front of the kitchen, and the cooks would put a little food in it. I would watch his movements, so silent and beautiful. On one of those occasions, I had a small camera. "Swami" I called out! He looked at me, and I snapped a picture. Muruganar blessed me, even though he reprimanded me later, saying, "Do not do this anymore." Viswanatha Swami told me, "A scolding from a great sage is much more persuasive than his blessing."

When Muruganar would visit Bhagavan's *Samadhi*, his movement was almost poetic, since he was completely lost in meditation. I once asked him, "Muruganar Swami! What is your attitude when you come and prostrate here?" "There is only Bhagavan, there is nothing else," he replied. For him, there was only Bhagavan—no Muruganar, no *Ramanashram*, and not even prostration. Bhagavan is everything. Everything else is not.

I didn't know about Muruganar's two stupendous works then, approved and edited by Bhagavan—*Ramana Sannidhi Murai* and *Guru Vachaka Kovai*. I had brought him in to the *Ashram* and was looking after him with the other friends. My sister would sing some of his songs, and he would ask her to sing songs particularly from *Ramana Sannidhi Murai*, hearing which, he would be reduced to tears. On enquiring about the reason for his tears, he replied, "I was in the presence of Bhagavan one day, and he was looking at a girl child intently. I asked him, "Who is this baby who has received so much of your Grace and Blessings?" Bhagavan replied, "Do you not know? This is our Lakshmi." Muruganar then again shed tears and said that when Bhagavan used the word '*our*',

it implied a shared spiritual experience.

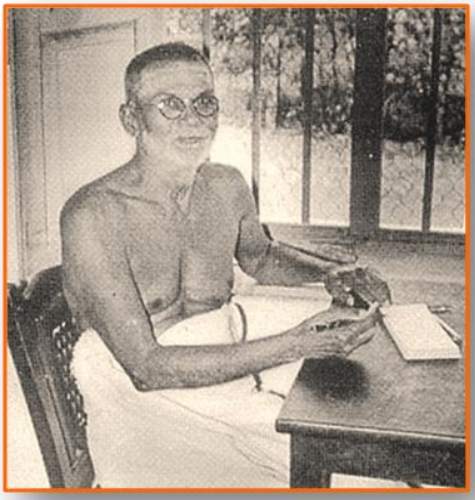
I asked him to tell me more about *Ramana Sannidhi Murai*. "When it was privately published, the management refused to sell it in the *Ashram*. So, many incidents of protest took place, and it is good that you are not aware of them," he recalled. "But I want to tell you this—one day I was so upset that I prostrated before Bhagavan. When I stood up, Bhagavan said, 'have no worry, we will publish it ourselves.'"

I ran back to the office and tried to get a copy of *Ramana Sannidhi Murai,* but couldn't find it and it wasn't available in the library, either. I spoke to some devotees in Chennai and got a copy of *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* and had it printed. When I presented it to Muruganar, his eyes moistened as he gratefully said, "Look, Bhagavan has fulfilled his prophecy." This happened a few weeks before he passed away. Then he told me about the other book, *Guru Vachaka Kovai,* which had the Guru's sayings that Bhagavan himself had edited and titled. With great enthusiasm, *Guru Vachaka Kovai* was also brought out by the *Ashram* as its prestigious publication. My heart beamed with joy that Bhagavan's assurance—"We will publish ourselves"--was thus successfully fulfilled!

When Muruganar was dying, the doctors said he was in a coma. Dr. Hugo Maier sent word saying, "His breathing will stop any moment. Come here quickly." It was three o'clock in the morning. I stood close to Muruganar. Hugo and the other doctors told me, "He is in a coma. He is not going to respond to you."

"No. I will sing *Arunachala Aksharamanamaalai*," I said firmly. Despite their repeated objections, I leaned close to Muruganar and whispered into his ear, "Swami, I want to sing *Aksharamanamaalai*." The body was still, but his eyebrows went up. This was witnessed by Hugo and the other doctors. Maybe they were right, too. The body was in a coma, but the Heart was in a spiritual presence, which out of compassion responded by moving the eyebrows.

We all sang and then his *samadhi* took place. We took Muruganar's body and interred it. His shrine is situated in between Mountain *Arunachala* and Bhagavan's Old Hall.



MURUGANAR AT THE DESK

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Jagadisa Shastri

Ramana Maharshi was ever welcoming, respectful, and addressed everyone reverentially, not only human beings; even birds, animals, plants, and trees, but exceptions were also there. With a few, he was also very close.

Even though Jagadisa Shastri was his full name, Bhagavan used to call him "Jagadisa." Jagadisa Shastri came to Bhagavan at a very young age when Bhagavan was at *Virupaksha* cave. Bhagavan was very fond of him. In the course of his life with Bhagavan, there were two remarkable instances, which will be not only of interest but very instructive also.

Jagadisa Shastri had terminal cancer in the abdomen. He and his wife had put up a hut in front of *Ramanashram* and were living very happily. Their whole happiness was shattered because the doctors diagnosed the cancer as incurable, and the family members also were reconciled to the inevitable end. The local doctor, who was a devotee of Ramana Maharshi, even, predicted that it was a question of days. The end was certain. At the eleventh hour, Jagadisa Shastri offered prayers to Bhagavan. Since he was a Sanskrit poet he composed eight verses appealing to Bhagavan, which are called *Prapati Ashtngma*. *Ashtagma* means eight verses. *Prapati* means surrender. These poems captured the splendor and intensity of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi as *Satguru*.

Every verse ended with the sentence, *I surrender totally to you, Oh! my Master*. The third verse was very moving**:** *I surrender to the chastiser of death in order to be rid of the fear of the all-devouring alligator tongue.* It goes on like that because Bhagavan was the chastiser of death, the conqueror of death, so it is very aptly mentioned in this verse. It appealed. Jagadisa Shastri was snatched out of definite death. This *Prapati Ashtagam* was written in 1945 on his death bed, but he lived until the ripe age of eighty-nine, and he dropped the body only in 1983.

In the second incident, Jagadisa Shastri and his wife were very happy. Faith in Bhagavan had saved Jagadisa Shastri from positive death. They had put up a hut in front of *Ramanashram* in a land purchased by a Westerner. Unfortunately, that Westerner underwent some financial strain and had to sell it. He came to Jagadisa Shastri and said, "I will pay you compensation for this hut. Whatever you have spent I will pay, but I will sell it." For Jagadisa Shastri, it was almost as if his whole happiness had been removed, because he had no other place to stay at *Arunachala,* and this meant he had to leave the hill. It was such a rude shock. He got the money from the Westerner and ran straight to Bhagavan in the hall. Bhagavan was seated, and Jagadisa Shastri dropped the money on Bhagavan's lap.

What is so great about it? In 1896, on September 1, when Bhagavan came to *Arunachala*, he had only a few coins. He went to *Iyer Kulam*, (meaning a *Brahmin*'s pool), had a shave, put on the loin cloth, and threw away the coins and sweets that he was carrying. Bhagavan never handled money the rest of his life.

Once Bhagavan was asked: Whatever we offer in the hall--fruits, biscuits, chocolates, vegetables, rice--you accept anything, but why do you not accept money? Bhagavan's humorous reply was, "All the other things I can eat, but I cannot eat money."

In the case of Jagadisa Shastri, Bhagavan allowed the money to be kept on his lap. This is what N. Balarama Reddy, who was present at the Hall, shared with every one of us. Bhagavan was keeping it because Jagadisa Shastri was weeping, and his wife was also weeping until that time when Jagadisa could get through his depression and smile at Bhagavan. Bhagavan said to Jagadisa, "Keep this money," only after lifting the depression of the family. Bhagavan went out of his way with boundless compassion for the devotee.

Jagadisa Shastri's Sanskrit knowledge was very well utilized. His most important contribution was that he had written commentaries in Sanskrit on *Upadesa Saaram***,** and on each step, giving us instruction on *Arunachala Pancharatnam* from the light of Bhagavan. He also composed the litany *Sri Ramana Sahasranama Stuti. Sahasranama* means the mythical aspect of the thousand names of Ramana Maharshi, which is now being chanted at the Shrine of Sri Bhagavan in *Ramanashram*. It is a guiding prayer book that we had shared—the *Ramana Ashtottara, the one hundred and eight Names of the Maharshi.* The *Ramana Sahasranama Stuti* written by Jagadisa Shastri was thoroughly perused by Bhagavan. If one is a ritualistic person, he can do it as a ritual. If one is an intellectual, then there is a wealth of intellect in it. If one wants the Truth directly, it is enough if he stayed with one Name in it. He will directly commune with Truth.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

It was Jagadisa Shastri who invoked Bhagavan to write a Sanskrit verse on the direct teaching. He being a Sanskrit poet, one day he was murmuring a phrase, *Hridaya Kuhara Madhye*, in the inner core of the Heart. It was repeating itself in him and he endeavored to compose a verse. Though a great Sanskrit poet, he could not add any more words in addition to that single word. He left it on Bhagavan's sofa. When he came back, in the same paper, Bhagavan had completed the verse. One can see this verse engraved on the wall of the New Hall. The Sanskrit verse means:

In the inmost core, the Heart Shines as Brahman alone, As I—I, the Self aware. Enter deep into the Heart By search for Self, or diving deep, With breath under check. Thus abide ever in Truth Supreme.

This powerful verse defining the awareness of Self is a guiding light for many an aspirant. We all are grateful to Jagadisa Shastri.

Family circumstances and other problems forced Jagadisa Shastri to go away and shift his residence from *Arunachala* to Chennai. Until his last day, he dedicated his life to spreading the efficacy of the *Vedas*, the greatness of the Sanskrit language, and highlighting the essence of Bhagavan's direct teaching to yearning aspirants.

I had the good fortune of meeting Jagadisa Shastri in 1956. I was studying my postgraduate course in philosophy; my professor in the university was Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan, who was a great devotee of Ramana Maharshi. Every year, he would celebrate Ramana Maharshi's birthday at his residence in Chennai for three days, arranging many talks by eminent scholars. One of the talks was given by Jagadisa Shastri. I was literally spellbound by his talk. He was expounding on the uniqueness of *Satguru*, Ramana Maharshi, not just conforming to the scriptures, but transcending them! That day he was quoting a verse from the *Supplement to Forty Verses on Reality*. It says that for a Self-realized person, a *jnani*, the effects of the two *Karmas*—*Sanchita, Agami*—gets nullified, while the *Prarabdha* will still stick to him. In Hindu culture, it is equivalent to a man married to three wives, and if he dies, only two wives would become widows, but the third will not be made or considered a widow.

I was given the opportunity to drop Jagadisa Shastri at his residence in Chennai. I prostrated to him and said**,** "I am so thrilled," and that I wanted him to tell me more on Bhagavan's uniqueness. He said, "Come to me tomorrow. I will tell you more." The next day, he quoted four verses from *Reality in Forty Verses***:** *v.36, v.37, v.39, v.40*. He added, "If you go through them carefully, you will see how Bhagavan has transcended scriptural statements and has presented the Truth as it actually is, and that the Truth is our true nature."

In verse 36, it is said that if one thinks, "I am the body," the thought, "No, I am That," will help to abide as That. But should one keep on thinking that? Does any man keep on thinking that he is a man? No,

since one is always a man. Likewise, there is no need for one to think "I am 'That' to be 'That'."

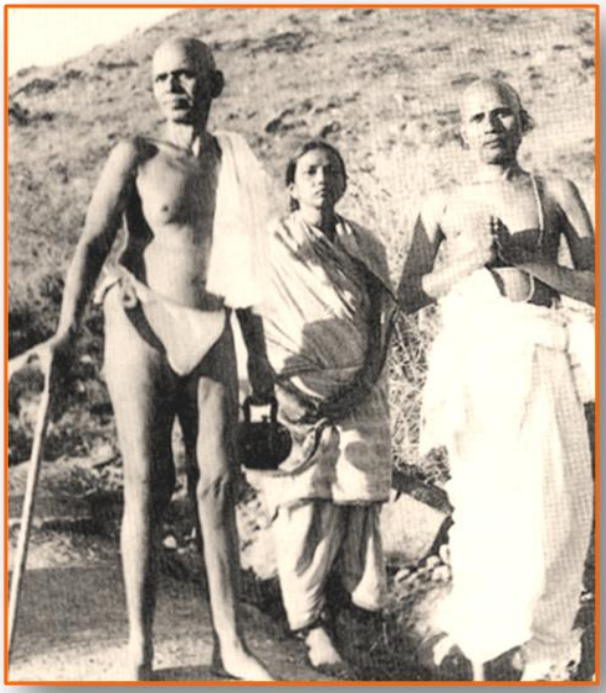
In verse 37, it is said, "Duality is true while aspiring, and nonduality is reached only on realizing the Self." Bhagavan refutes that, by citing the story of the "tenth man." Ten men crossed a stream and wanted to make sure they were all safe. In counting, each one left himself out and found only nine. A passerby gave each a blow and made them count ten blows. One is always realized, viz., in the true state of Awareness, whether one is aspiring for or already established in the state of Self-realization.

In verse 39, it is only so long as the thought, "I am bound," continues that the thoughts of bondage and liberation exist. Through quiet enquiry, "Who is bound?" one realizes one's ever-revealed and eternal Self, and the thoughts of both bondage and liberation get dissolved, simultaneously.

Verse 40 refers to the attainment of Liberation, according to the philosophical systems, like *Saiva Siddhanta*, wherein it is emphasized that when a saint dies, he should turn into a "form," like a *lingam* or a cross, or should become a "flame," which is formless, or become with and without form, as the sound "Om." Bhagavan refuted that and affirmed that the destruction of ego, which alone projects thoughts of form and formlessness, is Liberation.

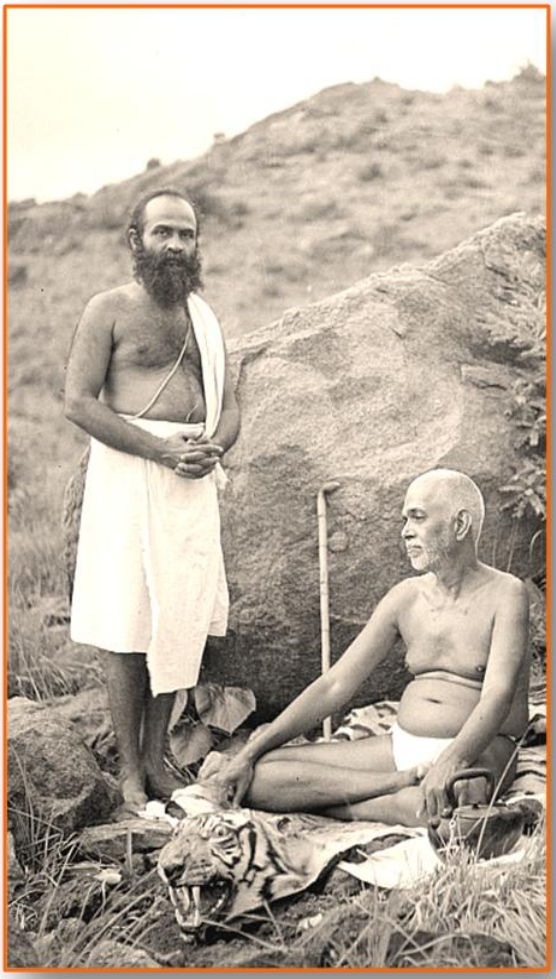
I was very happy that Jagadisa Shastri clarified the uniqueness and greatness of Sri Bhagavan, who, while accommodating scriptural

concepts, also helps us transcend their limitations and dogma. As concepts, everything projected as thought is falsehood. The source from which all thoughts sprout and into which they merge—the Heart, the Self—alone, is the sole, single, and simple Truth. I once again prostrated to Jagadisa Shastri.



RAMANA, JAGADISA'S WIFE, AND JAGADISA

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN



DAIVARATA WITH BHAGAVAN ON HILL

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Kapali Shastri Daivarata

Notable personalities like Madan Mohan Malviya, Vinoba Bhave, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, and the first Indian republic president, Dr. Rajendraprasad, all revered Daivarata as a Master, as a Great Vedic Rishi. In fact, Vinoba Bhave is a direct disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, whom the whole of humanity reveres as a great sage. Whenever Gandhi was confronted with a doubt on the *Vedas* via inquiry, he said, "Go to Daivarata." He would direct them to Daivarata wherever he was, giving the reason, "He knows all the four *Vedas* thoroughly; he will explain." And that Daivarata came and stayed with Bhagavan at *Skandashram*.

Bhagavan was very fond of him. Daivarata, being a very austere saint, would live with Bhagavan and then go to the town and beg food every day, but would not eat it there. He would bring it to *Skandashram* and then put it before Bhagavan in his traditional way, "*Indraya swaha*," which means, "I am offering to this Lord of Lords," which is the Vedic way of offering to the Gods. He considered Bhagavan as the Lord of Lords, and when Bhagavan took something, Daivarata would eat only what was left.

Daivarata is a splendid ascetic saint and scholar. In 1917, he was seated in front of Bhagavan in *Skandashram* along with Kavyakanta Ganapathy Muni and six other illustrious scholars. They were seated in front of

Bhagavan. They were badgering Bhagavan with questions, beautiful spiritual questions. They are all recorded and brought out as *Sri Ramana Gita*. The English translation is also available. All these six were asking questions, and Daivarata was also available. He shared with us that he had asked Bhagavan a crucial question—the most valid question for us--as to what was the paramount duty of an aspirant. Bhagavan's definitive answer was that "the paramount duty of an aspirant, anywhere, whatever path an aspirant may be treading is the same. The paramount attention is discovering one's own true nature, not finding the greatness of God, but one's own true nature is that paramount duty." How to do that? Bhagavan stated: "Withdrawing all thoughts from sense objects through surrender, one should remain fixed in steady nonverbal enquiry."

Daivarata was from his childhood interested in *Bhajans*; he was a Bhakti man, and he would dance and dance. In those days Bhagavan would go from *Skandashram* around the hill along with the devotees, and whenever Daivarata was there, Bhagavan would wink at him and start singing and dancing, and Daivarata would jump up. This is what Bhagavan would say: "Daivarata will jump from one end of the road to the other." He was so energetic, full of energy, joy, and enthusiasm. There are certain things I would like to bring out about the significance of Daivarata, which are yet to be shared. Immersed in Bhagavan's beauty, he writes, "His eyes glitter with clear light—full of peace and pure love, like God's. His eyelids do not close. Even though his eyes are so wide open, they remain steady and introverted. To sit and gaze at his countenance is itself true worship. You need not even offer flowers . . . just gaze."

Now, as always, even just gaze at an image of Maharshi. People become so engrossed in his Darshan that they do not like to leave that Divine presence. Daivarata is also the only person who has recorded an evaluation of Bhagavan's voice. No one else has told me this. Only Daivarata's records have informed me how Ramana Maharshi's voice sounded. "Maharshi's voice is melodious and soft as that of a child; it is exceedingly sweet. At times it is so soft that it is not even heard clearly. It must be heard with attention. When we hear his voice, we feel as if we are hearing a Divine and subtle voice coming across the firmament. His is the form of Divine speech so vastly extolled in the *Vedas*." Who else can give that credential except a Vedic scholar? He says that in the *Vedas* it is extolled as the Divine speech. My Master, Ramana Maharshi's voice was Divine speech.

Who is this Daivarata? His original name was Ganesa Shastri Kosomani. Having a long name, he was called Ganesa and sometimes Gajanan. He came from a very traditional family, so in his heritage, *Vedas* and Sanskrit were flowing. His inclination from childhood was toward Bhakti and Devotion. A saint from Ujjain visited him and initiated him into Bhakti. In our unique Hindu culture we live our life as initiated by sages and saints. He was initiated into devotional life by an Ujjain saint and, after some time, yet another saint trained him in Hatha Yoga practices. He became a great adept because of that saint's blessing. The third saint, Kavyakanta Ganapathy Muni, met him, and Daivarata was immediately attracted to him, as he was also a Sanskrit scholar. Kavyakanta Ganapathy Muni, looking at Gajanan, asked him, "What is your name?" I think this saint is a great taskmaster in changing names! He changed Venkataraman, the boy's name, into Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Daivarata was originally called Ganesa Shastri Kosomani,

popularly known as Gajanan. Kavyakanta Ganapathy Muni said, ´From today onward, you will be known as Daivarata, named after Daivarata, who Z D V D F H O H V W L D O E H L Q J U Thus he named him Daivarata.

It was Kavyakanta Ganapathy Muni who actually brought Daivara to Skandashram. At the very first sight of Bhagavan, Daivarata was swept D Z D \ E \ % K D J D Y D Q · V V S R Q W D Q H R X V D E L G so well adorned in all the four Vedas. Maharshi welcomed him to stay with Kavyakanta Ganapathy Muni up on the hill, and wherever Kavyakanta Ganapathy Muni went, Daivarata followed him. In 1936, Kavyakanta Ganapathy Muni dropped the body, so Daivarata left for Nepal. In his eagerness to be soaked in the Vedas and to lead a Vedic life, he felt Nepal would be appropriate. And indeed he was supported by the king of Nepal. Wherever any of these three people were, abou whom we are sharing, they were writing letters to Bhagavan and Bhagavan would be waiting for their letters. He would respond to them either by writing or by thought or just simply by silent Grace. The last line of every letter that Daivarata wrote from Nepal would be, always at the Holy feet of Sri Bhagavan.

Daivarata was advocating Bhakti and Yoga all his life. In 1960, I had the good fortune of receiving this Holy man at Sri Ramanashram. One sighting was enough. I could see that here was a Saint, a Vedic Saint. Actually, at that time, he was extolled as Maharishi Daivarata, though at Ramanashram he was not using that title. However, I could feel that here was the Maharshi. I had the good fortune of serving him, though his needs were very little. % K D J D Y D Q K L P V H O I K D G H | austerity. He could live on mere mangos or Neem leaves. He woul

drink a cup full of cow urine and eat a few mangos or Neem leaves, and he could live happily for days.

When he came in 1960, I attended to him. I wanted to know more about Bhagavan, so I asked this man. He was very childlike, this saint Daivarata, so I could ask him anything. I said, "Daivarata, you will tell me about Bhagavan as Man and also Bhagavan as God." He just smiled at me. Perhaps he was laughing at my ignorance. Then he said only one sentence: "Bhagavan was God, living within the garb of the human frame, the man." He described Bhagavan as man and God in one sentence. He continued because I was eager to know if Bhagavan had the tremendous powers rumored. Daivarata said that apparently he had tremendous powers, but was concealing them all, not exhibiting them or making them known. Immediately, I asked, "What do you mean by that? Might you give an example?"

"Yes, I can tell you but can you understand?" he asked. So I responded to him, "Yes, tell me. I will try." Then he told me that Bhagavan apparently had the power to go back to the past and alter it. "Can you understand this?" he asked me, for which my reply was, "Not only can I not understand, I do not even know what you are talking about." Then he was kind enough to share with me what he experienced. He said he was wandering in 1940 in the Himalayas, in the snowy peaks, just an ascetic immersed in meditation. Suddenly he noticed tears were dropping from his eyes and he wanted to know why. Then some force . . . a prompting from his Heart . . . caused him to feel a separation from his Master, Ramana Maharshi, causing this anguish. Immediately, without any preparation, he came straight to *Arunachala*. It took fifteen days. He came and stood in front of Bhagavan. Bhagavan saw Daivarata

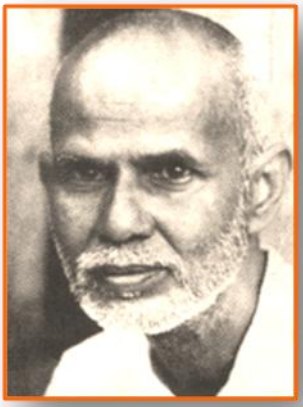
actually melting in tears and joy. Bhagavan said, "Just a few moments ago I thought of you. I had a strong urge to see you, and now you are here!" What beautiful synchronicity!

Daivarata said, "Hey, my namesake!" He was Ganesa, and I am also called Ganesa. " ey, my namesake, have you understood it?" I said,

Bhagavan willed that I should be here. Fifteen days ago, I realized that my Master is calling. Bhagavan confirms, 'Just few moments back I thought of you, Daivarata.' Not only did he share the thought, but he then took me aside for the important sharing of the day. Daivarata revealed it only to me, not the arrogant "me," but the silent "me" that includes all. I am also revealing it to you all. Bhagavan took him aside and then said, "You have a divine role here. That is why I thought strongly about you a few moments back. It is a spiritual secret." Daivarata followed him up on the hill and asked him what that secret is. He said, "While Bhagavan was walking alone with me on the hill, he turned to me and said, 'Abide in *Arunachala*, Abide in the Heart; remember, Heart is thy name, is what I sang, abide in the Heart, abide in *Arunachala*.' Ever since then, Bhagavan constantly lives in my Heart as *Arunachala*."

It is auspicious to remember these three saints. Just as Daivarata has imparted to us that, "Heart is thy name Oh! *Arunachala,*" to turn our attention to the Heart and to be *Arunachala* is the message of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi to each one of us here and now. is not just the spatial place alone in India. Whoever turns within to the Heart is living in *Arunachala*, the omniscient everpresent 'Self', the substratum. Daivarata had to go away in 1960, so he told me, "Ganesan, from that

K. Lakshmana Sarma (Who)



Lakshmana was a poet scholar who is equally very remarkable, not because of acquisition of scholarship, but because he denied any form of recognition for himself. Many people do not even know what his name was, because he hid himself under the pseudonym "*Who*." This notable scholar poet's name is K. Lakshmana Sarma. In the recent editions of *Maha Yoga*, you will find "*Who,*" a.k.a., Lakshmana Sarma, but previously nobody knew who he was . . . such was his anonymity.

Lakshmana Sarma was a lawyer and a naturopath. He came to Ramana Bhagavan in 1928. He was captivated by the very look of Bhagavan and stayed on. One day, Bhagavan asked him, "Have you read *Ulladu Narpadu*?" Forty Verses on Reality composed by Ramana Maharshi himself. Lakshmana Sarma said, "No," and also added, "I do not know classical Tamil." He was fortunate enough to add, "If Bhagavan teaches me, I will learn it."

Bhagavan was as compassionate as ever, and the daily sessions with Lakshmana Sarma were long and in depth. Later on, when the book was printed (he never intended for it to be a book), Sarma described the sessions that he had with Bhagavan and how he worked with what Bhagavan taught him. During that time, Lakshmana Sarma lived in a hut at Palakothu. When he returned to his hut in the night, he would compile all that he had gathered into a verse in Sanskrit, since he himself was a good Sanskrit scholar. He would show the verse to Bhagavan the next day, and Bhagavan would read it and correct it. Occasionally, there would be a look of dissatisfaction on the face of Bhagavan, and therefore Sarma would rework the verse.

Bhagavan rarely condemned any one, rarely criticized any one, rarely pointed out the mistakes; but from his face, from his eyes, one would understand his response. This is how Lakshmana Sarma's class was going on, not just for one day, or two days, or two months, but for three years. Forty-two plus forty-two equals eighty-four verses; to be explained and recast by Bhagavan. It is all a significant lesson for aspirants, who, in this information age, would like to demand a question and be answered instantly.

How he came to write about it, Lakshmana Sarma himself said, "Bhagavan began to teach me. I needed to precede slowly, one verse at a time. To make sure that I fully understood what Bhagavan had shared with me, I composed verses in Sanskrit embodying the meanings of each verse. Before going on to the next verse I would submit each verse to Bhagavan to make sure I had faithfully and accurately translated his words. If approval from Bhagavan was not forthcoming I would recast

the verse as often as necessary until he was satisfied. In this way, I studied all the verses and translated them into Sanskrit. Having done this job I found I was unable to stop at the first translation. The text of *Ulladu Narpadu* took complete possession of me. I felt impelled to go on revising the Sanskrit again and again. I showed each new verse to Bhagavan and obtained his approval before I proceeded to the next step. When for the next time I reached the end of the forty verses, I went back to the beginning and started all over again. It seemed to me that no amount of time and labor would be too much for achieving the end that I had in mind. The preparation of an almost perfect and faithful rendering into Sanskrit of this Holy text resulted in a Sanskrit text bearing the title, *Sad Darsanam,* meaning, 'the Vision of Reality.'" Lakshmana Sarma worked so hard that Bhagavan, himself, made a comment: "For Lakshmana Sarma it was *tapas,* again and again going on revising the verses, studying them, and living by them."

When he had almost completed the Sanskrit verses, Lakshmana Sarma gave them to the distinguished Sanskrit scholar, Kapali Shastri, to read. Kapali Shastri said, "I will send it to my Master, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, the Sanskrit scholar. He will go through the Sanskrit and suggest something if necessary." Kavyakantha was away at Sirisi, so this was sent to him, and when he read it, he was much taken in by the depth of the subject dealt with in all of these forty verses. He was such a genuine extempore poet that instead of editing these Sanskrit verses, he composed afresh the whole thing and cast it. Kavyakantha had good, responsive admirers, so they printed it with the same title, *Sad Darsanam,* and sent it to Kapali. (Later on, Kapali Shastri even wrote a commentary on it). When this was brought in the 1930s to the notice of Bhagavan,

he and Lakshmana Sarma both appreciated the poesy aspect of those verses. From the poetic point of view, the fresh verses composed by Kavyakantha were definitely superior. But Lakshmana Sarma found that in many places the translation was not true to the original Tamil text of Bhagavan. He went to Bhagavan and openly told him, "Bhagavan, in many places, the meanings have deviated from what you wrote in the original." He had the right to say that because he had worked for three years, not only on the Tamil, but also on the Sanskrit version. Our Master never condemns if somebody states even factual mistakes. So Bhagavan told Lakshmana Sarma, "If you think you can expound the teaching more faithfully, you may write your own commentary." That is Bhagavan's way. If you find fault in something, then that shows you know the correct thing. Why do you merely point out the mistake or wrongness, and not state the correct thing? Lakshmana Sarma took it as an encouragement. With enthusiasm he worked hard and wrote elaborate notes and commentary, in Tamil, for each verse. At that time a Tamil monthly magazine's editor was there, and he volunteered to serialize it in his magazine.

Every time the magazine came, Bhagavan would cut out the pages of the commentary and, with keen interest, paste those pages on a sheet of brown paper to preserve them. Once the entire commentary had been published, he himself stitched the pages into a book. When the devotees noticed Bhagavan's deep interest in the commentary, they decided to have it printed. However, for some reason, the *Ashram* was unable to print the commentary. So, Lakshmana Sarma himself brought out a private edition of the book, called *Ulladu Narpadu Urai*--not for personal reasons, but because of Bhagavan's interest in it.

Soon after the commentary was published, an interesting incident took place. One day, Chinna Swami was busy with some office work. He was so absorbed in it that he did not observe Bhagavan patiently waiting to get his attention from behind a window. Bhagavan could have very well called out to him. But he would rarely do that. After fifteen minutes, someone else noticed Bhagavan waiting and told Chinna Swami, "Bhagavan is waiting for you behind your window." Bhagavan told him, "Everyone acclaims that Lakshmana Sarma's commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu* is the best so far. Nobody has studied the text the way Lakshmana Sarma has." Chinna Swami took the hint and the *Ashram* immediately published it. Chinna Swami himself studied the work and started recommending to everyone, saying, and "Please read *Ulladu Narpadu Urai*. It is a true reflection of Bhagavan's teaching." *Ulladu Narpadu Urai* was acclaimed by all as the best publication of the year, and even today it is considered an invaluable Tamil text.

Muruganar once told me, "Lakshmana Sarma lived *Ulladu Narpadu."* When I asked him what he meant by that, he clarified, "Whatever was conveyed by the Master in *Ulladu Narpadu,* Sarma practiced to the core." He lived, breathed, and thought only about the forty glorious and sacred verses. Since he was a scholar of English, Tamil, and Sanskrit, he constantly kept translating the verses into these languages. The introductory sentences of his translation reveal the great adoration he had for the Master: "The ancient lore—the Upanishads—has received a striking confirmation from the life and teachings of the Sage of *Arunachala*—Bhagavan Ramana. To his disciples, both Eastern and Western, the written and oral teachings of Bhagavan are the primary revelations. The ancient lore is of value because it is found to be in full

accord with the teachings of Bhagavan. But even for those who look upon the ancient lore as the primary authority, the teachings of a living sage must be profoundly interesting. In these pages, a systematic presentation of the old and new revelations is being shared."

His English translation of his original Tamil book was titled, "*Maha Yoga*." For many years, this remained the only English book that was an authentic rendering of Bhagavan's teaching of *Atma Vichara,* or *Self-Enquiry*. It was only after Bhagavan's *Maha Samadhi* that other English publications such as Arthur Osborne's books and "Talks" were made available in English. These books gave the English audience access to the direct teachings of Bhagavan.

What made Lakshmana Sarma give the book such a title? Toward the end of chapter nine of the book, in a beautiful chapter called *The Quest*, Lakshmana Sarma reveals why he called it *Maha Yoga*. "Bhagavan once said that the question, "*Who am I"* is the quest that one has to undertake. Since all the *yogas* are included in the question, "*Who am I"* it is called *Maha Yoga*. Bhagavan bound the final proofs of the manuscript and preserved them since he himself had spent many hours reading the proofs. Moreover, as he humorously put it, "Who has the money to buy it?" As Bhagavan was going through the ancient *Puranas*, he found a Sanskrit verse in *Kurma Purana*, which he transcribed at the bottom of the ninth chapter. The Sanskrit verse read, "The *yoga* in which one sees the Self, and which Lord Shiva declares is 'Me,' is the one immaculate, eternal bliss that is considered to be *Maha Yoga,* pertaining to the Supreme Lord." This is what Bhagavan wrote below chapter nine.

Lakshmana Sarma and Muruganar were good friends and ardent devotees of Bhagavan. Both of them came to Bhagavan with knowledge of neither Vedanta nor Advaita, and hence, they could imbibe whatever Bhagavan directly told them. Muruganar had already written *Guru Vachaka Kovai,* or *The Garland of Guru's Sayings,* in the form of Tamil poetry. Muruganar and Lakshmana Sarma selected three hundred verses, and the latter translated this into English and published it under the title, *Revelation*. All these English books are of great value to those who know only English. When someone asked why he wrote all his books under the pseudonym of '*Who'*, he said, "These books express all that I have learned from my Master, Bhagavan, and my friend, Muruganar. So, 'Who' wrote them?"

Lakshmana Sarma practiced naturopathy and returned to his native place to treat people. Even today, he is considered to be the father of Naturopathy in India. Yet his mind was tuned to the teachings of Bhagavan. After Bhagavan dropped the body, Lakshmana Sarma continued composing Sanskrit verses on the teachings and provided his collection of verses, titled, "*Sri Ramana Paravidyoupanishad."* The *Ashram* brought out the book in English. The book is meant to be lived by. Such is the beauty of the book. I want to pay homage to Lakshmana Sarma by quoting a few verses from this invaluable book on this supreme science, as taught by Bhagavan:

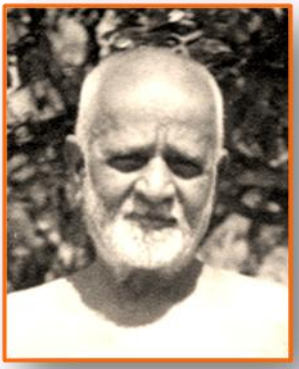
Verse 386: "The Master (Bhagavan) says that the original sin affirmed to be the cause of death by the Christians does not pertain to the act done by the first person. It pertains to the sense of 'I-am-the-body.'" [The sense of being human is due to the identification of one's Self with the body. Consequently, "original sin" is only the mistaken body identification.]

Verse 439: "If it is taught that ignorance exists, then it is present for the aspirant to question, 'To whom does the ignorance belong?' If by this enquiry, the Truth of the Self is sought, the ignorant one and the ignorance both become extinct."

Verse 453: "In the words of Bhagavan, 'there is nothing real apart from you. You are one alone, transcending time, space, causation, and everything else. Cast off the delusion of ignorance and remain at peace.' Thus, did Sri Ramana, my Master, teach about the state of the true being of the Self."

Verse 505: "The meaning of the *Vedantic* text 'You are That', 'That thou art,' is that the Supreme Being itself shines as the real Self. In the process of seeking the Self, if one gives up the notion, 'I-am-the-body,' and becomes aware of one's true nature, then one becomes established in the Heart and shines as That."

Munagala Venkataramaia



Munagala Venkataramaia is the compiler of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi,* which has become the primary text for almost all sincere devotees and admirers of Sri Bhagavan. In the first week of September 1896, a school boy named S. Venkataraman went from Madurai, where he was studying, to his native village, Sholavandan, and told his mother, "Mother, a Brahmin boy from my neighborhood school ran away from home." S. Venkataraman did not know that destiny would bind him with that run-away boy. In 1918, he was to meet Bhagavan at *Skandashram,* and from 1930 onward, S. Venkataraman was to be a constant companion of Bhagavan, until Bhagavan dropped the body. In later years, S. Venkataraman came to be known as Munagala S. Venkataramaia.

Munagala S. Venkataramaia came from a *Vedic* family His ancestors and his brothers studied the *Vedas* in the *Vedapatashala*. He knew Sanskrit well, but chose to go to an English school in the next town. Subsequently he went on to study in a college. He got married even as he was studying. Since he was research-oriented, he found himself a job in a laboratory in Mumbai. His daughter was born in Mumbai in 1900. Although he was extremely fond of his daughter, his entire focus was on

the research he was doing. After doing extensive research for ten years, he went back to college. He graduated from Presidency College with a gold medal and then taught in one of the prestigious colleges in Chennai from 1912 to 1918. Even during this period, he led the life of an ascetic. Professors were given huge houses to stay in on the campus. He requested his wife and daughter to stay in the main house, while he himself lived in a small outbuilding. Such was his simplicity.

During this time, he had an urge to lead a spiritual life. He then met a *mahatma* who taught him the ten *Upanishads,* the *Bhagavad Gita,* and the *Brahma Sutra*, the main *Advaitic* texts in Sanskrit, and he also instructed him to "continue to read *Upanishad*." Even when I met Munagala S. Venkataramaia, he was reading these *Upanishads* every day. On his table, all these ten *Upanishads* would be there. Whenever he had any leisure time, he would be reading these *Upanishads*.

In 1918, his daughter, of whom he was so affectionate, died. He could not bear that tragedy. He then became restless and sought peace. He was wandering about. In 1918, he came to *Arunachala* and was told a sage was living at *Skandashram*. He went there and met whom? That run-away boy, who was now known as Bhagavan Ramana! But S. Venkataraman had to come back because he had a *mahatma* living near Chennai, whom he served until 1922 because that *mahatma* was giving him solace. In 1922, that saint also passed away, adding to S. Venkataraman's sorrow, but that saint had told him to "continue to read *Upanishads*." Even on the last day, the saint waited for Munagala S. Venkataramaia to come from college before dropping the body.

Munagala Venkataramaia continued to study these Advaitic texts for the next five years. He visited Bhagavan once again in 1927 in what is the present *Ramanashram*. During that visit he discovered that Ramana was his Master, his *Satguru*, and therefore he stayed on at the *Ashram*. One day, he got a letter from the Government of India extending a job offer as Head of the Research Department in Delhi. The job was a very lucrative one and would give Munagala both name and fame. The offer was in recognition of his discovery of a chemical that helped in solidifying ink. Prior to this discovery, people found it extremely difficult to write with a pen because the ink would constantly dry up. Munagala showed Bhagavan the job offer; since Bhagavan's reaction did not seem encouraging, he turned down the job offer, saying, "I am not coming."

Under the guidance of Bhagavan, Munagala took ardently to *sadhana*. He started living at Palakothu; Bhagavan then introduced him to all the Tamil works also. He taught Munagala the verses of *Saiva Siddhanta*, hundreds of verses in Tamil written by *Saivite* saints. Munagala had become the compiler of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, so it was very important for him to be acquainted with Tamil literature also. Munagala already knew Sanskrit and English; Bhagavan was teaching him Tamil so he could translate all the Tamil answers that Bhagavan offered into English. Munagala had to be a fast interpreter because of the overwhelming flow of words when Bhagavan spoke. When Bhagavan answered the question of an aspirant, it was not the number of words that made the answers so intense, but the fact that the words were charged with a deeper meaning. Hence, translation took time. Sometimes aspirants asked questions in English or other languages, and

this had to be translated into Tamil for Bhagavan. Bhagavan would then give the answer in Tamil, and Munagala would then translate the answer into the appropriate language. He had to be totally faithful to the translation—so much so, that Chadwick once told me: "Munagala is the English mouth of Bhagavan." Chadwick was a very humorous person.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa had "M" (Mahendranath Gupta), a school teacher, as his interpreter. Munagala occupied the same kind of position from 1933 to 1939, during which time he recorded whatever Bhagavan was translating or interpreting. At night, he would go to his cottage and write Bhagavan's statements down in his notebook. That is what we read and ponder now as *Talks*. Munagala would bring the notebook to Bhagavan, who would read it and edit it. Wherever necessary, he would also correct it. Thus, the entire content of *Talks* was reviewed by Bhagavan. I have seen the original corrected notebooks, amended with Bhagavan's corrections. Seeing the keenness of this scholar, Bhagavan had Munagala translate the old Sanskrit texts, such as *Tripura Rahasiya, Advaita Bodha Deepika, and Kaivalya Navaneetam,* into English. In addition, what we see now as *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, the basic work of translating Bhagavan's works into English, was done by Munagala Venkataramaia. Later, Arthur Osborne edited it and then corrected the English, and it is now appearing under Arthur Osborne's name. The basic work was done by Munagala Venkataramaia and then shown to Bhagavan. The relationship between Bhagavan and Munagala Venkataramaia is a standing example of the traditional *Guru–shishya* relationship.

After Bhagavan dropped the body, Munagala departed and was called back in 1955. Munagala Venkataramaia took *sanyas*. He was absorbed in *Arunachala* in 1963. Munagala Venkataramaia was a living example of abidance in gentleness, personified. He inspired the young aspirants during his stay, after Bhagavan's *Maha Samadhi,* more through his quiet living than through preaching or pontification. I am so fortunate that he inspired me in my own spiritual quest. That is the beauty of the old devotees. They encouraged and empower the young people. They rarely pointed out limitations.

Following are a few examples Munagala gave me of his inspiration of others. His younger daughter, Kamatchi, was a child prodigy in Sanskrit scholarship. At the age of nine, she had mastered all Sanskrit works. In her teens she would tease people for arguments and dialogues, which he would almost always win. She was very intellectual. She knew all the Sanskrit works, and even noted that scholars were reluctant to argue with her because she would most likely defeat them. Look at our Master's kindness. This is how Masters should be understood. The relationship between the Master and the disciple can never be brought out in an article or a book. We actually feel and abide in it. Bhagavan guided Kamatchi from being a mere intellectual scholar on *Advaita Vedanta* into a devotional *Advaitin*.

Bhagavan was asked once about his teaching, "Is not your teaching merely an intellectual one?" Bhagavan responded, "I urge devotional enquiry." He called Kamatchi inside the hall the one morning at four-thirty, and then gave her a book, *Srimad Bhagavatam*. This is the Sanskrit book on the lives of Gods, particularly Lord Krishna, which induces so

much devotion in Indian culture. He showed her a place in the hall to "sit there and read it." And when people started coming, he would call her and then put a bookmark on the page where she had studied, then told her, "come next day." Until she finished, he asked her to come again and again, because *Bhagavatam* was both Wisdom-oriented and *Bhakti*-oriented. Thus, he coaxed her to imbibe the devotional enquiry. Another day when she was walking around, he called her in and handed her a slip of paper. She read it, and on it the *Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaaya* mantra was written. She read it out loud. She had a beautiful voice. Then Bhagavan was presenting to her an intent look. She understood. "Bhagavan, should I be chanting this every day?" she asked. Bhagavan said, "Always," and got back that chit, that paper, and put it on the stove and *burned* it. Traditionally, if some oath was taken in front of the fire, it meant, "Yes. I will do that." Two persons must take such an oath. Bhagavan assured her *Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaaya* was her *mantra*. The *mantra* means, "Obeisance to Bhagavan Sri Ramana."

Whenever I used visit Munagala's room during 1960s, he would be reading those *Upanishads*. I asked him, "I am told that you are a direct disciple of Bhagavan practicing *Self-Enquiry*. Why are you reading all these old spiritual Sanskrit texts?" With seriousness in his eyes and melting voice, he said, "This is what my old teacher has told me. The moment I came to Bhagavan, I asked him, 'Shall I adopt it as my practice?' He said, 'You must go on reading it.' Then I asked him, 'Should I read it every day?' His answer was, 'Always.'" One of Bhagavan's very beautiful words is "Always." That is, all is always "happening" and as such, one should abide by it.

Another time a lady saint came to the *Ashram*. Her name was Mother Rama Devi. She melted into ecstasy when some verses were being sung. She had a lot of followers. She had also guided me very beautifully when I was caught up in an inward knot. It was she that helped release that knot and I did not even know about her. Munagala Venkataramaia came to me and said, "Ganesan, I am going for the *bhajan* of Saint Rama Devi. Will you come with me?" I said, "No. I am not interested. I have my Bhagavan. That is enough for me." He then asked, "Ganesa, you have read Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, is it not?" I said, "Yes, Swami." He continued, "Have you read there that Ramakrishna would go into *Bhava Samadhi*? We have all read about it, but we have never seen that true *Bhava Samadhi*. Mother Rama Devi goes into that. It is not a psychic circus. When one is possessed, one goes into all this." Munagala explained to me, "It is not a psychic state. It is a pure spiritual state. After Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, to my knowledge and to the knowledge of co- aspirants, Mother Rama Devi is most likely the only other person that goes into that state." And he held my hand and had me sit next to him and there was so much *bhajan* going on, and the Mother was in meditation (she had a large body). When particular verses were chanted with eyes closed, she was in meditation. Suddenly she stood up. Then Munagala pressed my hand. "Look, look, this is the *Bhava Samadhi*. She is going to *Bhava Samadhi*. Be reverential. Be looking at it." In that mythical song, mother Goddess is fighting the demon of illusion with a sword and then destroying that demon. Munagala was showing me all that. When the demon was destroyed by the Goddess, Mother Rama Devi went into *Samadhi*. She stood on one leg with that sword and having this demon's head (the mind) while standing in the *asana*. Munagala pointed out, "See, for the large body, it is impossible to stand in that position. It is *Bhava Samadhi*. It is the Lord who supports

that position." I had the good fortune of witnessing that splendor.

Munagala Venkataramaia denied name and fame. Until Bhagavan's *Maha Samadhi,* none of his works were printed. *'Talks'* was not yet printed. *Tripura Rahasiya* was not printed. Everything was in manuscript form, typed manuscript form, bound by Bhagavan. Bhagavan would keep a portable library and when a serious aspirant came, Bhagavan would take out this *Tripura Rahasiya* or *Advaita Bodha Deepika* or *Kaivalya Navaneetam*, English translations done by Munagala Venkataramaia, and then share it with those Westerners or Indians who did not know Sanskrit.

By Bhagavan's blessings, I had the privilege of bringing them all in book form published by *Ramanashram*. I was one among those fortunate who had typed the manuscript of *Talks with Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi* before it went to press. When I came to know about the bound manuscript of *Tripura Rahasiya* and that Bhagavan was interested in it, I had it printed as an *Ashram* publication. However, I did not understand the meaning of *Tripura Rahasiya*. I requested Munagala, "Sir, give an English title to the book for our sake." He condescended to my request and named it: "Mystery beyond the Trinity."

K. K. Nambiar

I request that you read with devotion what we are going to now share. It is devotional reading. Why? It is because by being open to this sharing, you are going to imbibe joy, and make it your own, the spiritual wealth that is strewn all around us. Whatever you gather from books, from scriptures, and whatever you learn, only points to Wisdom. At best, it is a reflection and the lantern might be more prepared for lighting. We spend all our lifetime in acquiring this fraction of Wisdom. By the way, are we simultaneously aware that we are missing the most, which is inner attention on Awareness *per se* available to us, now, and all the time? We seek for what we already are. Seeking is the *mantra* of doubt. Practice is not doing something to find your Self. Practice is actually abiding as that! These sharings are very significant. It is *satsang,* the company of Truth. It is affirming.

For the next thousand years, aspirants, serious aspirants, are going to tread this Direct Path that Bhagavan has meticulously articulated and practiced. To have the real grasp, to have the real texture, the hue, the aroma of this Direct Path, we may imbibe by listening to this exceptional spiritual relationship the Master had with his disciples. None of this is exaggeration. The grand old sire, Grand Duff, was the best Westerner who came to Bhagavan, looking at Bhagavan, said, "People in

India in this century are very lucky to meet Bhagavan, *Divinity in Human form.*" He further added, "I have made a thorough comparative study of all religions, and I have come to the conclusion that the teaching of Bhagavan is probably the only philosophy that could stand scrutiny in the modern scientific age." He wrote this in the 1930s. We are going to share the "Divinity" as transparent in a human form in our midst.

From all walks of life, people were attracted to and came to Ramana Maharshi. The best among scholars, the cream of the best poets, scientists, the best medical doctors, astrologers, and astronomers… all "called". You must remember in those days, there was no easy access to Tiruvannamalai, and Bhagavan was not that well known outside his region. This media expansion was not there. It was purely the mysterious spiritual attraction (Leela) of Bhagavan that brought them here.

We are going to share two beautiful beings. One is an engineer and the other is a college principal. Truly worldly beings, yet totally dedicated. They had the attractions and distractions of the world, like any one of us have, but their aspiration for the spiritual path, with all hazards, with compromised health, was one-pointedly pivoted to the Maharshi's teaching. They are K. K. Nambiar—the engineer, and a college Principal, Professor G. V. Subbaramayya.

I had the good fortune, the blessings, and the Grace to move with them closely. K. K. Nambiar and Professor Subbaramayya are spiritual gems.

I have no other refuge. You are my only support, Ramaneshwara! Please have mercy on me and protect me. K. K. Nambiar wrote this *sloka* on a piece of paper and left it before Bhagavan. Bhagavan took this piece of paper, read it, and directed his look of Grace on the seated Nambiar, which totally transformed him. This *Darshan* directed at him by the Master set Nambiar's mind completely still. That was his first encounter and he could stay so, for nearly an hour. When he left *Ramanashram*, his mind was ruminating over Daivarata's poem: *Oh! Bhagavan Ramana! Your eyes are introverted but yet they are filled with compassion and love. For what? To dispel the fears of those that prostrate before you.*

In 1932, K. K. Nambiar was building highways and constructing roads. He put the first tar road in front of *Ramanashram* in the whole of India—from the hospital road to *Ramanashram*. That was his depth of devotion. K. K. Nambiar came to Bhagavan in 1932. He was in Salem, ninety miles away. A friend of his gave him *Who am I* in Malayalam. Malayalam was his mother tongue and there in a sentence, two words, "living Maharishi" attracted his attention. He laughed aloud because Maharishis were supposed to have lived thousands of years ago. Hence, he was distracted by those contradictory terms. He was laughing within himself over such a wild exaggeration! Where could there be any Maharishi now? Even if one doubts or abuses, the very mentioning of the Maharishi was so fruitfully fulfilling. Another friend came the very next day, "Hey, do not do that. I have seen him, and he is a real Maharishi. Let us go there." That was how Nambiar came first to Bhagavan. When he had to leave after one hour, he felt, "On leaving the *Ashram* I felt that

my Heart was being irresistibly attracted to a mighty spiritual magnet, toward that divinity expressed in human form." He had not read the writings of Grand Duff at that time. But that was his experience: "Divinity in human form."

K. K. Nambiar started visiting Bhagavan again and again. His sister's husband, a medical doctor, Dr. P. C. Nambiar, happened to be posted in Tiruvannamalai. Taking that as an excuse, he would come to Tiruvannamalai quite often.

In 1936, K. K. Nambiar, himself, was transferred to Tiruvannamalai as the civil engineer, and by that time, his association with the Master was becoming deeper. It was a festive day; so he wanted to have food in the presence of Bhagavan. There was a long line. While moving in the line, he longed, "I would like to eat looking at Bhagavan." When the line ended, the power of Faith put his seat exactly opposite Bhagavan, just a few feet away. And, while the rice was being served, he was feeling egoistically, "how the prayer has been answered." When the person was serving the rice, one ball of rice just slipped and rolled down from his plate. Then Bhagavan looked at Nambiar and said: *Adu tanna vilundadu-tane vilundadu*, "it rolled by itself." When Bhagavan said *that took place by itself, a* series of synchronistic coincidences started happening in his life, everything through dream.

When he was staying at the town, he had a dream where Bhagavan appeared and showed him a black-cloth bound notebook—its size, thickness, and number of pages. Bhagavan told him, "I want this notebook." He woke up, pulled the drawer, and saw exactly the same

notebook. He took that notebook to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, you appeared to me in the dream and asked for this notebook with specifications." Then Bhagavan turned to his attendant and said, "I have been asking you for three days, I have been giving you these specifications. See, Nambiar has brought it." Bhagavan wanted to write down *Sri Ramana Gita,* composed by Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, in Malayalam script, in a particular notebook, so he had been asking the attendant for it for the past three days. Having accomplished it, instead of feeling pride, Nambiar immediately remembered. *Adu Taanaa Vilundadu*. It is all Grace! Every action is perfect.

Another day, Nambiar had a vivid dream. Bhagavan was seated in the old hall. There was a Yogi named Sridhar, who was straining to do *Pranayama.* From his body, energy was going out like sparks from the head, and he was suffering. In the dream, Sridhar appealed to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I am suffering. Help me." Bhagavan said, "Stop all these gymnastics. Pursue *Self-Enquiry* as taught by me, the safest, the most direct, the simplest, and the most powerful way of being the Truth." Nambiar woke up and came to *Ramanashram*, dashed into the hall, prostrated to Bhagavan, and saw Sridhar seated there. Nambiar signaled to Sridhar to come out and told him what happened. "Thank you very much, I was suffering so much. I wanted to ask Bhagavan, but I had not enough courage to ask him, nor was I in a condition to ask him. Thank you once again," said the grateful Sridhar.

Nambiar was drawn more and more toward dreams, because from these dreams he could understand that the direct path of *Self-Enquiry* was the simple way to relieve ourselves from ignorance to Truth, from non-

Truth to Truth. Coming directly from the awakened Master this Truth affirms that the awakening from mortal illusion is already within every one of us, if only one turned attention inward.

This helped Nambiar to go within and understand intuitively that God is seated in the Heart; by turning within, one directly perceives deathless Truth. He remembered a verse from another contemporary saint, Sadashiva Brahmendra, whose constant prayer was: *Oh! Lord! I am not asking for anything new from you. My Lord! You need not give me anything new. Give me my own blissful state.* Nambiar often prayed likewise. That drew him to *satsang* with Chadwick, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer, Munagala Venkataramaia, Kunju Swami, and Viswanatha Swami. Sometimes, he would take them to his residence in Chennai. Years rolled by; Chinna Swami, Bhagavan's brother, *Sarvaadhikari* of the management, sought Nambiar's help. Bhagavan gave his approval, "Help him." Thereafter, in all the *Ashram* official matters, Nambiar extended all possible help, in every way required of him.

He was pursing the inner path of *Self-Enquiry* while meeting the challenges of worldly life. Job-wise, Nambiar came up from nothing to the highest level. Meeting the politicians, government officials, one could understand what a big load it could be. Yet, he was inwardly doing *Self-Enquiry*. Bhagavan told Paul Brunton: *There is no contradiction between work and wisdom.* Nambiar is a standing example for leading an active outward life integrated with an inward life. He was relying on Bhagavan every minute. It was pure Faith. He would tell his friends, "Bhagavan is looking after me."

During the Second World War, Nambiar had come with his family of five members from Chennai to Tiruvannamalai by train. Though he was a government officer, getting back to Chennai was very difficult, as all the military staff would be stuffed into the train. No reservation of seats was provided. One of his friends challenged him, "What about your Bhagavan, how are you going to come back to Chennai? The whole train would be occupied." Nambiar, in all confidence, replied, "My Bhagavan will look after me." The stationmaster pleaded, "At best, I could push one person into a compartment, but you are five with children. I feel totally helpless." Nambiar consoled him, saying, "My Bhagavan will look after us. Do not worry." The express train arrived and was jam-packed—there was not a single space. His friend was relentlessly saying to him, "Hey, I told you." Nambiar was equally relentless and said, "You have no idea about Bhagavan." He walked up to the engine, next to which there was a new compartment that was locked. It was a first class compartment. Being a government officer he ran to the stationmaster, saying, "There is a new compartment. Please unlock it and open it for me." The entire new compartment was free for him and his family.

Whenever Nambiar would share this story of synchronicity with me, he used to shed tears of ecstasy and would add, "You should not pay attention to the incident as a miracle. It is one's own pure Faith. It is Compassion of Bhagavan."

He went to England and America on an official tour. How he met devotees there is all very interesting—details of these are given in his book of reminiscences: *The Guiding Presence of Sri Bhagavan*. While

returning from America, he brought a movie camera (in the 1940s), because of which we have now the films of Bhagavan. Had not Nambiar taken this first step to make films of Bhagavan, perhaps others would not have ventured to take movies in later years.

He also brought a few Charlie Chaplin movies and showed them to Bhagavan. When Bhagavan saw them, I sat next to him. Bhagavan laughed and laughed so much that it proved to me he thoroughly enjoyed Charlie Chaplin movies. And that made me an ardent Charlie Chaplin fan, too!

Nambiar's contribution toward the building of Mother's temple was invaluable. The traditional engineer who constructs a temple is called *Stapathy*. Such temples could not be constructed by ordinary engineers. Vaidyanathar Stapathy was entrusted with the construction of Mother's temple. One day, Nambiar went to Bhagavan and said, "Chinna Swami is calling me to assist in the temple construction, but I do not know the traditional way." Bhagavan said, "Does not matter. You help him." Nambiar involved himself in full faith. When the temple construction was completed, a celebration, *Kumbhabhishekam*, was performed. Every worker's contribution was honored and thanked. Chinna Swami arranged for a photo of Bhagavan to be taken, with both Vaidyanathar Stapathy and Nambiar. On seeing the photo, Bhagavan made a beautiful comment, "The traditional Engineer, Vaidyanathar Stapathy, and the modern *Stapathy*, Nambiar, are together!"

In April 1950, Bhagavan's health condition was termed critical; at any time, Ramana Maharshi would drop the bodily form. It had to be

ascertained where to inter the body of Bhagavan. There was commotion over locating the correct place. That night Nambiar had a dream wherein he saw Bhagavan was having a private talk with my grandfather, Niranjanananda Swami, and my father, Venkatoo, inside the room. The door of the room was open a little. Nambiar was standing outside. Bhagavan said, "Call Nambiar in." Then Bhagavan made a drawing of the location. Bhagavan took all three men to that spot where Bhagavan's *Samadhi* Shrine is situated now. That was not the site chosen by the management.

When Nambiar woke up, he told my grandfather and others about Bhagavan's instruction in the dream. They said, "You and your dreams! We will not follow that. We are going to have it in a different place. We have decided it. Please, do not interfere, and do not tell others about your dream." They did not know the significance and power of the "rolling rice." But the town people, important town dignitaries, and honored officials came and, for no known reason, started gathering. Even now we do not know how or who induced them to come. They pointed out the place where Bhagavan's *Samadhi* is now and adamantly insisted that the *Samadhi* should be constructed only there. Nambiar had not told anyone else about the dream, as had been requested of him. At the last moment, the management had to relent. Bhagavan's *Samadhi* is now enshrined where it was indicated by Bhagavan in Nambiar's dream.

One personal incident I want to share about K. K. Nambiar is the following: While working in Mumbai (1960), I had an inner prompting to come and stay in the *Ashram*. I resigned my job and ran away to Benares where I was branded. For six days I was unconscious. Nobody

knew where I was. My family members were deeply affected over my absconding. Nambiar was chief engineer in a private company in Mumbai. He had a dream. Bhagavan came to him and showed him where I was lying upside down; on my back there was a big abscess. Bhagavan put his hand into the affected portion, in the blood, and said, "Nambiar! See, Ganesan has this, and I am going to heal him." When Bhagavan removed his hand, the abscess was totally cured. The back looked all right. Bhagavan told Nambiar, "Tell Venkatoo that Ganesan will be all right. I have saved him." It is all Grace!

MY FATHER, VENKATOO

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

The Old Hall

As Shared by V. Ganesan

Professor G. V. Subramaiyya

G. V. Subbaramayya was a college principal. Not only do spiritual aspirants owe a deep sense of gratitude to Prof. G. V. Subbaramayya, but also all of humanity, for it was he who elicited from Bhagavan an assurance of sanctuary and emancipation for us all. It was one of Bhagavan's last days. Professor Subbaramayya and Sub-registrar Narayana Iyer went inside the room where Bhagavan was lying. Subbaramayya and Sub-registrar Narayana Iyer could not control their emotions and cried. Bhagavan asked Subbaramayya, "What do you want?" "We need protection." Bhagavan looked at him straight and said: "It is already given." Not only protection, emancipation, everything is given to you. Then, Narayana Iyer asked, "Bhagavan! Is it only for Subbaramayya?" Bhagavan turned to him and said, "To everyone, every human being." We owe this to Subbaramayya. Bhagavan has assured protection and emancipation for us all. It is the Truth.

In the 1960s, at *Ramanashram* there were only two or three visitors who knew Bhagavan's teaching. Now, wherever I go I see various modes of Bhagavan's message spreading. The teaching is not meant as philosophy. It is the Truth about oneself. Humanity is waking up to immortality. That is the *Abhaiyam* that is the protection and the emancipation.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Bhagavan once said that everyone finally has to come to *Arunachala*, the true Self. Not the geographical *Arunachala*, but *Arunachala* that is within, without, silent and unmoving, waking up to the still everpresent substratum of the Self; the silent state of "I Am."

In 1933, Subbaramayya came to Bhagavan, soaked in sorrow. He had lost his two-year-old son, and he could not contain that sorrow. Moving about here and there, somebody told him to go to Ramana Maharshi. And during that period, somebody gave him *Upadesa Saaram* in Telugu. He was a great scholar and felt that if a Tamilian could write such great poetry in Telugu, he must be a spiritual man. He wanted to see Maharshi, but at that same time, his two-year-old son died. The sorrow prompted him to come to Bhagavan. On the very first day, Bhagavan gazed a look of pure Grace which allowed him to drop the burden of sorrow. Subbaramayya says: "The pole star of my life is, of course, my *Satguru* Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. At a time of distress, in 1933, I was drawn to him. That very first *Darshan* plunged me into the ocean of peace and bliss. It cannot be imagination, it cannot be a thought. When you are in sorrow and misery having lost a child, that happiness cannot be mere imagination." The very first look, the very first *Darshan* plunged me into ocean of peace and bliss. Ever since, Bhagavan has been the light of my life. Bhagavan is my mother, father, and my Guru. Bhagavan is my own, my all in all. In him my little self and all its moorings were consummated and sublimated. In a word, he is the embodiment of Grace. At every step, even with the least incidents of my life, I have come to feel a growing consciousness of the guiding hand of that Divine Grace that is also known as Sri Ramana."

On that very first day, even after receiving this look of Grace, there lingered a sincere doubt and he raised it: "Bhagavan! The *Bhagavad Gita* says mortals, human beings, cast off their worn out bodies, and acquire new bodies just as one casts away worn-out clothes and wears new clothes. How does this apply to the death of infants whose bodies are new and fresh?" Bhagavan looked at him graciously and replied: "How do you know that the body of the dead child is not worn out? It may not be apparent, but unless it is worn out, it will not die." And instantaneously Subbaramayya's sorrow and misery dropped. Most of the time, intellect, non-understanding, puts us off from the spiritual state, so when an intellectual answer is given, it is rooted out. He was a great conversationalist. Subramaiyya was a scholar in Sanskrit, Telugu, and English, and he was drawn to Bhagavan like iron filings to a magnet. He started translating Bhagavan's works into English. (His translation of *Sri Ramana Gita* into English is even now a standard work.)

On his second visit, he had another bothersome issue. A *Mahatma* initiated him into a *mantra,* and he was chanting that very scrupulously. When he came to Bhagavan and met his gracious glance, that *mantra* dissolved in the silence. He could no more chant that *mantra* and he started feeling guilty. "Have I done something wrong?" He asked Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, suddenly it has stopped. I feel I have a fear," Bhagavan said: "You have done a lot of *japa* of that *mantra*. Its fruit has brought you here. Why do you fear? All other paths eventually lead to *Self-Enquiry*. This is the direct path." At a much later date, he questioned about the difference between *japa* made by the mind and meditation. Bhagavan's answer was: "They are the same. In both, the mind is concentrated on one thing, whether you are doing *japa* or meditation.

The mind is focused on one thing either on the *mantra* or on the Self. *Mantra, japa,* meditation, *jnana*, these are all only different names. As long as they require assumed effort, we call them by these names. As the Self is realized, abidance is without effort."

Subbaramayya had, after sometime, more serious trouble. He was practicing breath control as taught by Swami Ramtirtha (through his book) and he had a specific period in the day when he had to do the breath control. After some time, even without consulting Bhagavan, he stopped doing that breath control exercise, but at that particular time of the day, the same pain continued— his head would almost go into pieces, it was so painful. He asked Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, what is happening?" Bhagavan's answer, "What! Again you are seized with fear? These are the usual experiences of people that do yoga exercises without the immediate guidance of a yoga teacher, but having come to me, why should you fear?" Then Bhagavan added in an undertone, "Next time you get that sensation, think of me and you will be all right." These are all words to be inscribed in our Heart with gold. Whichever form of practice one may be following when any pain happens, remember the name of the Master. Subbaramayya told me there was no "next time" at all!

Subbaramayya also got a very clear definition of how aspirants offer prayers seeking help of the Guru. Should we do it or should we not? Should we pray for mundane help from the Guru, or should we ask for spiritual emancipation alone? Another child of Subbaramayya, a small daughter, was going into fits when he was in his native place. She became unconscious; it was almost certain death. People suggested that

he call the Ayurvedic doctors. Two came. But suddenly Subbaramayya remembered and sent an express telegram to Bhagavan: "Bhagavan, my child, Indira is suffering. Please help her!" His brother in law who was staying in the next village, for no apparent reason, came there and brought the sacred ashes, *prasad,* which he had received the previous year from *Ramanashram*. He said, "Apply this to the child." The telegram had reached Bhagavan, and the next day in the post a reply came, assuring: "Bhagavan saw your telegram at seven o' clock in the evening. Everything will be all right." At seven o' clock, the *Prasad* came as the two Ayurvedic doctors arrived. They examined her and applied the sacred ash, and the child was all right.

Subbaramayya took it as a miracle, and during the next holiday, Christmas, he went to Bhagavan. He had this doubt; all intellectuals and academics have this challenge. Bhagavan, it seems, had looked at the clock and told the office to write, "I saw this telegram at seven o' clock." Subbaramayya asked him: "Bhagavan, did you think you should save that child? Did you have a thought to save my child at that time?" Bhagavan responded: "Even the thought to save the child is a *sankalpa*, a desire. A *jnani* has no *sankalpas*. The moment a *jnani*'s eyes fall on an object then a 'Divine Automatic Action' is revealed." This is the clarity that Bhagavan shared, "God sees God."

On his intimate filial affection, I will share one incident. Every time Subbaramayya came to *Ramanashram*, Bhagavan would wake him up at two-thirty in the morning, and take him along with two others, Sub-registrar Narayana Iyer and Kalyanasundaram Iyer, to the kitchen for preparing *sambar* or chutney. They would start working while Bhagavan

would start cooking.-These people assisted though they did not have any cooking skills. Bhagavan would just say, give me this dish or vessel or something. It was summer. Bhagavan was perspiring; Subbaramayya started fanning him. Bhagavan did not like special attention paid to him. He said, "Stop!" But when Bhagavan was seriously doing the cooking, Subbaramayya was stealthily fanning him from behind. Bhagavan said, "You want to do it on the sly, even though you do not know how to do it. Come on, I will show you." Bhagavan touched his hand and showed him how. Subbaramayya said "it was a divine moment, Bhagavan physically touched me." And when that was over, they removed themselves to the next room where they would grind for chutney. Subbaramayya did not know how to move the pestle. Bhagavan told him to "hold that stone." Putting his hand on Subbaramayya's, Bhagavan said, "Do it like this." Again, he fell into ecstasy. After the chutney was done, Bhagavan would taste it and also give to others for tasting. If their hands were occupied, Bhagavan would say, "Open your mouth," and then he would make a small ball and throw it into their mouth. Subbaramayya said, "I was in heaven when Bhagavan did all this."

Once I asked him, "What is so unique about Bhagavan?" Subbaramayya said: "One outcome of the originality of Sri Bhagavan's Self-realization was that his approach to problems was equally original because his Samadhi from the death experience was original. He did not imitate, he did not read from books. He was never pretentious. All his answers and all his actions were absolutely spontaneous. His reply to questions was never obscure or bookish, but simple and direct. He spoke as a man of supreme integrity and authority. His words came out not from book

learning and hearsay, but from direct firsthand knowledge and experience. He said what he knew and he knew what he said. He went to the root of any question and simplified its terms. There were no confusing technicalities when he spoke, for he would give only concrete illustrations along with answers that made the meaning crystal clear."

Subbaramayya would wax into ecstasy whenever he spoke about the clarity of Bhagavan's utterances. For instance, Bhagavan's clarity on *Self-Enquiry*: "As a person enquires for whom is this realization, the individuality melts. And the delusion disappears that the Self is yet to be realized. This is solely the Grace of the Guru. Only the *Higher Power* can dispel the delusion that the Self has not been realized. But to grant Self-realization is impossible, not only for the Guru, but also for God. To pray to the Guru asking him to give Self-realization is like asking, 'Give myself to me.' Because of identification with the body, there arises this delusion: 'I am an individual.' This creates the further delusion that the Guru is an individual other than me. Really the Guru is not other than your own Self."

In his last days Subbaramayya wrote a few verses and submitted them to Bhagavan, and one of the verses is very important for us, in which he makes a commitment to Bhagavan on our behalf. The prayer is:

We take an oath to keep your teachings constantly in mind, to watch your movement attentively, and to learn the lessons therein to dispel the delusion of the ego and abide firmly in the Self you ever are. This is the service which all devotees render to you, my beloved Sat-Guru. Oh! Ramana

Actions speak louder than words. We fulfill our commitments. We will practice the teachings of abiding as the Self, relinquish the body idea, and live in faith constantly.

Subbaramayya saw Bhagavan in the last moments of the Guru's physical existence. The devotee cried uncontrollably. These were Bhagavan's last words to Subbaramayya: "Do not worry. Be at peace. Everything will be well. To be is our nature. Coming and going is just a trick of the mind."

When Subbaramayya was in the presence of Bhagavan, two important occurrences happened for Subbaramayya we should share. There was one B. Ananthachari who took great pains to print *Sri Ramana Gita*. When his services were appreciated and referred to in the Preface, he pleaded hard with Sri Bhagavan that his name should not be so mentioned. Sri Bhagavan asked him, "Why do you worry? To ask for the omission of your name is as much egotism as to desire its inclusion. Let it be. After all, who knows who Ananthachari is?" Most of us think to withdraw recognition is humility. Humility is accepting things as they are.

Another incident to share is when Pannalal, Commissioner of Allahabad division, who was visiting the *Ashram* with his family, complained to Sri Bhagavan that though he had riches, enormous power, and every material comfort, he could not find peace. Sri Bhagavan asked him, "Why do you want peace? Why can you not be as you are?" Pannalal replied, "Because I cannot be happy, otherwise." Bhagavan replied: "Oh! Then it is like this: a man suffering from headache will not rest quietly until he has taken the right medicine and got rid of the ailment.

For health is our true nature, not illness. Likewise, peace is our true nature. Indeed we are peaceful, but forgetting that, we seek peace from external sources. It is an impossible quest and causes all these troubles. The moment you withdraw your mind from external objects and turn inward, it takes one to real peace."

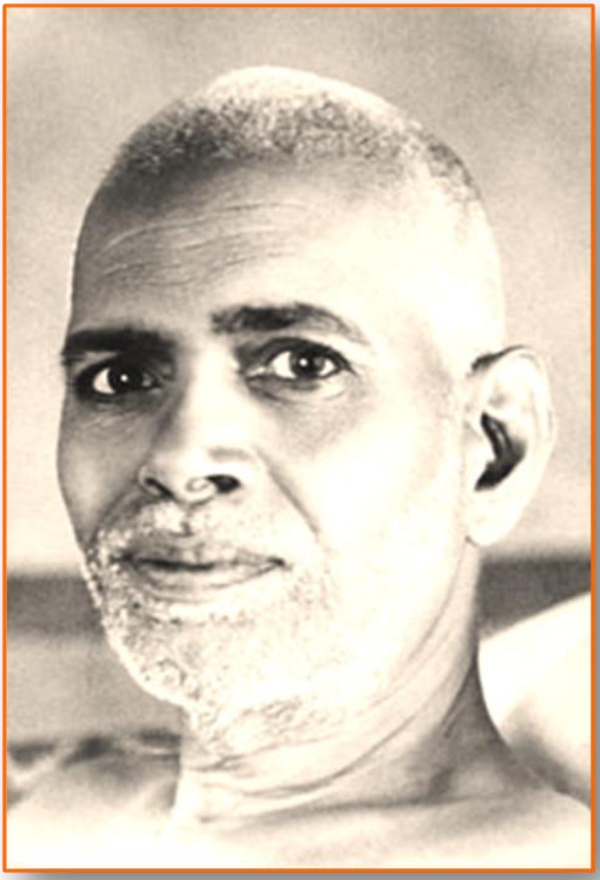
Early one morning during Subbaramayya's visit, Bhagavan explained how we have a glimpse of the real Self every day. "Between sleep and waking, he said there is a moment of twilight. The waking consciousness begins with the 'I' thought. Just before the upsurge of the 'I' thought, there is a split second of undifferentiated pure consciousness. First unconsciousness, then the light of pure consciousness, then the 'I' thought, with which the world consciousness floods in. This is the apparent order. We can sense it if we are sufficiently alert and watchful." The beauty of Bhagavan's teaching is that it is simple, direct, and natural. By dealing with all these awe-inspiring relationships between the Supreme Master and the sacred old devotees, our own consciousness is purified. It focuses on the Truth that we already always are.

Have complete faith. Surrender. That is "spiritual effort." Recognize and be who you really are behind the I-thought. *Arunachala* means *Aruna-Achala*, "being," "unmoved." Whenever your mind is unmoved, still, it has no boundaries. The apparition of body and world will dissolve, leaving the immaculate still Self, the omniscient substratum. Bhagavan said, "Everyone, finally, will come to *Arunachala*, the stillness of the silent Self." *Arunachala* is everywhere and omnipresent. Whenever there is no movement of the mind, the state of *Arunachala* is Self evident!

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Once I was at Subbaramayya's native place. He showed me the horizon and asked, "Can you not see *Arunachala*?" Naturally, I saw *Arunachala*! It was not a miracle, but the beauty of oneness. Four hundred miles away from *Arunachala,* he showed me and I saw *Arunachala*. That oneness is experienced when the mind is unmoved. One can only be *Arunachala*. When I was in Mumbai in 1960, K. K. Nambiar showed me *Arunachala* while pondering the vast ocean. These old devotees were soaked in Truth. He was a very big official in a company and lived in a palatial house facing the ocean. He took me for dinner and showed me the ocean: "Look, *Arunachala* is here." Again, I saw *Arunachala* as he saw *Arunachala* there. Everyone returns to the one source, *Arunachala*. Have faith--not only faith in the holy words of the Master, but in yourself and your circumstance. Trust the Mystery. You are the Truth. Turn to yourself as the Truth. Everywhere is the Truth. Have faith and let go. Do not turn to the illusory brain and your mind. It is an unTruth. It is an apparition. It will project a mortal vision, and mortal existence is not true. It is cruel. Turn within, be the spiritual Truth.

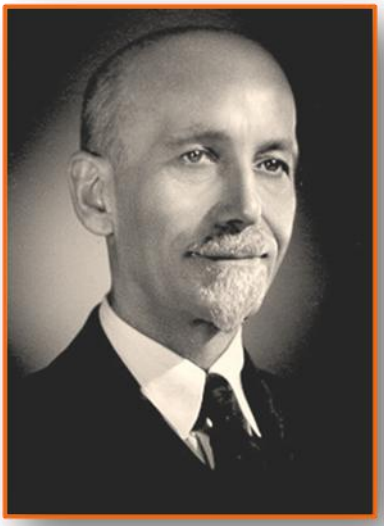
G. V. Subramaiyya had two daughters, Lalitha and Indira. They were three and four years old. They would come to Bhagavan and, with difficulty, they had to take leave and go back to their native village. That was the day most of the people cried, but these two girls were very brave and wanted to take leave. Bhagavan was about to go up the hill. They went to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, we will go home." And then they cried. In the seeming pretext of amusing them, Bhagavan said: "You go to your home. I will go to my home." Actually, the invisible Omniscient *Arunachala* Self is the "Home" of us all!



THE SILENT GRACEFUL GAZE OF BHAGAVAN

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Paul Brunton



Spiritual wisdom couched in words has been available for humanity throughout human history. It will remain available in the form of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bible, the Torah, the Koran, Tao Te Ching, the Zend Avesta, and the Bhagavad Gita, not to mention the many "unknown" scriptural texts. There will be no dearth of that. But it is all in alphabets, words and concepts.

The word is not the thing. The word, "water," is not water. It will not quench thirst. On the other hand, if you have a sip of water, the miracle takes place. Apply the same principle to true spirituality. Any amount of spiritual teaching, either given or taken, will not give you the taste of true spirituality.

The Truth is that "the Kingdom of God is at hand," otherwise all these sages and saints would not have left behind those Holy words affirming

it. It is not without function. A Holy person will be Truth-centered the rest of their life. The nonmoving eternal moment is that Truth of existence, the screen or substratum of life's illusory movie. Authentic spiritual realizers imbibe the Truth and they experience the Truth. All that is said in the scriptures, one could see exemplified in Ramana Maharshi. The scriptures affirm that grace.

In all these sharings of the elder devotees of Bhagavan, the primary function has been to make it known that Ramana Maharshi, like other seers and sages, actually lived the Truth in community constantly. He was available twenty-four hours a day, and there were very few rules and regulations. The doors were always open. The elder devotees lived and imbibed the proximity, witnessing the Truth while walking with legs, talking with the mouth, and looking with the eyes. They inhered in the Truth. I am so fortunate that I could live and move with them and see how they were the Truth itself. Truth seeps into your Heart perhaps imperceptibly. That is a way you can have communion with the ultimate Truth, which may seem on the surface, unattainable.

I am going to share about a luminary who came to present to the whole world that the trap of mortality is not true. There is clear undifferentiated light. It is a different paradigm of perception. It is invisible to the eyes, but illuminates all that is perceived. It is immortality. Turn your attention to your very Self, beyond the mind. The Truth is always here as the Now.

The first Western devotee of Bhagavan, who openly declared that by the Grace of Ramana Maharshi he was blessed with inner illumination, was

Raphael Hurst, popularly known as Paul Brunton, which was his pen name. He was a writer, and in the course of this sharing, you will find the ups and downs in his life and experiences. When you ponder it carefully, you will be surprised that it is much like your own life. One time we are high, and another time we are low. But when you depend on and surrender to the *Higher Power*, there is never a failure. That is true faith. That is surrender.

Paul Brunton wrote: "My own final illumination happened in 1963. There was this bomb-like explosion of consciousness. It came of itself, and I realized that the Divine had always been with me and in me. The word 'I' was pronounced in me. I saw that it was the only reality. 'I Am' is the foundation of Truth and reality of the whole existence. Although I had descended deep into my being and experienced timelessness, I was still able to live in my surface being and experience time. The two experiences went on side by side, and I saw my body as a mere shell and all the other people's bodies as shells. I felt like a bird, free from all desires and really detached from everything. I was not the body and felt so free of it that I knew I could not die. And that in the real 'I,' I would always be able to live for, 'I Am' is God. Deep down within my Heart I lived in an everlasting Now." What a summary of one's inner realization! That Self-realization through *Self-Enquiry* is attainable in this one life by you and me is amply proved by Paul Brunton's early life, faith, and finally, his being taken to a true Guru.

Paul Brunton was guided by the *Higher Power* throughout his apparent struggles. Whenever he was falling down, the *Higher Power* was helping him up. It is a great impetus for us and a pointer to every aspirant that if

you surrender to *Higher Power*, which is *Leela* (Play of God). The "I Am" state within and without each one of us is host to that *Higher Power* and with faith, will lead us through to the still Heart of Shiva, the Father, *Arunachala*. He adhered to that and followed the instructions so arduously that he realized the state of perfection. As a boy, Brunton (then called Raphael Hurst) was in school studying. One day in class his geography Master's voice uttered the word, "India," sending quivers of joy through the boy's body. The sound of the word, India, and then locating it on the map, was the beginning of Paul Brunton's quest for the true Self, for the Truth of existence. At that very tender age, to have a strong urge in his heart to go to India could not have been just a fleeting thought or just a curiosity. It was a calling.

In his adolescence, Raphael felt a widening chasm between himself and the prosaic surroundings that were soaked in occultism and mysticism. He even wanted to end his life. The very thought of ending his life fortunately aroused a curiosity in him to know what is death, and what is after death. From where did he get the urge to know? He could have committed suicide. He went to the British Museum, libraries and studied all theories on death. It included all the theologies in Occultism and Mysticism in the form of Modern Rusicrusianism, Buddhism, Gnosticism, Christian Mysticism, and Indian Yoga.

The suicidal thought left him completely. He became deeply interested to know about Occultism. He joined the Theosophical Society. But within two years, he became disappointed with their claims. His joining the Theosophical Society induced in him a great urge to know more about Occidental and Oriental Mysticism. Very strangely, he again

dropped his interest in Mysticism and Occultism and put all of his attention in learning journalism and becoming a good editor. He was destined to be a writer that would awaken the Western world to the true meaning of spirituality.

He started writing very powerful passages which attracted the attention of both the commoners and scholars alike. For instance, he wrote, "What did Jesus Christ mean when he rebuked those who sought to enter the kingdom of heaven, like thieves breaking in over a wall? Jesus meant that they were trying to enter without giving up their ego, without removing their ego's rule. Who are these robbers? They are the seekers of Occult powers for personal gain."

He earned fame due to his fiery writings, but still, his bent of mind toward Occultism and wanting to know the Truth about Reality was also lurking within him. Hence, there was an apparent conflict. Should he continue this sensational journalism and become famous, or should he take up the less attractive spiritual practices? The struggle within him continued. He met two teachers, Allan Bennett and Thurston in America. They endeavored to influence him in a proper way. But it ended up to be a turbaned Indian who influenced him and encouraged him to go and take up research in Indian Yoga.

There was yet another change in his life. He was married and had a son, Kenneth Hurst. I had the good fortune to meet him and received some of his father's unpublished manuscripts on Bhagavan, one of which was later published as *Conscious Immortality*. Later, he brought out sixteen volumes posthumously. These writings of Paul Brunton's are all

beautiful spiritual points he had noted and jotted down during the course of his life.

A significant turning point in his life came in 1930, when he was thirty-two. There was a strong urge in him to know what true Indian Yoga is. He came to India and arrived in Mumbai, determined to find out the greatness of its seers, the wisdom of the sages and saints of India, which had been admired for centuries. He wanted to have firsthand information from them. He traveled from Mumbai throughout India in search of sages, saints, messiahs, mystics, and astrologers. His book, *A Search in Secret India*, is a very awe-inspiring book.

He met many yogis while traveling and he struggled and worked very hard. There was one traveling Yogi, Chandi Das, and the moment he saw Paul Brunton, he foretold three predictions. All of the three predictions came true. But the third one is very significant**:** Chandi Das told him, "You will return two more times to India and will fulfill karmic ties with a sage who is waiting for you." Who is that sage who was waiting for Paul Brunton? It was Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. In the divine plan of things, Paul Brunton's very coming to India was to reveal to humanity the spiritual brilliance of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. It is to the credit of Paul Brunton's powerful writing that the passages hiding Advaita Vedanta were opened and translated. He just threw open for aspirants all over the world to know that there is a revelatory Truth and that Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is an authentic divine messenger.

It is absorbingly interesting how the encounter with Bhagavan Sri

Ramana Maharshi took place for Paul Brunton. It is also synchronistic, as if it had been well planned. Paul Brunton came to the Maharshi, along with one Subramania Iyer, in 1930. While coming by train, he prepared very carefully, being an intellectual and a journalist. He had prepared thirty-two pages of questions to put to the Maharshi. These were very well thought-out questions, not just curiosity arising from his thorough study of mysticism. He arrived and was taken to the presence of the Maharshi, whom he was meeting for the first time. The prediction Chandi Das had made, that a sage was waiting for him was now coming to be, and he immediately understood that this was the sage. He looked at the Maharshi, and the Maharshi looked at him. Bhagavan's one Glance of Grace was directed at him steadily and they went into ecstasy. That look awakened Paul Brunton to the unfathomable silence. He remained there in silence and not a word could surface either from his mouth or from his mind. He was filled with inherent silence and peace, which he had never experienced before. He felt, "There is something in this man which holds my attention as steel filings are held by a magnet. I could not turn away my gaze."

Later, when writing about the significance of this first encounter in silence in the Pure Presence of the Maharshi, Paul Brunton wrote: "I became aware of a silent, resistless change taking place within my mind. One by one, the questions which I had prepared in the train with such meticulous accuracy dropped away. It does not now seem to matter whether I solve the problems which have hitherto troubled me. I know only that a steady river of quietness seems to be flowing near me; that a great peace is penetrating the inner reaches of my being, and that my thought-tortured brain is beginning to arrive at some rest."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

One cannot easily overlook the mysterious yet fulfilling Divine guidance which led Paul Brunton to visit the Maharshi. The scenes in that divine *leela,* that drama, are interestingly absorbing.

When Paul Brunton arrived at Chennai, he was in a state of mental bewilderment, spiritual poverty, and perplexity. He fell sick and was terribly affected. His ill health troubled him so much that he wanted to go back abruptly to England. Fortunately, there was a tug of war within his mind. Even in that confusion, the Divine Grace as a slide projector had him review all the sages, saints, and mystics he had met, like images. He was sincerely evaluating all of what he had heard about Ramana Maharshi. Ramana Maharshi's image shone throughout, enabling him to be established in a favorable position.

His friends in Chennai saw his perplexity and continued to advise him to meet with the Maharshi. It could not be anything short of the Divine *leela* that induced his friend, Venkataramani, to take Paul Brunton to the Shankaracharya of Kanchi, His Holiness, *Chandrasekhar Sarasvati*, the Hindu "Pope" of South India. Paul Brunton agreed. On seeing Paul Brunton, the sage told him, "I recommend you to go to the Maharshi . . . I know him to be a true Master. Shall I provide you with full instructions so you may discover him?" Later, he learned from Venkataramani that the Shankaracharya had whispered to him**,** "Your friend will travel all around India. He will visit many yogis and listen to many Masters. But in the end he will return to the Maharshi."

When Paul Brunton was pondering a visit to the Maharshi, a letter arrived from *Arunachala*. B. V. Narasimha Swami, the biographer of

Ramana Maharshi, asked him to come to *Arunachala* and meet the Maharshi.

How prophetic the Shankaracharya's guidance was. For his stamp of authority from this South Indian "Pope", Paul Brunton was totally dedicated, all his life, to Shankaracharya. With convinced determination, Paul Brunton arrived at *Arunachala* in 1931. This time he came without anyone to deter him from his decision. B. V. Narasimha Swami and the other devotees there, recognizing his determination, helped him to build a hut. If you visit even now, you can see Paul Brunton's hut in the compound next to *Ramanashram*, Palakothu. Paul Brunton decided to give his all to experience the immortal Truth at the holy feet of Ramana Maharshi. Paul Brunton was known for his traits of steadfastness, resolve, and total faith.

He had many interviews with Ramana Maharshi, short and long. H**e** was frequently seen following the Maharshi with a notebook and a pencil. He put questions to the Maharshi, and did so until he understood thoroughly the Direct Teaching of *Self-Enquiry*, he did not leave the Maharshi.

After understanding the complete teaching of *Self-Enquiry*, he put it down in book form and published it in 1935 as *A Search in Secret India*. The beautiful essence of this book is that for the first time in the Western world, from the powerful pen of a Westerner the guidance is given to turn attention inward to the spiritual Truth. The state of "I Am" within is God. In the Bible, it is said "the kingdom of God is within you . . . or at hand." With his compelling words, Paul Brunton

was able to present that inner vision is available to each one of us whenever we turn within, not at a future time, but right Now. These powerful writings brought many Westerners and also Indian scholars to the Master.

His writing was so lucid that Major Chadwick, S. S Cohen, Maurice Frydman, Dr. Hafiz Syed, and so many other remarkable people, all came to Ramana Maharshi after reading Paul Brunton's books.

Even many heads of Indian schools following religious teachings did not know about the Maharshi prior to this publication. He became instantaneously admired. True aspirants, who were seeking and suffering in many parts of the world, saw the glimmer of Truth through this book. It was not just to popularize Ramana Maharshi in a missionary sense. The emphasis was on individually turning each one's attention within to experience the Truth of nonphysical existence. That is the secret of this book. That is the secret which influenced all people, including commoners and scholars. I would like to quote a few passages from Paul Brunton.

"The words of this sage of *Arunachala* still flame out from my memory like beacon lights. Roy Emerson wrote, 'I pluck golden fruits from rare meetings with men.' It is certain that I plucked a whole basket full with my talks with the Maharshi. Our best philosophers in Europe could not hold a candle to him. One could not forget that wonderful, pregnant smile of his, with his hint of wisdom and peace. He was the most understanding man I have ever known. You could be sure that some words from him would smooth your way a little, and that his words

always verified what your deepest feeling already told you."

And here are a few dialogues quoted from his book, which in memory of Paul Brunton I would like to share with you.

Brunton: What exactly is this Self, of which you speak? If what you say is true, there must be another Self in man.

Bhagavan: Can a man be possessed of two identities, two Self's? To understand this matter it is first necessary for a man to analyze himself. Because it has long been his habit to think what others think, he has never faced . . . his "I" himself. He has, for too long, identified with the body and the brain. Therefore I tell you to pursue the enquiry, '*Who am I'* You asked me to describe the true Self to you. What can be said? It is that, out of which the sense of the personal "I" arises, and into which it will disappear.

Brunton: Disappear? How can one lose the feeling of one's personality?

Bhagavan: the first and foremost of all thoughts, the primeval thought of every person, is the thought, "I." It is after the birth of this "I" thought that any other thoughts can arise at all. It is only after the first personal pronoun has arisen in the mind that the second personal pronoun, "you," can make its appearance. If you can mentally follow the "I" thread until it leads you back to its source, you would discover that just as it is the first thought to appear, so it is the last to disappear. This is a matter which can be experienced.

Brunton: You mean that it is possible to conduct such a mental investigation into one's Self?

Maharshi: Certainly it is possible to go inward until the last thought of "I" gradually vanishes.

Another quotation . . .

Brunton: What path do you advise? We need your Grace.

Bhagavan: Be still, do not think, and know that "I Am."

Brunton: Should I meditate with eyes open or closed?

Maharshi: You can meditate with eyes open or shut whichever suits you best. It differs with different people. Seeing is when the mind looks through the eyes, but if it is not looking because it is focused within, it does not see even though the eyes are open. It is the same with sounds. If you pay attention to them you will hear them but if you persistently focus on the Self within, you will not hear them. So too, with the postures; postures are immaterial for this Path of Wisdom. Posture really means steadfast location in the Self. It is internal. The best posture is to be the Self.

Brunton: Should we make effort?

Maharshi: No one succeeds without effort. The mind control is not

one's birth right. The successful few owe their success to perseverance. When attention is directed toward objects and intellect, the mind is aware only of these things. That is our present state of suffering. But when we attend to the Self within, we become conscious of it alone. It is therefore all a matter of attention.

Brunton: How should we meditate?

Maharshi: All you need learn is to close your eyes and turn inward; that which you seek is inside yourself.

Brunton: Is the thought, "I Am God," helpful?

Maharshi: "I Am" is God and not thinking. Realize "I Am" and do not think "I Am." Know it and do not think it. "I Am that". "I Am" means that one must abide as "I." One is the "I" alone and nothing else.

At that time, a pet squirrel was awaiting an opportunity to run out from Bhagavan. Bhagavan caught it and said, "All wish to run out and rush out. There is no limit to going out, happiness lies within and not without."

When Brunton was in a quieter village in London, Bhagavan appeared to him in a vision and asked him to write his second book, *The Secret Path*. Then a cascade of writing came by Grace. Paul Brunton wrote nine books. Out of that, one book, *The Quest for the Over Self,* is of paramount interest to aspirants because the guidance he experienced in the presence of Bhagavan, and how to put it into practice, are brought out so

beautifully in this book.

By the year 1938 or 1939, there was some misunderstanding of Paul Brunton with the *Ashram* Management. He had to put down the pen and could not write anymore. His anger was so inflamed that he could not even live anywhere near *Ramanashram*. He left *Ramanashram,* but fortunately, he was supported by the Mysore Maharaja, the king of the state called Mysore. He stayed until 1947 in India. Yet, he never lost contact with Bhagavan. His devotion and surrender to Bhagavan were so total that he was in constant connection with Bhagavan through letters. He wrote ecstatic letters of devotion, surrender, and wisdom.

Brunton wrote in one of his letters: "Bhagavan is 'I Am,' all the time abiding in the inner space of my Heart, where Ramana Maharshi always resides." Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi was very affectionate toward Paul Brunton. One day Bhagavan said openly in the hall, "Paul Brunton's thought comes to my mind. I am sure Paul Brunton is also thinking of Bhagavan." At that very moment, I do not know whether it was in America or in London, Paul Brunton was giving a talk which he began by paying his obeisance to Bhagavan. The exact timing, as always, was exquisite!

In the hall, Bhagavan received a pamphlet by post office with a great many quotations from Paul Brunton. Bhagavan picked up the pamphlet and read it out. The following quotation is mentioned in *Day by Day with Bhagavan:* "I remain perfectly calm and fully aware of whom I am and what is occurring. The Self still exists, but it is a changed, radiant Self. Something that is far superior to my unimportant personality rises into

consciousness and becomes who I am. I Am in the midst of an ocean of blazing light. I sit in the lap of Holy bliss. Divine Grace is recognized and acts when it is invoked by total surrender. It acts from within, because God resides as the Heart of all beings. Its promptings can be interpreted only in a quiet mind purified by Self-surrender and prayer. It is a continuum of God in the soul's zone of awareness. It is emergence of a source unexpected and unpredictable. It is voice spoken out of cosmic silence. It is cosmic will, which performs authentic miracles under its own law of Thy will."

Paul Brunton was keeping himself isolated; no one could contact him. If he chose, he would visit a few friends, or, very rarely, gave talks. All his letters were to be addressed to his publisher. Sometime later when I was in *Ramanashram*, I also had to do the same thing to contact him. In 1952, after the Maharshi dropped the body, Paul Brunton came, and it was as peaceful as it was when Bhagavan was physically present. He did not feel any difference as to what it had been like when the body was there in 1930. For nine years he had enjoyed the physical presence of the Maharshi. He was enjoying the same constant spiritual presence in 1952. When he came, he did not discern any difference. He was able to feel the same spiritual presence. He wrote, "Death of the Master's body had not ended our relationship or barred our communion. He still existed in my Heart as a veritable force; an entity bereft of flesh and forms, but clearly present." He adored the Maharshi as a transparent sighting of the *Higher Self*.

"Pursue the Enquiry, Who am I, relentlessly. Analyze the entire personality. Strive to find out from where the 'I' thought arises.

Continue your constant meditation. Allow your attention to simply be within. One day the wheel of thoughts will slow down and intuition will mysteriously arise. Follow the intuition and let your thinking stop and it will reveal unwavering perpetual Self awareness."

After his illumination in 1963, Paul Brunton became a gentle, irresistible powerhouse of Peace. The beauty of the Inner Peace attracted many aspirants. His "never-say-die" spirit could be seen through all his years of searching and questing for genuine spiritual experience, which he initially had, with the Grace of the Maharshi, in his Presence, on the very first day. It remained all through the years. But he was to go through the rough and tumble of the spiritual path before he could establish it as his own. In all his encounters with fresh aspirants, he would emphasize that one has to pursue the quest within by implicitly putting into practice the sacred words of the Master. He wrote: "I had all the human failings. I had fallen by the wayside several times. But it is also true that I picked up myself each time, and at last achieved the Goal."

In the 1970s, Apa Pant was the Indian Ambassador to England. He was a true devotee of Sri Bhagavan through Maurice Frydman's influence on him. He wanted to express his gratitude to the Maharshi by openly displaying a large portrait of Sri Bhagavan at the Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan in London. A big gathering was arranged. As part of the celebrations, a souvenir was brought out. I was consulted from its conception. I advised them to invite Paul Brunton to participate in it, by requesting him to give the principal talk. Paul Brunton instead sent an excellent article for the souvenir. It was a veneration of his Guru

Ramana. Later, I had it printed in the *Ashram* journal, *The Mountain Path.*

There, he wrote: Forty years have passed since I walked in his abode and saw the Maharshi half-reclining, half-sitting on a couch. After such a long period, most memories of the past become somewhat faded, if not they lose their existence altogether. But I can truthfully declare that in this case nothing of that kind happened. On the contrary, his face, his figure, his surroundings are as vivid now to me as they were then. What is more important to me is that, at least during the period of meditation, the feeling of his radiant Presence is as actual and vivid today as it was on the first day!

How fortunate we are that, now, we are able to share about this remarkable devotee extolling his Master!

In 1960, I was in charge of visitors. I would receive them like a guide and take them around. Very rarely, Westerners would come, and I loved them because I was so eager to be in the midst of sincere aspirants. Just as I was very eager to serve the old devotees, I was very excited to be in the midst of young aspirants who were coming in search of the Maharshi and in search of Truth. And a few of them have revealed to me that they were directed by Paul Brunton to come there. He told such close friends, "Go to Shankaracharya, he is the reality in the flesh, but more important than that is to go to *Ramanashram*. The reality without flesh is there, which you will experience." I communicated with Paul Brunton. I wanted to have guidance from him, the man who has made Bhagavan known all throughout humanity. I wanted his guidance and longed to serve him. Even though I had written him many letters

("Come and stay in the *Ashram,* and I will serve you. I will not expose you to the world and you can have your secrecy. But allow me to serve you.") There was no direct response. Through these friends, I would send him letters. His replies to me were sent through his friends.

Paul Brunton implanted his expression of emphasis in me through many letters. In one of them, I raised this question, "Brunton, you asked Bhagavan about work and wisdom when you said to him, 'You are in the jungle *Ashram,* but I will go back into the world and earn my livelihood. So how can I live?' Then Bhagavan said, 'There is no difference between work and wisdom.' So I had a doubt because our Hindu ideology is without the sense of doership. I did not understand what it meant. If you act, that you should not have the thought of doership looked very contradictory and impossible for me. I wrote to Paul Brunton, asking him to explain it to me.

He wrote back to me a very short letter: "'Things happen to you, is it not? But now you are thinking that things are being done by you. It is wrong. Things are done through you. Alter the attitude 'by me' to 'experience through you.'" Ramana Maharshi was the transparent being for the *Higher Power* to shine through. All these sages, saints, and seers were conduits for the *Higher Power* to pass through, and you and I are also the same. There is no difference, if we allow ourselves to be the channel for the *Higher Power* to pass through.

I want to share one more incident about when Paul Brunton dropped the body. He did not answer my invitations to come and live in *Ramanashram*. But after he dropped the body, a month later, I received a

letter from his secretary. She said, "Sorry, Ganesan, I had to attend to and answer many pending works, so please pardon me for this delayed response. Paul Brunton was to drop the body at two-thirty, and at twelve o' clock, he called me and said, 'Please write a letter of thanks to Ganesan.'"

I had the fortune of going and visiting Brunton's institution called Wisdom's Golden Rock, near New York. They wanted to name it after Paul Brunton, but he refused to have his name on it. He was invited by Damiani, an Indian, who had arranged a hall, in which he had put a picture of Paul Brunton. Paul Brunton had the habit of previously visiting the place where he would be giving a talk to see how things were laid out. When he saw his photograph, he said, "Remove that and put my Master's picture there." When I was at that institution, they took me and showed me that hall where Paul Brunton had his picture removed and Bhagavan's picture put there instead.

He was a totally surrendered intellectual devotee of Bhagavan. From the times of the Vedas, the essence of spiritual instruction has been: "Turn within. You are That." When Jesus Christ said, "The Kingdom of God is within you," few could understand what it meant. Paul Brunton invoked Bhagavan to share this message: "Turn within. Be still . . . and know, 'I Am' [is] God."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Major Chadwick

Frank Humphreys was the first Westerner to come to Ramana Maharshi. He went up the hill in 1911 and, seeing Bhagavan seated on a rock outside *Virupaksha* cave, he wrote, "From that human body, God radiated terrifically." The second Westerner who came to Bhagavan was Paul Brunton in 1930. He saw Ramana Maharshi as his guru. In the role of a disciple, he elicited Bhagavan's direct teaching of *Self-Enquiry*, wrote several books on it and made it available all over the world.

Frank Humphreys saw Bhagavan in and as God; Paul Brunton saw Bhagavan as guru. The third Westerner came. This third Westerner, too, came from England. He saw the most natural, the fullest human being in Bhagavan. Here was the trinity of God, sage, and human being, anchored in the Now. This third Westerner's name was Allan W. Chadwick. The old devotees of Bhagavan endearingly called him Satvic. The Sanskrit word, Satvic, means "pure," or one who is free from worldly passions and attachments. (Paradoxically, this Satvic man had been a major in the British army and had participated in killing its enemies in the First World War.)

In *Ramanashram*, A. W. Chadwick was known as Major Chadwick. He came in 1935 to *Arunachala* after reading Brunton's book. Eleven years before he came to Bhagavan, he had formulated his own form of meditation, which he was scrupulously following every day. Chadwick said, "I had argued with myself that since God had created this world, it was only out of himself that he could have done so, for, if there was some other apart from him then he could not be God, the undisputed and omnipotent power. So I decided that the aspirant himself was God. My method of meditation thus was to make the mind cease from thinking as an individual and just rest in its pristine Godhead.

Do not think. Just be." See how prophetic this is even before coming to Bhagavan. To stop thinking and just be was already his form of meditation.

Major Chadwick read Paul Brunton's book, *A Search in Secret India*. In it, three chapters were dedicated to Sri Ramana Maharshi, and it also had his photograph. These three chapters, and especially the picture of the Maharshi, totally captivated his heart. He felt that *Arunachala* was his home and that Ramana Maharshi was his spiritual Master. At that time, Chadwick was in Majorca in Sicily. He immediately disposed of whatever pending matters he had, gave up his house and possessions in Majorca, and went to England to spend some time with his sisters, of whom he was very fond. He relinquished his home there and started his journey to India. He never returned to England.

After a long journey, he arrived in *Arunachala*. Standing in front of Bhagavan, whom he was seeing for the first time, his Master in flesh and blood, he felt he was seeing, simultaneously, God, guru, and the perfect

human being. When asked how he felt, Chadwick said, "I felt the tremendous peace of his presence and of his graciousness. It was not as though I was meeting him for the first time. It seemed I have always known him. It was not even like the renewal of an old acquaintanceship. It had always been here though I had not been conscious of it until presently. Now I know."

The potent presence of Bhagavan influenced Chadwick then and there to stay permanently with his Master. There was no wavering. He never altered his stance, never questioned it. When such a remarkable disciple surrenders totally, how does the Master respond? The *Higher Power* takes complete charge. The rest of his devotees thought it strange, because Bhagavan took very special interest in Chadwick. He informed the management that he had given up his all and come so we would look after him. Food should be prepared for him without spices. In *Ramanashram,* they make a special vegetable and soup for foreigners called dorai kootu and dorai rasam. It was formulated by Bhagavan for Chadwick in 1935. In those days, the Westerner, the white man, was addressed as dorai, meaning lord. Naturally, Chadwick was also addressed like that. So Bhagavan named the vegetable and the soup dorai kootu and dorai rasam after Chadwick. Even today it is called dorai kootu and dorai rasam. The Ashram guests cannot forget Chadwick at all!

Breakfast in the *Ashram* invariably was, and still is, a steamed rice and lentil cake called "idly," which is served with chili powder and oil. Chadwick's appellation for that chili powder was "gun powder," because for him, it was explosively hot! So Bhagavan ordered ghee and sugar to be served to Chadwick along with his idly. This practice continues to

this day for foreigners. And at night, because Chadwick could not eat the spicy rasam and chutney, Bhagavan arranged for some milk and fruits to be given to him. So in every circumstance, Bhagavan paid particular attention to Chadwick. Everyone, including the *Sarvaadhikari* Chinna Swami, noticed this. Consequently, Chadwick was permitted to construct a personal room within the *Ashram*, something without precedent in the ashram's history. Many years later, Yogi Ramiah, Balarama Reddy, and then Devaraja Mudaliar, were permitted to build three such rooms—adjacent to Chadwick's.

While his room was being built, Chadwick stayed in a tile-roofed shed adjacent to the *Ashram's* store room. Sometimes, during his morning walks, Bhagavan would enter Chadwick's shed like a friend and approach his table. He would be seated on a chair in a corner, reading a book. Bhagavan would pick up Chadwick's wallet and take out photos, identity cards, everything, and question him: What is this? And now this? Bhagavan moved that closely with Chadwick. Even after Chadwick moved to his newly built cottage, Bhagavan would occasionally visit him. After lunch, every day, Bhagavan would take a walk around the pond in Palakothu. Chadwick's room was very close and was separated from the pond by a fence with a wicket gate. Sometimes, Bhagavan would open it and wander to Chadwick's room.

While paying special attention to Chadwick's physical needs, Bhagavan was also guiding him spiritually. On the very first day that Chadwick came, Bhagavan talked to him so freely that Chadwick, who was very tired after a long journey, felt at home and at ease. After his rest in the afternoon when he came, Bhagavan sent word for a copy of *Who am I* and presented it to Chadwick. He didn't just hand it over. He said,

"Read it and practice it." Through this spiritual gift, Bhagavan commenced showering spiritual blessings on Chadwick. Within a few days he called Chadwick again and gave him B. V. Narasimha Swami's *Self-realization*, the first biography of Ramana Maharshi in English. Again he said, "Read it and practice it." Chadwick told me that he formulated his spiritual practices based on reading these books daily.

Chadwick's whole attention was pivoted on Bhagavan and Bhagavan's teaching. Chadwick understood the seriousness of his responsibility as a true disciple. Thus, his attention, his grasping the teaching, his experiencing the blessings of the proximity of the guru, became his paramount duties. He was very meticulous. Either he would meditate in his room or on *Arunachala* hill, or if he wanted some relaxation, he read spiritual books. The rest of the time he was seated in front of his Master, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

When I asked him why he was always seated in front of Bhagavan from 1935 on, he said, "I felt that here is God and guru in human form. When I am able to be near him in his presence and his proximity, will I miss this golden opportunity? Am I a fool come to while away my time?" Chadwick was one person who not only stayed permanently in *Ramanashram,* but didn't waste time. There were no attractions or distractions for him even when other Westerners came.

Chadwick was a towering personality. Tall and handsome, he was a very disciplined man. He had a welcoming smile and was friendly toward everyone. While meticulously attending to his *sadhana,* he was also very supportive of the *Ashram* management. He even became part of it. Even after Bhagavan dropped the body, when the *Ashram* had to face

litigations, financial problems, and internal squabbles, Chadwick stayed on, supported the management, and stood by them.

Unlike Paul Brunton and Frank Humphreys, Chadwick stayed in the *Ashram*, listening extensively to the dialogues the Master had with devotees and visitors. Books like *Talks with Ramana Maharshi* and *Day by Day with Bhagavan* were verified by Bhagavan and Chadwick. In *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, he wrote a beautiful introduction where he says, not only were the questions shown to Bhagavan, but they were all verified by the questioner himself, whether or not it was properly noted down. And Bhagavan verified them after it was written in the notebook. So while Brunton was the sail that spread Bhagavan's teaching in the world, Chadwick was the anchor giving us confidence that every word recorded was authenticated by the Master himself.

At this juncture, I would like to share a few incidents that took place at Sri *Ramanashram,* in which, I too, was involved. In a way, these were all connected with Chadwick. After my graduating from college, my father asked me to study further. I refused, saying I would rather work and earn some money, as my family was then going through financial difficulties. From 1956 to 1958, I was staying in Tiruvannamalai and trying my level best to get a job. Major Chadwick and Mrs. Talyearkhan also tried to find a job for me. Obviously, the *Higher Power* had a mysterious destiny for me.

During those two years, I was moving closely with all the old devotees who lived in Tiruvannamalai: Chadwick, Arthur Osborne, Muruganar, Cohen, Devaraja Mudaliar, and a host of others, like Professor G. V. Subbaramayya, who would regularly visit the *Ashram*. Something about

them aroused tremendous awe, wonder, and interest in me. I would pester them, "What did you talk to Bhagavan about? What was Bhagavan's relationship with you?"

Sometimes, they condescended and took some time off to tell me. I would get so excited that I would invariably react by requesting them to write all these precious gems down so that they wouldn't be lost. Many of them demurred, saying, "Who am I, and what can I say?" I would plead with them, "Who is going to be worried about you? It is about what Bhagavan told you and what his relationship was with you. You owe a responsibility to posterity by preserving these remarkable reminiscences. Please note them down."

I am very grateful to Chadwick because he was the only person who encouraged me. On many a day, when there were no crowds or much work to be done at the *Ashram*, he would make me sit next to him and narrate a thrilling incident. I did not know then that after narrating each incident, he was going to his room and noting it down in a notebook. In 1958, I had to go away from Tiruvannamalai to take a two-year postgraduate course in philosophy. Before I left, Chadwick told me, "Thank you. I have noted all of these reminiscences in a notebook."

After my post graduation, I worked for a few months and then came back to *Ramanashram* permanently in 1960. The very first thing that I did after coming to *Ramanashram* was go straight to Chadwick's room and tell him, "Give me your prasad, that notebook, in which you have written everything." This notebook of Chadwick's was the first book of reminiscences that was published. A few days after the book was released, I received a letter of thanks from Chadwick, in which he wrote:

"There is no tradition in our *Ashram* to dedicate the book to a person of one's choice. For every book is an offering to Bhagavan '*Ramanarpanamastu*', dedicated to the sacred feet of Sri Bhagavan. If there would not have been such a custom, I would certainly have dedicated this book to you, dear Ganesan."

By that time, I had become so close to the old devotees that another person, G. V. Subbaramayya, listened to me and said, "I am writing my reminiscences in my mother tongue, Telugu." I replied, "What is the use if you write it only in Telugu? You are an English professor, so translate it into English, too." This was the second book of reminiscences. He had it published outside. I pleaded with him and subsequently got its future editions published from *Ramanashram*. A cascade of reminiscences followed: T. K. Sundaresa Iyer's *At the feet of Bhagavan*, Devaraja Mudaliar's *My recollections of Bhagavan Ramana;* Suri Nagamma's *My life at Sri Ramanashram* and then those of Kunju Swami, Balarama Reddy, and Kanakammal. The spiritual fruit was theirs. I was the fortunate one, blessed to be the spoon that served it to the hungry spiritual aspirants!

If the teachings of Buddha, Jesus Christ, Lao Tzu and Sri Ramakrishna were not recorded by their chosen devotees and disciples, how could we have been influenced by them? If these reminiscences about Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi are with us today, it is primarily because of Chadwick. Thanks to him and all the other devotees who acceded to my fervent and persistent pleas to record them as a sacred affirmation for mankind's spiritual awakening.

These Gospels bring out the intimate relationship between a true Master and his surrendered disciples. It is very precious because mere verbal

teaching is not enough. How does one put that verbal teaching into practice? We receive affirmation to support our practice of the verbal teaching. Otherwise teachings from the Bible, Koran, and Bhagavad Gita would have been enough. The reminiscences of these old devotees, how they lived with the Master and how the Master, through his pure and simple living, taught that which is really of great magnitude to us.

Chadwick had a one-of-a-kind relationship with the Master. "Tell me what Bhagavan looked like when you saw him and moved with him?" I asked. "What was it that struck you most?"

His reply was the same that he wrote later in his reminiscences: Bhagavan was a very beautiful person who shone with a visible aura. He had the most delicate hands I have ever seen, with which he expressed himself eloquently. One might almost say that he could talk with his hands and gestures. His features were regular and the wonder of his eyes was famous. His forehead was high and the dome of his head the highest I have ever seen. In India this is known as the dome of wisdom and it was only natural that it should be so with our beloved Bhagavan. His body was well formed and of only medium height, but this was not apparent, as his personality was so influential that one looked upon him as tall. He had a great sense of humor and, while talking, a smile was never far from his face. He had many jokes in his repertoire and was a magnificent actor. He would always dramatize the protagonist of any story he related. When people came to him with their family stories, he would laugh with the happy and at times shed tears with the bereaved. In this way, he seemed to reciprocate the emotions of others. He rarely ever raised his voice and if he did occasionally seem angry, there was usually no sign of it on the surface of his peace. Talk to him immediately

afterward, and he would answer calmly and quite undisturbed. He did not speak unceasingly and unnecessarily.

His potent silence only showed how much foolish chatter usually goes on amongst us. He preferred every sort of simplicity and preferred to sit on the floor, but a couch had been forced on him by devotees, and this became his home for most of the day and night. He did not like any preferences shown to him. He would wander out on the hill a few times a day, and if any attachment to anything on earth could be said of him, it was surely an attachment to the hill. He loved it and said it was God himself.

Chadwick moved closely with Bhagavan. He did not take any action simple, small, or big without consulting Bhagavan. Although Bhagavan never approved or disapproved verbally, all the old devotees of Bhagavan could tell from Bhagavan's expression what his response was. If he approved, he would nod his head. If he disapproved, he would go into his royal silence.

Once, Chadwick had a bad toothache. In those days, Pondicherry was the closest town where one could find a good dentist. So he told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I have a very bad toothache. May I go to Pondicherry to have a dentist treat it?" There was that royal silence, and Chadwick did not go. Within three days, his toothache miraculously disappeared. He told me, "One should always be in tune with the Master. His answer is there. It doesn't have to be a verbal yes or no. If you adhere to that, then even if his answer is in the negative, a positive action of healing flows from it."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

As we saw earlier, Chadwick followed a strict regimen of meditating, reading spiritual books, and sitting in front of Bhagavan for long periods. As a tall, six-foot four-inch man, he could not sit cross-legged for long on the floor. So he would struggle. Observing this, Bhagavan advised him to have a meditation belt. In his reminiscences, Chadwick writes about wearing a cotton meditation belt around his body while sitting on the floor keeping his knees vertical. With it, he didn't recline on the wall or stretch his legs. He could sit for hours on the floor without any problem. From then on, Chadwick could be invariably seen sitting in a corner of the old hall wearing his meditation belt. (He is wearing it in the picture at the beginning of this chapter).

Chadwick once told me that this idea was given to him by Bhagavan. I asked about why his reminiscences did not mention that it was Bhagavan's idea. Chadwick replied, "I didn't write it because Bhagavan told me not to." I persisted, "But at least you could have left a hint that Bhagavan gave it to you. That way, we would have had a glimpse without you directly disobeying him." He replied, "I have left a hint, read it carefully." On close reading, I discovered that Bhagavan had told Chadwick about how his father had a similar belt. Though his father used it rarely, Bhagavan remembered it when he observed Chadwick's struggle to sit on the floor, and advised him appropriately. How Bhagavan meticulously looked after Chadwick's physical and spiritual needs!

There is another incident told to me by Cohen that Chadwick has not written about in his book. The person who was attending to English correspondence in the *Ashram* office had to go away. Suddenly helpless and not knowing what else to do, Chinna Swami, the *Sarvaadhikari*,

called Chadwick and requested that he come to the office and take care of the English correspondence. Chadwick refused and went to his room. But his conscience started pricking him: "All of them, particularly Chinna Swami, have helped me a lot. But when he needed a little help from me, I refused." When Cohen came in the evening Chadwick told him about his dilemma. Cohen suggested that they go to Bhagavan and get his advice. On hearing about Chadwick's dilemma, Bhagavan kept silent for some time. Then he turned to Cohen and said, "Chadwick is doing me greater service by meditating."

Many aspirants, as their meditation progresses, experience an intense and unexplainable fear. This happened to Chadwick, too. He went to Bhagavan and told him about it. Bhagavan reassured him, "The fear is not for you. The fear is created by the ego, and the ego has to face this fear. Ask, for whom is this fear? When you ask this, the fear will drop off. The ego will bring in many obstacles, particularly in meditation. Whatever the natures of the obstacles, immediately ask, who am I? Who is having this trouble? Who is having the problem? It will immediately drop. And in raising this question, who am I, if you notice the silence instead of looking for an answer, that silence will dispense with the ego instantly." Chadwick's greatness was that, at the very moment he listened to Bhagavan, he was completely rid of the fear. He never had fear in his meditation again.

Once, Chadwick was reading a book, in which it was declared that one look of grace from the guru was enough to get liberation. Chadwick had a doubt: "If one look can give liberation to everyone, then why is everyone not liberated?" So he went to Bhagavan and started telling him, "Bhagavan, this is what the scriptures say." Not allowing him to go

any further, Bhagavan uttered three words: "Charcoal, coal, and gunpowder." Puzzled, Chadwick asked, "Bhagavan, what do you mean by that?" Instead of Bhagavan answering him, Muruganar, who was present there, explained, "The look of the grace of the guru is always here and has the same potency all the time. But to receive it, the aspirant has to have the same intensity and be in the same confessional innocence. That is why aspirants are said to be like charcoal, coal, or gunpowder. Charcoal takes a long time to ignite, coal takes less time and gunpowder ignites instantaneously. So some aspirants get it instantaneously, some aspirants take more time. Aspirants, who do not listen to the teaching of the Master and practice it, take a long, long time. Bhagavan told Chadwick to ask, *Who am I,* when fear comes, and the fear will go away in that very instant." Chadwick put it into practice and the fear was gone forever. Like gunpowder, indeed, was Bhagavan's military disciple, Major Chadwick!

Knowing that Chadwick was very interested in reading spiritual books, Bhagavan asked Munagala Venkataramaia to translate traditional texts like *Kaivalya Navanita, Yoga Vasishta, Tripura Rahasiya,* and *Advaita Bodha Deepika* from Sanskrit and Tamil to English. Once the translations were done, Chadwick himself would type it and send it to a printer he knew in Ooty with instructions to have two copies of each book printed with black-cloth binding. He would give one copy to Bhagavan and keep one for himself. Bhagavan kept these copies in his mobile library. Whenever serious and sincere aspirants came, like Dr. Mees, Miss Marston, and Maurice Frydman, who did not know Sanskrit or Tamil, he would hand these out saying, "Read this *Tripura Rahasiya* or *Advaita Bodha Deepika*." It was because of Chadwick's interest and Bhagavan's compassion for him that these translations were made available.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Bhagavan had lots of fun with Chadwick. In those days, there were no ceiling fans in the old hall. Instead, there was a *punkha*, a manually operated Indian ceiling fan made of a long, stout wooden stick attached to an equally long strip of cloth. When the rope hanging from it was pulled, the *punkha* would move to and fro, sending down a pleasant breeze. In the old hall, the *punkhas* rope hung down behind Bhagavan's sofa. One day, when no one was in the hall but Chadwick, Chadwick somehow folded his 6-feet 4-inch frame and hid himself behind the sofa without Bhagavan noticing him. Then, stealthily, he started pulling the *punkha*. Bhagavan was surprised because there was nobody in the hall, but the *punkha* was going on in full speed! Since Bhagavan could only turn around very slowly, by the time he tried to find out who was pulling it, Chadwick would stop pulling the *punkha* and hide. When Bhagavan turned his back on him after seeing nobody, Chadwick would again resume pulling the *punkha*. This happened a few times until finally, Bhagavan called out, "Chadwick, I know you are there!"

Bhagavan shared many of the secrets of the holy hill with Chadwick. Once, while they were in the hall, he addressed Chadwick. "Chadwick, when I was going around the hill, suddenly I was aware of the mystical realm of the hill. In that vision, I saw many communities, waterfalls, rivers, temples, and people there. These people who are here now were there, too, and hey, Chadwick, you were also there!" After Bhagavan expressed this, Chadwick, Munagala Venkataramaia, Osborne, and many others had an inner visionary experience, where they suddenly found *Arunachala* within themselves, and there were apparitions and visions of waterfalls and communities with sages and saints meditating. It may seem mysterious, but it is an actual subtle astral experience. The state of "I Am" that we awaken to remains the same silent un-movable

mountain, the screen, *Arunachala,* within which all appear and disappear, gracefully.

Chadwick asked Bhagavan to tell him more about *Arunachala*. He told Chadwick about how he had roamed over the hill so much that hardly an inch of space on the hill was untouched by his feet. Bhagavan then narrated to him what happened once when he was roaming about the hill, during his stay at Pachaiamman temple, situated in the forest and at the foot of the hill. On that day, Bhagavan happened to look up and see a huge banyan tree on top of a steep cliff. It struck him that it might possibly be the mythological tree under which lord Dakshinamoorthy sat as Arunagiri Yogi. Bhagavan wanted to climb up to it. On the way, his leg disturbed a hornet's nest on a bush and was consequently badly stung by the hornets, who were now angry occupants. Bhagavan said that everything he saw suddenly disappeared. He returned to the temple with a swollen left leg. Later on, Bhagavan warned his devotees not to attempt to climb to that banyan tree. After narrating this incident to me, Chadwick said, "It is a great blessing to us that Bhagavan returned to the temple on that day without further pursuing his uphill sojourn. Otherwise, we may have lost our Bhagavan on that day itself. Bhagavan is *Arunachala*, and he might have merged with Arunagiri Yogi.

Bhagavan once openly told stories about how Chadwick was among us previously. He had a great desire to be born in the West. So he was born there as Chadwick, but now he has come here to us. When Chadwick told me this, I was not happy because Bhagavan never talked about reincarnation or previous births. Chadwick then pointed out, "The true import of Bhagavan's statement is to be desireless. That is the important teaching, not whether I had a previous birth or was reincarnated." This

is an indication for aspirants not to jump to conclusions. The one thing that we may always put attention to is the native state, "I Am", prior to obstructing conclusions..

Bhagavan once made a rare witty admission to Chadwick that he was a guru. Bhagavan very seldom accepted the duality of guru and disciple. He never broadly announced that he is the guru, and others are disciples. But at a particular stage, Chadwick had a problem with this. "You never declare that you are the guru, but you also say that a disciple cannot get liberation without a guru. So where do I stand, Bhagavan? Am I to go in search of a guru?" Bhagavan informed him that there was only the Self, and there cannot be a separate guru. A true guru cannot declare himself to be a guru as distinguished from the disciple. He was saying that there is only one Self that includes everyone, equally, but Chadwick was not happy with the answer. Noticing this, Bhagavan turned to the others, "Chadwick is not satisfied with what I have said. So ask the sub-registrar to bring a legal document that declares this. And ask the office to send their seal so that it can be stamped and given to him!" That was how Chadwick got Bhagavan to admit that he was, indeed, an authentic guru!

Chadwick told me that a few days before Bhagavan was to drop the body, he went inside Bhagavan's Nirvana room and wept bitterly, saying, "Bhagavan, you are leaving." There, Bhagavan also revealed that he indeed is the guru, the substratum, through this reply: "The prime duty of a guru is to establish the certainty of spiritual existence in the hearts of his disciples. Having that established, he is free to let go. He had already shown the Truth in Chadwick and others, hence he was free to drop the body. I moved very closely with Chadwick and once I asked

him, "Are you realized?" I have put this question to all of the old devotees like Muruganar, Chadwick, Cohen, Osborne, Sadhu Natanananda, Devaraja Mudaliar, and others. None of them either said yes or no—all smiled.

When I asked Chadwick himself whether he was realized, he did not say yes or no. Instead he told me, "I will tell you what happened. After many years of my stay with Bhagavan, four or five years, I committed the mistake of trying to evaluate how much I had progressed spiritually. This is a thing an aspirant should refrain from. I felt that I had not progressed. Many who saw me in Ramanashram looked at me like I was a sage or a saint, saying, 'Oh! He is so fortunate. He is so close to Bhagavan. He meditates so long. He is already in that state.' This created a contradiction in me, as I personally felt that I was not maturing spiritually and, having left the material life, I could not go back to a worldly life either. I felt caught in no man's land, out of options. I was sorrow- stricken. So I hurried to Bhagavan's hall. He was alone. I told him, 'Bhagavan, this is my plight. I am neither here nor there, and this causes much sorrow in me.'" Bhagavan looked at me with compassion and said, 'Chadwick, who says all this?' Immediately there was a current like shock in my body. I literally ran to my room, shut the doors, and went into a neutral state. I was not bothered whether I was spiritually maturing or whether I would be able to go back to the world. I went into a neutral state of silence. A few days passed like that wherein I was neither happy nor worried."

The only luxury that Chadwick allowed himself was taking his bath in a bathtub, which he had in the verandah of his cottage. One day, shortly after the above incident, something happened. As Chadwick told me

later, "I was taking my bath and honestly, I was not in a spiritual state or in a prayerful mood when suddenly it dawned—the state of 'I Am!'" He experienced it directly, not just as words. He was so ecstatic that he did not even dry himself. He just wrapped a towel around his waist and ran to the old hall from where he had run away a few days back. Fortunately, this time too, Bhagavan was alone. In this spiritual ecstasy of experiencing the state of "I Am," where there was no Chadwick, just the "I Am," he asked Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, is this It?" Chadwick said that Bhagavan beamed the most glorious smile with him and then confirmed, "Yes, Chadwick, This is That!" "Since then," continued Chadwick, "I've never had any doubt."

Once, Chadwick advised me: "Do not try to gather more knowledge, because finally, knowledge itself will become a great hindrance to Self-realization. When I made an effort to learn Tamil language and sought Bhagavan's permission for it, his response was, "Why do you want to acquire one more dead weight? All knowledge will be finally given up to experience the Truth. You will plunge within to experience the Truth, through the relentless practice of the enquiry, 'Who Am I'. The key to Self-realization is practice, practice, and practice only."

I took that opportunity to seek one more clarification from him as to why Westerners were drawn more to Sri Bhagavan's teaching. Chadwick's reply was significant: "Bhagavan's message certainly is much appreciated in the West. His purely rational arguments and the lack of sentiment in his teachings have great appeal. He never preached or laid down the law. Instead, he always concentrated on turning the aspirant back to the Self and pointed out that it was entirely up to him, since the

guru could only indicate the way and guide. For no one can give self-realization to another."

When Bhagavan's will was drawn and executed, Chadwick fully supported it. He was there on that day when Bhagavan drew a line in lieu of his signature in the presence of a high court judge and a court official. Later on, when some people started contesting it, Chadwick went to every relevant government office and testified that he was there when Bhagavan executed his will and that the management of the *Ashram* was left to the family, though not any spiritual hierarchy, since there was no spiritual hierarchy for his Master. According to Chadwick, instead of just anyone who might not care, if the family was made the manager, whatever happened, they would not leave the *Ashram*. So Bhagavan's apparent choice was the best choice. Thus, when my grandfather Niranjanananda Swami passed away, his son, my father, Venkatoo, became the next manager, as he was next in the family hierarchy.

As mentioned already, from 1956 to 1958, I was staying in Tiruvannamalai and trying to get a job. Finding no success, I was very disappointed. On one such day, Chadwick called me to his room and said, "During Bhagavan's lifetime Osborne, Cohen, Munagala Venkataramaia, and I-were very much interested in astrology. Munagala Venkataramaia and I believed in Hindu astrology, whereas Cohen believed in Western astrology. Osborne had faith in the I-Ching, the ancient Chinese science of divination. We knew that according to the will, the next president would be Sundaram, the eldest son of Venkatoo, and elder brother. But among the three grand-nephews of Bhagavan, who would be the one who spreads the spiritual teachings? This was our

question. So, each of us consulted our preferred divination methods. All of us arrived at the same conclusion: "You are going to be the one, Ganesan, to be the messenger to spread and pass on the teaching and practice." This was in 1957, when I had no inclination to take to spiritual life or stay on in *Ramanashram*. Chadwick pleaded with me, "Why do you want to go seeking a job when your place is here? Stay here!" But I did not stay, and went away only to return in 1960.

Chadwick was a pillar of strength for me when I came back to the *Ashram* and started helping with its management. Whatever problem I had, whether financial or legal, Chadwick stood like a rock behind me. Once it happened that my father was away; the year was 1961. I had been in the *Ashram* for one year, and in the absence of my father, I had to take up the responsibility of the president in making decisions and arrangements. The annual, ten-day Karthikai festival was on. The climax of the festival was the lighting of the *Karthikai Deepam*, a huge flame, from a cauldron of ghee on the summit of the holy hill, *Arunachala*. During Bhagavan's lifetime, Bhagavan would be seated outside the hall from where the *Deepam* could be seen. The moment the *Deepam* was lit on the hill, a lamp of ghee would be lit in front of Bhagavan. After Bhagavan dropped the body, it was *Ashram* practice to keep a picture of Bhagavan and light the ghee lamp in front of it as soon as the *Deepam* on the hill was lit, a tradition that continues to this day.

That year, it started raining torrentially. I was agitated because we could not keep the picture and light the lamp outside as it was traditionally done. Seeing this, Chadwick came to me and said, "Do not be agitated. We can take the picture inside the dining hall and light the lamp there." I expressed my concern. Though Bhagavan was seldom interested in

rituals, he was very particular on witnessing the *Karthikai Deepam*. How could I deviate from the *Ashram* tradition? My father is not here, and I do not want to do something that breaks it. He reassured me that during Bhagavan's lifetime, one year it had rained just like this. Since he was keen on seeing the *Deepam*, Bhagavan suggested that we go into the dining hall and open the big door, through which one could see the hill's summit. (Now the new dining hall has blocked this view.) I was next to Bhagavan. I told him, "Bhagavan, we will not be able to see the *Deepam* because it is raining torrentially." Looking through his binoculars, Bhagavan exhorted, "Watch! Watch!" At that moment, the *Deepam* was lit on the hill. I was watching eagerly. The rain stopped, the clouds dispersed for a few minutes, and we got a glimpse of the *Deepam* as it was lit. Immediately Bhagavan said, "Now light the ghee lamp. The *Deepam* has been lit. So we too will follow suit." I was a little skeptical because it was pouring. But I followed Chadwick's advice. Chadwick sat next to me and said, "Watch!" And exactly the same thing happened. At the time of lighting the *Deepam* on the hill, the rain stopped. The clouds dispersed. And we lit the ghee lamp in front of Bhagavan's picture inside the dining hall just before the clouds gathered again and hid the *Deepam* from our view!

Chadwick was a pillar of strength for the *Ashram* management, too. Due to financial restrictions, some of the activities of the *Ashram* came to a close after Bhagavan dropped the body. The *Veda Pataskala*, the school, which taught the *Vedas* and was started by Bhagavan in 1938 in *Ramanashram*, had to be closed down. The *puja* and ritual worship were not being done properly. Then Chadwick took it upon himself. He restarted the *Veda Pataskala* and, with the help of my Teacher, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, he regulated the daily worship in the shrine of Bhagavan

and the Mother. It was he who started the regular performance of the *Sri Chakra puja* in the Mother's shrine. As a fully surrendered devotee who was like an anchor in *Ramanashram*, Chadwick's very staying facilitated the teaching to be shared. People like Somerset Maugham, Spalding, and the many other famous people who came, all talked to Chadwick. And Chadwick convinced them of the greatness of Bhagavan. He was also instrumental in spreading Bhagavan's teaching in a more solid way by authenticating *Talks with the Maharshi* and *Day by Day with Bhagavan.* All the conversations that we now read in these books were perused by Chadwick.

When *Talks with the Maharshi* was to be printed, there was a committee that took the manuscripts to Madras (Chennai). Some scholar or the other struck out many pages, saying they were repetitious. It was brought to the *Ashram* before sending it to the press. I was in the office at that time, and it was given to Chadwick for his approval. After going through it, he came back, his whole face red with anger: Who has struck out all this, my Master's words? How do you know? Why do you use mere intellectual knowledge and see the repetition? The repetition is absolutely essential and purposeful. This is what he writes in its introduction, the repetition is meaningful. Not a single word is to be removed, because every word has been seen by Bhagavan and approved by him. So the accuracy of what we read now is all due to Chadwick. Without his influence, we would have lost a major portion of the *Talks with the Maharshi, Day by Day with Bhagavan,* and other talks with Bhagavan. In this way, Major Chadwick functioned as a major channel in communicating the message of Truth about immortal existence, and for this we thank him.

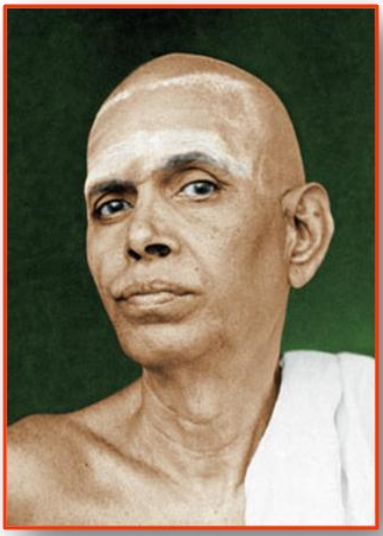
AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

During his last days, Chadwick became very ill and was taken to the Christian Medical College Hospital in Vellore. The illness was the result of a hernia operation he had in Tiruvannamalai, which became infected. He did not want to go away from the physical *Arunachala*. But all of us pleaded with him to go to get treated at Vellore. When he was there, his doctors sent a message that his end was imminent. I was very eager to go, but my father, Mrs. Talyearkhan, and Hugo Maier, a German doctor, told me to stay back and look after the *Ashram* while they rendered whatever help they could. When they reached the hospital, the doctors said that Chadwick was in a coma and could not talk. Chadwick was lying helpless with tubes coming out from his body. Surprising all, Chadwick uttered these words, "Today is Easter." Hugo Maier corrected him, "Chadwick, today alone is not Easter. Easter is to be observed for one week." Hence, Chadwick replied, "I know that. For me, today is Easter."

After the body dropped away, it was brought to the *Ashram*. There were many who were opposed to interring him in the *Ashram*. Countering them, I gave my firm view that Chadwick is the child of Bhagavan, and his body should not be sent out. So, next to his room on its southern side, his body was interred. You will be surprised to know that on the northern side of the same room, his ego has a samadhi. In 1938, he was digging a small grave there. Knowing that he did not have a pet like a cat or dog, the other devotees were puzzled: "You do not have a pet cat or dog needing a grave. So why are you digging?" He looked at them and said, "It is a samadhi for my ego."

This remarkable devotee, after serving the Master, Bhagavan Ramana, went back to his source and was merged. Today, we can only see the samadhi of his body and ego. If one is to see the real Chadwick, one can see him here and now. Turn to one's own heart of Being: Bhagavan is here, *Arunachala* is here, and my most revered friend Chadwick, is here.

Every day, he would greet me, *Salaam Alaikum*. It is the way Muslims greet each other. It means "Peace be unto you." Yes, Major A. W. Chadwick, staying in the heart, is saying to all of us, Salaam Alaikum: "Peace be unto you."



Maurice Frydman

Maurice Frydman was brilliant practically from birth. He was born in 1894 in a Jewish depot in Poland. His family was so poor that he tasted white bread only at the age of thirteen. But even by the age of ten, he could read and write in Russian, Hebrew, and Cyrillic, and could speak fluent Russian, Polish, French, English, and Hebrew. In his school he was at the top of his class, even in his later years when he was studying electrical engineering. Before the age of twenty, he had one hundred patents to his credit for his inventions in the engineering and mechanical fields, including a talking book, which was a marvel at that time. He was simply brilliant.

From age twenty-five onward, he had an inner inspiration which was guiding and pushing him to see God. He was very sincere. He wanted to know what Truth was. He gave up Judaism and took up Russian Orthodoxy. He became a monk. He confined himself to a solitary monastery and led an austere life. During one of his very rare outward errands, he stood in front of a mighty waterfall. Doubt tempted him: "If you have real faith in Jesus Christ, if you really love the church, jump into this waterfall." And Maurice jumped from a one-hundred-foot precipice, wearing only a black crèche robe. The robe became entangled in some shrubs, and he was miraculously saved. When there is sincerity

to know the Truth, the Truth enjoins and guides you. It is not necessary to try and decide the choice-less Truth. You will be caught up in the middle of delusion. Just have a tremendous aspiration to recognize the spiritual Truth. The Truth will guide.

Soon he was vexed with all the orthodox dogmas. He wanted to know what the single Truth is. He wanted freedom from all sorts of bondage to concepts. This led him to the Theosophical Society, and especially to Mrs. Annie Besant. But what impressed him most was J. Krishnamurti. These events happened all in 1926. J. Krishnamurti had declared that there is a raucous path of studious application of one's Self, not dependent on any authority, by which one could recognize Truth. This attracted Maurice, who started having long dialogues with J. Krishnamurti. It is recorded that J. Krishnamurti never refused any talk with Maurice Frydman. Still, Maurice Frydman's Heart was burning with the aspiration to see God, to know Truth. From 1928 to 1934, he took up various jobs in the electrical industry; finally he was hired to be the General Manager in one of the recognized electrical goods manufacturing companies in France. His aspiration led him to *Vedanta,* and he started thoroughly reading *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, almost all the Hindu scriptures. Of course he read the German and French translations. Throughout, Frydman retained his deep urge for guidance that comes mysteriously.

In 1935, he had a turning point in his spiritual life when he came across Paul Brunton's books. The direct teaching of *Who am I* offered him a tremendous revelation: Truth is available within oneself. He was seeking

the Truth very sincerely, not trying to define the Truth outside. When he read Paul Brunton's books, he turned within; naturally he developed a desire to come to India and to meet the living sage, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. And divine providence started guiding him. There was a Divan, a chief minister, from the Mysore state. The Divan was touring Europe and England, learning to modernize the state of Mysore. His tour of facilities and factories brought him to the factory where Maurice Frydman was the chief boss. When he saw Maurice Frydman's sincerity, application, and hard work, the Divan sought his help. "Will you please come to our state and advise us how such developments could be effected in our state in India?" In the 1930s, India was very backward in terms of scientific development. Maurice shot back characteristically, "Sir! My bags are packed. I am prepared to leave with you for India."

Maurice Frydman arrived in India, the country of his dreams, in 1935. He was put in charge of setting up a big electrical goods manufacturing plant since he was an expert in the field. His aspiration, however, was to meet Bhagavan. Hence, even as he was working, he went to meet Ramana Maharshi. From the very first instance, he was prepared to surrender himself to Bhagavan. He would work day and night at the factory during the week--so much so, that he became very successful within a short time. But on the weekends, he would go to *Arunachala*, where people would greet him with: "Here comes our Maurice." During his sojourn, he would talk to his friends and to Bhagavan, questioning Bhagavan often, and Bhagavan would tolerate it all. Bhagavan was spontaneous and natural, reflecting each person like a mirror. When a person was totally immersed in spirituality, Bhagavan responded by

giving himself up to them, too. People in *Ramanashram* would comment thus on Frydman's frequent weekly visits: "Maurice, why do you not come once a month, or maybe once in two months? You have to spend so much to come here." Maurice would reply, "What can I do? My battery can take only so much charge. Within a week it is drained. So I will come here to be in Bhagavan's presence in order to get it recharged!"

Maurice was extremely close to Bhagavan. He gathered as much as he could about *Vedanta*, had discussions with others and read up as much as possible about the Hindu scriptures. He read that if one wanted final emancipation, one had to take *sanyas*. Therefore he approached Bhagavan and enquired, "Bhagavan, this is what the Hindu scriptures say. Will you please give me *sanyas*?" Bhagavan remained silent…but you know our dear Maurice. He was persistent in his appeal. One day he approached Bhagavan on the hill and said, "Bhagavan, give me *sanyas*. I want to renounce the world and strive toward enlightenment." Bhagavan, in a very compassionate tone, answered, "*Sanyas* is taken from within; not from without." Maurice's face fell at the response. But Bhagavan, so much like a mother, looked at Maurice and explained, "You are already a *sanyasi*. Why do you want to take up ochre robes? I will not 'give' you *sanyas*." So what did Maurice with his ingenuous, inventor brain do? He went to Swami Ramdas, a realized soul in Anandashram. Somehow or the other, he convinced Swami Ramdas to give him *sanyas*. So the Swami gave him the outward *sanyas* that he so desperately desired. Maurice was given a new name. He was called Swami Bharatananda, which means "one who delights staying in India."

Maurice became close to Swami Ramdas. Once Swami Ramdas told him, "Maurice, Swami Bharatananda, this is your last birth." Being a great sage, he could understand the greatness of Maurice Frydman.

One day, while Bhagavan was coming down the hill, Maurice came and stood in front of him, dressed in the ochre robes and beads of a Hindu monk. Maurice was rather anxious because he wanted his master to approve of what he had done, although Bhagavan himself had not personally granted him *sanyas*. Seeing him, Bhagavan started laughing! Then, Bhagavan smilingly turned to his attendant and said, "He looks like a buffoon in a circus." Maurice understood. All his life, he had been a true *sanyasi* from within. Consequently, his attachment to wearing ochre robes continued only for a few more years. That is what Bhagavan meant when he said, "*Sanyasa* is to give up attachment**,**" because he never had any kind of attachment.

You will be astounded to know that even while working in the factory, he led a very austere life. He refused to accept his monthly salary of 3,000 rupees —an incredibly huge amount in those days! He declined the amount by merely saying, "I do not want it." And where did he sleep at night? Once the shops closed for the night, he would sleep on the porch of those shops! And what did this big boss, this top man working at the factory have for lunch? While all the other workers trooped into the dining hall to eat the lunch that they had brought from home, Maurice would stand at the dining hall's entrance, clad in his ochre robes with his begging bowl in his hands. This was in the spirit of a Hindu *sanyasi*. The workers, who loved him so much, would first put

something in the begging bowl before going into the dining room to eat. Not only that, Maurice sewed his clothes. He wore only *Khadi* pajamas and *kurtha* made out of cloth from the yarn that he himself had spun on the *charkha,* a traditional, Indian spinning wheel. Even his footwear was stitched by him! He led a remarkably simple life, but he was happy and content. He didn't gloat about his way of life nor relent from it. He was just tremendously happy.

Maurice's association with Bhagavan remained close and regular. Just like the child questions the mother, so too would Maurice put forth a lot of incisive questions to Bhagavan on the practical aspects of *sadhana*. It was not just to satisfy his intellectual curiosity that he had these exchanges with Bhagavan. Bhagavan would patiently answer his questions. Maurice would record these exchanges and would then show the record to Bhagavan and get it corrected. This was then later published as the original *Maharshi's Gospel* on the occasion of Bhagavan's sixtieth birthday in 1939. From that year onward, the book has been guiding true aspirants. Even today, it remains such a beautiful guide for us serious aspirants. I have always recommended three books for sincere aspirants to study—*The Maharshi and his Message, Who am I* and *Maharshi's Gospel.* It was during such close interaction with Bhagavan that Maurice wrote a moving series of verses and gave them to Bhagavan. Bhagavan read them all with great interest. In two of these verses, Maurice says:

So long I have been on this stage to please thee. My eyes are blinded by the light of thy plague, My ears are deafened by the rolling thunders of thy laughter, My heart is turned to ashes by the flame of real sorrow. My Lord to please thee I have made a

fool of myself. And now I am unable to stop the agony of the plague. My Lord, drag me down from this stage, Master, I have forgotten the way in and the way out.

Bhagavan was happy to read through the verses. And just look at the response given by Bhagavan—he said that this was exactly what had been written by Appayya Dikshitar, a sage who lived several centuries ago! His verses in Sanskrit were written on palm leaves, and many people were still not aware of them. Bhagavan said that Appaya Dikshitar's verses describe the situation of the court dancer performing in the presence of the king. She cannot stop dancing unless it pleases the king to tell her to stop. The dancer's limbs may ache, but she cannot stop of her own accord. She cries, "Oh Lord, I am weary of the many births and deaths that I have endured. One glance from you, Oh Lord, is sufficient to put an end to this dance of birth and death and grant me release." Bhagavan paused before saying, "Maurice Frydman belongs here. Somehow he was born abroad, but he has come here again. Otherwise, how is it possible for him to compose verses similar to *Appayya Dikshitar*?"

Bhagavan allowed Maurice to continue his dance by not asking him to come down. He was to continue performing on stage because he was a *karma yogi* who still had a lot of good deeds to perform, as we are going to see. So Maurice flowed along with the state of things and continued working busily in the factory.

It so happened that a prince, Apa Pant, who had studied in England, was sent to the Maharaja of Mysore state, so that he could be trained in

the art of governance. In the course of his training, he was asked to visit the factory where Maurice was working. Apa Pant himself was a glorious person. When he went to the factory in which Maurice was the managing director, he could not help being drawn to the brilliant and dedicated Maurice. Likewise, Maurice, too, took a great liking to Apa Pant and started guiding him spiritually. He impressed upon the young prince the need to focus on developments in the villages of his state, and to take science and technology to the villages so that life could be easier and smoother for the peasants there. Apa Pant pleaded–with Maurice, "Please come to our state, and stay there at least for five or six months to guide us."

One fine day, the Prince did find Maurice at his palace! Maurice told the Prince, "I have come to you. I have resigned my job in Bangalore. I would like to serve the villages of the Aundh state!" The stunned Prince did not know what to say. He could only say, "This state cannot afford to pay a rich engineer like you." Maurice, in his very characteristic manner responded, "I will sleep on the floor there in that room. Just give me an Indian desk to work from. I have got legs to walk, and I will take you on my walks. We will both work together in the villages of Aundh. Now, if you could give me some food . . . I am hungry." Maurice was always telegraphic, but very, very clear!

Wherever he was, Maurice remained in correspondence with Ramana Maharshi. We will come to understand that inwardly, he was at all times in the presence of the omniscient Bhagavan. In one of his letters to Bhagavan, he wrote, "The Maharshi is with me not only when I think of

him, but also when I am not thinking of him. Otherwise, how do I live?"

Apa Pant and Maurice started working together. You will be surprised to know that his office was under the shade of a huge tree in a village. He lived and worked very hard in the villages. Maurice heard about Mahatma Gandhi's deep interest in bringing decentralized democracy into the villages in order to empower them. He set out to meet Mahatma Gandhi to learn more about the process. Mahatma Gandhi took to Maurice immediately and always addressed Maurice only as Bharatananda; everyone in his Sevashram addressed him in the same manner. Gandhi found that Maurice was not only a hard worker, but also an inventor who was using the Indian *charkha*. By way of blessing, Mahatma Gandhi asked Maurice, "Why do you not invent something to help us produce yarn more quickly?" Maurice immediately invented a new *charkha* called *Dhanush Takli*. The extraordinary thing about the new invention was that one could produce three times the yarn with the same energy that was spent previously. Mahatma Gandhi was so pleased!

Whether Maurice was with Bhagavan, with Mahatma Gandhi, or with J. Krishnamurti, his method remained the same: first questioning, experimenting, and experiencing the Truth at every level, and only then accepting and following it. Such was his nature.

This is exactly how he led the seventy-five villages that he was reforming. He loved the poor, uneducated villagers and was so

compassionate toward them that they felt purified in his presence; in fact, they addressed him as *Swami*. Maurice was successful in his venture in the villages, and very soon, the whole of India became aware of the kind of life that Maurice was leading. By that time Bhagavan and Mahatma Gandhi had dropped their bodies. This was a great setback for Maurice, but he decided to rededicate himself to the cause they had taken up because he felt he was still on stage and had to play the outward game.

Maurice went to Varanasi to stay in the Krishnamurti institution. He implemented all the reform programs in the surrounding villages. Krishnamurti's followers were also great admirers of Buddhism, since the teachings of the Buddha and Krishnamurti are similar in many aspects. The senior followers of Krishnamurti like Achipatuvaradan and others became very close to Maurice. This also happened to be during the Tibetan turmoil, when the communists in China were in the mood for seizing power. When Maurice heard about the tumult, he swung into action, because at that time, Apa Pant had become the governor of Sikkim. Without wasting time in gossip or in sharing the news, he immediately went to Sikkim and met Apa Pant. He told Apa Pant with gusto, "You are going to be of great use to me! We have a great mission to accomplish here because we will save His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, all the old Buddhist manuscripts, and thousands of Tibetans."

Characteristic of Maurice, he immediately escorted Apa Pant to Delhi in order to meet the then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru. Maurice, the diligent worker, already had the road map by this time to

successfully carry out the rescue plan. Achut Patvardan related to me how Maurice worked toward the escape of His Holiness. It was eventually the blueprint laid down by Maurice that Nehru followed in getting His Holiness out of Tibet. They fed the Chinese government with wrong information on the movements of His Holiness, and ultimately the Indian government acted in a contrary manner.

The day His Holiness escaped to Indian Territory, so did hundreds of other Tibetans. His Holiness came with all the old Buddhist manuscripts, which are now in the museum in Saranath. Thus the priceless palm leaf manuscripts were saved from the hands of the communist Chinese. When the Dalai Lama entered India, Maurice planned that Achipatuvaradan would meet the Dalai Lama and give him the details. Yet, there is no mention of Maurice in any of the books related to either Dalai Lama's escape or the smuggling in of the Buddhist manuscripts from Tibet. I have never seen a person as Self-effacing as Maurice! Similarly, there was originally no mention of Maurice's name in the *Maharshi's Gospel*; only now is his name being mentioned!

At the time of the Tibetan struggle, Jawaharlal Nehru very bluntly said, "My hands are tied." Maurice immediately flew all over India, spending his own money, in order to find refuge for these hundreds of Tibetan refugees. Maurice sought a cooler place for the refugees and established five settlements. If today, the Tibetans are enjoying a peaceful existence in India, it is because of this Jewish mystic saint, whose name is not mentioned anywhere! Jawaharlal Nehru discovered the capability of this

man in bringing a semblance of order even in chaotic situations, and therefore requested Maurice to take over the *Khadi* movement. It had initially been started by Gandhi, but had fallen into total disarray. This meant that Maurice had to go to Mumbai, where he stayed with an old friend of his, Miss Petit. Miss Petit was a millionaire, but never once did Maurice take advantage of her fortune.

Bhagavan provided me the opportunity to meet Maurice in Mumbai. I had earlier met him at the *Ashram* in the 1960s during the rare visits that he made here. I met him again when I went to Mumbai in the 1970s to collect funds for the advertisements for the *Ashram's* journal, *The Mountain Path*. Maurice then told me, "While your body is engaged in running the *Ashram*, your heart should be totally settled in that pure awareness of formless Truth. Never miss that, whatever you are doing."

We used to have beautiful private conversations. Once Maurice confessed to me with a natural seriousness, "The burning regret for us all is that probably full advantage was not taken of those happy and precious days when Bhagavan was with us physically; eating, talking, laughing, and openly available to us all. Reality was there in abundance in our midst for the taking, and anyone could take it. But we enclosed ourselves in our humility, in our false humility, in procrastination, and false excuses. We took, therefore, a cupful, when the ocean was at our feet!"

On yet another occasion, he prodded me on, just to give me a push: "See, Bhagavan is not the person. He is the teaching. As the teaching, he

is fully available to you. In addition to whatever work you are doing, plunge within and taste awareness inwardly. That awareness is our Bhagavan."

Maurice would take me for long walks in Mumbai. He would tell me, "I will not provide you with a car. I will not even take you by bus. You will walk wherever you go, along with me. Are you prepared?" With hands folded in a *Namaste*, I answered, "Would I hesitate to be in the proximity of the Truth of reality?" Maurice was a spiritual giant, but physically he was less than five feet tall! Surely no one would hesitate to walk next to him!

On one of these walks, Maurice told me, "Today I am going to take you to the place where I met a simple man selling *beedis* (Indian cigarettes)." As we were walking toward the place, Maurice narrated, "I saw a group of people smoking *beedis;* they were relating their woes of life. This simple man answered them exactly in the manner of Ramana Maharshi. Had Ramana Maharshi spoken in Marathi, it would have been the same! I stopped in my tracks and listened intently. It was astounding to see an ordinary man selling *beedis* talking so spontaneously! So I started going to the place every day and noting down what he had said. I would then go home and translate all the questions and answers into English."

However, Maurice was ridden with guilt because he had not sought the permission of this person. He informed the man what he had been doing and read out all his writings, translating them into Marathi. The man was delighted and told Maurice, "Go on recording, go ahead!" This

was later published as *I am That*, a publication that helped lay a foundation for the spiritual world. This man was none other than Nisargadatta Maharaj. Later on, after I had met Maharaj, I told Maurice, "Whatever you say is absolutely true. I can feel Bhagavan's presence in his presence. The same teaching of Bhagavan comes from him spontaneously."

Maurice always used to encourage me, "Come on and narrate to me the dialogue that you had with Nisargadatta Maharaj." He would add, "Being a spiritual aspirant, the association with sages and saints will deepen your understanding; it will help you go deeper and experience it. Reading improves only the intellectual understanding. This experience-oriented understanding will happen, whether you have understood it or not, only in the presence of realized masters." Saying this, he encouraged my going to the Maharaj.

I was unable to be with Maurice Frydman in his last days, but I am happy to understand from one of Bhagavan's devotees (who also happened to be Nisargadatta Maharaj's devotee) that Bhagavan himself looked after him. The devotee told me about a nurse in Mumbai, who normally charged a huge fee for her services. This nurse had a dream, in which *a sadhu appeared* wearing only a loin cloth. The *sadhu* very clearly said, "My devotee is suffering. Go and attend to him." So saying, the *sadhu* also gave her the precise directions of where to go.

The nurse went to the place described in the dream the next day, and found Maurice Frydman in bed. Miss Petit was older than Maurice, and

she, too, was helpless and unattended. The nurse immediately offered her services. Maurice's austere attitude would not allow him to accept her services; therefore he refused. The nurse was very disappointed and was leaving the room when she saw a picture of Ramana Maharshi in the room. She went back to Maurice and exclaimed, "This is the *sadhu* that appeared in my dream." Maurice was visibly moved and said, "So, my master has come to look after me." The nurse served him until the last.

Apa Pant, who looked on Maurice as his guru, was present, and I would like to share some glorious passages about his experience: "The sage is dying," whispered a soft voice over the phone in Mumbai. "The sage is asking for you: 'Apa, come as soon as you can.' When I arrived, Miss Petit, the doctor and the nurse complained to me that Maurice was refusing to eat and take medicine. They implored me to make Maurice eat and take medicine--as if anyone could make Maurice do anything that he did not want to do! There he lay in his familiar room, with everything meticulously clean and in its proper place. As I approached him reverentially, he shouted, 'Apa, who is dying?'

"The next day, he drove everyone out of the room, ordering them to leave him alone with me. Then, he said beautifully, 'Apa, I hear music. I see the bright light. Who dies? No one is dying. This diseased body is keeping me away from that harmonial beauty. Do not let them keep me in this body. Go now in peace.'"

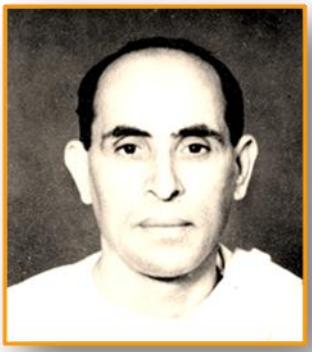
The next day we were all at his bedside as he breathed his last. Three breaths, *Hari Om, Hari Om, Hari Om*, and… he was re-absorbed. Nisargadatta Maharaj was also at his bedside, so I asked him, "Maharaj, where is Maurice going? What is happening to him?" Maharaj replied, "Nothing is happening. No one is dying, for no one is born."

I asked him, "Then why this sorrow, this emptiness, this loss, Maharaj?" Maharaj graciously turned to me and said, "Who is feeling the sorrow? Who is feeling the emptiness? Who is feeling the loss?" I remained silent. Within hours, in the presence of Nisargadatta Maharaj, the remains of what we called Maurice Frydman were consumed in the electric fire. Ashes to ashes; dust to dust.

NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

S. S. Cohen



S. S. Cohen had a keen intellect for enquiring. He was born into a Jewish family from Iraq. At the age of eighteen or nineteen, he came across an esoteric book that detailed miraculous happenings in the life of yogis. Determined to go in search of the Truth, he felt he should sacrifice everything and all to meet such a life-transforming spiritual person.

The First World War took place at that time. It taught him the great lesson that peace can never be attained outwardly, but only inwardly. Even though a teenager, this conviction born out of the heart, not the head, told him that the key to the mystery of his life lay in India. Indians call it providence or coincidence when we have such experiences, but it is only the *Higher Power*'s grace. In an aspirant's life, nothing happens as coincidence. So as divine providence would have it, S. S. Cohen's close friend in Mumbai fell seriously sick. He was a millionaire until one day, his stocks and shares crashed. Shortly, he was on the streets, a pauper and deeply depressed. He wrote to the one true friend who could help, S. S. Cohen. Cohen felt that this friend who was drowned in depression should read the same esoteric book which had helped him so much. Cohen also felt this was his opportunity to go to India, but he belonged to a very, very poor family. He was the eldest of eleven children, and his father was a cleaner on a ship. But the father loved his son. When he

came to know of his son's inward longing, he went to his boss and requested that he give his son a deck hand's job on a ship that could take him to Bombay. Cohen was soon on his way to India. Cohen's father was so poor that he could give him only one coin for his journey. He put that one coin into his son's pocket and lovingly blessed him, "Go, and be successful in your spiritual search."

Cohen went to meet his friend. The book helped his friend to come out of the depression, but both of them were still poor. Cohen still had that one coin, but his friend did not even have that. Cohen, who was always a hard worker, hunted and found a job as a shop assistant in Bombay. With his keen intellect, he observed that there were two sets of people. One set were happy and comfortable, and the other set were unhappy and always complaining. He figured out that the people who were happy had two qualifications. They had lots of money and knowledge. Those who were unhappy did not have money or knowledge. Cohen decided, I will be a man of knowledge *and* earn money. He wanted money only so that he could do spiritual *sadhana*, without the distraction of severe poverty. So he learned accounting. He first started with his boss**,** who was also not a very wealthy man. His boss trained him in accounting and saw that he was brilliant, so he entrusted all his accounts to Cohen. He also recommended Cohen to the other shops around. Cohen began keeping their accounts and became very well known among the neighborhood shopkeepers as a reputable accountant.

While this was going on, his friend whom he had helped save from depression became a member of the Theosophical Society and started taking Cohen to some of the Society's meetings in Mumbai. There Cohen met its president, Mrs. Annie Besant. Her keen intellect, total dedication

to work, and perfect execution of it attracted him. Again as providence would have it, Annie Besant was looking for somebody to help her with the accounts whenever she came to Mumbai. By that time, Cohen felt drawn to her. He had already had a few private meetings with Annie Besant. Consequently, she asked him to assist her with the accounts. She was so satisfied with his work that she took him to Chennai, the headquarters of the Theosophical Society. Cohen was there for five years and made full use of it. The library of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, Chennai**,** is one of the biggest libraries in all of India. There he studied *Vedanta* and other branches of philosophy. The sages quote: "If you take one step toward God, God will come nine steps toward you." Cohen was almost in tears when he told me, "I was so near Bhagavan for five years, yet I did not even hear about him."

During this time, one of his other friends, living thousands of miles away**,** sent him a book by post. That was the turning point in our revered friend S. S. Cohen's life. The book he received was Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*. Reading it thrilled him, as his life's ambition was to sacrifice everything to be with a life-transforming sage. This milestone was about to be fulfilled. Upon reading the book describing many masters, Cohen, like Major Chadwick, was attracted only to the three chapters on Ramana Maharshi. His intuition told him that this was the sage he had been yearning for.

He packed up and left for Tiruvannamalai with seven thousand rupees in savings. He came to *Ramanashram* in February 1936 dressed in Western attire. He was ushered into the dining hall where Bhagavan was finishing his breakfast. Bhagavan, without even lifting his head, invited the stranger in a most sweet voice, "Please come and have breakfast." When

Cohen later recounted this, he was literally in tears. That was the beginning. One can say that was the end of my spiritual seeking. When he went in and saw Bhagavan seated there wearing a loin cloth, immediately he had an ecstatic feeling that he was in front of Truth in human form. While Cohen was still in a state of ecstasy, Bhagavan went walking on the hill as usual. When Bhagavan came back to the old hall from his walk, Cohen entered and sat in front of his guru. He could not control his emotions, which were welling up as spiritual ecstasy. This is what Cohen said**:** "I was alone in the hall with Bhagavan. Joy and peace suffused my being. Never before have I had such a feeling of purity and well-being at the mere proximity of a person. My mind was already in deep contemplation of Bhagavan, Bhagavan not as flesh, although that was exquisitely formed and featured, but as a divine presence, which could make itself so pronouncedly felt. After a while I became aware of my environment, and I saw Bhagavan looking at me with large penetrating eyes wreathed in smiles, rendered divinely soothing by childlike innocence." This is how Cohen was called!

Seated in front of Bhagavan, totally lost, he suddenly realized he still hadn't changed his clothing. He also remembered the fruits he had put into his suitcase to be offered to the Master. But as he searched for his suitcase keys in his pocket, he couldn't find them. It turned out to be yet another synchronistic event. Resigned to the turn of events, when he sat with his eyes closed, he felt the clinking of keys on his lap. One of the devotees, Ramaswami Pillai, had gone to the railway station by cycle on *Ashram* work. The station master was waiting with the bunch of keys, expecting somebody from *Ramanashram* because a passenger had handed them to him saying, "Sir; these keys were found on the empty seat where a Westerner who alighted here was seated. Perhaps you will be able to

hand them over to him." After this he had gone and caught the moving train. So the station master gave them to Ramaswami Pillai. When Ramaswami Pillai came back and told Bhagavan this, Bhagavan confirmed, "Whose keys are these? Indeed, they are his!" So, Ramaswami Pillai dropped them on Cohen's lap. This was one of the series of coincidences that happened in the presence of the Master. It brought forcefully and naturally to Cohen the fact that he had embarked on this journey to India to find the key to the mystery of life. And now he had confirmation that he had found it!

Cohen had also brought with him a letter for Paul Brunton, who was staying in *Ramanashram* at that time. As he was in search of Paul Brunton to hand him the letter, he saw a Westerner seated in front of a table reading a book in one of the rooms. He greeted him. "Mr. Paul Brunton, good morning!" The Westerner replied, "I am not Paul Brunton. I am Major A. W. Chadwick." Chadwick and Cohen instantaneously became friends. Chadwick continued, "Paul Brunton has gone away. He will return in two days." When Paul Brunton came back, Chadwick, Cohen, and he had a beautiful satsang talking for hours about the Master and trying to get some of their doubts clarified. Now, Paul Brunton was an intellectual and so was Cohen, which of course resulted in, as it usually does, heated discussions! The topic was celibacy. Paul Brunton did not believe in continence. However, Cohen maintained that continence was vital for a spiritual aspirant. He was convinced that for aspirants, practices like sattvic food, continence, and satsang were all helpful. But Brunton was unmoved. Then Chadwick said to them, "Why are you going on arguing? Let us go and ask Bhagavan." So they went to Bhagavan, and Chadwick asked him, "Bhagavan, is Brahmachari, continence, necessary for spiritual aspirants?" He replied, "To remain

unmoved in Brahman is Brahmachari. Charya in Sanskrit means movement. The very word bramacharya indicates, you should not move from Brahman. So staying unmoved in the 'I Am' is very essential for aspirants."

This answer of Bhagavan, which led to instantaneous dissolution of the problem, influenced Cohen to feel that he must study all the works of Bhagavan. He stayed in the *Ashram*, became a permanent resident and started studying all the books of Bhagavan. What he especially liked about *Ramanashram* was that it was free from any form of control. Nobody was forced to attend meetings, classes, bhajans, or rituals. The absolute freedom given to the aspirant by the institution captivated Cohen's heart. When he turned to Bhagavan, Bhagavan, too, allowed absolute freedom. There were no instructions from Bhagavan such as, "This should be done! That should not be done! This is more important! That is less important!" There was none of this for the simple reason that Bhagavan knew that each person knew what was best for him, and no one else could know it better. Cohen was very much attracted to the *Ashram*, but even more to Bhagavan, who was free from all forms of control. Cohen has said, "Bhagavan was the most liberal of gurus. At no time did he feel the need to form rules and regulations to control the lives of his disciples. Neither did he believe in a common enforced discipline, because he himself had attained the highest without them and had discovered the Self-evident Truth within himself. It was his experience that at the right time, Self-realization surges up from within by a free impulse like the budding and blossoming of a flower."

At that time, Cohen was staying in the *Ashram's* common guest room. As a serious aspirant, he felt he needed solitude for his *sadhana*, which the

crowded room could not offer. So he went to Bhagavan and asked, "Bhagavan, may I stay in a hut outside the *Ashram* to pursue my *sadhana*?" Getting an affirmative answer from Bhagavan, he had a hut built in Palakothu. Since Cohen was a chronic asthma patient, Bhagavan took care that he should not go into a wet hut by advising him, "Wait for it to dry up." Cohen told me that he often wondered how Bhagavan knew that he was an asthma patient. For the house warming ceremony of his hut, Cohen invited Bhagavan and the other devotees. When Bhagavan entered Cohen's hut, he told him, "Do not put a chair for me or anything." Then he sat on a mat on the floor along with all the others. After the ceremony, when Bhagavan was leaving, Cohen followed him, full of emotions**,** and prayed to him, "Bhagavan**,** you have given a home for this body. Will you please give me an eternal home for my soul also? It is only for this that I have come here severing all ties with family and worldly affairs." Bhagavan, still walking, turned to him after a little time and said, "Cohen, your firm conviction brought you here. Where is the room for doubt?"

Cohen's only income was the meager interest that he was getting from his savings of seven thousand rupees. While living in his hut at Palakothu, every morning he would cook a little rice and vegetable, after which he would go to the *Ashram* to be with Bhagavan. He would come back only for his lunch. Cohen told me that all through his life, he had never been attracted to variety in food. He ate only to appease his hunger, not his palate. One day in *Ramanashram*, a very wealthy man happened to offer an extensive and huge feast. Cohen was not invited for that. On that day, when he went to his hut to have his meager meal, for the first time in his life, he was troubled about food. Cohen told me, "I never thought about food anytime before or after, but on that day, I was

suffering. They were all eating such rich food there, and here I was eating this meager meal."

When Bhagavan passed by his hut that afternoon, he asked Cohen whether he had eaten his lunch--something he had never done before. Cohen replied that he had eaten just a little rice and vegetable. To which Bhagavan replied, "Rice and vegetable? That is very good. When I was in *Virupaksha* cave, for days there would not be any food. On some days somebody would bring some rice. I would add water to the cooked rice and then eat it without salt. You have got rice, vegetables, salt, and yogurt on top of it." Cohen told me, "After that day, not even once was I distracted by any thought of food." He added, "That is the advantage when you stay with the Master. Every defect is rooted out once and for all. Living with a master is itself a spiritual *sadhana*."

Cohen was with Bhagavan the whole day and sometimes in at night, too. He said, "When staying with the Master, you would imbibe his spiritual energy [presence]. At night, when only a few of the serious aspirants would be around him, Bhagavan would tell us about the lives of ancient saints, sages, and mythological stories. But whether Bhagavan talked or was silent, it was supercharged with spiritual energy, and we loved to look at him and soak in that spiritual energy. Cohen once said that such proximity to the Master was very rewarding to him in that stage of his *sadhana*. When I asked him how this was so, he replied, "It healed those wounds I had from wasting energy on foolish expectations and upholding false values and hollow ideals. Bhagavan was pouring his grace on me. I was suddenly gripped by an overwhelming urge to surrender myself unreservedly to him to guide me in my spiritual hunger, abandoning all the methods I had previously followed and all the beliefs I

had built my hopes on. My fate and all that I was, from that very moment I passed it on to the sacred hands of my Master, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi."

Three years of austere *sadhana* followed. Cohen started going on the eight-mile circuit of the hill every other day. When I asked him why, he told me, "During those three hours of walking round the hill, there is no thought; only Self-attention. There are no physical or mental distractions. The holy hill helps focus attention on your Self without volition and with greatest ease." This helped him establish inner silence and solitude. When external activities started attracting and distracting him, he went to Bhagavan and said, "I want to intensify my *sadhana*. To do that, I want to go on a Yatra, a pilgrimage." Bhagavan asked him if he had made any arrangements for it. Cohen replied, "Bhagavan, I have not made any arrangements. I am going as a sadhu. I will dress like an Indian; eat vegetarian food, visit temples, and sacred places, keep myself secluded, and focusing attention toward my Self."

Cohen toured all over southern India. He visited many temples. Cohen, like Maurice Frydman**,** had a truly questioning and logical approach to spiritual pursuit. Initially, Cohen was very intellectual. The intellect, being the eye of the mind, can take an aspirant to a state of perfect theoretical understanding of the Self. But it can never provide the aspirant even an iota of the taste of it! At this stage, a true aspirant gets frustrated and disappointed for he can, at the most, experience only a vacuum. This produces in him a "dry" state. The sage recognizes this depression and helps the aspirant to transcend it. One way is to guide him to go on a pilgrimage. During such travels, the aspirant gets ample opportunities to recognize, within their self, the actual shift from theory to practically

experiencing the Truth. Bhagavan helped Cohen to achieve this transcendence by approving his pilgrimage across South India. This brought about a tremendous change in his spiritual life.

This is how Cohen interpreted to me his successful transcendence from "dry" saturation in theory to his abidance in the still Self within, as Love, as the Heart: During his pilgrimage, he met Swami Ramdas at his Anandashram in Kerala. Ramdas, full of love and joy, was frequently heard singing Ram's name. In the presence of Ramdas, who had his realization in the presence of Ramana Maharshi, joy permeated the very air. For the first time, Cohen understood the real nature of bhakti: it is pure, inward joy. When he walked out of Anandashram, he walked out as a happy, joyful man still pursuing jnana marga. He went to Kanyakumari and there, he started feeling his separation from Bhagavan. Cohen told me, "This emotional pining for Bhagavan was the gift of Swami Ramdas to me." Lying down on the sands by the ocean, he started crying, "Oh Bhagavan, how mighty you are and how sublime and all-pervasive is your immaculate purity. With what tender emotions do we, your disciples, think of your incomparable qualities, your gentleness, your serene, adorable countenance, your cool refreshing smile, the sweetness of the words that come out of your mouth, the radiance of your all-pervasive love, and your equal vision toward one and all… even toward diseased, stray animals!"

Thus pining for his guru, Cohen came back to *Ramanashram*. He started noting down the conversations and dialogues between Bhagavan and his devotees. Since taking notes in the hall was not acceptable at that time, he would memorize whatever conversations took place there, and then go to his room and note it all down in his notebook. It was this notebook

that was later published as *Guru Ramana*. He was also the only person to note down in his diaries the last two years of Bhagavan's illness. Being a homeopath, he had the knowledge to write accurately about the various treatments tried and the surgical operations performed. Meanwhile, he was starting to see glimpses of bliss, which Bhagavan had said was the very nature of the Self. It had taken a long time for Cohen, but being an intellectual, he still had doubt. He had read in the scriptures that the ultimate realization is always instant and sudden. So he went to Bhagavan and asked, "Bhagavan, the scriptures say that the final realization is a sudden and instant event." Bhagavan smiled at Cohen and said, "Yes! But it should not be forgotten that before that, there must be a maturing, which is a slow process like the ripening of a fruit on a tree."

He recorded the following on April 12, 1950, two days before Bhagavan dropped the body: "It looks like we are on the eve of doomsday. The eve of the day, on which we are destined to be deprived of everything we hold worth living for; our refuge, our love, our hope, the greatest treasure, the precious life of our great Master. Maharshi is still conscious and at times, speaks. But until the last, he asks for nothing, expresses no opinion on what should and should not be done for him, does not complain of any pain, except when lifted or touched on a painful spot. Then, and then only as if to give a piece of information, he would remark, 'There is not a spot that is not painful to the touch.' Then the attendant takes greater care in handling him, especially today when the pain is so severe."

After Bhagavan dropped the body, Cohen helped the *Ashram* management. There were a lot of quarrels and feelings of enmity toward the management. Most of the old devotees had left. From 1950 to 1951,

the situation was so precarious that there was no breakfast, tea, or coffee—only lunch and dinner. Soon, the *Sarvaadhikari*, Niranjanananda Swami, also dropped the body. My father became the next president. He did not know English. So Cohen supported my father, studiously writing the many letters and defense affidavits required for the numerous legal cases against the *Ashram*. Cohen was immensely helpful in getting the *Ashram* back on its feet. Being the true renunciate that he was, when everything was almost settled, he passed on his small cottage to Mrs. Talyearkhan, another devotee with whom he was sharing it. He also had a small piece of land next to my father's land. He bequeathed it to my father without any condition. Not wanting to be a burden to the *Ashram*, he left and settled in Vellore. When I asked him why he left *Arunachala* and settled in Vellore, he replied, "My asthma became worse. The weather in Vellore, though just fifty-two miles from here, is more conducive."

There too, Cohen led an independent life. He never asked for help or money from anyone and lived a very, very frugal life. When aspirants visited his house, he would fill them up with stories about Bhagavan and his teachings. One of the devotees, Dorab Framji, would visit him regularly. On one such visit, Cohen was not to be seen. Searching for him, he found Cohen lying down in his bathroom. He had been lying in the bathroom for seven hours, as he could not get up. So Dorab put him up in his house at Ramana Nagar, opposite to the *Ashram,* with the request that I send him food. After a year, he again fell in the bathroom and was not discovered for many hours. Fortunately, Dorab came that day to Tiruvannamalai and found Cohen lying down in the bathroom. He came running to me saying, "We cannot leave him without assistance. Let him stay in the *Ashram*." In the *Ashram*, he fell one night from his bed

and thought he had broken his legs. I brought both orthopedic and Ayurvedic doctors to examine him. After checking him they both agreed that nothing was broken. But Cohen had convinced himself that his legs were broken and that he could not walk. So I obtained for him a wheel chair and an assistant called Kannan, who served him until the end.

Cohen was very kind to me. If by five in the evening I was still in the *Ashram* office, engrossed in work, he would come by and urge me to stop for the day. If I protested, he would scold me, "What is all this work? You have come here for *sadhana*. We have come here for our Master. All this service to the institution, to the Master, these will all bring you name, fame, popularity, and comfort, but you will be nowhere near emancipation. You will do *sadhana*. Wake up**,** Ganesan! Wake up as I have done. I did enough service and then went into solitude. Go into solitude. Plunge into *sadhana*." He told me repeatedly, "Do not be duped by all these imaginary convictions that you are serving the guru or helping the institution."

For reasons unknown, Cohen's mind became outwardly disturbed in his last days. Whenever I went to his room after my work at the office, he would tell me again and again, "Beware! Beware! Go back to *sadhana*. All this work is of no use to you. I am interested in you, Ganesan. You have come for emancipation." Immediately after saying this, he would continue, "Your father has put me on the seventh floor. I have no legs, so how can I climb to the seventh floor?" The first time this happened, I was shocked: "Cohen, you are one of the greatest intellects that has come to our Master. What are you talking about? There is not even a first floor in *Ramanashram*!" Since he continued to blabber, I shook him to get him out of what I thought was his delirium. At this, his eyes brightened up

and this is what he said: "Ganesan, just as in old age, the body goes beyond control and uncontrollably urinates or defecates; the mind also sometimes loses control. But since we are neither the body nor the mind, it does not matter."

To that I asked him, "Then, what state are you in, Mr. Cohen?" He replied, "I am in bliss. I am in total bliss." Next minute, he was blabbering again: "You put only one servant, Kannan. But, there are nine Kannans in my room. How can I sleep alone in the room?" Bewildered, I shook him again. He looked at me steadily and said, "Why do you listen to my mind? These are all in my mind. I reminded you not to listen to my mind." Since the intellectual aspect was very important in his life, his mind was now unwinding. Similarly, when some of the old devotees had to go through intense physical suffering in their last days, I would ask them, "Why should someone like you get such a disease?" They would invariably reply that it was because they had paid too much attention to the body and its comforts and now it was returning the favor! Cohen was the first devotee I saw who actually demonstrated the bliss that was beyond the mind. When I asked him why he blabbered Cohen answered, "When I turn my attention outward, it blabbers. When I turn my attention inward, it is bliss, Ganesan. I bless you, that you should never have this affectation from the body and the mind. I bless you."

Sometimes when he cried, I would console him, "Cohen**,** why do you cry? You will pass away smoothly into death, as peacefully as you slip into deep sleep." A very humorous man, he would then give me a smile and say, "I know**,** Ganesan, why you say this. You are saying this so that after I die, you can tell everyone else that Cohen died exactly as you predicted!" For some reason, Cohen was very particular that his body

was to be buried in the *Ashram*. My father and I assured him it would be done. Cohen even showed me the spot where he should be buried. Sometimes, when I was not at the *Ashram*, he would take Kannan to that spot and instruct him: "Dig a pit here and drop my body into it, now. Then, fill it up with earth." Frightened, Kannan would shout: "Oh, no, no! That is a sin!" Cohen would plead with him: "It is all right, Kannan! Don't worry. This is the place where I will be buried anyhow when I am dead. I am only asking you to do it now when I am alive. That's all! No sin would come to you!"

I traveled away on *Ashram* work in 1980. At that time, Cohen dropped the body. We don't know why Cohen wanted his body to be buried in the *Ashram*. Unfortunately, despite the assurance given to him, his body was taken outside and given a common burial. When I came back from my tour, I said, "Cohen was one of the greatest devotees of Bhagavan. He is a spark from *Arunachala*! Could we not fulfill this small wish of his?" I did not know how many would approve of it, but the fact is that I had his body exhumed and buried where his tomb is now in the *Ashram*. That night, I slept happily, knowing that Cohen's wish was fulfilled.

We should not waste thoughts on why he asked to be buried in the *Ashram,* if he was beyond his body and mind. Instead, we should look at how it happened. When he was in Vellore, he had given money to a Christian institution so that his last days should be taken care of by them. What forced him to fall in the bathroom**,** and then brought him back to the *Ashram*? It would have appealed to his sense of humor that although he wanted his body to be buried in the *Ashram,* his body was buried outside at first. The ongoing playful *leela* brought his body back to be reburied inside the *Ashram*.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

When his book, *Guru Ramana* was ready, since *Ramanashram* could not publish it for lack of funds, Cohen published it himself in 1952. I wanted to bring it out as an *Ashram* publication. I went to Vellore and made a request for its publishing rights. He agreed. When in 1962 I brought out the second edition of *Guru Ramana*, for no known reason, I sent a copy to Dorab's elder sister, who was equally or more, a devotee of Bhagavan. At that time she was having serious family problems. She had a small room with Bhagavan's picture, which she worshiped. Her family and relatives objected and wanted to throw away the picture of Bhagavan. She said, "You can do anything to me. But just give me half an hour to worship Bhagavan". When she was denied even that, she decided to question and take Bhagavan to task, by locking herself in that small room. She prayed, "Bhagavan, prove to me that you are there, that you are my Guru."

I have visited her in that big apartment. Between the front door and the floor, there is an inch or two of space. Her meditation room is in a straight line from the front door, and the meditation room door, too, has a similar space beneath it. The postman whisked the parcel I had sent her through that space. It went straight into her room and hit her forcefully. The parcel was also amazingly open in such a way that when she looked down, she could see the title, *Guru Ramana*! To this day, I do not know why I sent the only copy to the lady in Mumbai instead of to anyone else.

Cohen's life is our life. It is our own life. It is like breathing. Breathing is common to all, but it is individualized. In the same way, Cohen's *sadhana*-oriented life is everyone's life. Reading about him and absorbing it awakens in us that pure awareness which Cohen aspired to and lived all his life. This very bright spark has gone back to the "Hill of the Holy Fire." Samuel Suleiman Cohen has been reabsorbed into *Arunachala*.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

N. Balarama Reddiar

Oh! Lord! Oh! Guru! You are the reality. Remaining as my inmost Self, ruling me during all my countless births. Glory to you who have put on this human form in order to redeem me through your upadesa. I do not see how I can repay your grace in helping to liberate me. Glory! Glory! Glory! to your sacred feet.

These lines from *Kaivalya Navanita* are quoted very often in *Talks with Ramana Maharshi* and *Letters from Sri Ramanashram*. This shows how significant they are.

The lines are a reflection of Bhagavan's teaching, which states that when a person has not recognized his Self, then the Self takes the human form of the guru who in turn leads the disciple on the path of Self-realization.

N. Balarama Reddy came to Sri *Ramanashram* in 1933. Unlike other people who came there in search of a guru, Balarama Reddy had already found a Master in Sri Aurobindo of Pondicherry and was a resident of his *Ashram* for five years. Aurobindo *Ashram* in Pondicherry was structured by many rules and regulations. Balarama Reddy did not find this an inconvenience since he had been raised by devout parents, and his father had been a particularly illustrious aspirant. He had seen his father touring all over India and observing silence for a whole year. Since he

wanted to do practice, like his father, he volunteered to do gardening for two hours in the afternoon so that he could have time for himself. All the while, he was also reading extensively. He read about Ramana Maharshi for the first time in B. V. Narasimha Swami's book, *Self-Realization*. Kapali Shastri, also a guest of Sri Aurobindo *Ashram*, was a Sanskrit scholar who paid frequent visits to Ramana Maharshi. Kapali Shastri's accounts of Ramana Maharshi both intrigued and fascinated Balarama Reddy.

When Kapali Shastri urged Balarama Reddy to pay a visit to the great sage at least once, he made up his mind to go. Balarama Reddy arrived in Sri *Ramanashram* early one morning in March 1933. Delicious *idlis* were being served for breakfast, and he was invited to partake of the breakfast. By the grace of a *Higher Power*, he was seated not only next to the Maharshi, but also to the right of him. Once the food had been served, it was the Maharshi's custom to give a nod to the person seated to his right. This was a signal for everyone to start eating. The Maharshi's simple gesture of nodding made Balarama Reddy feel elated. He found it to be a beautiful and pure experience because it enabled him to have a glimpse of the spiritual radiance of the Maharshi. Balarama Reddy was also overwhelmed by the sense of freedom in the *Ashram*.

Ramana Maharshi rarely asked anyone who came to the *Ashram* questions such as, "Who are you? Where do you come from?" Or, "How long will you be staying?" Since Balarama Reddy had come only for the day, he went to Bhagavan in the evening to take leave of him. The feeling of awe and wonder had still not left him. Bhagavan asked him, "Where do you come from?" Balarama Reddy was reminded of Adi Sankara's famous question, "*Kuthayatha*," meaning, "Whence do you come from?"

Balarama Reddy was thrilled by the question. It pulled him inward to the source of thought, and he experienced a taste of spiritual bliss. This is an example of the *Leela* bringing the aspirant and the guru together.

On his return to Pondicherry, he once again started reading B. V. Narasimha Swami's book *Self-Realization*, this time paying greater attention. He read that it was possible to change one's guru; to Balarama Reddy, this seemed a little contradictory. He decided to go to the *Ramanashram* once again. On his second visit, too, Balarama Reddy was captivated by the spiritual presence and peace that permeated *Ramanashram*. Yogi Ramiah, another significant devotee of Bhagavan, received him and took him to Bhagavan. Yogi Ramiah introduced Balarama Reddy to Bhagavan, saying, "Bhagavan, I know his father. This is Balarama Reddiar." Bhagavan looked at Balarama Reddy and this encouraged him to clear his doubt. Balarama Reddy asked, "Can a person change his guru?" Bhagavan responded with a beautiful reply. He said, "Yes, certainly! One can change their guru. What of that?" The question "What of that?" implied that Bhagavan had already changed the guru in Balarama Reddy's case. Balarama Reddy did not quite grasp what Bhagavan had said, yet he felt a sense of profound peace just sitting beside Bhagavan. He felt liberated at the *Ashram* because it did not have the rules and regulations of Sri Aurobindo *Ashram*. There was a natural and organic air about the *Ashram* that was elevating. He lost interest in everything except the Maharshi and his presence. He felt that he was being guided even though there was no one to tell him what to do or where to go. Even years later, Balarama Reddy would emphatically state, "The power of the presence of the Maharshi is the guiding force." He was well aware that the guidance had come from within.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Balarama Reddy stayed at the *Ashram* for three days, and during this time, he was even more convinced that Bhagavan was his guru and *Ramanashram* his home. On the third day, when he went to take leave of Bhagavan, he found Bhagavan alone, sitting on the sofa. What happened next strengthened his conviction further. He said, "In order to take leave of the Maharshi, I approached him while he was sitting on his couch, which was outside on the verandah. His feet rested softly on the ground. He had just returned from an afternoon stroll, after the midday meal. I fell to my knees and prostrated before his holy feet. I was aware of the *Ashram* rules, which prohibited devotees from touching Bhagavan's body. I kept at a slight distance—but just look at the beauty! As I lowered my head near his feet, in the twinkling of an eye, Bhagavan's feet ever so gently rose and the big toe of each foot very lightly touched my closed eyelids. It all happened in an instant. I was thrilled!"

Balarama Reddy went back to the Aurobindo *Ashram*. While there, he visited his village, but he would not stay in his house. Being a very austere man, he stayed in a small cottage on its grounds, continuing his practice and sustaining himself with whatever food was sent to him from his house.

A year later, he came to *Ramanashram* for the third time. This time, there were no rooms available. He had to stay with others in the common guest room, which continues to exist even now. One day he had the strong desire to go to the top of the hill. Without consulting anyone, he started climbing. After some time, he found himself in a very precarious position on a very steep rock face with no way up or down. There was nothing to hold on to, for there was rock everywhere. He prayed to

Bhagavan, and suddenly he found himself grasping at a root. He used it to pull himself up and to his surprise, found that he was on top of the hill. This strengthened his conviction in the power of faith and a divine presence. The experience influenced him to recognize Bhagavan as his Master, and his place, holy *Arunachala*.

Balarama Reddy returned to Aurobindo *Ashram,* determined to take leave of his guru, saying, "I am going to Ramana Maharshi." At Aurobindo *Ashram,* the custom was for aspirants to correspond daily with the Master. Everyone had their doubts cleared by putting them in writing and depositing the slip of paper in a box. The next morning Sri Aurobindo granted the answer to the question. Balarama Reddy wrote, "Master, you begin your teaching with Self-realization; Ramana Maharshi dwells only in Self-realization. Give me permission to go to *Ramanashram* and attain Self-realization." Quick came Sri Aurobindo's reply: "You can discover Self-realization here. There is no need for you to go anywhere."

This response disappointed Balarama Reddy. He was not ready to give in because he was drawn magnetically to the presence of Ramana Maharshi. He wrote yet again to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo replied, warning him, "If you go away, whatever work we have done on you until now will all be undone. So we will not give you permission." Balarama Reddy knew that he could not argue or quarrel with such a towering personality like Sri Aurobindo, but the divine play was such that he was compelled to write for the third time. He was determined to leave, whatever the reply. Such was his resolve to go to Sri Bhagavan's abode at *Arunachala*. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo understood Balarama Reddy's yearning and therefore granted him permission, albeit with a lot of hesitation. The rule

in Aurobindo *Ashram* was that all correspondence, once read, must be torn or *burned*. Balarama Reddy did this with all letters with the exception of the last letter of permission.

Balarama Reddy came to *Ramanashram* in 1937. And what an invaluable day it was! It was Ramana Maharshi's fifty-seventh birthday. It was a most auspicious occasion for the relentless disciple and the guru to bond. Balarama Reddy came with the intention of doing practice, dedicating, and surrendering his brilliant mind to the Master.

The *Ashram* had no private rooms at that time, and Balarama Reddy wanted privacy to pursue his practice. He was advised to take a room in town and come to meet Bhagavan every day. He would arrive at three in the morning and stay until eleven, only to go back for lunch. He would again visit the *Ashram* at three in the afternoon and stay on until eight at night. Meeting Bhagavan every day was vital for him as he said, "The presence and proximity of the Master is very important for the aspirant." This arrangement made it easier for Balarama Reddy to spend time just observing the Maharshi. The Maharshi guided him through words, gestures, acts of kindness, and the expression of love in silence.

Although he had given up Sri Aurobindo and had come to embrace Bhagavan as his Master, there was still this gnawing doubt, "Have I done the right thing?" Sri Aurobindo's physical and psychic influence was so overpowering that he could not easily extricate himself. He felt that he had to have it clarified that Ramana Maharshi was his guru and that moving away from the other Master had been the right decision. He intended to get the issue clarified by Bhagavan. Meanwhile, while reading

the newspaper, Bhagavan read a review on Sri Aurobindo's *Light on Yoga*. Someone seated in the hall said, "Balarama Reddy has that book!" Since the Maharshi had not read about Aurobindo's philosophy, he asked for the book and read it. Why? It was not for himself, but for the sake of his devotee who was soaked in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy.

One day, when Balarama Reddy was alone with Bhagavan, he sought the answer to two questions: had he done the right thing by coming away, and was it possible to attain physical immortality like Sri Aurobindo was proclaiming? Whenever this topic of physical immortality was discussed, Balarama Reddy would argue for its possibility with Chadwick, Cohen, and the others. However, he could never argue this topic with Bhagavan because he felt that the answers were coming straight from the Heart. The lingering doubt about physical immortality remained, until one day Bhagavan told him after reading the newspaper in the hall, "You know, in Kumbakonam, there was a C. V. V. Rao, who was a yogi. He professed the knowledge to prepare an herbal elixir that would ensure physical immortality. He said he could help people attain physical immortality. Great personalities like Tilak and Annie Besant wanted to meet him. But C. V. V. Rao died at the age of thirty-six!" Bhagavan showed Balarama Reddy the newspaper announcement and put his mind to rest on this issue.

Balarama Reddy showed Bhagavan the final letter that he got from Sri Aurobindo. Bhagavan found it difficult to read Sri Aurobindo's handwriting and requested Balarama Reddy to read it. Sri Aurobindo had written, "You are determined to follow a path in which you can achieve only partial realization. We give you blessings; if you stayed on here and

pursued your practice, both the Mother and I could have helped you."

When Balarama Reddy came to the part about partial realization, Bhagavan interjected, "Partial realization! If it is partial, then it is not realization. If it is realization, then it is complete—there are no parts to it." This settled all his devotee's doubts. He gave up all thoughts of continuing as Sri Aurobindo's disciple and decided to follow Bhagavan's path of *Self-Enquiry*. He lived in the *Ashram* where he looked on the members of the *Ashram* as his family and Bhagavan as his guru; a guru who was available all the time, to guide and bless his path.

It would seem to onlookers that Bhagavan was not interested in the affairs of others. But according to Balarama Reddy, "Bhagavan was keenly interested in true young aspirants, and this only the aspirant would know." When I asked him if Bhagavan had helped him, he said, "Bhagavan has helped me personally, and also in strengthening the depth of my practice." I asked him to share some of these experiences with me.

Balarama Reddy explained to me the struggles he experienced as an aspirant. Even the most sincere aspirant has a struggle. When Balarama Reddy was in Aurobindo *Ashram*, there was a young Hindu girl who was in love with him. The girl's parents came from the same state as Balarama Reddy, and they too wanted him to marry their daughter. The parents met the Mother at Aurobindo *Ashram* and the Mother said, "Yes. You marry this girl. It will be wonderful."

However, Balarama Reddy's mind was more drawn toward spiritual practice. He liked the woman, but he felt marriage would be a distraction.

The woman and her parents pursued him to *Ramanashram*. In a weak moment, Balarama Reddy wondered whether he should marry her, but he wanted permission from Bhagavan first.

That was the remarkable thing about Balarama Reddy. Before making a decision, he consulted his Master, who was available twenty-four hours a day. He wrote a note to Bhagavan asking, "Should I marry this girl?" Bhagavan read the note, folded it, and then put it under his pillow. Whenever Bhagavan agreed with something, he would nod his head and return the note. Otherwise he would keep quiet. In this case, he kept quiet.

A few months after this incident, as Balarama Reddy entered the hall, Bhagavan tossed a newspaper to him. The newspaper mentioned the marriage of this girl to a politician. Balarama Reddy's question was answered. Bhagavan loved his disciples like a mother, protected them like a father, guided them like a teacher, and moved with them like a friend. He was constantly guiding them and loving them. It was possible to ask him anything. One only had to surrender the doubting mind and accept him as Master.

Once, Balarama Reddy went to Almora in the Himalayas. After returning back to *Arunachala*, he informed Bhagavan, "In Almora, it was so cool and so pleasant! Here, it is so hot!' Bhagavan immediately said, "Real coolness lies within. If we have that coolness, it will be cool wherever we go." That was the beauty of Bhagavan's guidance. Bhagavan rarely commented on the weather. This comment helped Balarama Reddy be unmindful of weather. He did not allow the weather to affect his body.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Balarama Reddy would come to the *Ashram* in the morning, afternoon, and in the evening to be with Bhagavan and sit next to him. The *Ashram* became crowded in the afternoons so Balarama Reddy stopped coming at that time. Bhagavan noticed this because one evening he gestured to Balarama Reddy when he came in and said, "Professor G. V. Subbaramayya asked me this afternoon whether Balarama Reddy was here." Balarama Reddy understood this to be an indication for him to come in the afternoons also. However, the next afternoon, he did not go to the *Ashram*.

The next day, Balarama Reddy was, as usual, at the *Ashram* at three in the morning. At that time, Bhagavan would be just getting up from his sofa. Normally, Balarama Reddy would fold the shawl that Bhagavan had over him at night and then put it in its right place. But that morning, Bhagavan folded the shawl himself and put it under his pillow, refusing to give it to Balarama Reddy. Balarama Reddy said, "Bhagavan taught me to attend the afternoon session also because being in the presence of the guru is absolutely important. Not even one minute should be wasted." From that moment onward, Balarama Reddy was with Bhagavan, his guru, in every possible moment.

Once, when he was going around the hill, Balarama Reddy suddenly felt like observing silence. Unknown to Bhagavan, he started observing silence the very next day. At the time, he was staying with S. S. Cohen in Palakothu. Then sometime later, Viswanatha Swami got a letter from Swami Ramdas saying, "I am very happy Balarama Reddy is observing silence. It will do him good. Congratulate him on my behalf." Viswanatha Swami handed over the letter to Bhagavan. Balarama Reddy was also

present at the time. When Bhagavan read out the line, "It will do him good," he looked at Balarama Reddy. Balarama Reddy believed that this confirmed the fact he should continue to observe silence.

Balarama Reddy observed silence for one year! Toward the end of the year, Sadhu Vaswani, a saintly man, visited *Ramanashram*. Not many people knew him, but Balarama Reddy had met him during his Himalayan wanderings. Sadhu Vaswani sat next to Balarama Reddy in the hall, but did not talk to him there. He thought he would talk to him outside. But Balarama Reddy had to go somewhere urgently and by the time he came back, Sadhu Vaswani had already left. Bhagavan asked, "Did you know that Sadhu Vaswani had come?" Balarama Reddy nodded his head. Bhagavan then said, "You should have spoken to him. He is your friend." It dawned on Balarama that the guiding hand of the Master was instructing him to break his silence since it had served its purpose.

Balarama Reddy was an affluent man. He owned lands which his family was looking after, and his elder brother was sending money. One day, he got a letter from his brother saying, "I can no longer take care of your land. You will come here and supervise your land." Balarama Reddy was downcast because this meant that he would leave the *Ashram* and only visit Bhagavan once in a while like many others. Bhagavan read this letter, laid it aside, and kept quiet. Balarama Reddy refrained from asking anything. Three days later, Balarama Reddy got a letter from his mother, a spiritual person, saying, "Do not come here. It is your good fortune that you are able to stay with such a holy person. I will take care of your land. I will send you money. Do not come away." Bhagavan smiled at the letter, indicating that Balarama need not go back for the sake of money.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

During Bhagavan's last days, devotees like Balarama Reddy rarely visited him because they did not want to cause him any inconvenience. One day, accompanied by Balarama Reddy, a friend of his who was a minister in the government, called on Bhagavan in the Nirvana Room. Balarama Reddy noticed a halo around Bhagavan, which made him ecstatic and thrilled him to tears. He wondered whether it was his imagination playing tricks on him. But when he came out of the room, the minister asked him, "Where did the brilliant glow in the room come from? There was no electric light in the room!" This was an exquisite spiritual aura that saturated Bhagavan's Presence in his last days.

Once, Balarama Reddy's sister came to the *Ashram* with her husband and their baby. The *Ashram* gave permission to his sister and her baby to see Bhagavan, but the husband had to wait outside. Before prostrating, his sister happened to put the baby down on the floor on the left side of Bhagavan, the side that was so excruciatingly painful for him to move due to the surgery on his left arm. The baby started to cry and Bhagavan, with excruciating difficulty, extended this hand to pat and console the baby. It was such a kind, empathetic sight!

The night that Bhagavan dropped the body, Balarama Reddy, Viswanatha Swami, and a few other senior devotees like Subba Rao went outside. They sat under the light of the moon. "Our Master is gone," they said and wondered, "Will we ever see the ocean of compassion in human form again?" Thousands of people had sat before Bhagavan and had their lives transformed. He had shined grace on them like the sun. We will never know how many lives he touched and how many Hearts blossomed like a lotus on account of that grace. Bhagavan had given

them everything they needed to rise to the supreme heights of spiritual awareness. Such were their feelings as they sat under the moon.

Balarama Reddy returned to his village and continued his practice there. He would come for Bhagavan's *Jayanthi* and *Aradhana*, but would go back to his village. Many changes were taking place in the *Ashram*. My father (who was then the president of the *Ashram*) and I were called to invite all the old devotees to stay in the *Ashram*. We persuaded Balarama Reddy to stay in *Ramanashram*. He was given no work, and no donation was taken from him either.

Balarama Reddy would lock himself up in his room and practice constantly. I had a servant waiting on him and taking food to him so that he could focus on his goal. Being in close contact with him, I once asked him, "Could you tell me about the uniqueness of Bhagavan?" Balarama Reddy said, "Once I asked Bhagavan if he would describe his state of *jnana*, the state of Self-realization, in which he is rooted. He replied, "In this state, it is as difficult to think a thought, as it is in bondage to be without thoughts." Balarama Reddy added, "The greatest features of Bhagavan were *sameepya* and *sowlabhya*. *Sameepya* is proximity, nearness, accessibility. *Sowlabhya* means not having any feeling of duality. Bhagavan was so close to us! There were so few rules and restrictions that it improved and encouraged our practice. We could do almost anything we wanted before Bhagavan. Sometimes we would read the newspaper and at other times we would even discuss political matters. It was beautiful!"

On another occasion, Balarama Reddy wanted his doubt about Self-realization clarified. Balarama Reddy was well versed in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

In the *Gita*, Krishna says that it will take *bahunaam janmanaam,* or thousands of births, to attain Self-realization. When Balarama Reddy mentioned this to Bhagavan, he got seemingly angry and declared, "What *bahunaam janmanaam*? I say it is here and now!" As he said the last sentence, he raised his voice and everyone assembled in the hall, including Balarama Reddy experienced the state of Self-realization at that very moment. Balarama Reddy said, "That is the beauty of a Master being present; experience is given and shared directly and instantaneously. There is no demand for maturity."

Balarama Reddy played an important role in my life, as well. Many years ago, my family and the people of *Ramanashram* thought I was lost. There were reports in the paper of my disappearance. My father was very naturally concerned and turned to Balarama Reddy for advice. Balarama Reddy comforted my father and told him that they would perhaps consult Anandamayi Ma, a wonderful woman saint, whom Balarama Reddy revered. The Maatha ji was then in Bangalore, so my father, Mrs. Talyearkhan, and Balarama Reddy went to Bangalore. The Maatha ji smiled when she heard about why they had come. "Do not worry," she said, "My Ganga Maatha is protecting him." My father was puzzled because he thought that he would get a specific answer. On returning to *Ramanashram*, they found a telegram from one Dr. S. Nath, Benares, which said, "Ganesan is here in Benares."

When the Maatha ji came to Chennai, Balarama Reddy insisted I come for her *Darshan*. I was a fervent supporter of Bhagavan and therefore hesitated, but he compelled me to go with him. There was a huge audience, and it was impossible for me to have a personal meeting with

her. Balarama Reddy did not give up. He took me to the railway station, and we met her on the train as she was leaving. She was alone in her compartment. Balarama Reddy said, "Prostrate before her," and I did so. He introduced me to Maatha ji as "Bhagavan's brother's grandson." Maatha ji was delighted and blessed me profusely. She offered me an orange as *prasad*.

Balarama Reddy would lock himself up in his room and be lost in practice. People in the *Ashram* mistook his deep meditation for arrogance and said, "Why can't he participate in the functioning of the *Ashram* like other people? Does he think he is supreme?"

Before his end, he was involved in a car accident that injured his back. He was admitted to a hospital in Bangalore. I sent Natesan to look after him. Balarama Reddy was in the hospital for nearly two months. Before departing from the world, he called out, "*Natesa! Natesa!* Look, Bhagavan has come. Bring a chair!" Natesan said," Swami, Bhagavan is not here. He is in *Ramanashram*. Tomorrow we are going there." Balarama Reddy retorted, "Fool! Idiot! Bhagavan is standing here. He is straining himself, give him a chair." These were Balarama Reddy's last words. The very next moment, he collapsed with a blissful smile on his face. Bhagavan had come for him! The unique Heart had gone back to *Arunachala*.

ANANDA MAYEE MA

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Santhammal

Throughout Bhagavan's life, there remained two important aspects: his emphasis on the direct teaching of *Self-Enquiry*, and not a single aspirant left the *Ashram* hungry. From reading *Day by Day with Bhagavan* and *Letters from Sri Ramanashram*, it is interesting to note that anyone who came to the *Ashram* was first asked to go to the dining hall. In fact, some professors asked Bhagavan himself as to why he always insisted that every devotee should first be fed, regardless of the time of day. Bhagavan simply replied, "I know what hunger is."

Ramana Maharshi, himself a cook, conferred great importance not only to feeding, but also to cooking. Prior to 1916 or 1917, when Bhagavan's mother Alagammal began cooking at *Skandashram*, the Maharshi and his attendants subsisted on food that was obtained by begging. Sadhu Sundaram, who later became Swami Trivenagiri, once served Bhagavan assisting him as a cook. He reveals, "With time I realized that working with Bhagavan in the kitchen was not mere cooking, but definitely a form of spiritual practice."

A valuable lesson that Bhagavan taught by entering the kitchen and participating in the cooking was that one is to rely on and completely abide by Divine Will. To surrender and accept how the Divine guides us

is effortless and graceful being, or *Sahaja Samadhi*. As Annamalai Swami, an early kitchen assistant of Bhagavan, wrote, "One morning in the 1920s when there was virtually no food in the *Ashram*, I saw Bhagavan take what little ingredients we had and begin to cook a meal. He had faith that the *Higher Power* would send more food before the cooking was over. It was about five-thirty in the morning when Bhagavan began to clean a handful of broken rice. He washed it in a pot, removed all of the small stones from it, and started cooking it on a charcoal stove. I found his activities rather strange and perplexing as the rice would not even be sufficient for one person. As the rice came to a boil, a devotee appeared with two liters of milk. When the rice was cooked, Bhagavan put a larger vessel on the stove and began cooking the rice and milk together. A few minutes later another devotee came with an offering of raisins and sugar candy. Bhagavan washed the offering and put it in the pot. At about six-thirty, when the cooking was almost finished, a party of devotees arrived from Kumbakonam, bringing with them a big pot containing *idlis*, *chutney*, *vadais*, *special hill bananas,* and some cups made of dry banana leaves. These dried banana cups were what we needed to eat Bhagavan's homemade *payasam* (rice pudding). At seven in the morning, after Bhagavan had taken his bath, we all sat down and ate a scrumptious breakfast."

At this juncture, acknowledgement should be made to Gudipatti Venkatachala (Chalam), a very famous Telugu writer who is responsible for recording what is about to be shared. Without his efforts, we would have lost the kitchen chronicles, and hence, would not be paying homage to the illustrious cooks of *Ramanashram*. Knowing that Chalam had recorded all of this in the Telugu language, Maurice Frydman, who was in Mumbai, arranged for the English translation. He, himself,

rewrote the manuscript and brought it to me. Such a saintly man he was that he left the manuscript without a word, knowing full well that the *Ashram* was in a financial crisis and would not be able to publish it.

In 1978–79, Bhagavan's birth centenary was to be celebrated. I was sent by the *Ashram* all over India to meet devotees and collect donations. One of the means of raising money was to bring out a souvenir magazine with advertisements from various donors. My respected friend T. S. Nagarajan, a sound businessman, graciously offered to take charge of this project, but found that there were not enough articles for the souvenir. I requested that he search the archives, not remembering that Maurice Frydman had left the kitchen manuscripts. He located the articles and printed them in the souvenir magazine. I am very grateful to all three; Chalam, Maurice Frydman, and T. S. Nagarajan**,** for allowing these cooks to be known.

Please remember that these narrations are not all just stories or anecdotes. They are the experiences shared by people who have lived with an awakened being. As one of the other lady cooks said about her time with Bhagavan in the kitchen, "Bhagavan would sit in the middle of the kitchen watching and offering suggestions. The kitchen was small at that time, and every time I needed to move, I would have to go around him. Thus I would perform numerous *pradakshina* of Bhagavan during the course of the day. Was he not my Guru? Was I not fortunate to have him in the middle of my kitchen?" She continued, "Bhagavan would taste all of the food before it was served. As a result, the food would be consecrated and sanctified for all." Even today the food that is being served in *Ramanashram* is considered sacred because Bhagavan's touch is everpresent.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Now, let us share about Santhammal, with whom I have had the privilege of moving very closely. I cannot claim that at the time I understood her importance. I now realize how blessed I was to have her *Satsang*. It was only after reading Maurice Frydman's manuscripts that I could comprehend her spiritual grandeur.

Bhagavan came down from *Skandashram* to *Ramanashram* in 1922. At that time there were only four or five residents, including Bhagavan's brother Chinna Swami, who was the head cook from 1922 to 1928. Others would come and help for a few days at a time and then return home. Santhammal came in 1928 to *Ramanashram* to assist Chinna Swami and never left.

Santhammal was a widow who had lost her husband as well as her three sons. She was left with only one daughter whom she gave in marriage with great difficulty. Tragically, during childbirth, she also died. Santhammal was left with no one and nothing to hold on to. Being utterly poor, she went to various relatives' houses to assist in the kitchen. One day, in her brother-in-law's house, in the midst of boiling the rice, she felt an inner prompting: "What am I doing with myself? My children are dead. Why have I forced on myself these responsibilities? Whom am I serving? Who am I?" These were not just thoughts, but the Guru's commandment that she was feeling so intensely. She left her brother-in-law's house and went to Ramanathapuram where her friend Muruganar was staying. Upon entering his house, she went into his room and saw Bhagavan's picture for the first time. It captivated and beckoned her. "Here is my God," she thought. "How is it that I did not know about him until now?" She yearned to go to *Arunachala*, but alas, she did not have enough money for the journey! Fortunately, in 1927, a

group of people from Ramanathapuram were going to *Arunachala* for the *Karthikai* festival. They provided her the ticket money and took her along with them.

She arrived at *Ramanashram* and stayed for forty days in the town along with the group. Every day, she went to *Ramanashram* and basked in the presence of Bhagavan. She prayed inwardly, "The dream of my life has come true. Today I am blessed, for here is my God. I am in heaven now in your presence, but when I go away; grant me that my mind does not trouble me anymore." Bhagavan, being shy in nature, turned to Muruganar, who was standing next to him**,** and said, "Ask her to find out whether there is such a thing as mind. If so, what is its form? Does it have a moustache and a beard?" Hearing this, Santhammal stood still. Muruganar had to intervene and say, "Do you not recognize that Bhagavan has initiated you into the search of the Self?" She could not immediately grasp the deep spiritual content of the statement, but she was overwhelmed by a feeling of immense devotion and started singing a verse from *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*. The meaning of the verse is, "Oh! Bhagavan, your spiritual splendor fills the universe with its fragrant perfume. Attracted by the aroma, numerous beings turn their heart to you. I too grew restless and sought you eagerly. Where is he? I enquired, and now I have come to you." This beautiful verse written by Satyamangalam Venkatarama Iyer in the 1910s aptly fit her situation. This verse applied not only to Santhammal, but applies to each one of us as well. In the Now, we have the opportunity to recognize communion with God. God is nothing other than this inner silence, the direct experience of the Self. When Santhammal went to take leave of Bhagavan, he said to her, "Stay one more day. *Upadesa Saaram*, the book containing thirty verses of essential teaching**,** is coming tomorrow. If

you stay one more day, I will give you this book." She stayed one more day, and Bhagavan forwarded to her this *Upadesa Saaram*. At the time of her departure, Santhammal cried and cried. Bhagavan consoled her, saying, "Do not cry. You are not leaving *Arunachala*. Go and come back soon." Santhammal could not return to *Arunachala* for one year.

Meanwhile, in Santhammal's absence, preparations were underway for the celebration of Bhagavan's *Jayanthi* (birthday). Calling the *Sarvaadhikari*, Bhagavan asked him to send an invitation to Santhammal. At that time, Santhammal was a "nobody," and aside from a spiritual contact, the management had little interest in a poor widow. Santhammal was deeply moved that the Master was bridging the gap between the guru and disciple. She begged for money and finally came to the *Ashram* permanently in 1928. When she entered the Hall, Bhagavan was explaining *Ulladu Narpadu*, i.e., *Forty Verses on Reality*. He stopped, looked at her, and asked, "Have you received a copy of this book? The second copy of the book I asked to be sent to you." Santhammal was greatly touched by the compassion and personal attention that Bhagavan was showering on her. She vowed, "I will stay with this Master, not going anywhere, and I will cook for him."

The next day she appealed to Bhagavan, "As long as I am with you Bhagavan, my mind is at peace. Away from you I am restless. What am I to do?" Bhagavan said, "Stay here until your mind becomes restful." The following morning, Chinna Swami left for Chennai for medical treatment and had to be away from the *Ashram* for some time. In Chinna Swami's absence, the *Ashram* would be left without a cook. Santhammal was requested to take up the cooking. She replied that it was her dream to stay with Bhagavan and cook for him--a golden

opportunity for her.

Upon entering the kitchen, Bhagavan, not wanting Santhammal to be left alone for the first time, went with her and started helping her. Apart from being a cook, Bhagavan was a spiritual chef, too. As Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni has sung, "Oh! Bhagavan, you are the perfect cook, but you are a non-vegetarian cook. You cook all of our egos and then feed them to your Father *Arunachala*."

Once Santhammal had encountered difficulty because the oil container was leaking, and she could not find a replacement. She reported this to Bhagavan, saying that things would be much easier if she could get another vessel. Bhagavan did not answer. Within ten days, six huge jars were delivered from the railway station to *Ramanashram* without a return address. Even now it is not known who sent the jars. Bhagavan called Santhammal and said, "Santhammal, you wanted a jar. Here are six jars."

Another time, Santhammal needed money. Within three days, she received a money order for the exact amount needed. It was sent by someone named Srinivasa Rao, who had read an article in the paper about Ramana Maharshi. When he read that a lady cook named Santhammal had come to the *Ashram* to serve Bhagavan, he had the urge to send her some money. Santhammal later told me that these two incidents showing that complete faith in the Guru was enough

One day Bhagavan and Santhammal were cooking in the kitchen. Bhagavan was stirring and stirring the vegetable stew when he suddenly stopped and looked at her. Santhammal immediately became still. Everything disappeared, leaving behind only complete silence and pure

joy. She was experiencing the highest beatitude. Suddenly Bhagavan started moving, and Santhammal came back to her senses. He looked at the stew and said, "This has boiled to noiselessness, and now you can add the spices." Santhammal understood this to mean that she should make the mind noiseless and at that state add the spices of wisdom to it. This is how Bhagavan incorporated the teaching into daily activities.

On another occasion, Bhagavan entered the kitchen just as Santhammal was finishing cooking something. She requested Bhagavan to taste it. Bhagavan jovially answered, "You know, the *Maharajas* (Kings) have food tasters whom they pay enormously. Santhammal, this is what you are asking me to do? What is the payment that you will give me?" Santhammal replied, "Bhagavan, I am a beggar. I can give you only myself." This surrender was wholeheartedly accepted by the Master. Santhammal's cooking was loved by all not only because it was extremely wholesome and delicious, but because it was performed by a fully surrendered being.

Santhammal went on to narrate the glory of Bhagavan's Silence, "There was once a stranger, a European who came to the *Ashram* in a horse cart and went straight into the hall. He had written something on a piece of paper that he proceeded to give to Bhagavan. Bhagavan read it and bestowed a look to him, and immediately the man became quiet. After some time, Bhagavan also closed his eyes, and together they remained in silence. A few people around them were also submerged in that peace. The lunch was struck at eleven o' clock, but still Bhagavan and the European were unmoved. At twelve o' clock, both opened their eyes. The European left, ecstatic."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Bhagavan once said, "With whichever vessel you come with, if you go to the ocean you can get only that much water. If it is merely a cup, you will get a cup of water. If it is a bucket, you will get a bucket. Go and loot the whole ocean." This European came empty enough to loot the whole ocean! Santhammal told me what a fortunate person the European was to have received that grace.

Another interesting incident that Santhammal has recorded involves a Hindu monk. Once, an aged North Indian *sanyasi* came to *Ramanashram* and stayed there for a few weeks. On the last day, he came to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, everything in *Ramanashram* has given me great satisfaction. Now I am ready to leave. Fill my heart." For the first and perhaps the last time, Bhagavan stood up, walked near the *Sanyasi,* and touched him. Both stood this way for some time until the *Sanyasi* fell at Bhagavan's feet with tears and got up with an exquisite smile on his face. Filled with ecstasy, he left.

One more happening shared by Santhammal and not found in any of Bhagavan's other books involves the Mysore *Maharaja.* During the British regime, there were about three hundred kingdoms within India, each one having a king, queen, palace, and army. Among these, the two largest were Hyderabad and Mysore. The Mysore Maharaja was a scholar and patron of the arts and culture. One day, wishing to go unnoticed, he came to Bhagavan in the dead of night and stayed until early the next morning. He wanted a private audience with Bhagavan, but Bhagavan had rarely ever previously obliged anyone this favor before. There were always devotees in the hall. However, Bhagavan permitted the Maharaja to meet him at eight o'clock in the eight-foot bathhouse where he bathed. The Maharaja fell at Bhagavan's feet and

wept and wept. Santhammal writes that Bhagavan himself said that the King's tears drenched his feet. The Maharaja then got up and said, "Bhagavan, they have made me king and forced me to sit on the throne. For this sin, I am not able to come and stay with you and be in your presence. These few moments are the only precious few in my whole life. After this, I will not be able to come. Please bless me." When Santhammal asked Bhagavan about the Maharaja, Bhagavan uttered just one sentence: "He is a ripe fruit."

Every year in Tiruvannamalai, the *Karthikai* festival is celebrated in a grand manner for ten days. Lord *Arunachala*'s symbol is taken on a procession around the main streets of the town, and thousands of devotees flock to watch this grandiose sight. Among these devotees, many were beggars, *sadhus, or sanyasis,* and they would come to *Ramanashram* to have their food. Though they would all be served, the *Ashram* workers felt that this particular year, the crowd was becoming unmanageable, so a decision was made to stop serving food to beggars and *sadhus*. The night the decision was made, Santhammal had a dream. She was sitting in Bhagavan's hall when suddenly she saw something like an insect flying next to him. Slowly it became bigger and bigger and transformed into a huge red horse with wings. It went first around Bhagavan, then around the entire *Ashram* before it finally came back to Bhagavan and disappeared.

The next day, curious as to the significance of this dream, Santhammal approached Bhagavan and shared her dream. Bhagavan explained, "During the *Karthikai* festival, the Gods and celestials come to Tiruvannamalai in the guise of beggars and *sadhus*, so it should be a privilege to feed them." The following morning, Santhammal reported

this to Chinna Swami who immediately arranged to continue giving food to all the beggars and *sadhus,* even on those ten difficult days. This practice continues ever after, annually.

Santhammal would have visions of bright lights. She shared, "When I first came to Bhagavan I saw a bright light like the sun with Bhagavan in the midst of it. Later on, I would see a light between my eyebrows. On another occasion, I saw a big light come out of Bhagavan's head and fill the whole hall. In that light, everything disappeared, including Bhagavan, and the feeling of 'I' remained floating like a luminous void." When I related this to Bhagavan, he affirmed that such visions do occur. He said, "To know how one looks, one must look into a mirror. However, one should not take the reflection to be oneself. What is perceived by the senses and the mind is never the Truth. All visions are mere mental creations or apparitions, and if one believes in them, spiritual progress ceases and mortality returns. Enquire to whom the visions occur. Find out who is the witness. Stay in prior awareness, free from all thought, and be motionless in that state."

Once a person from the northern corner of India came to the *Ashram* and stayed for weeks. On the day of his departure, he stood before Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, I am going far away, and I do not know when I shall be coming back. I am much less fortunate than those who have the benefit of your constant presence. How can you help me, a sinner in a distant place, unless you think of me? I implore you to give me a place in your mind." Bhagavan answered, "A *jnani* has no mind. How can one without a mind remember or even think? So, how can I remember all of these prayers? The Lord of the universe takes care of everyone and their needs. He will look after you." Later on, after the

devotee had left, Bhagavan turned toward us and said, "People imagine that the devotees crowding around a *jnani* get special attention. If a Guru shows partiality, how can he be a *jnani*? Is he so foolish as to be flattered by people's attention on him and the service they do? Does distance matter? The Guru is pleased with one who gives their self up entirely and abandons the ego forever. Such a person is taken care of wherever they may be. It is faith. God looks after one unasked." Then Bhagavan offered the example of the frog that lives constantly at the base of the lotus stem in the water. Though the frog is constantly in the proximity of the flower, it is the bee that gets the honey. They fly from long distances, get the honey, and then fly back.

Another time, two ladies from the far South of India came to Bhagavan. One pretended to be the guru and the other the disciple. When they came to the hall, the "disciple" spread a huge seat for her guru and had her sit on it. After going to Bhagavan to get his blessings, she came back to sit in front of her guru. Again she went back to Bhagavan and asked him to teach her the path of salvation in order to achieve liberation. Bhagavan kept silent. The disciple felt hurt as it was nearing evening, and they had to leave on the night train. "Swami, please instruct us," she begged. "It is getting late." A few minutes later, she again reminded Bhagavan. Finally, exasperated, she asked, "Swami, at least tell us something. All people speak of ignorance. What is ignorance? Please explain that to us." Bhagavan turned to Muruganar, who was seated next to him, and compassionately said, "Ask her to enquire within who is ignorant?" Muruganar turned to the ladies and replied; "Now you can go, for your initiation is over." Both ladies left, disappointed. Later, Bhagavan remarked about this incident: "Everything has to be done in a hurry. Everybody has some train to catch. They visit this Swami in a

rush and want to carry away a parcel of liberation and salvation. They read something here and there and they think they are educated and ready for liberation. Who wants salvation? To whom is the liberation? Instead of simply turning within and being the silence, which is saturated within the Heart, one's core Heart of being, they roam about outside and remain agitated without peace. The one who searches is the very being one is searching for. Stillness is the Truth." Santhammal's such diligent recordings are of great value for all aspirants.

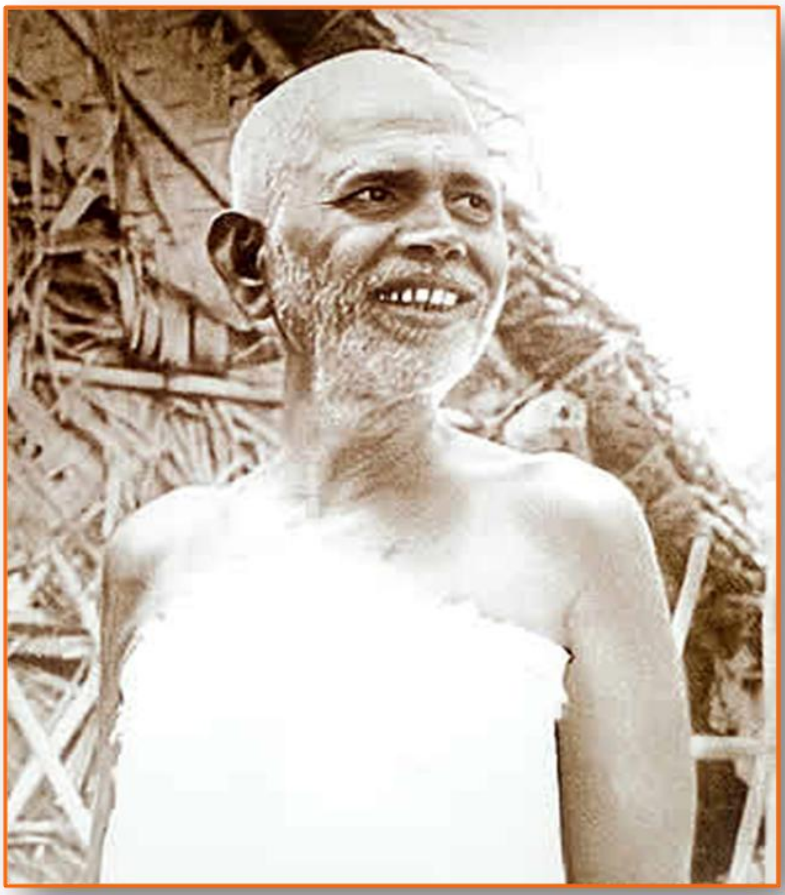
In addition to being a wonderful cook, Santhammal was a very strong woman. One day, as a big pot of *sambar* (lentil stew) was boiling, Bhagavan suddenly entered the kitchen. The pot was so big that it usually took three men to handle it. As the sambar was boiling vigorously, Bhagavan recommended the pot be lifted off of the fire and then he went away. Santhammal, seeing no one else around, effortlessly lifted it and put it aside. After doing so, she exclaimed, "This is a miracle performed by Bhagavan. Ordinarily, no single lady would even be able to touch it, but because Bhagavan uttered it, I was able to lift the pot and put it away." Such a lady of sound faith she was!

Santhammal was very kind and helpful to the sadhus living in Palakothu at the time. They had to cook their own food, so she would supply them with the things that they could not get, such as pickles and even some of the sweets, and other delicacies that were made in the *Ashram*. She did all of this with Bhagavan's knowledge. Once, *aviyal*, a South Indian delicacy with a lot of vegetables, was being served in the *Ashram*. Muruganar was living in Palakothu, so Bhagavan called Santhammal and told her, "Muruganar loves *aviyal*. Who will give *aviyal* to Muruganar?" Santhammal took the hint and immediately ran to the kitchen to make a

parcel of *aviyal* for Muruganar. She ran to Palakothu, but Muruganar was not there**,** as he had gone to the town to beg for his food. She caught him on the road and told him that Bhagavan had sent the *aviyal* for him. Muruganar wept profusely**,** thinking of this great act of compassion of his Master.

As she became older, Santhammal felt that she could no longer work physically for the *Ashram* and, not wanting to be a burden, was preparing to leave. That night, Bhagavan appeared to her in her dream and said, "Where will you go, Santhammal? Who will look after you?" Indirectly, Bhagavan was saying that only he would look after her. Santhammal remained there and breathed her last, peacefully and consciously.

Through the example of the kitchen assistants such as Santhammal, Bhagavan proved that anyone can live this direct teaching, *Self-Knowledge*.



SMILING BHAGAVAN ENTERING KITCHEN

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Sankarammal

Sankarammal was a child widow. She became a widow at the age of three. There is no other known record about her. Sankarammal was a cook. From childhood, all the child widows in India are advised to turn to God. Sankarammal was a brilliant girl; so, when they said to turn to God, and there were so many Gods, she felt that God means Truth; there can be only one Truth. There cannot be many Truths. Even in her childhood, she felt this. When she was in her teens, her brother shared with her Tamil spiritual texts like *Kaivalya Navanita, Yoga Vashista,* and so on. She studied them, and found a confirmation of her own intuitive thought that Truth can only be one, and here, in India, there are hundreds of Gods and Goddesses in Hindu pantheon. The *Kaivalya Navanita* and *Yoga Vashista* enlightened her with a theoretical confirmation that Truth is immortal Oneness, and that Truth could be recognized if one receives the blessings of a Guru. That is what *Kaivalya Navanita* teaches. After studying them, she had a complete grasp of this Advaitic exposition that there is one Truth and that Truth ever exists as nonphysical awareness, but she knew it only theoretically and her study of *Kaivalya Navanita* and *Yoga Vashista* induced in her a longing to strive for the actual experience.

She was being taken by family to temples and Holy places. When she was in her later twenties, her pining to experience the Truth increased. She supposed, at the feet of a Guru, she would be able to experience it. Yet she could not express it to anyone. She was longing for that. Her brother took her to *Arunachala* just to visit the *Arunachaleshwara* temple. Both of them were in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple when they were

offering *pooja* to the *Arunachala lingum*. The priest, all of a sudden made the statement, "Oh, you both have come to pay homage to Sri Ramana Maharshi." Sankarammal was hearing that name, Ramana Maharshi, for the first time. She went into ecstasy. She lost bodily consciousness. For a few moments, she was swimming in ecstasy. When they came out, her brother took her to *Ramanashram*.

When they entered the presence of Bhagavan and she saw Bhagavan, he offered her a smiling gracious look, which, she told me, communicated to her, "Did it take this long for you to come to me?" A few of the old devotees have seen this expression of a questioning look from Bhagavan which also seemed to say "Has it taken so long for you to come to me?" She saw in Bhagavan all that was described in *Kaivalya Navanita* and *Yoga Vashista* as marks of a realized person, a *jnani*, a *stitaprigna*. Point by point in the very first look of Bhagavan, she could verify that everything was there. She saw God in human form as Bhagavan. Bhagavan was smiling at her all the time, and in that very moment she decided, "Here is my God, here is my Guru. I have been longing to know and to experience the Truth through the Guru. He has given me *Darshan* right now. This ecstasy is what is expressed in *Kaivalya Navanita* and *Yoga Vashista* as the highest state of realization; the thoughtless, effortless state the Master has revealed and shared. So pondering, I have decided, these are not all just mental thoughts, these are all happenings within. I will stay and serve my Guru the rest of my life."

When Sankarammal and her brother came out, she had very rarely asked him for anything, not even material things. It was not she who wanted to go to temples and sacred places. It was he who was taking her. In the Hindu belief system, the sister obeys the brother. For the first time

when she came out of the hall, she said, "Brother, I am asking you for one simple thing. Leave me here, I will serve my Guru." The brother understood.

He ran to the office, and my grandfather, Chinna Swami, was looking worried. He was discussing with the staff in the office that Santhammal, the cook, was going away. Now that there were so many visitors, VIP visitors, who would cook? This was the problem in the office. The brother of Sankarammal spoke up and offered, "My sister wants to stay here." "Will she cook?" My grandfather asked. "Yes!" So she became the next cook, all the play of *leela,* inviting her to *Arunachala* and then allowing Santhammal to go away so that she could stay.

Sankarammal remained in the presence of Bhagavan. Bhagavan would come to the kitchen and each time she would be swimming in ecstasy from verifying the descriptions given in these sacred texts of a *jnani.* Bhagavan's every movement, his words, his looks; his actions of perfection were described in the scriptures. She was blissfully enjoying seeing God so gracefully revealed in a human form. Fortunately Sankarammal stayed in that state of inner peace and happiness. There are no other incidents to record as she remained in that pure state of joy, simply doing her work and then seated in the corner of the kitchen, just peaceful.

Bhagavan availed all his spiritual Grace on Sankarammal just by the *Darshan*, by his presence. There was no need for exchange of words.

She was unattractive and a widow, but somehow by Bhagavan's Grace, I was attracted to her. I would go and sit next to her. There, also,

Sankarammal would not exchange any words. One day I asked her to "tell me something about Bhagavan." I went on pestering her, until one day she spoke. She said, "*Bhagavan's* silence was the direct teaching. *Self-Enquiry* was taught by him for those who could not grasp his silence, and as such, even *Self-Enquiry* takes a secondary place of importance. The silence he could easily share through his Grace-filled look. That look, Muruganar and the others refer to as the Glance of Grace. It is *Darshan* (God seeing God). There was no need for me to talk to Bhagavan. He ripened me slowly and steadily. Generally all devotees would extol Bhagavan's look of Grace, and that look was a sharing of inner silence only. Silence was his state. His direct teaching was through silence. Those who received his message of silence had no need to talk to him, much less demand his verbal teachings. How can I express in mere words this mysterious working of Bhagavan through silence?"

However, I was not prepared to leave Sankarammal. I observed her as quiet and calm, and I was drawn toward her. She was not out-going while meticulously doing her kitchen duties. I would pester her, "In what state are you? You are not like others. You are not talking to others, but you are very active. I would not say you are in *Samadhi*. You are very active, but all the time open-eyed and in silence only. Will you please tell me what your state is?" Sankarammal was an astute and stern person. She was usually seen absorbed in herself in the kitchen, not talking to anyone, but very keen in fulfilling her daily duty as a cook with care and one-pointed attention. These strange elements usually made others withdraw from her, but I was drawn to her--powerfully, too. The closer I moved with her, the greater my admiration grew for her. I was convinced of her extraordinary merit. Once I humbly requested her to tell me the secret of her perfect equipoise.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

After many repeated and persistent efforts, I succeeded in getting her to reveal it to me. She said, "I myself had a puzzle at a particular stage. I was in that inner peace and happiness, which is extolled in the scriptures. But there was one doubt. I am an ordinary woman. The scriptures say that even sages and saints will do penance for many years to be established in that state. Am I in that state?" That was a very light doubt in her, but whom could she ask? She was waiting for an opportunity. One day Bhagavan was standing alone, after breakfast. She prostrated to Bhagavan and quoted a verse from *Kaivalya Navanita*, the dialogue between the Guru and the disciple. There are two parts in it. The first part is the Guru giving the instructions of the "I am" and sharing it with the disciple. The second part is the Guru asking the disciple to tell "what they have grasped." One is not expected to repeat what the Guru has said, but to state one's own experience. In this practical aspect, *Kaivalya Navanita* is very significant.

When she prostrated to Bhagavan, a verse from *Kaivalya Navanita* came to her. It was from the second part. The Guru had asked, "What have you understood?" This is the very first verse where the disciple addresses the Guru, with folded hands:

Oh! Lord
You are the reality, the Truth
Remaining as my very inmost Self
Ruling me during all my countless births
Glory to you
Who have now
Put on a human form in order to redeem me through your teaching
And thus grant me

That perfect state of inner peace and happiness
I do not see how
I can repay your Grace
For helping to liberate me
Glory! Glory!
To your Holy feet

When she recited this verse, Bhagavan understood that she was already in that state. Bhagavan looked at her with all compassion and Grace and said that the reply was in the very next verse. The purport of that verse Bhagavan referred to is: The Guru, after listening to the outpouring of the disciple, felt so happy that he granted them a glance of Grace, bid them to come near and embraced them. Then, he said, "To stay fixed in the Self, to maintain the state of inner peace and happiness without the three obstacles—ignorance, uncertainty, and wrong knowledge— that obstructs your experience is the highest recompense you can pay to me." Bhagavan again looked at her for a few minutes steadily. Sankarammal, with her eyes full of tears, repeatedly prostrated a few times. She told me, "Ever since, I am staying only in that state. There is no thought." It is a statement from a person living the Truth. One can get verbal clarity, which is the first step. One must have the experience. Sankarammal's sharing is very affirming.

Before she died, I fell at her feet and requested that she bless me, by giving me the state in which she was steadily established. She smiled and asked, "What is this talk of 'giving' and 'receiving'? Who is there as 'somebody' to give a 'something'? Stay in the state in which you already are. Remain in that inner peace and happiness. There is nothing to get from outside. You are already That. Stay, unmoved as you are!"

BANANA LEAF AS PLATE FOR RAMANASHRAM MEALS

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

CAULDRONS OVER FIRE PIT IN THE RUSTIC ASHRAM KITCHEN

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Subbalakshmiammal

Bhagavan moved with each and every cook, no matter how ordinary, while at the same time sharing with them the highest teaching, the same teaching shared with scholars like Kavyakanta Ganapathy Muni, Muruganar, Chadwick, Cohen and Arthur Osborne. All had the same one-pointedness. It is not surprising to find Bhagavan moving very naturally with these child widows and then imparting to them the same teaching and guiding them to experience it.

This shows the true Guru has been and will ever be impartial in imparting the highest teaching. You can be affirmed in whichever state you are in, if you focus your attention on the Guru. The Guru imparts the same certainty in totality. There is no partiality there at all.

Now, we are going to speak about the third lady cook, who was also a widow. Her name is Subbalakshmiammal. She embodied the combination of Santhammal and Sankarammal—Santhammal's total dedication to Bhagavan plus Sankarammal's total dedication to the teaching. Subbalakshmiammal could not do hard work like Santhammal nor apply the perseverance or methods of Sankarammal. The beauty of Bhagavan was that he made no distinction, though I am making the apparent distinction. He extended the same Grace toward Subbalakshmiammal, lifted her up and revealed to her the highest state.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Subbalakshmiammal was a remarkable lady. I was two or three years old, and all these ladies were very fond of me because I was a little chubby, and I had no fear. Without hesitation, I would approach anyone, unlike my other brothers. They were all very shy. Any one of these ladies would take me, cuddle me, and do whatever they wanted to. One day, Subbalakshmiammal took me outside the kitchen and was feeding me lunch. She took this child, Ganesan, and sat him on her lap. I was very fond of the excellent varieties of the mango fruit. I was holding two mangoes and holding them very tightly. A huge male monkey rushed toward me. He wanted the mangoes, but Subbalakshmiammal was there to protect me. The monkey got very angry! Subbalakshmiammal put her arm around me knowing full well that the monkey was about to bite. The monkey did bite and take away a chunk of flesh from Subbalakshmiammal, and she was bleeding profusely. She shouted to others and handed me over safely. She was hospitalized due to a fear of rabies, for which there was no cure at that time. She bore this deep scar on her arm. When I was grown-up, I asked, "What is this scar on your arm?" I felt very sorry it was because of me. She said, "No! No! Do not feel sorry. I feel very grateful to you because for many days, every day Bhagavan's attention was on me. 'How is your wound? Is it cured?' Just by his look, he saved me from the attack of rabies. So I am grateful to you." I touched her Holy feet and said, "You acted as a protecting mother principle to me. How can I express my gratitude?" Subbalakshmiammal was so moved, not because of my statement, but by the words "mother principle". She followed, "Bhagavan's devotees are all protected by this mother principle. Even Bhagavan referred to it a few times, though the commentators of Bhagavan seemingly miss this phenomenon. Bhagavan did refer to this mother principle (*Sita*) intervening in his life, influencing his life."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

She narrated what Santhammal, the first and eldest cook, told her. Santhammal had a dream in which Bhagavan was seated in the hall, and next to him was a most beautiful female form, a deity, a lustrous brilliance. Simultaneously in a dream, she saw another most beautiful radiant female deity going around the *Ashram* doing many forms of service. The next day, she told Bhagavan about this dream. Bhagavan, by way of confirmation and affirmation, said "Yes! Even when I was up on the hill, a lady would come and give me food." This was Akhindammal. These are Bhagavan's words: "While serving food, she will put an extra leaf next to me every day with ingredients and foodstuffs. And then one day I asked, 'What is the purpose of this next leaf? For whom have you put this extra leaf?'" Akhindammal told him, "It is for the Mother." Then Bhagavan added, "Akhindammal also had a similar dream."

Subbalakshmiammal continued, "I was a witness to another incident involving the wife of Appa Shastri, a very beautiful devotee. In those days when people came to Bhagavan, they would bring coffee, little knowing that Bhagavan does not like coffee. This was because, at the time, coffee was the most luxurious beverage in India. Mrs. Appa Shastri, who was very devoted to Bhagavan, brought a big vessel full of excellent coffee. Seeing the coffee, Bhagavan said, 'You know very well that I do not like coffee.' Then she answered, 'What can I do? Yesterday in my dream, I was standing in front of the temple. Mother Parvati herself was standing at the entrance of the temple. She beckoned and told me, 'My son is without coffee. You prepare coffee, and go and give it to him.' 'Do not blame me. This is your entire Mother's instruction.' Bhagavan said that he had to accept it and nodded, 'Yes! Yes! Mother has no other job except to interfere in my life and frustrate my austerities.'"

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

"Even up on the hill it happened." I asked Subbalakshmiammal, "What was that incident?" "In those days when Bhagavan lived in *Virupaksha* cave and in *Skandashram*, there was no set routine. At eight o' clock, we ate whatever begged food was there, which was usually just rice—cold rice, that three or four people would share equally along with one monkey. These were all guests, all of them equally sharing and then everyone was left free. There was no formal routine. Bhagavan would usually be roaming about the whole hill.

One day, while Bhagavan was roaming, he came upon a rustic woodcutter lady who had extended her legs across the width of the footpath. Bhagavan stood there hesitating. She did not withdraw her legs, and Bhagavan did not want to step over her. We have a Hindu custom that we should not cross over someone. The rustic lady asked, 'Why are you restlessly roaming about? Why do you not stay unmoved in one place?' This happened in *Skandashram* days. Bhagavan obeyed her orders and afterward he remained unmoved in *Arunachala*."

Historically, he did come down to Ramanashram and very rarely moved except for a little walking. This was what Subbalakshmiammal was referring to. Bhagavan said, "Who else is it… except the mother principle." Usually rustic people when they see Brahmins become very devoted, and Bhagavan was very popular at that time. No rustic woman would use such rustic language and command Bhagavan. So Bhagavan's reference, "Who else was that" implied the Mother principle. Subbalakshmiammal was in such an emotional mood. I asked her, "Please continue with how you felt about Bhagavan." She said, "To me, Bhagavan is only a mother. I would say it is easier to hold onto to him tightly if one approaches him as the Mother. He was without a doubt the

most compassionate mother principle as I have ever come across. Otherwise, where was there any hope of emancipation for me, an uneducated widow cast out by the entire society? He saved me from my lowliness, lifted me up, bestowed fully on me his Grace and thus emancipated me." I was thrilled by these emotional outpourings of Subbalakshmiammal. This protective mother principle is evident even now, today. If only you have ears to hear and eyes to see, you may enjoin this protective Mother principle, now.

I asked Subbalakshmiammal to tell me how she adored Bhagavan in his fullness, in his complete wholeness. These are all reminiscences of how she held him as the Supreme Being. She said, "The Lord God in his mercy, eons ago, became a cowherd. This is Krishna's story 'to teach simple milk maids the way to liberation, 'found in *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Similarly, Bhagavan, the same Supreme Being in yet another form, took to cooking in order to save a few uneducated women. With his eyes Bhagavan served his devotees the food of spirit; with his hands he served the devotees the bread of life." I am so moved by Subbalakshmiammal's approach to Bhagavan.

Subbalakshmiammal said, "Yogis and Rishis of yore underwent severe austerities and penances to attain the state to which Bhagavan would take us by having us active near him in the kitchen. He would make the small tasks of daily life into realms that led us to light and bliss. We experienced ecstasy in grinding, rapture in cooking, joy in serving the devotees in the dining hall. Why? Because while doing them, he blessed us with his proximity, the state in which the mind merged in the Heart. Our Hearts were with him and in him and he was in all the work we did. Someone who has not had this ecstatic experience cannot possibly know

how much bliss and capacity a human Heart can fathom." In devotion, she continued clasping her two hands together in adoration of her Satguru, Ramana.

Subbalakshmiammal added, "Bhagavan himself was our true goal, our home. To us, he alone existed. His radiant form was enough for us. One had to live and work with him to know what a great teacher he was. Through trifles of daily life, he taught us *Vedanta*—the highest Truth, both in theory and practice. We were changed to the very roots of our being, not even knowing the depth and scope of his influence. He led us through his infinite kindness to absolute wisdom." Subbalakshmiammal, at that moment, was a literal symbol of the Mother principle. She saved this body from being bitten by the angry monkey and possible death from rabies. Through all this sharing she allowed me a glimpse into the realm of the ever-present Kingdom of God.

BHAGAVAN ON THE HILL

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Sampurnamma

Next we are going to learn about Sampurnamma, the woman cook. Sampurnamma was very fortunate. Bhagavan, who rarely used any comparative statements, had openly declared that "Sampurnamma is the best lady cook." *Sampurnamma* literally means the "sweet filling in something," but, for us the real spiritual meaning is "abidance in bliss." Sampurnamma was born in a village next to Bhagavan's village, Tiruchuzhi. Both families were very close. When this young boy of Tiruchuzhi had his ego-death experience and moved to Arunachala, he became known as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Her family members were all excited to go to *Arunachala* and have *Darshan* of Bhagavan. They invited Sampurnamma, but she refused to go because she was a homebody, very much devoted to her husband and her relatives.

Soon after, her husband died, plunging her into insurmountable sorrow and pain. She could not get over it. Her relatives felt that Bhagavan alone could affect a cure for her and requested, "Come, we will take you to Bhagavan." But still she was adamant and refused to go anywhere, drenching herself in sorrow. One day when she was in the *Meenakshi*

temple offering worship in the shrine, a calm and bright-looking Brahmin disturbed her prayer and asked her very strangely and very strongly, "Will you cook a meal for me?" This was very strange, as Indians would understand. Usually when they ask for alms they say, "Will you give me food?" They would not say, "Will you cook a meal for me?" Since Sampurnamma was last in worship, suddenly she woke up and thought, "I have an opportunity to feed a Brahmin. I am so happy." But when she searched for the Brahmin all over the temple and could not find one, at that very moment, she felt that Brahmin must be no one other than Bhagavan.

Along with her sister and brother-in-law, Dr. Narayana Iyer, she went to Ramanashram in 1932. Though she was still sorrowful, she felt a soothing effect from the glance of Bhagavan. She continued to look at Bhagavan, and Bhagavan continued to look at her until her sorrow subsided. It was a miracle. They stayed for twenty days and every morning, they would go to Bhagavan. Sampurnamma, being a very active person, had never meditated. In the presence of Bhagavan when she sat, automatically, without any effort, she was in deep repose. There was no thought. But when she would go into the town of Tiruvannamalai, away from Bhagavan, the same sorrowful thoughts were crowding her. The next day when she sat in front of Bhagavan, the same miracle happened again. There were no thoughts at all. She was in meditation and she could see Bhagavan looking at her. Then he forwarded to her a copy of *Who am I*. After twenty days, they had to return to her village and she was very restless. She understood that the calm, soothing effect that she felt was because of Bhagavan's presence, so she wanted to go back. Her uncle was kind enough to take her to *Ramanashram*. The very first day she entered, Santhammal, the cook,

needed to leave and Sampurnamma was asked to take over the cooking job. She was so thrilled to be asked in the presence of Bhagavan, "Will you take over the cooking so that Santhammal can go?" Bhagavan looked at her and she immediately understood. She cooked that very day, and while serving Bhagavan, she recognized that he was the Brahmin who requested, "Will you cook a meal for me?"

Her spiritual quest started and was fulfilled at the very first meal because she was serving not to a person, not to a Brahmin, but to the Brahman who is God in everyone. By feeding Bhagavan, she felt she was feeding all. She stayed there permanently preparing food for Bhagavan.

Though she knew cooking like any Indian woman, it was Bhagavan who taught her the nuances and niceties of cooking in the *Ashram*, in how many various ways pulses, vegetables, and grains could be cooked and combined. While being with her and cooking, he was not only giving instructions on how to cook, he was also telling stories of his boyhood. He would slowly shift it to stories of *Vedanta,* and finally bring it to the highest teaching of one's Self, the non-dual existence of the supreme state of Truth—the deathless state of "I am." On one such occasion, Bhagavan handed over the *Ribhu Gita* and explained to her the significance of it.

Sampurnamma said, "In addition, Bhagavan taught us that work is love made visible, *Seva*. By his very presence, he taught us that we are all in the presence of God and that all work is in his service. He used cooking to teach us philosophy and spirituality. For instance, once Bhagavan told me, "You must cover your vegetables when you cook them, only then

will they keep their flavor and be fit to eat." Bhagavan continued, "It is the same with the mind. You must put a lid over your mind and let it simmer quietly. Then, only, does a man become food, fit for God to swallow." Not only while cooking, but also while serving, Bhagavan would bestow the highest teaching. The meticulous and the minute details Bhagavan disclosed while preparing the dishes in the kitchen would make a stranger think that Bhagavan liked eating gourmet food! The opposite was true. When meals were served he would mix up the little food that he would allow us to put on his leaf—the sweet, the sour, the savory all together--and swallow it down unthinkingly, as if it had no taste in his mouth. When we would point it out to him, Bhagavan would say with a smile, "Enough of multiplicity. Let us have some unity." On another occasion, Bhagavan's reply was almost the same. He raised questions thus, "Why all this separateness, is not all one indistinguishable whole?"

Sampurnamma has given us a clue as to how a spiritual aspirant would mature: very easily, effortlessly, and quickly. Guru's Grace is inherent in all the Hindu scriptures. You cannot escape from Guru's Grace and also mature to that state of high inner peace and happiness. Toward that, this is what Sampurnamma said, "Bhagavan has cooked and worked diligently. He intuitively knew the exact portion of ingredients to be used. He would advise us likewise. He was correct. We would simply obey his instructions. That is all. Thinking of him was thinking of pristine *Arunachala* when we cooked, and the dishes would turned out delicious. Thus we learned to think of him first, before deciding what or how much each ingredient to add, and it would result in excellent tasty dishes. We extended this "thinking of him process" before plunging into

any form of activities, trivial or huge, and whatever happened would be successful and complete. Thinking of him before doing any action became part of life. By daily practice of it, we learned to have the mind focused on Bhagavan. Whenever we were afraid, anxious, or in pain, we had only to think of him to feel his hand enjoin us." Sampurnamma affirmed and strengthened this statement by quoting Bhagavan's own word of assurance. She said, "By coming to and going away from the *Ashram,* I sometimes had to walk alone in the dark along a jungle path right at the foot of the hill. When Bhagavan came to know of it, he asked, 'Why are you afraid? Am I not with you?' He confirmed it again when Chinna Swami posed the same question, on my behalf, out of fear for my safety as a woman. 'Why are you coming alone? Are you not afraid?' When Chinna Swami posed this question, Bhagavan intervened and asked, 'Was she alone? Was I not with her all the time?'" Then Sampurnamma had an epiphany. When attention is focused on Bhagavan within one's Heart, he is present all the time, guiding us and maturing us. We are all One in "That."

Sampurnamma shared with me two beautiful reminiscences. Once, the doctors advised that Bhagavan should be given yogurt instead of buttermilk. But there was not enough yogurt, as Bhagavan insisted that everyone should be equally served. Another cook, Subbalakshmiammal, felt she was clever to put yogurt in the ladle before dipping it in the bucket of buttermilk and then putting it on Bhagavan's leaf. Bhagavan saw this and then with agony told her, "Subbalakshmi! Do you know what you have served on my leaf? You have served poison. Showing distinction between devotees and myself is giving me poison." Immediately Subbalakshmiammal became upset and contracted a fever

which she suffered for three days. Santhammal went to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan you seem angry with Subbalakshmiammal. The poor lady is having intense fever. Will you please pardon her? Please forgive her?" Bhagavan smiled and said, "Did I get angry with her? I got angry only with her behavior." Immediately her fever disappeared.

The second incident is also very delightful. Sampurnamma shared, "Once I sought Bhagavan's permission to accompany some friends who were going on a pilgrimage to Benares. Bhagavan made fun of me. 'What do you expect to find in Benares that you cannot find here in *Arunachala*?' He asked. Then he made the most profound declaration: 'The Lord of Benares, Vishwanatha, is here. He is himself *Arunachala*. Why go in search of him who is here now with you?' He was referring to himself. The Father is with every one of us here and now. Why even search? He is always here.' Since he would not give permission, I decided to abandon my trip. The next morning, Bhagavan told me, 'Sampurnamma, I had a dream last night. I saw you worshipping the Lord in *Vishwanatha* temple, Benares.' I was so moved. Was it just a dream? No, I felt he had taken me there and given me an opportunity to worship, and then brought me back." Bhagavan was very compassionate to Sampurnamma. Most of those who have moved with her, who are even now present, could see only the frailties of Sampurnamma. But Bhagavan extended further kindness and attention to Sampurnamma so as to lift her up to spiritual perfection.

She dropped the body at the *Ashram*, on Sri Bhagavan's *Maha Samadhi* day. As in the case of most of the elder devotees, I had the privilege of carrying her to the burial ground and then lighting the funeral pyre. This

is the blessing Bhagavan bestowed on me for nearly forty old devotees. When I told this to a saint, he was so moved. He said, "I could not light the funeral pyre even once." Sampurnamma had the blessings of Sri Bhagavan.

BE STILL AND KNOW, 'I AM GOD'

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Lokammal

Lokammal, like her colleagues in the kitchen, was overwhelmed by her very first *Darshan* of Bhagavan in the 1930s. One look from him and forthwith, Lokammal surrendered herself completely. When she was young and living in her village, her uncle, who was a pious and holy man, initiated her into *Panchakshari mantra,* i.e., the five-syllable Holy name of *Namah Shivaya.* From childhood, her attention was on God. Unfortunately she became a child widow and was neglected by society, family, by everyone . . . which added to her sorrow. She had one friend in the village, Tenammal, who was also a widow. They used to share spiritual topics. Tenammal had been to *Arunachala* and had met Bhagavan. She would narrate all of her experiences. Whenever she was narrating about Bhagavan, Lokammal felt, "Will I also go to Bhagavan and sit at his Holy feet?" But all of her family people, who were wealthy, flatly refused. Many times she begged, but nothing happened.

One day a lady came holding a newspaper saying, "Lokammal, your saint at *Arunachala* has died." It was actually the news that Seshadri Swami had passed away, but this lady did not know the difference. Lokammal's heart broke. One day in bright daylight, while alone, she saw an apparition of Bhagavan walking toward her. This was a vision, but it was authentic.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

She again begged to go, and her brother at last agreed. He allowed her to go along with a group of women who were going to Tirupathi, which is a pilgrim center a bit away from *Arunachala*.

When Lokammal came to Bhagavan, she stayed in the town with the others. She came very early in the morning to the *Ashram*. In those days, the tradition of having morning *idlis* had not yet been established. Only rice gruel and coffee would be served. On that very first day of her arrival, very early in the morning, Bhagavan spoke to her, "Here in the morning, they will have rice, gruel, or coffee. Which do you prefer?" Immersing herself in Bhagavan's presence, she said, "It's all the same, whatever is served." And she went to the kitchen because wherever Bhagavan was, she was following. In the kitchen, Bhagavan was cooking, and she was assisting. In the hall, she would arrive and sing beautiful Vedantic Tamil songs, which Bhagavan liked. She had a melodious voice. Lokammal in those days was very famous for singing. Bhagavan would ask her to sing a few specified songs.

The group that had gone to Tirupathi had come to fetch her so she had to depart with them. When she went to take leave of Bhagavan, Bhagavan asked, "Are you going away?" He expressed his affectionate tenderness in such a way that Lokammal melted. To show that it was not just personal affection alone, Bhagavan forwarded his copy of *Upadesa Saaram* to her. She cried and cried. Lokammal said, "Bhagavan! Except you, I have nobody to hold to as my own. I do not want to go, but they are all dragging me. I pray that you will draw me to your Holy feet, and I will be a servant. Please grant me Grace." Bhagavan looked at her for a long time with love and compassion.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

We have now shared stories about five cooks. How Bhagavan enticed each of them is very fascinating. He had a pattern of taking them in and inspiring them not only to just be the cook, but he nurtured them to that spiritual state of inner peace and happiness. What Lord Krishna had done to the cowherd maids, Bhagavan had done with these very poor child widows. These four things happened: The first thing was a "Gracious look" in the beginning as *Darshan*. All these five ladies were seen as God by Bhagavan and vice versa. The second was his personal, affectionate attention. He paid personal attention to each one of them. Then he provided a book to each one of them. It was not just personal affection. To bring them into the teaching in the very first meeting itself, he passed on *Upadesa Saaram* to Santhammal; to Sankarammal, he forwarded *Kaivalya Navanita;* to Subbalakshmiammal, he bestowed *Ribhu Gita;* to Sampurnamma, he forwarded *Who am I;* and with Lokammal, he even handed over his own copy of *Upadesa Saaram*. The fifth thing is that he empowered each one of them to experience the silent, formless Truth of the state of "I am" in the very Heart or core of being, itself.

Bhagavan's *Darshan* brought Lokammal back. She came, tearing herself away from her family, and now she was cooking. How Bhagavan appreciated that! One day when he came into the kitchen, the *sambar* preparation was boiling in a big vessel. Bhagavan just asked, "Is it still on the fire or is it not?" And then she said, "Yes, it has to boil further." Bhagavan appreciated her, saying, "Only Lokammal listens to me and makes the *sambar* complete its boiling. The rest of the people in their haste take it away half cooked."

The young ladies had a three-day menstrual cycle. It was treated with great contempt by the local society. Even within families, menstruating women are segregated and kept away in a corner of the house. They are given separate food and treated like untouchables. This was prevalent at that time. In the morning, when Bhagavan entered the kitchen, he usually suggested what the menu was to be. That day, when he entered, Tenammal was in the kitchen preparing lentils separately. Bhagavan asked if that was not discussed in the morning. "What is this that Tenammal is making?" Then she had to explain, "One of us is having the menses, so she has been kept away from the *Ashram* and has to be given this food." Bhagavan seemed livid, so displeased. Bhagavan said, "Why should she eat food separately? Why can't she eat some of the food which is served to everyone else? Why does it matter if she is not well? Make no difference and serve her from the food that you have prepared for all. Let her have rice, *dhal,* and curry from the regular kitchen." Even after Bhagavan had given such clear instructions there was resistance in the office and the *Ashram* environment. They were not prepared to do that.

Bhagavan erupted, "The *Ashram* gives food to all and makes no distinction. There are no untouchables here. Those who do not like it may eat elsewhere. At *Skandashram*, there would be the same trouble with the mother. Here we have menses, and there she had the *parayas,* i.e., the untouchables—*harijans*. She would not give food to the man who brought us the fire wood because she was afraid of pollution. She insisted that I must eat first, then she would eat and then the woodcutter would have the remaining leftovers, on the grounds outside the *Ashram*. I refused to eat until the man had been decently fed. At first she would

not eat, and would suffer and weep and fast, but I was adamant, and she came to see that she could not have her way in such matters. What is the difference between one man and another? Am I a Brahmin and is he a *paraya*? Is it not correct to see God in all, and all in God?"

This is what Lokammal said**:** "Bhagavan elevated each one of us from lowly ignorance. In the realm of religion, spirituality, and society, he bestowed on us the supreme state of equality and oneness." Lokammal and the other lady cooks matured in Bhagavan's presence. How fortunate that we have had this fate to share about these wonderful five cooks. They were all elevated into the highest state of inner peace and happiness. Let us offer respect to them.

I would like to share two more incidents connected with Lokammal. Why we eat *idly* in Ramanashram, now, is because of Lokammal. There was no *idly* before. When Lokammal was there in her village, Patakuruchi, the fertile soil produced a particular kind of rice which they made into parboiled rice that was very fit for *idlis*. One day Lokammal's brother sent a little quantity to the *Ashram*. Bhagavan himself ground it and made it into *idly*, and it was very tasty. Bhagavan made a statement, "How good this parboiled rice is!" So Lokammal wrote to her brother and relatives, "You need not do anything for me, but please go on sending this parboiled rice for Bhagavan because he made this comment about it." From that day onward, *idlis* are still being made in Ramanashram. We owe its origin to Lokammal.

In her last days, Lokammal lived alone and away from the *Ashram* in a cottage. Even though inwardly she was so ripe, her *prarabdha*, her

samskara, was to be a somewhat irritable person even until her last days. She said, "I am afraid. You must send a maid servant to attend me." I sent a maid servant, but she was not adjusting. I had to change maids eighteen times! Every time, they would, with folded hands, say, "Please do not ask us to go to Lokammal." Finally, I could not send a maid servant and the next morning when I went, Lokammal scolded me**:** "See I was alone. I was afraid. You did not send a maid."

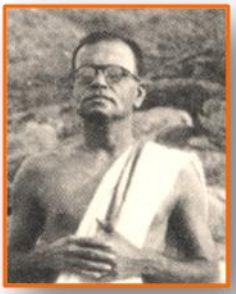
The next day, with apprehension, I entered into her cottage and saw her face was glowing. She asked, "Is it Ganesa?" I said, "Yes**,** Amma**.**" I thought she was going to scold me because I had not sent another maid. She said, "Come here, my child. Come near." She was lying on the bed. She just held me tightly and said, "Because of you, I had *Darshan* of Bhagavan. Last night, I was scolding you, but look at Bhagavan, this picture of Bhagavan that he gave me; once when I told him that young people were troubling me. He got down from the sofa, brought this picture and gave it to me. 'From today onward, you will not have any trouble.' Look at me, Ganesa, I am ninety years old. After that there was no problem from any one. Last night, when I was scolding you, I heard Bhagavan's voice: 'Lokammal! Lokammal!' Bhagavan came alive in that picture, 'Have I not told you I am always with you? When I am with you, where is fear? Be happy.' Bhagavan spoke to me because of you."

The next day she passed away, and I did the funeral pyre rites for her. What a blessing!

VAIKUNDAVASAR, TPR AND BHAGAVAN

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

T. P. Ramachandra Iyer



We already saw how the cook, Santhammal, was very helpful to aspirants wanting to have contact with Bhagavan, but who could not open up innocently in the hall in the presence of everyone else. Similarly, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer or TPR, who was one of the attendants of Bhagavan, was very helpful to aspirants in the hall. He was very congenial by nature and understood the agony of aspirants who flocked to Arunachala in quest of solace and clarification in their spiritual struggle. TPR was a bridge, so to speak, between the aspirant and Bhagavan. T.P. Ramachandra Iyer was especially of great help to aspirants when the *Ashram* grew larger in the latter half of the 1940s, when so many people were gathering to see Bhagavan. Soon, rules and regulations naturally came into play to ensure that Bhagavan was not unduly disturbed. Genuine aspirants who found it difficult to approach Bhagavan with their personal and spiritual problems would approach TPR for assistance. He became their oasis, as it were. TPR arranged for these aspirants to have contact with Bhagavan in some form or the other. Bhagavan sometimes allowed either Santhammal or TPR to flout the rules because he understood their selfless reasons.

T.P. Ramachandra Iyer was born in Tiruvannamalai and grew up at the foot of holy *Arunachala*. His family had stayed there for generations. They were devoted to *Arunachaleshwara*, the temple deity, and *Apitakuchambal*, the Goddess deity. When TPR was a boy of six or seven, he had the *Darshan* of Bhagavan many times in the *Virupaksha* lower cave. He would run to the *Virupaksha* cave, but he was honest enough to admit, "I went to Bhagavan because Bhagavan shared with us sweets, such as sugar candy and raisins." However, he also came under the imperceptible spiritual influence of Bhagavan and received silent blessings. The impact of these experiences became obvious when he was a youth and was going to school and college. He became passionate about the study of religion and philosophy. In fact, in college he chose philosophy as his subject, much against his family's wishes. Perhaps he wanted the theoretical knowledge of the scriptures of all religions in order to understand and put into practice Bhagavan's direct teaching. In his later years, he became an affluent lawyer in Chennai. In 1938, Ramanashram had some litigation problems, all of which he attended to. But in the 1940s, he took voluntary retirement and settled down at *Arunachala*. After 1946, he became the attendant of Bhagavan. Imagine such an intelligent and erudite scholar willing to help Bhagavan by attending on him!

I was very close to TPR during my childhood and even later on. In fact, I was fascinated by him. Now, looking back, I can very clearly see why I was attracted to him. On the day when Bhagavan was to drop his body, the family members, along with the doctors and other important people of the *Ashram,* were inside the small *Nirvana* room. Bhagavan was lying down. During the last moments, doctors advised everyone to leave the

room. So we all prepared to leave. I, too, was going out, when TPR held on to my hand tightly and had me stand at the entrance to the *Nirvana* Room. Had he not forced me to stay on, I would have missed the glorious opportunity of seeing Bhagavan drop the body as the synchronicity of an extraordinarily bright meteorite passed over and behind the peak of *Arunachala*. The *Life* magazine photographer, Cartier Bresson, saw the same meteorite streak trails of light as it topped the hill. He was opposite the *Ashram* at the time. It was he who marked the time as 8:47 p.m.

Bhagavan, through TPR, had shared with me this unique synchronicity. Now I understood why I had always been drawn towards him. Even when I was studying in college, whenever I came to the *Ashram*, I would seek him out. We would spend time together. In 1960, after I had worked in Mumbai for seven months, I gave up my job and returned to the *Ashram* for good. Because of this, I was in close touch with all the old devotees, including TPR. All this happened on account of grace. When a person is dedicated to the Truth, then the *Higher Power* through sages and saints guides them. When I came to the *Ashram,* a lady-saint instructed me in a *Seva* to perform. She said, "Bring back all the old devotees who left the *Ashram*. Bring them back and serve them." This is how everyone, including TPR, came back to live within the domicile of the *Ashram*.

One day when I was walking to the *Ashram*, TPR tapped me on the back and said, "I, too, studied philosophy like you. I took philosophy as a special subject in college. I liked it immensely. When I had just become a lawyer, I came to the *Ashram* on one of my frequent visits. One time

there was a discussion going on in the hall about the nature of the Self. Since my mind was still afresh with all the bookish knowledge that I had gathered, I freely gave vent to whatever I had learned. I talked about the various grades of consciousness that exist in the Western system of philosophy. I also used terms such as super-consciousness, sub-consciousness and unconsciousness. I boasted before Bhagavan. Bhagavan listened to my enthusiastic and elaborate explanation, and then suddenly responded sharply by saying, 'It is only with reference to something that one can postulate a super-, a sub-, or an unconscious state. Consciousness being the Truth, any form of postulation of it, is learned ignorance, even if it is very appealing to the intellect. Truth is very simple and direct. It has no variations. What exists is only consciousness. Call it by the name *God, Brahman*, awareness, or absolute. It doesn't matter. It is all the same and pure consciousness.' TPR said "these powerful words of Bhagavan instantly shifted me into that one and only consciousness forthwith. I was submerged in non-physical bliss for a long time."

What takes volumes of reading from books to understand, takes just one look from a genuine Master - it can have you go into that state of the silent Truth instantaneously. TPR continued, "This was not the only knock I got, because when you engage close to the master, you get many knocks. Each knock takes you deeper. Similarly, every storm in life, being the nothing I am, took me towards *Arunachala* and not away from it." TPR commented another day, "Even though I was closely associated with Bhagavan, there were doubts that assailed me. The cause of these doubts was centered on the non-understanding of scriptural texts."

He had this problem because, like me, he had done his post-graduate course in philosophy. When you read too much, then there is some kind of contradiction. I said, "Please be more explicit. This looks exactly like my problem, too." TPR explained, "There was always a confrontation within me between knowledge and wisdom. Is all knowledge of the scriptures really so useless that one can attain wisdom only by giving it up, or does one go beyond this framework? This was the dilemma I was in. I wondered whether all scriptures were a mere waste. I therefore put this question across to Bhagavan." Bhagavan then calmly explained, "*Arunachala* is the center of unlearning. Everything that one has learned will be given up here for the final culmination of spiritual perfection." Unless one has learned something, then how can one be advised to unlearn it? The scriptures equip us with learning. Un-learning is relinquishing the identification with intellectual knowledge, body and mind. It is re-cognizing one's Self as the experience of the silent, still Truth is prior to the mind, i.e. making it one's own and not keeping it outside, as something other than oneself. When we keep the scriptures holy, we keep them outside. However, what is conveyed in the scriptures should reflect and affirm one's own inner recognition of Godhood.

Because I continued to be perplexed, TPR said, "*Arunachala* offers perfection by giving the cream of all the scriptures as one's own experience in which theoretical knowledge is transcended." In short, the individual 'I' or the ego is the learning mechanism. This learning, this knowledge is the brain, in the head, while the silence and continuum of the non-physical 'I-I' in one's heart is wisdom and prior to the mind.

Where is the contradiction then? Bhagavan has clearly stated, 'Descending from the head to the heart is spiritual *sadhana*.'"

Very often I would go to TPR's room outside the *Ashram* and wait for him. One day, as he came out of the room, he was murmuring, "The grandfather sowed; the grandson is reaping." He kept muttering it repeatedly. I asked him, "What are you saying?" He then gave me an interesting explanation. He narrated, "One day, a devotee offered a huge *bhiksha* to Bhagavan in the *Ashram* - (a traditional feast given in honor of a saint is called *bhiksha*.) While I was expressing joy over the feast, Bhagavan walked in. He had heard our exchange. He smiled and then turned in my direction and said, 'Thinking about *bhiksha*? Your grandfather's house was the only one I entered to eat, after coming to Arunachala. Every day your grandfather would regularly visit the temple of *Arunachala*. He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva. He was a tall and heavy-built man; he adorned himself with a *rudraksha* garland and other beads. In those days (around 1896), I would stay inside the big temple near the *Gopuram Subramania* temple (this is situated, after entering into *Arunachala* temple, through the eastern *Gopuram*-tower). Every day your grandfather would sit in front of me without saying anything. I was a young teenage boy. He was an elderly person, well known in the town, and a lot of important people would be his guests. One day, a very important person came home and arrangements were made for a feast. Even on that day, after your grandfather came to the temple to have the *Darshan* of the Lord, he came to me and sat down. He got up, and then abandoning his usual silence, told me, 'Get up! We will go to my house, have *bhiksha* and then come back." I was not used to talking in those days. I made signs to indicate my unwillingness. He did not heed

me. He was big and strong, whereas I was much smaller. He repeated his request. I persisted in signaling 'no.' Given that I didn't budge even a little, he bent down, linked my arms to his, forced me to get up and follow him into the house. He made me occupy the most important place and spread a leaf for me that was much larger than that of the others. He himself served me. After I finished my meal, he ate. In those days, I never had a bath. My body would smell, so nobody would come close to me. Yet your grandfather would come unfailingly and sit before me. So many people in this town would come to see me and then go away. Your grandfather alone realized that though I was young, what was in this was fullness.'" TPR had tears in his eyes when he narrated this. He concluded, "Ganesan, it is solely my grandfather's devotion to Bhagavan that is now enabling me to enjoy his holy presence and experience the inner felicity which Bhagavan is showering on me every day."

Another day I asked TPR, "Can you tell me about the compassion of Bhagavan? Many people talk about Bhagavan's compassion as his greatest attribute." He replied, "There are two sides to Bhagavan's compassion. If someone is afflicted, he accepts that person, thereby lifting him up and restoring him to normalcy. In such cases he will even break his strict adherence to his own teaching of Self- enquiry. The other side of his compassion goes even deeper. He will not just alleviate the person's suffering, but completely transform him."

I persisted, "Please explain with some anecdotes." I was always eager for stories. TPR said, "Once, a very big officer came to Ramanashram when the post office here inside the *Ashram* compound was being opened. He

came into the hall with tears in his eyes. He melted when he looked at Bhagavan. He said, 'Bhagavan, I have lost my only son. My wife and I have been neither peaceful nor happy after the death of our son. We have been wandering around aimlessly in life since then." Bhagavan looked at him with great compassion. The man continued, 'We have only one desire, Bhagavan. You have to fulfill this. We want to see our son in our next life."

TPR said, "We devotees in the hall knew what answer Bhagavan would give. Bhagavan indeed gave the very same answer. Bhagavan looked at the man very passionately and posed a question, 'Who is the father? Who is the son? What do you mean by relationship between father and son? What do you actually mean by rebirth? If you understand all these, you will understand the depth of what you are asking for.' The man prostrated before Bhagavan and said, 'I do not understand all these, Bhagavan. I only want to see my son.' Bhagavan then did something remarkable and unusual. He got up from his seat, raised his hands and said, 'Yes, I will give it to you. I will make sure you see your son. You will see your son in your next birth, as you have seen him clearly in this birth.' The officer became extraordinarily happy and fell at Bhagavan's feet several times. Feeling highly elated, he left the hall."

The others in the hall, including TPR were concerned and worried. TPR asked, "Bhagavan, how could you give him such an answer? This is against your own teaching. Your teaching postulates that there is no birth and no rebirth. When even this body is not born, where is the question of rebirth?"

Bhagavan turned to TPR and said, "What am I to do? Had I not given him this answer, he would have been shattered." TPR continued, "I was not happy because I felt Bhagavan should not have condescended from his teaching. Bhagavan noticed the unhappiness and disappointment, and suggested, 'Go and get a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita*.'" Bhagavan chose a passage from the *Gita* and asked TPR to read it out aloud. Lord Krishna in the passage says: "Here, knowledge should be given according to one's ability to grasp it. If one teaches philosophy to those who are not ready to receive it, their faith will be totally shattered." TPR concluded by saying, "This is Bhagavan's compassion."

I then prodded him to tell me about the other kind of compassion - the transforming one. This is what TPR recounted: "A. Bose was a big industrialist. He was also an intellectual and an ardent devotee of Bhagavan. He was strongly drawn toward Bhagavan's teaching of Self-enquiry. He began an industry in Bangalore which is well known even today. He would come to visit Bhagavan every week and would also bring along some friends. Bose had a son who was around twenty years old at the time. He was a brilliant young man to whom Bose wanted to hand over the management of the factory and then settle down at the holy feet of Bhagavan. However, the boy suddenly died and Bose was inconsolably shattered. Many of us went from *Ramanashram* to console him. We talked about all the theoretical aspects of Bhagavan's teaching, but it was to no avail. We felt that he had to be brought to the presence and proximity of Bhagavan.

Since very rarely were there people in the hall between 12:00 and 2:00 in the afternoon, I brought Bose to Bhagavan then. Bhagavan instructed

Bose to sit close to him and continued looking at him. Bose was in both physical and mental anguish. He was very restless and could not even open his eyes. Bhagavan focused on him and ultimately, Bose opened his eyes. He managed to look at Bhagavan and Bhagavan continued looking at him. After some time, this shook him up and so he shouted at the top of his voice, "Bhagavan is there God?" His voice was saturated with the pain and agony of his loss. Bhagavan continued to look at him for some more time. Bose, too, continued to look at Bhagavan. Then Bhagavan said, "Bose, your question itself has the answer." He had shouted, "Is there God?" There is God. For five minutes there was absolute silence. Bhagavan continued to look at Bose and Bose, too, looked at Bhagavan. TPR observed all this from outside the window. He noticed a change in Bose. He became his normal self and prostrated before Bhagavan. He smiled, and for the first time after many days, and said, "Thank you, Bhagavan."

TPR said, "This is the compassion of Bhagavan. We cannot understand what took place during the *Darshan* between Bhagavan and Bose. He asked the question, "Is there God?" And Bhagavan answered, "Your question itself has the answer." The answer was intellectual, but the compassion was overwhelmingly healing. Bose remained a great devotee of Bhagavan. He built the "Bose Compound," which has many cottages for devotees to stay in. Even TPR stayed there during his last days until I brought him back to the A*shram.*

After a day or two, I asked TPR to narrate more such stories. These stories touched my heart so much that I wanted to hear more and more. Moreover, with every story, some kind of transformation was also taking

(Liberation).' We all laughed to ourselves because the man had put forth such requests to Bhagavan. But a miracle took place. Bhagavan got up from the sofa, and stood in front of him, pointing to his feet. The man fell at Bhagavan's feet and for five minutes he seemed like a happy puppy. We saw that his tears had drenched the feet of Bhagavan. After a while, Bhagavan lifted him up, put his hands on his shoulder and declared, 'I have given you *Aas Sakshatkar*.' The *swami* was in tears born of total fulfillment and gratitude as he took leave.

TPR continued, "An American came to the *ashram*. The tall, handsome American entered without announcing his name. He came to the *Ashram* because he had read about Bhagavan. From the moment he entered, Bhagavan's gaze was on him. He sat before Bhagavan for three hours. Some kind of communication was going on between him and Bhagavan during this time. There was such deep silence; no words were exchanged. After three such hours, the man got up and left. He never came back. I asked Bhagavan, 'How is it that this man came and left without even talking to you, Bhagavan?' Bhagavan replied, 'He came here. He got what he wanted. His mission is over. Where is the need to stay any further? Everything ends in the now.'

"There was an aristocratic lady from America who sent a telegram stating that she was coming to India just to be with Bhagavan. She also said that she was reaching Mumbai by ship on a particular date, and then taking the train to Chennai. She had also written that she would be taking a special train (which was available in those days) and coming to Arunachala on a particular date. She sent another telegram from Mumbai confirming her program. She sent another telegram from

Chennai. She was disappointed that there was no one to receive her at the station when she arrived. Once again at the entrance of Ramanashram there was no one to receive her. She came into the hall on her own. Bhagavan was reading the newspaper and she couldn't even see his face. Chadwick and Munagala Venkataramaiya had been asked to look after her since she was coming from such a great distance and was making a special trip. She was fuming at the treatment that she received.

She said, 'I am a lady. What have I done wrong? I have taken all the correct steps and come here. Nobody gives me any respect here, and this Ramana Maharshi doesn't even look at me.' She was terribly angry. She told the two devotees, 'Come to my salon at four o'clock. I want to talk to you.' She left the *ashram* abruptly. When they went to her place, she demanded, 'Who is this Ramana Maharshi? He does not even have common courtesy. What did I do wrong? I did everything perfectly but he does not know how to respect or even receive a lady.' They said, 'Do not talk ill about our master. We will go and report everything to him.' She said, 'That is the reason why I am saying it. Go and tell him. Let him learn something.' The two, with great feeling, reported the incident to Bhagavan. Bhagavan listened with great interest and coaxed them to tell all the details by asking questions like, 'Then what did she say?' He seemed very curious to have a detailed account. Finally he assumed his usual poise and said, 'Did she say all this? Then it will work itself out.' That night, at Chennai, the lady had a dream. In the dream, Bhagavan said, 'Come back.' The next day she returned, but this time unannounced. From 8:00 onwards, Bhagavan's eyes were at the entrance to the hall. She came at 10:00 and Bhagavan showered her with his smile. She became such a beautiful devotee of Bhagavan! We can never

judge a master or how he will act. From his action, you cannot decide anything."

TPR gave not just an account of these incidents but also an insight into Bhagavan's teachings. I told him to elaborate on the teachings of Bhagavan since he was drawn to him, admiring his teaching of *Who Am I?* He once informed Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I came to you not because I adored your personal form. Your teaching *Who am I* was so logical that it attracted me toward you. Although I am practicing it, I am still not heading anywhere. I am not able to experience it." Bhagavan looked at him and said, "The man who wants to catch a fish attaches a very tempting worm to the fishing rod. Does he want to feed the fish? He only wants to catch it. The eleven page book: *Who Am I* is only the tempting worm to catch us all and destroy our ego!"

I asked TPR, "Did you get any great clarification from Bhagavan?" TPR said that he asked Bhagavan about the meaning of the Tamil word *aaroli,* which means "shining light." The phrase appears in the first verse after the first two benedictory verses of the *Forty Verses on Reality:*

Since one actually sees the world one has to accept

There are varied forms of multiplicity as well

Yet all that is seen, i.e. the names, the forms

The onlooker, the screen, the light that illumines

Verily all are that one principle, the awareness, the I AM.

TPR asked, "What is this light that illumines? What does it refer to?" Bhagavan replied, "*Aar Oli* means all-pervasive brightness. It refers to that light of the mind in which we see the entire world."

Only with a particular kind of mind are we able to see the world - both the known and the unknown. Even the psychic phenomenon is seen only through the mind. The known we see; the unknown is the vision of God that we long to have. The white light is bodily based, what is called the Sahasara or seventh chakra. The clear light is the light of the formless Self which transcends both light and darkness. No-thing can be seen in this light. Here, there is neither a seer nor the scene (seen). There is total darkness or ignorance prevailing in which no objects are seen. Just as in deep sleep we do not see any objects; here, too, we do not see anything. However, from the Self reflects a light, which is the light of pure being. This is the light which illuminates the existence of the entire illusory world as a play of consciousness (*Leela*). What is seen cannot be actually seen in total light (as in enlightenment) or in total darkness (as in deep sleep). It can be seen only in this subdued or reflected light, and this is the light that is being referred to in the verse.

I told TPR, "We aspirants also have comments, so how do we balance worldly responsibilities and spiritual aspirations? It seems like a contradiction." TPR replied, "I can refer to what happened with Bhagavan. I pleaded with Bhagavan to save me from the grips of *samsara* because, however much I turned my mind inward, the pull of commitments in the activities of life was still insurmountable. I wanted a

way to tide over these involvements. Bhagavan turned around and said with great love, 'Be like the tiniest chip of wood that is thrown into an inundating and profuse flood.'"

I requested TPR to explain this further, and here is what he said: "The external life of action and involvement (everyday living in this world) is unavoidable, both for the spiritual aspirant and others. Assuming that they are very important, men strive for name and fame; hence, they face a lot of problems and strife. One must understand that true spirituality is not the avoidance of action, but involving oneself in action without giving importance to one's efforts. In other words, one should be like dust thrown into a floating flood while indulging in any kind of action. The sense of being the actor is to be given up, but not the action itself."

I questioned TPR further, "How can I give up the sense of being the actor? I am the actor!" TPR explained, "I too asked Bhagavan this. Bhagavan showed two practical ways of erasing the importance given to the actor. One already *is,* by not reacting to the action that takes place around you. One may act, responsibly, but not react. The other is to understand totally and experientially that things and actions happen through you and not by you. It is being done by a *Higher Power*. Actions, whether good or bad, are being done through you and not by you. Reaction is futile mental work. The mind always binds us to the action. If you do not react to the action, then it dies."

During his last few days, I appealed with TPR to come to the *Ashram*. I wanted to bring him to the *Ashram*, as I had invited several other devotees. It was he who first occupied Chadwick's room. No one had

occupied it before. TPR was a treasure of information to aspirants. He would often flood me with reminiscences of Bhagavan and then bless me.

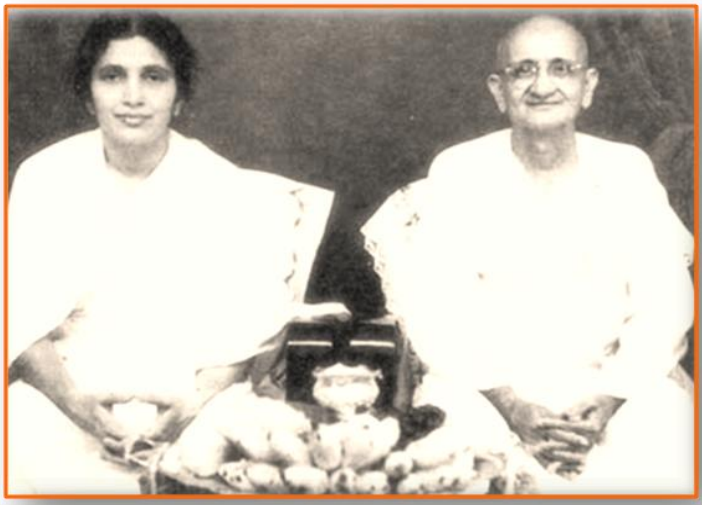
Soon afterwards, he had a stroke. I took him to Pondicherry, where Bhagavan's devotee, and my close friend, Dr. Bhaskaran attended to him. Within a few days, he was able to speak. I paid a visit to the hospital and said, "Please bless me."

Perhaps this is the disease I am afflicted with - to ask for blessings from old devotees. He put his hands on my head and said, "Follow the direct teaching of Bhagavan - his direct teaching is Silence and Self-enquiry. Do not swerve towards any other method, even if such methods might be found in the books by Bhagavan himself. Be silent at times when you have nothing else to do; at times when you do something, always ask of yourself, 'Who is doing this?' Raise this Self-enquiry constantly, and it will restore the state of *Summa Iru*." *Summa Iru* in Tamil means "Be the Stillness." It did not mean being quiet physically. TPR continued, "I did not understand that, Ganesan. The state of 'Being Still' is the link between the aspirant and Bhagavan (formless God). Whenever you are silent and doing nothing, bring your attention to the inner silence, the 'I AM'. Then you are always communing with the ultimate Truth - Bhagavan, Arunachala, Jesus, and God… whatever name you want to ascribe to it. You are always established in the Inner Felicity, the Truth."

TPR passed away, not at Arunachala but in Bangalore. His last words to the relative who was attending on him were, "Write to Ganesan that I

am blessing him." It was not a blessing for the individual Ganesan. It was a blessing for all aspirants.

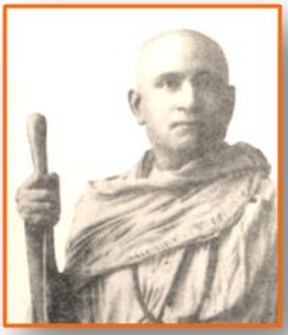
Let us pay homage to these illustrious devotees, as they are *Arunachala*, the ever-living Truth. By these sharings, we are all being translated into that state of Truth.



MATAJI KRISHNA BAI AND SWAMI RAMDAS

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Swami Madhava Thirtha



I am going to share with you two remarkable devotees of Bhagavan. One was a skeptic, the other a very deep scholar-philosopher-Swami. The Master's influence transformed both of these different metals into gold with the alchemy of compassion, love, attention and illumination. The application of the transformation in each of them may appear to differ but the end result of spiritual emancipation was always the unchanged.

Notice that the emphasis of these sharings is not on giving details of events, but to focus on the intimate Guru-disciple relationship in India. As the Master accepts the state of awareness of the aspirants, their obstacles are dissolved, thereby inspiring them to attain the final emancipation by themselves. Reading their stories, each one of us is also receiving the effect of that spiritual emancipation -- whether one is fully

may not totally be conscious of it, but it does not matter. The divine alchemy does take place, most certainly but it may not be conspicuous.

Swami Madhava Thirtha was a renowned Saint. He was called *Motilal*. From his childhood he pondered deeply over the mystery of death. He would pester whomever he met, especially the wandering *sadhus*, *sanyasi*s, them with questions, "Please explain to me. What is this mystery, death?" This keen inquisitiveness in him was really deep. He learned Sanskrit and studied all the available scriptural texts - his favorite Hindu scriptural text being *Srimad Bhagavate*. The study of it established him deeply in the spiritual sojourn. He was also very well-read in modern science. Thus, he was interested in the theory of relativity, as he found so many parallels to *Vedanta* in that theory, particularly in Adi Shankara's exposition of the theory of *Maya*.

He started giving talks in schools and colleges on the theory of relativity and its parallels in *Vedanta*. He was a very popular speaker. In the course of his tours he was able to meet sages, seers and saints, like Ananda Mayee Ma. In the 1920's, a direct contact with Sri Aurobindo, the well-known saint of Pondicherry, drove him deeply into a true spiritual quest. *Motilal* was very popular in his state of Gujarat. His deep study of *Vedanta* inculcated in him the spirit of renunciation. In 1939, he took *sanyasa* and was named Swami Madhava Thirtha. As a Swami, he was traveling in his local state where was very popular. Not only was he a scholar, but the noble ways in which he applied whatever he studied to his personal life made him a very sincere aspirant. He was a prolific writer and had written 132 books. Yet his quest for spiritual fulfillment continued unabated.

This unquenchable quest landed him in *Arunachala* in 1944. He had heard about Ramana Maharshi. He stayed for 14 days – all the fourteen days filled with study and experience. Since he was a scholar, he was very keen to note down whatever experiences he had, whatever questions and answers he put forth and obtained from Bhagavan. The very first day, when he was introduced to Bhagavan in the dining hall, Bhagavan granted him the glance of grace. About that very first look, Swami Madhava Thirtha wrote, "I found in the glance of the Maharshi the brilliance of the sun. My breath seemed to stop and my mind was elevated into a spiritual realm of unutterable peace and happiness." With that very first look, the Maharshi imparted his own highest state with all who met him. It was not a gradual increase. It was truly a "*Darshan*." Whether the visitor was capable of recognizing it or not, the Master always shared all of his fullness. Fortunate are those like Swami Madhava Thirtha who could recognize it. He was making every minute of the fourteen days of his stay useful for himself, and, thereby, also for everyone else.

Swami Madhava Thirtha wrote, "While sitting in the hall I observed the Maharshi silently resting on the couch, wholly unconcerned with what was taking place in his presence. Yet I could easily discern in him the attitude of oneness with all (in Sanskrit, it is called *Abhinna Bhava*), through which he touched the inner being of the aspirant, who was thus able to feel within himself the same presence of the Supreme - transcending thoughts - just by a silent look." Madhava Thirtha being a scientist, added, "I would venture to suggest that the relationship between the Maharshi in his *Abhinna Bhava* and the aspirant sitting in his presence is analogous to that of a radio transmitter and the receiver. Maharshi's spiritual influence is shared unceasingly, but such continued

beneficial influence by the sage will have no apparent effect until the aspirant is open to receive it. The aspirant's preparedness to receive it is called 'the operation of Grace.' Bhagavan would often say, 'The Grace is always here. You may inhere in it.'"

Swami Madhava Thirtha had sent his book called *"Maya"* (illusion), in which he had logically presented how Adi Shankara's concept of *Maya* was fully vindicated by the theory of the modern scientist. Madhava Thirtha asked for Bhagavan's views on that book. Bhagavan was gracious enough to point out a mistake in Swami's treatment of the subject and how he had based his arguments on a wrong presumption. The theory of relativity maintains that time and space is purely a relative notion, dependent entirely on conditions governing the observer and the object under observation, such that there is no such thing as objective time and space. This is the theory of relativity. The Maharshi pointed out to him that the very presumption of two beings situated at two given points is in itself an unwarranted assumption and not true. Bhagavan says that two observers put in different situations, is itself a theoretical notion. In other words, the space between one observer and another, being relative and unreal, there cannot be more than one observer. Swami Madhava Thirtha at once recognized the error. It was a revelation to him that the Maharshi could discern off-hand, as it were, such modern theories based entirely on his own experience of the supreme absolute.

Swami Madhava Thirtha put forth questions based on his study of *Vedantic* scriptural texts, and Bhagavan answered beautifully from his own understanding. Swami asked, "If the world is nothing but the

Divine, why does *Isavasya Upanishad* direct the aspirant to renounce the world?" Bhagavan replied, "One is commanded to renounce only the wrong knowledge that the world exists as an objective 'something' other than the benign divine *leela*. One must give up the notion that there is duality and multiplicity, and whatever the manifested existence that may appear to be true."

Swami Madhava Thirtha persisted, "If the notion of duality is to be given up - no duality, no multiplicity - what place is there for the scriptural injunction of self-surrender to the Divine? All Hindu scriptures say surrender to the Divine." Bhagavan answered, "The custom prevalent in South India, among some people, is to offer *puja* to the idol of Lord Ganesha before their daily meal." Bhagavan continued, "A poor traveler was carrying *jaggery* and flour as food for himself on the way. He had to do *puja* to Lord Ganesha before he could eat. He took out a portion of *jaggery* and molded it into a lump, identifying it with the Lord. He had to offer some food to that Lord, so he pinched from the same *jaggery* idol and then offered it to him. Thus he defiled the image. Your idea of self-surrender is nothing better than the offering made by the wayfarer. By presuming your existence apart from the Supreme Being, you have merely defiled it. Whether you have surrendered yourself or not, you have never been apart from the Supreme Being. Indeed, at this very present moment, even as in the past or in the future the Divine alone exists… the Divine alone IS."

The story of *jaggery*-offering took place at the end of the fourteenth day of Swami Madhava Thirtha's stay. Before taking leave of Bhagavan, Swami Madhava Thirtha put before Bhagavan an abundance of fruits.

Bhagavan benignly smiled at him and said, "And so, you are offering *jaggery* to Lord Ganesha." Blessed by Bhagavan with those words of total identification, Swami Madhava Thirtha was instantly and gracefully awakened, emerging as a saint.

I would like to quote some of the important spiritual instructions that Swami Madhava Thirtha elicited from Bhagavan during his short stay. By sharing these few words of Grace from Bhagavan, we are now paying our full respect and homage to Bhagavan Ramana; and also, our true gratitude to Swami Madhava Thirtha. These are the Holy words of Bhagavan:

"Do not reply to questions of the mind, like, should I say, 'I am Shiva', or 'I am not the mind', 'I am not the intellect', etc., while pursuing *Who am I,* Self-enquiry. Pursue the enquiry relentlessly and the Heart will reveal the answer by itself.

"The state of silent-*I*, behind the speaking '*I*', is the greatest *mantra*. This I-state is the greatest *mantra*. *Brahadaranyaka Upanishad* says that the first name of God is *'I'*. *'Om'* - the primal sound and vibration come into existence only after the 'I' thought. There is no *japa* at all without the doer of the *japa*. All do the *japa* of 'I' only. How many times we say I-I-I in our lives. All do *japa* of 'I' only. Be as you are. Reality, i.e., pure non-physical awareness right now, is the real *japa*. *Japa* and God are one and the same. You are perfection. Abandon the idea of imperfection. There is nothing to be dropped. Ego is not a real thing, just as it is not necessary to kill the rope which one imagines is a snake. Also, there is no need to destroy the imaginary mind. Paying attention to the mind

makes the mind benign and it disappears. Stability in the silent stillness of the Self is the real *asana*. Be steady in that real posture.

"You ask what book you should read. The Self is the real book; life, the written pages unfolding. You can glance anywhere in that book. Nobody will take that book away from you. Whenever you remember, turn toward the Self. This is true book reading. Keep your attention introverted and the mind still. That is enough. When the mind becomes still, the Self is self-evident. The Self is all pervading. If the mind is at peace, then one begins to experience the peace of Self. Gaze at your own nature. One is everywhere. It is all the same whether you keep your eyes open or shut during meditation. Turn within and meditate on the still I-ness, your true nature. Be as you are. The whole world is in the infinity of the formless you, not the other way around. Therein is all Truth and happiness. Worries do not belong to you. Dive into the silent source of the mind where worries simply cease to exist. Seek the Self and all misery will come to an end. Introvert your mind and turn inside out. You will then come to know that a *Higher Power* (*Shakti*, Holy Ghost) is functioning everywhere. Know that one seer, your Self, and all will be well. Just as the sun has never seen darkness, the Self has never seen ignorance. The Self is unknowable, but it can be experienced by direct perception. Intuition remains. The state of such experiencing is called Self-illumination. Whatever is to be in the future is to be understood as impermanent and Mystery. Learn to understand properly what you are now - what you have now - so that there will be no need of thinking about the future. Trust the Mystery."

When Swami Madhava Thirtha asked Bhagavan for personal advice, Bhagavan told him, "Reduce your tour-travels. Reduce giving talks." Swami Madhava Thirtha implicitly obeyed. He went back and founded '*Vedanta Ashram*' on the banks of *Sabarmati* (a river in Gujarat). In the state of Gujarat, all the elite, all the scholars, all the affluent, all the saints, knew him well and came to him for spiritual solace. He relentlessly advised all the serious aspirants, "Go to Ramanashram. Be with Ramana Maharshi. Spend some time in his presence. Whatever you think I have was all revealed to me by Ramana Maharshi." Sages and saints, the elite from Gujarat, and also the affluent people started coming to *Ramanashram* because of Swami Madhava Thirtha. At that time, *Ramanashram* was filled with *Gujuratris*!

Swami Madhava Thirtha came to *Ramanashram* in 1956, along with sixty devotees. He was already well renowned as a saint. He stayed for a few weeks within the *Ashram*, while his devotees stayed outside in the *Ashram* guest house. I had completed my degree course and was making efforts to find a job. Thus, I was serving in the *Ashram* for two years. My father, who was the President, had to go away on a long journey and I was entrusted with the management of the *Ashram*. Senior devotees, like T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, were guiding and protecting me. These old devotees advised, "Swami Madhava Thirtha had his Self-realization in the presence of Bhagavan. Spend some time with him."

On the day Swami Madhava Thirtha was to leave, along with his devotees, the duty of seeing them off fell to me, as my father was away. I arranged for twenty horse-carts for them to reach the railway station. The horse-cart for Swami Madhava Thirtha was waiting at the entrance

of the *Ashram*. When I entered his room, the Swami was in an ecstatic state, tears flowing from his eyes. His devotees extended to him his sandals and an umbrella because it was raining hard. I said, "Swami, it is time for you to go to the train station. All the horse-carts have come. All your devotees are waiting. So, please come." He followed me, not wearing sandals and rejecting the umbrella. He just walked in stillness, drenched in the pouring rain. We reached Bhagavan's humble shrine..

I saw for the first time in my life an elderly man, six feet tall, with *Tejasvi,* such countenance, the arresting personality of a *sanyasi,* fall like a cut tree at the entrance to Bhagavan's shrine and start crying like a baby. He uttered the following prayer addressed to Bhagavan: "I am like a suckling baby, Bhagavan. I cannot leave you. Yet, I have to go." We had to literally pull him up and support him as we dragged him to the cart. He refused to get into the horse-cart inside the premises of the *Ashram*. So we walked with him outside the *Ashram* to where all the devotees and the many horse-carts were waiting. All along, Swami Madhava Thirtha was shedding divine tears in his ecstasy, submerged in the state of surrendered devotion to the Master. The devotees put him into the cart.

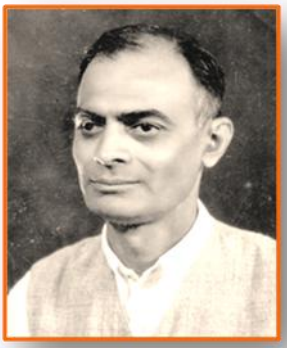
A pious old devotee, B.M.S. Naidu, who was fully aware of the greatness of the Swami, goaded me, "He is a saint. Place your head on his holy feet." I obeyed. Swami Madhava Thirtha put both his hands on my head and blessed me. I went into ecstasy. That was my very first spiritual experience of going beyond the limitations of the body and mind! I felt blessed! It was B.M.S. Naidu who helped me to commence on my spiritual sojourn, though at that time, I was not aware of its true significance. All God's Grace!

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

RAMANA MAHARSHI AT EARLY RAMANASHRAM

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Chaganlal V. Yogi



We have shared about the saint, Swami Madhava Thirtha. Now, let's explore the skeptic Saint, Chaganlal V. Yogi. Swami Madhava Thirtha traveled to *Arunachala* to receive the Grace of Bhagavan, whereas for the fortunate skeptic, the Master went to him, as it were. Chaganlal V. Yogi was a confirmed atheist. He denied God. He scoffed at sages and saints and had a strong feeling that the world was filled with corruption, inequalities and miseries. As a young man he was a hard worker. In the metropolitan city of Mumbai he had earned a good reputation. He owned a printing press. He had many friends, as he was a very entertaining conversationalist. Yet, all their attempts to persuade him to give up skepticism were unsuccessful.

One day, when Chaganlal Yogi was travelling in an electric train, a close friend, who had been to Ramanashram and stayed with Ramana Maharshi, informed him about the significance of Maharshi, that he was the divine in human form. Chaganlal laughed at him, with sympathy and pity. That friend continued to persuade him, "Here, I have brought holy ashes (*Vibhuti*) from the Master, the Maharshi from Holy Arunachala. Please apply a little on your forehead." But he spurned it. When Bhagavan came as *Vibhuti*, Chaganlal rejected him. On a different day, a friend who had been to Ramanashram brought *Sri Maharshi* with 117 illustrations and gave the publication to Chaganlal, saying, "I am coming

from Ramanashram. Hey, Chaganlal! He is God! If only you will go to Arunachala and see Ramana Maharshi your skeptic views would definitely change. At least, read this book." While unrelenting and firm in his skepticism, the book was very attractively printed, so he, being a printer, was naturally intrigued to go through it.

Through yet another friend, he received a copy of *"Self-Realization"* by B.V. Narasimha Swami, the authentic biography of Ramana Maharshi. When he started reading "*Self-Realization"*, many doubts arose in his mind. Though still not feeling a profound respect for Ramana Maharshi, he wrote to Ramana Maharshi concerning his doubts. Routinely, the Ramanashram office was sending the replies. Some of the replies were plausible, but still Chaganlal felt they were merely intellectual. However, he did feel that there was some depth in them. "This mere intellectual knowledge and understanding is not sufficient. I must have direct experience," he felt strongly. So, his friends took that as the most appropriate opportunity and persuaded him, "Come. We will all go to Ramanashram. We will meet Ramana Maharshi and directly address all doubts."

That is how Chaganlal Yogi came to Ramana Maharshi in 1938-39. When he came into the presence of the Maharshi, Ramana Maharshi focused his look. Forthwith, Chaganlal was feeling the peace of Ramana Maharshi's spiritual benevolence. It was literally affecting him. He started feeling that the presence, the affection, the compassion of the Maharshi was very genuine. Bhagavan's unfathomable look connected and converted him. Chaganlal recorded what happened to him in that moment as follows: "The darkness in me that had been heavy and

unbearable before gradually lightened and melted into a glow within. My erstwhile sadness disappeared, completely leaving in my Heart an inexplicable joy. My limbs appeared to be washed in an ocean tide of freedom. The color of the world changed for me and the light of day now took on an ethereal aspect. I saw the foolishness and futility of turning my gaze on the dark side of life. Bhagavan, the strange magician, had opened before me a fresh new world of illumination and joy. Thus, I was caught in the tiger's jaws." He went there just for a day, but he could not release himself from that benevolent influence. It was not hypnotism nor mesmerism, but pure love, compassion and peace. He returned to the presence of the Maharshi again and again. In a dream, Bhagavan held his hands and took him to the top of Arunachala, which Chaganlal Yogi deeply felt as "a symbol of assuring me the goal of life." Many devotees had the same experience at different times, of Bhagavan appearing to them in a vision or in a dream and taking them to the top of the Hill.

Chaganlal Yogi could no more tear himself away from Bhagavan. He wanted to be at the Holy feet of the Master, '*Bhagavan*'. He was prepared to give up the world and take *Arunachala* as his permanent abode. But he was also conscious that he had to maintain his family.

In 1945, he decided to sell his printing press and live at the Holy feet of Bhagavan. But, the question remained, how to sell the press, quickly? Again, Bhagavan appeared to him in a dream. In the dream, along with him he saw one of his friends who had never been to *Ramanashram*. Bhagavan told him, 'You sell your press to him.' In the dream he asked Bhagavan, 'I have to maintain my family. At what amount can I bargain

with him? He must buy my press, so that I can come to *Arunachala*.' In the same dream, Bhagavan wrote on the wall a five figure amount, which was satisfactory to him. In the morning, when he went to the printing press, that same friend was waiting for him! He confessed the details of the dream. His friend immediately accepted, "Yes. I will buy your printing press."

His friends advised him, "Go to Tiruvannamalai every week, but continue with your profession. Put a printing press in Bangalore, so that you can visit and assist the Ashram while staying with your family in Bangalore." He went to Bangalore. He was a very hard-working, intelligent man. He saw the need to purchase a printing press there. He found a big press which had not been operating for six months. When he started bargaining, he was quoted a price higher than he could afford. This skeptic-turned-devotee knew the secret! He requested the man from Bangalore, "Come. We will go to *Ramanashram*." That man had never heard of Ramana Maharshi. Chaganlal Yogi told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan! I want to purchase the printing press from him." Suddenly, the printing press owner said, "Yes, I will give it to him. Whatever price he offers, I will accept." He was deeply influenced by the presence of Bhagavan. The press was soon bought. At the request of Chaganlal, Bhagavan named the press, "*Aruna Press,*" and he worked hard publishing all the publications of *Ramanashram*.

September 1, 1946 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Bhagavan's advent to Arunachala. Devotees wanted to celebrate that significant event as "*Golden Jubilee Celebrations*". They also wanted to bring out a memorable souvenir to commemorate that event. They wanted *Aruna Press* to print it. It was a large book, with numerous illustrations. That work was thrust on Chaganlal Yogi. He knew that the deadline was soon and he thought he could not complete it in the allotted time. He could not say 'no' because the *Ashram* was putting pressure on him. He went to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan! It is physically impossible to complete the printing within the stipulated time." Bhagavan listened for a few minutes and then entered silence. After some time, Bhagavan said in English, "Do your work." Chaganlal took it as a command and blessing and he worked day and night, along with enthusiastic workers. Two days before the celebrations, he took copies of the "*Golden Jubilee Souvenir*" and presented them to Bhagavan, to the delight of all that had assembled at the *Ashram*!

Chaganlal Yogi narrated two beautiful incidents on Bhagavan's sense of equality. Chaganlal Yogi affirmed that among the many sages he had met all over India, he had never found Bhagavan's trait of equality, equal sharing, with anyone else. Chaganlal Yogi narrated a story about one day when he was seated in the Hall. "Bhagavan received a big parcel from faraway Punjab. It contained *Chawanprash Lehiyam*, an Ayurvedic paste-like health tonic. The devotee who had sent it requested that Bhagavan should eat a little bit everyday for two months, which would improve his health. Bhagavan simply offered a smile of acceptance. The next morning at breakfast, on each one's leaf-plate there was found a little portion of the *Chawanprash* that was meant for Bhagavan alone. Thus, the whole thing was equally shared and finished in one day. The

devotees said, "Bhagavan, it was meant to be taken by you every day for two months. But you have exhausted the whole thing in a single day!" Bhagavan smiled and said, "Yes. Do you think Bhagavan has only this one mouth? All these mouths are Bhagavan's own." Bhagavan did not transgress the devotee's wish. Bhagavan did eat the whole thing in his own mouth --the mouths of all!"

Chaganlal Yogi also told this story: "Looking at Bhagavan's poor health, a devotee made Indian bread with plenty of *ghee* and a cup full of milk and a cup full of orange juice. He brought them to the Hall and said, 'Bhagavan! You should take all these, for the betterment of your health.' Bhagavan did not even look at them. Bhagavan shunned any special treatment extended to him. Even in his treatment of devotees, Bhagavan was absolutely and unequivocally impartial. One of the ladies in the audience, with a sense of good will, pleaded, 'Bhagavan! When we requested that you sit on the sofa you did oblige us by sitting there. Likewise, why not take this. This is only for your health.' Bhagavan said, 'Yes. What you say is true.' He got down from the sofa and squatted on the floor, which shocked everyone! They all begged, 'Bhagavan, please sit on the sofa!' That lady, with profuse tears in her eyes, said, 'I did not mean it that way.' Bhagavan, with a glorious smile on his face, said, 'Why, you have told me the right thing to do.' He refused to get up from there. Fortunately, an attendant with thirty-five years of service took the boldest step. He simply lifted Bhagavan and put him back on the sofa. Fortunately, Bhagavan did not resist being lifted up nor afterwards insist on squatting on the floor." Chaganlal Yogi once told me that in his presence, an American came with a single slab of chocolate and offered it to Bhagavan. There were a total of 36 people in the Hall at that time.

Bhagavan said, "Cut it into 36 pieces". After it was equally distributed, Bhagavan took the last piece. "Bhagavan was that brutally honest with equal sharing," said Chaganlal Yogi.

Once, there was a Sadhu Swami who had unexpectedly come to Arunachala and took shelter in one of the *mandaps,* an open construction, on the road going around the hill. The *mandap* was a little away from the *Ashram* on the *pradakshina* road. By giving holy ashes (*Vibhuti*), he was curing sick people. Hundreds and hundreds of people were flocking to him and they felt all diseases, all ailments, and rheumatism would be cured by him with a pinch of the holy ashes. It was a big spectacle at that time. Some of them would come on their way to the *Ashram*. Bhagavan had problems with his knees. In those days, he was not allowing others to massage his legs. He would do it himself with a little Ayurvedic oil that he would apply on both knees when he wanted to get up. One day, he did not apply the oil on one knee. When he tried to get up, he could not. So, he sat back on the sofa and was applying the oil on that knee. Simultaneously, a huge group of people came from *Vibhuti Swami*. They all looked at Bhagavan, pointing to him, and then with a face of disappointment, they all left. They did not even prostrate to him. Bhagavan smiled, and pointing to him, said, "What must they be thinking about this swami who is massaging his own knee? Perhaps they may say to themselves, 'How can this swami heal others when he cannot heal even his own knee ailment?'" Chaganlal Yogi observed that Bhagavan could make a joke about his own inability. Even when miraculous cures did happen on account of a devotee's faith in him, Bhagavan never owned any form of responsibility for such cures. Bhagavan would say, instead, "All these things take place automatically

and are part of the natural activity of the *Higher Power*. One's attention is always to be poised."

Chaganlal Yogi had one daughter and one son. When the daughter came of age, the wife of Chaganlal Yogi was worried about her daughter's marriage. She approached T.P. Ramachandra Iyer, who promptly took her to Bhagavan. In the hall, a new devotee, Bhatt, had come. When they informed Bhagavan, Bhagavan said, "Why? There is no cause for any worry. Here is Bhatt. You approach him." He had a son for marriage. The marriage was settled in the presence of Bhagavan! The couple is now living happily in Chennai. Chaganlal Yogi wanted a grandson. A son was born to the couple and Bhagavan named him "Arun". The whole family was devoted to Bhagavan.

In the *Bhagavad Gita,* there is a verse wherein Lord Krishna declares, "Anyone surrendering to me, the burden of their entire family I will take over and look after them." This skeptic surrendered to Bhagavan and Bhagavan took complete care of the entire family.

Later in his life, Chaganlal Yogi settled down at Anandashram, in Kerala. With the name of 'Ramana' continuously uttered by him, Chaganlal V. Yogi peacefully and consciously passed away, in the presence of two saints: Swami Ramdas and Mataji Krishna Bai.

N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer

Prof. N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer was a scientist who believed only in the intellect and doubted everything else. Bhagavan enabled this "doubting Thomas" to experience the inner felicity, directly and tangibly within him.

Professor N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer was a brilliant professor of physics. He studied under Dr. C. V. Raman, the Nobel laureate of international repute. Known as NRK, he would challenge anyone who ignored the practicalities of life and focused only on God and the spiritual side of life. He needed a scientific explanation to anything before accepting it. Though a Hindu, he felt that it was superstitious to prostrate before anyone, and also an act of degradation to oneself.

In 1922, NRK came to Tiruvannamalai to meet his sister who stayed there. NRK's brother-in-law, Kuppuswami, and his friend T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, were just leaving to see Bhagavan and said to him, "We are both going to Ramana Maharshi. Krishnamurthy, you come along with us." NRK agreed, but on the condition, "Do not expect me to prostrate before the one whom you call the Maharshi."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

At that time *Ramanashram* was only a thatched shed, built over the Mother's *Samadhi*. The three entered the thatched shed and then something strange happened. Without even being aware of it, the professor found himself flat on the ground, prostrating before the Maharshi. The two friends smiled broadly when they witnessed this. There is no need to persuade a skeptic to do something; the *Higher Power* is potent enough. Bhagavan was totally focusing on NRK. After a few minutes, when NRK stood up, he was taken aback by what he had done. He decided to have a debate with Bhagavan so that he could escape thinking of his spontaneous act.

NRK narrated to me what happened next: "I asked Bhagavan, 'Seated like this, what is your next state?' My idea was to elicit the reply that the soul survives the dissolution of the body and later gets united with the Self or God. I wanted to have a verbal skirmish with him in order to disprove him. But it was not to be. Several minutes passed after I raised my question. There was no reply. There was absolute silence as our eyes interlocked in a steady gaze. A thought arose within me: 'Is this man taking shelter in silence to avoid answering an inconvenient question?' At that very moment, Bhagavan's resounding voice rang out, 'You said *state*; what do you mean by *state*?' This sudden counter- question made me feel that I had to answer him. So I began to think. I did not ask him about the body that will be buried or burned; what I was thinking about was the thinking apparatus inside the body, called the mind. It is about this that I had asked. Now if I said that the question was about the state of the mind, then he would ask me to define the mind. I had to have a ready answer to this question. Therefore, within myself, I raised the enquiry, and this of course was because of the power of his look. I could, however, find no answer to the question. My mind was paralyzed;

the thinking power was dead. I became helplessly mute. I noticed the powerful glow in Bhagavan's eyes. They locked mine in a tight hold. Then a radiant smile of triumph spread over the Maharshi's face. I lost all awareness of both the body and the world as the insignificant 'I' in me was swallowed up in the pure awareness of being, in which all names, forms, time, and action were utterly lost. It was a state of immense silence, without a beginning or an end, but aglow with the Self-effulgent *'I Am'*. When I gained consciousness of my body and its surroundings, with the inner glow still effulgent, there were no more questions to be asked or answered. Reveling in the joy of that defeat, I quickly prostrated and left.

"That was the end of the ego-I. After having the experience of a spiritual explosion within myself, Bhagavan invited me to eat. He said, 'Come in; have lunch.' It was just a thatched shed, so everything; *Darshan,* food, and sleep took place there." NRK continued, "I will tell you, Ganesan, the secret behind the offering of food. To sustain the natural *samadhi*, Bhagavan always nourished the body, which had been so very strongly and deeply jolted, with pure food. Many do not understand this Mother principle or the compassion of Bhagavan. Granting the transpersonal spiritual experience is the Father principle; to sustain it in one's Self, Bhagavan compassionately extended the Mother principle of feeding the body through wholesome, nourishing food. That day, when I was thoroughly shaken up by Bhagavan spiritually, physically he poured his grace on me through wholesome nourishment. A leaf plate was placed on the bare ground. Two courses of rice, sambar, and buttermilk were served. Though simple, it was the food of the Gods. It was *prasad!* This *prasad* solidly bound me to the sacred feet

of my *Satguru*, Bhagavan Ramana."

Who is this scholar-cum-scientist devotee, Professor N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer? He was born in 1898, in a village near Trichy. His father, Ranganathar Iyer, was a reputed lawyer in the city. His uncle, Appachi Iyer, would often visit their house and talk about Bhagavan. NRK did not understand much at the time, since he was only fifteen years old. Fortunately for him, the entire family of twenty members went on a pilgrimage to Tirupathi. Tiruvannamalai happens to be one of the stations on the way. Since Krishnamurthy's eldest sister, who was married, lived in Tiruvannamalai, they stayed there. This happened around 1914 or 1915, when Bhagavan was in *Virupaksha* cave. All of them went to *Virupaksha* cave with the fifteen-year-old boy, Krishnamurthy, and the other boys and girls. When they prostrated before Bhagavan, Bhagavan's attention was on this boy of fifteen. Krishnamurthy, however, did not pay any heed to the focused attention of Bhagavan because he was too interested in running around the cave. He told me there was a big, white conch that the children blew. He was elated that the children were allowed to play around so freely.

In 1919, Krishnamurthy again visited his sister. He paid a casual visit to *Skandashram* to have the *Darshan* of Bhagavan. When he was in school, and later in college, from 1915 to 1922, he had many spiritual experiences, bringing him into silence. However, he was not able to attribute these to that first graceful look of Bhagavan. He had no answer as to what was happening to him. When his college professor asked the students to write an essay or an article in English, everyone else would write endlessly, but N. R. Krishnamurthy was not able to write even a

single word because his mind was blank. He never attributed these unexplainable spells of inner silence to that auspicious look of Bhagavan. But later on, when he shared the experience with me, he said, "I recollected that the entire route of my inward spiritual journey began from that single look of Bhagavan."

In 1930, he had his tonsils removed. The doctor made a mistake and removed more flesh than necessary. Incessant bouts of coughing led to acute asthma. He took allopathic medicines, but these did not provide relief. He then tried *ayurveda, unani,* and other systems of treatment, which forbade him from consuming tamarind and chili. During this time he visited Bhagavan with his uncle, Appachi Iyer, and his brother-in-law. Bhagavan again invited them for lunch. They all sat down and food was served. It was the same rice, *sambar, rasam,* and buttermilk that are served in *Ramanashram* even today. Krishnamurthy hesitated when he saw the *sambar* being poured on the mound of rice because of his diet restrictions. Bhagavan, who had been looking at him all the while, said, "Having come here to be rid of all your illnesses, why are you hesitant? Eat!" It took a few months, but he was completely cured.

In addition, another exquisite incident took place on the same day. Bhagavan's brother, Chinna Swamy, called NRK and then presented him with a big picture of Ramana Maharshi taken when he was twenty-one. He also gave him two Tamil books—*Sri Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* (five hymns written in praise of *Arunachala* by Bhagavan) and *Sri Ramana Stuti Panchakam* (five hymns in praise of Ramana written by a mystical devotee of Ramana Maharshi). An elated NRK took these to Bhagavan and placed them on his lap. Bhagavan picked up the Tamil books.

Bhagavan corrected the printing mistakes in the books and returned the books and the photo to NRK. NRK prostrated before Bhagavan and then received these as *prasad* from Bhagavan. He preserved and treasured them all his life.

It did not stop with this. A beautiful dialogue between the guru and the skeptic disciple had already taken place. It happened again in 1922, when the skeptic scientist had become the disciple of Ramana Maharshi. NRK said, "I prostrated before him and asked, 'Bhagavan, I am doing Rama *mantra japa;* I chant Rama, Rama, Rama. Is chanting *Arunachala Siva*, *Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva* superior to that?'" "No! No! No!" said Bhagavan intensely. "Both are the same. *Ra* means 'that which is' and *ma* means 'you.' In *Arunachala*, *A* means 'that,' *Ru* means 'you and *na* means 'are.' Thus, both mean 'That thou art'—you are that.'" Bhagavan then added, "Using your mind as the mouth, let the name Rama revolve continuously like Lord Vishnu's *chakra* (like a weapon). No other person needs to know that you are doing *japa*."

NRK, who was a professor of physics, interrupted, "If I spend all my time like that, what will happen to my teaching job? Will my job be in jeopardy?" Bhagavan looked at him graciously and replied, "The one whose name you repeat will take full charge of that. You need not be concerned about it. Keep repeating the Rama *mantra*." This assurance from his guru impelled him to chant the Rama *mantra* countless times in the course of five years.

In 1934, NRK visited *Ramanashram* with his wife and three children. Two of Bhagavan's classmates, Venkataramaia and Narayana Iyer, also

accompanied them. NRK was in touch with the classmates and playmates of Bhagavan. I had requested him to interview them all, and we are grateful to him for this. During this trip, he had a series of experiences in Bhagavan's company. One day, after dinner, they were seated in front of Bhagavan and Ramachandra Rao, a gentleman from Bangalore, was reading aloud the *Ribhu Gita*. This was the Tamil translation of the Sanskrit verses, and Bhagavan would advocate it to all serious spiritual aspirants. Each verse ends with *Aham Brahman*, meaning "*I am Brahman*," or in other words, "*I Am That I Am,"* as the Bible says. When this was being recited by Ramachandra Rao, NRK was ecstatic. Vibrations of the *Higher Power* stirred him. He lost body consciousness. He was aware that all else appeared as apparitions. In this state, attachment to his family and the world fell away.

In those days, *Arunachala* was in the midst of a thicket, so he decided that he would disappear into the bush. Bhagavan looked at him and only him. Bhagavan addressed NRK and said, "Krishnamurthy! Go back to Madurai with your family. The salvation that you want to gain as a *sanyasi* in the forest is what you will get even as a householder in your profession. I say, return home!"

NRK told me, "Just like the mantra, *Aham Brahman,* took me to the heights of ecstasy; this specific directive of Bhagavan woke me up." He prostrated and obeyed his master. He only asked, "Would you please forward to me a copy of the *Ribhu Gita*?"

With the book in hand, he took his family home, but he became a very serious *sadhaka.* He made time for his professional work and his duties

toward his family. Other than that, he chanted the *Rama Nama* or read the five hymns in praise of *Arunachala* and the five hymns in praise of Ramana. He almost memorized the *Ribhu Gita*. This is how we apply our master's teaching to our everyday routine. And when we do so, the inner *guru* leads us step by step in the sojourn inward as Bhagavan did with NRK.

In 1941, NRK, who was a professor at Madurai, received an invitation from *Ramanashram* for the *Navaratri* festival. The Mother Goddess is worshipped and celebrated for nine nights during this period. I was five years old then and my *Aksaraabhyasam* was to be conducted, according to tradition, on *Vijayadasami,* the tenth day. (*Aksaraabhyasam* is the ceremonial initiation of the child into the practice of writing. *Aksara* means the letters of the alphabet and *abhyasam* means practice.) My grandfather, Chinna Swami, invited NRK to attend this function. When NRK received this invitation, he felt that since he, too, was the child of Bhagavan, he should also have his *Aksaraabhyasam* done. In Sanskrit, the word *aksara* also means "the silent teaching of the Self." He felt that since he too would be in the presence of Bhagavan at the time, he would also attain the silent teaching of the Self. He therefore left for *Ramanashram* immediately.

For nine days he participated in the celebration, holding on to the *Ribhu Gita*. The other two books were already committed to memory and so there was no need to carry them around. He held on to the book and looked at his master. Bhagavan asked, "Why are you holding on to the book?" NRK explained how he had offered the book to Bhagavan and Bhagavan himself had given it back to him. He was very emotional, as

Bhagavan was paying so much attention to him. Gathering courage, he asked Bhagavan, "Please choose for me the important lines that I can recite every day." Bhagavan indicated Chapter Twenty-six, saying, "The recital is here. The recital of these lines is itself *samadhi*. You need not go into *samadhi."* NRK prostrated before Bhagavan and received the book with all reverence. He treasured this book all his life, along with the other two books and photographs.

An authentic spiritual book is not something that is just to be read and kept aside. The message becomes a part of us. It has to become an integral part of us like a limb of the body. This is an instruction that we consider our Master's directions seriously. NRK always carried these books with him. He recited the verses endlessly and the *Ribhu Gita* became as much a part of him as his breathing. When I once asked him why he had read these books so many times, he replied, "These are not just books; they are not just verses. They are *mantras*—the sacred and holy words of the Master." When I appeared a little hesitant or disbelieving, he said, "I once asked my *guru* to explain the five hymns of *Arunachala*. Maharshi replied, 'Repeatedly reading it… is the meaning.' That is why I have read them so many times."

The *guru* transformed the rusted metal into gold, from mortal to immortal. A scientist reading verses ten thousand times even though the meaning is simple! He also recited the *Rama Nama*. Being a scientist, he could still switch off his brain**.** He bathed it in *Nama*.

In 1946, NRK came to Bhagavan for his final initiation. During the interim, he was practicing *sadhana*, because he had received the personal

grace of Bhagavan. On that day Bhagavan was coming down the hill, and NRK prostrated before him. Gathering courage, he asked Bhagavan, "With your grace, how can I experience the Self? Please let me know how I can be in a state of *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi* (a temporary state of the Self in which outer awareness is lost) even in a state of sleep. How can I at other times be in a state of *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi* (the state of complete enlightenment in which one can function normally and naturally)? I would like it to be there even when I sleep. When I get up, the state should continue." Bhagavan replied, "Sleep is a God-given state. Thus you cannot do anything while you are asleep. But at other times, you must practice the enquiry of *Who am I*? The ripe fruit, which you so desire, will come to you automatically, of its own accord. You do your duty. I will give you the gift or the result of it myself."

In another place, Bhagavan has said, "You must do your duty." NRK told me, "I received my final *upadesa* from the blessed lips of my beloved master, *Satguru* Ramana. I had nothing more to ask from him. I knew that I had to work diligently to achieve my objective, and there was nothing else for me to do."

NRK dedicated himself totally to *sadhana*, and after his retirement in 1955, he became a regular visitor to the *Ashram*. I was amazed to find that he was constantly in the state of *samadhi,* and yet he never exclaimed that he was a realized person. That was such a revelation to me! As a matter of fact, none of the old devotees claimed that they were realized. I had a great affinity with NRK because he would come frequently to the *Ashram*. Since I stayed on at the *Ashram* from 1960, I would incessantly ask him to narrate some of the reminiscences. The

reminiscences written and published about NRK were revealed to me by him. I would like to say that the old devotees were a gold mine of spiritual wisdom. Therefore I requested NRK to bless me.

Around 1962 or 1963, he said, "We two are brothers. Remember your *aksaraabhyasam* when you were inducted into formal education in the presence of Bhagavan? I recognized the Self in the presence of Bhagavan. So we are brothers. We are always together, and we will always be together. It is Bhagavan's grace." From 1960 onward, whenever he came, he would stay for long periods of time.

It was NRK who gave information about the classmates of Bhagavan. When Bhagavan's family was at Tiruchuzhi, they stayed next to a family where there was a small girl called Lakshmi. Lakshmi narrated the following to NRK: "When Bhagavan was in the womb, Alagammal experienced an incessant and unbearable burning. Hence, the paste of the neem leaf and the *vilva* leaf was applied on her stomach every day in order to provide some relief." We get this information only from Lakshmi, who was close to Bhagavan's mother. She has also said that when she was two, Bhagavan and she would suckle from Alagammal at the same time. As a matter of fact, Bhagavan was nursed by his mother until the age of six, and Lakshmi attributed his strong physique to this!

I asked NRK about the personal habits of Bhagavan. NRK replied, "I have observed the personal habits of Sri Bhagavan; not only have I observed them, but I have tried to follow his example all my life. One noticed in Bhagavan's daily life the habits of personal cleanliness, tidiness of dress, the regular wearing of *Vibhuti* and *kumkum* on the

forehead, the equal sharing of all enjoyments with those around him, and a strict adherence to a time schedule. He did useful work, however 'low' it may have been. He never left a work unfinished, never asked another to do something which could be done by him, and never considered that he was superior to others. He always spoke the Truth, or kept a strict silence if his expressing Truth would hurt or lower the reputation of others. He pursued perfection in every action. Finally, he never worried about the future. Bhagavan taught by example."

Once, in 1980, I lamented to NRK, "You have been doing *sadhana*. Even now you are continuing your *sadhana*, Professor. I am burdened with the *Ashram* work. I have no time to do *sadhana*. I feel meager when I look at you." He replied, "Why worry? It is immaterial whether you do *sadhana* or service. Fully recognize that you are *Arunachala*. That is enough." Puzzled, I asked, "What do you mean that I am *Arunachala*?" NRK took me from my office to the foot of the holy mountain. He reverently pointed the mountain out to me and said, "*Arunachala* is the pure immaculate Self, the 'I Am,' the nature of *Tat Tvam Asi*—That Thou Art—you are that. The *Vedas* also declare this Truth. Humanity has forgotten that *Arunachala* is the same state of being, the nameless 'I Am' in and as every one of us, the essence of the *Vedas*. In order to inspire humanity to recognize and re-establish the Truth of I Am, *Arunachala*, the formless Self, has taken the human form of Bhagavan. When *Arunachala* (the Self) emerged as a human body to reveal the Truth of 'I Am,' all the retinue also took birth as devotees spread across the globe and are drawn here by synchronistic events. So be assured, Ganesan, you and I are also messengers of *Arunachala*, the One, sacred Self. Keep this Truth deeply embedded in your heart. Share and

announce the greatness of these messengers. Be happy, Ganesan, that you have this work to do. I feel Bhagavan is guiding you to do this."

I was very fortunate to have NRK and his wife stay in *Ramanashram* for a long time. This afforded me the wonderful opportunity of absorbing his blessings. Once, around 1986, I requested him to grant me the state of ecstasy that he and other old devotees experienced in the presence of Bhagavan. He was overjoyed at this request of mine. He said, "Yes, not only you, Ganesan, but anyone who listens to this incident will melt into Ramana's silence inwardly and shed tears of ecstasy outwardly. Listen to this."

One day, sometime between 1922 and 1929, Bhagavan was seated cross-legged on a bench close to the thatched mud hut that had been built over the Mother's *samadhi*. Bhagavan's classmates, Rangan and Ramaswami Pillai, and other old devotees were sitting on the floor before Bhagavan. They all started singing the five hymns in praise of Ramana called *Ramana Stuti Panchakam* in Tamil. Rangan was on the floor close to Bhagavan. His head was only a couple of inches away from the bench. The verses concluded with "Pray! Place your soft holy feet on my head." As this line was being sung, one of Bhagavan's soft feet descended, came into contact with Rangan's head and stayed there for quite some time. The whole group, including Rangan, was hypnotized during this remarkable spiritual experience, and continued repeating the same stanza again and again.

NRK later moved to Madras and passed away there. His sons told me that even though the doctors declared he was unconscious and was in a

coma, his lips were moving as if reciting something. Maybe it was the five hymns to *Arunachala*, the five hymns to Ramana and Chapter Twenty-six of the *Ribhu Gita*.

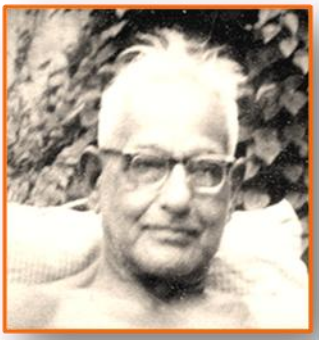
NRK AND FAMILY WITH BHAGAVAN AND DEVOTEES

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

NIRVANA ROOM

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

S. Doraiswami Iyer



Bhagavan has often used this phrase, "*Here and Now.*" Whenever he was using the word Truth, it would be followed by "*here and now.*" This is not sharing the Truth, but living the Truth, now. I humbly request that you pay full attention, not just to the words written; feel into it as if it were your own.

There were different sets of participants in the entourage; Bhagavan, the Master, and the devotees who were doing personal practice and nothing else in between. For example, Muruganar, Munagala Venkataramaia, Viswanatha Swami, and an array of many others came exclusively for practice. This is one set of actors. Another set of actors came as functionaries in the *Ashram* office. There were various activities in the *Ashram,* which had to be maintained, that had the full approval of Bhagavan. For example, Niranjanananda Swami, my grandfather, was the sole manager; Kumaraswamy, the store keeper; Vadivudaiyar, the guest-housekeeper, and so on.

There was a third group of people that came to Bhagavan; they were the personal attendants of Bhagavan. They were never deeply involved in either of the other functions. Most of these personal attendants were male and stayed within the *Ashram* in order to be available for service at any time. They were totally dedicated to Bhagavan; they stayed along with Bhagavan and attended on his rare needs. In rotations, the

attendants would sleep near Bhagavan. Regularly at three-thirty in the morning, Bhagavan would get up and go for washing. As soon as he got up from the sofa, one of them would give him the torch light. Not once was it necessary for him to call them by name or wake them up and ask for a torch. The moment he got up they would wake up without any special effort on their part. Bhagavan never ordered any of the attendants. He preferred to do everything for himself, but attendants would anticipate his wishes and do what was necessary. It would look as if they were all just doing physical work, but actually Bhagavan was paying personal attention to each one of these attendants' spiritual practices. Kunju Swami brings out this aspect so beautifully: "Once I asked Bhagavan's permission to live outside the *Ashram* and devote all my time to spiritual practice. I said I was not completely satisfied doing service. To this Bhagavan replied that the real service is not washing his clothes, but cleansing one's mind of obstructions. As for spiritual practices, Bhagavan said one should necessarily practice *Self-Enquiry*. When one found time one should practice *dhyana*—contemplation. When this became difficult one should practice *japa*—repetition of sacred names. If there was a distraction, one should recite *stottaras*—any of the sacred verses from scriptures or sacred verses composed by Sri Bhagavan, and by sages and saints. In this manner I would be engaged continuously in practicing one of these four means."

Now we will meet some of the hall attendants. For years I did not know or understand why I had been given this chance to move with them so closely, or be instructed by them, or venerate their love profusely, which they shared unreservedly. I did not understand how I deserved it. What

is the reason? Why I have been chosen? But now I know. I will share this with you about these gems of devotees of Bhagavan.

We will start with S. Doraiswami Iyer, one of the scholars that came to Bhagavan. He first came to Bhagavan not at *Ramanashram*, but at *Skandashram,* in the 1920s. Later on, he became a reputed lawyer in Chennai. Though he had been with Bhagavan even from *Skandashram* days, Doraiswami Iyer maintained a very active professional life. Over decades, he established himself as the most famous lawyer of his time in India. So the bee was attracted to the God flower. From 1948 to 1950, he was the personal attendant of Bhagavan, and there was a function behind it because he had such influence with the government at that time. When Bhagavan became sick with cancer which needed treatment, Doraiswami Iyer exerted all his influence. He saw to it that all the top surgeons in Chennai hospitals would come to *Ramanashram* and serve Bhagavan with medical treatment.

Whenever I think of S. Doraiswami Iyer, my heart melts with gratitude. In 1960, I had the privilege of going to Pondicherry where he was living in Aurobindo *Ashram*. I had gone there to interview him for an article in *The Mountain Path*. He was so kind, so gracious, to share with me what I am going to share with you. During my stay with him, he revealed a secret which is sacred to me and has great relevance in this sharing.

S. Doraiswami Iyer said: "At *Skandashram* in the 1920s, one day I was alone with Bhagavan. I was fully aware in the core of my heart that Bhagavan was Divinity itself in human form." This is the specialty of all the elder devotees of Bhagavan—to them, Bhagavan was not just a

saint, a holy man or an ascetic. In their heart of hearts, both Westerners and Easterners, whichever region they were from, whichever belief or religion they were following, whichever method they followed the one thing all of them identified in their approach to Bhagavan was, "Here is Divinity transparent in human form." It was not a thought. However, that day, suddenly I felt an urge gushing forth from within me, forcefully demanding mentally, "Bhagavan, who are you in reality?" Though it was my mental thoughts, Bhagavan seemed to have picked up on them, for, as if in response, he turned his attention on me, stood up, came to me, took my hand in his hand, and took me further up the hill. Soon, almost effortlessly, we were on the top of the mountain. Bhagavan's powerful presence and close proximity had me feeling ecstatic, and forthwith, I fell prostrate at his Holy feet. From that position I looked up at him and saw that he was directing his piercing glance of Grace into my heart and said, 'Who else is *Arunachala* than *I Am*? Look within . . . you, too, are *Arunachala*. Plunge inward.' He then graciously bent toward me and touched my chest near my Heart. Right then and there I experienced Bhagavan as *Arunachala* and myself as none other than the rock on which I was seated.' *Arunachala*, the Self alone, is omniscient. I prostrated again at the Holy feet of Bhagavan." He was in ecstasy when he narrated this to me. He shook my shoulders and said, "I experience *Arunachala* continuously even now. Stay in *Arunachala*, stay with Bhagavan's teaching and everything will end well. I bless you." I fell prostrate at Iyer's feet in an attitude of gratitude. He beamed his beautiful smile and lifted me up, saying, "Go! Search! Look!—all around this house." He had a picture just in front of him—Bhagavan's picture. "Except for this framed picture of Bhagavan, you will not find any other photos. I look at it all the time. It is very real to me. Bhagavan shared it with me with his own hands in 1938." Iyer could say no more because

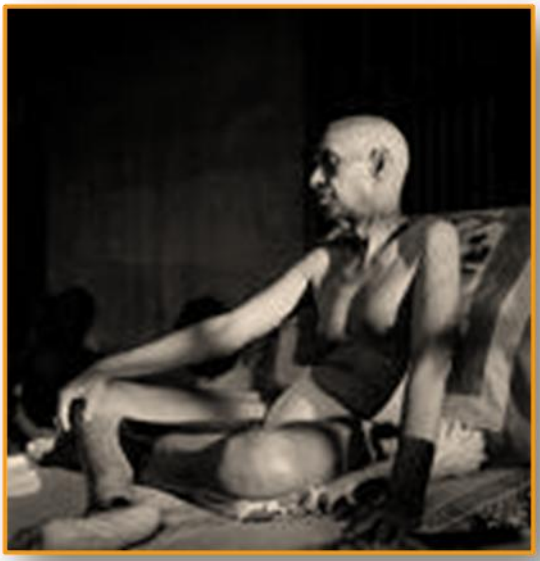
he was choked with emotion. This was surprising to me because I know that in *Aurobindo Ashram*, every room in each house should have the pictures of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

He shared with me another remarkable incident. In 1950, during the period of surgeries on Bhagavan's arm, the management brought in very stringent rules that Bhagavan should not be disturbed under any circumstances. Everything should be routed only through the *Ashram* office. Doraiswami Iyer was asked to sit, guarding the entrance to the room where Bhagavan was lying, thereby preventing any one from entering. Iyer was a very strict disciplinarian. In addition, he was in charge of all of Bhagavan's medical treatment. Iyer confessed, however, that in the presence of Bhagavan he was always very humbled.

One day, Bhagavan, with heavy bandages on the operated arm, was walking out through the door of the room. Due to exhaustion, he staggered and made a valiant attempt not to fall down. He supported himself by heavily leaning on the door. He pressed his left arm and yet fell down; blood oozed from the raw wound.

Doraiswami Iyer rushed to lift Bhagavan up. Bhagavan looked at him firmly. Then, raising himself up slowly, Bhagavan addressed Iyer, "Attend to the business for which you came—*Vanda Vellaiyai Paarum, Oyi."* Iyer said, "I went into ecstasy. I was transported within instantly, plunging into the Inner Silence. I have stayed in that state of stillness, inwardly, ever since. It is the final initiation that Bhagavan effected on me."

A few weeks after our meeting, I came to know that Doraiswami Iyer had dropped the body, in total peace. I offer my obeisance to this remarkable devotee, who ever lived in the true awareness of *Arunachala*!



Shivananda Swami

In Doraiswami Iyer we saw an elite devotee, blessed by Bhagavan. Next, I will go to the other extreme. Shivananda Swami was an innocent, uneducated, humble person. Shivananda Swami had a very childlike innocence. Those who have moved with him can vouchsafe for that transparent virtue. Perhaps due to such inner purity, Bhagavan always blessed Shivananda Swami.

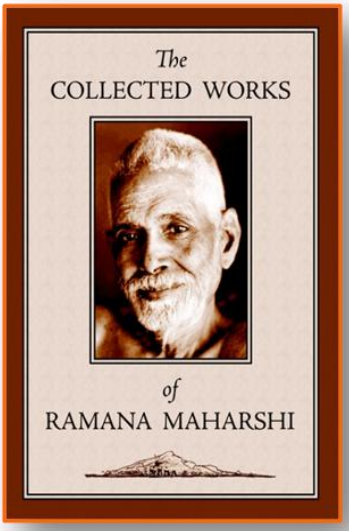
I would like to share two occasions with you. The first was the time when the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* in Tamil book form, which was originally called *Nool Thiratu,* was printed and available in the *Ashram* bookstall. My grandfather was very frugal. He would not give anything free or even half cost to anyone. He was right and proper in his duty. All the other attendants had money. They bought this *Collected Works* from the bookstall. Because Shivananda Swami was a true renunciate, he had no money whatsoever. Like Kunju Swami, these were the two people who could not buy the book for themselves. Bhagavan told the following story: He had an unused notebook. He took it out and copied in his own handwriting the entire collected works in Tamil, but nobody knew what Bhagavan was doing. For one whole day he was going on writing in this notebook. People had never seen Bhagavan write so many notes. When it was completed, he called Shivananda Swami, "Shivanandam, come here! Where will you go for money to

purchase this book? I copied it myself for you. Keep this!" That is not the end of the matter. When he received the book from Bhagavan, it was in Bhagavan's own hand. He felt so ecstatic, his mind turned inward. The mind was going out a little, so he wanted to do inner practice and needed help from Bhagavan. So he went to him, and in his own innocent childish way asked, "Bhagavan, will you give me a mantra or a special *upadesa,* a special teaching by which I can emancipate myself?" Bhagavan beamed him a smile and told him, "Be true within yourself—*unnaku ne unmaiyaga iru.*" When he turned within, he could feel Bhagavan as *Arunachala*. He was feeling in his own childish way, "Is Bhagavan *Arunachala*?" The next day Bhagavan called him and asked, "Bring me your notebook." Shivanandam brought the notebook in which Bhagavan had written the whole of *Collected Works*. Then Bhagavan kept it for a few hours. Again, he called him and opened the notebook to a particular page and pointed out: "Where is room for doubt? Are you now satisfied?" Bhagavan had drawn a picture of *Arunachala* there in his notebook and he pointed it out because Shivanandam had a longing to know: "Is Bhagavan *Arunachala*?" When Shivanandam saw the drawing he became extremely happy!

The second incident took place on the Maharshi's last day, April 14, 1950, the night Bhagavan was to drop the body. In the early morning, when Shivanandam was alone with Bhagavan in the Nirvana room, Bhagavan called him: "Shivanandam." Then he folded his arms and said, "*Santosam*." Everyone was apprehensive, because at any moment, Bhagavan might drop the body. It was not a happy moment. Shivanandam could not understand, as "*Santosam*" means "I am happy." This was not a moment to be *Santosam*—happy. This was a moment

when many were crying that Bhagavan was going to drop the body. Then Bhagavan looked at him and said, "The English people have a word, "thank-you," to express their gratitude, but we have no such word except *Santosam*." Instantaneously he revealed to Shivanandam the divine experience of happiness.

I was very close to Shivananda Swami in the later years, in the 1960s and '70s. He blessed me by initiating me into the direct teaching of Bhagavan: "The core teaching of Bhagavan is, 'Happiness is one's true nature.' So, be rooted in it ever from the Heart. Be happy. Outwardly, Bhagavan and *Arunachala* are the same. Within the Heart of Wisdom, *Arunachala* is experienced as the eternal transcendental Happiness of Self."



AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Ramakrishna Swami

When Kunju Swami and Ramakrishna Swami were living in neighboring villages in the 1920s, it was Ramakrishna Swami who persuaded Kunju Swami to go and see Ramana Maharshi. Kunju Swami was serving Bhagavan, but later on wanted to practice outside the *Ashram,* so he called Ramakrishna Swami and then asked him to take over. Ramakrishna Swami was a remarkable person, totally dedicated. He was also innocent, but with a notable keen intellect. He served Bhagavan with rapt attention that equally pleased both Bhagavan and Niranjanananda Swami. Niranjanananda Swami saw that he needed assistance in the bookstore and the gardens. He requested Ramakrishna Swami to assist him. Ramakrishna Swami went to Bhagavan and received his permission. Ramakrishna Swami served the *Ashram* management so dedicatedly that my grandfather, Niranjanananda Swami, was always grateful and spoke highly of him. Ramakrishna Swami was very kind to me. He narrated many incidents, large and small, connected with Bhagavan and himself. I would like to share with you two such incidents:

One day, while serving Bhagavan in the hall, Ramakrishna Swami approached Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, I want to dedicate myself exclusively to contemplation and devotion and be alone. I would like to go to *Virupaksha* cave to do that." Bhagavan was very pleased. He said, "Go, go stay there." Ramakrishna Swami deeply dedicated himself to

meditation and contemplation. Within a week, while in meditation he saw a vision of Chidambaram, which was sixty miles away. In the temple in the sanctum next to the shrine, the curtain was burning. It was on fire. He could see that very clearly. He came out of meditation.

That evening, the whole town was talking about the fire accident in the *Chidambaram* temple. Ramakrishna Swami felt, "Hey, within a week, my meditation has revealed so much and I have developed so much." He ran to Bhagavan and narrated all these incidents. Bhagavan listened to him carefully, but burst out in annoyance and disapproval, "Ramakrishna! You went to *Virupaksha* cave only to see visions?! Was it not for intensifying your practice in meditation that you went there? Seeing anything outside of one's Self either with physical eyes or with psychic eyes is a sure sign of interruption in the pure stillness of one's meditation. Achievement of any sort of supernatural powers *(siddhis)* is a positive obstruction to one's spiritual progress. Enough of your isolation and meditation . . . Come away! Come down!" Ramakrishna Swami said he woke up because it was so exciting to see visions and have the feeling that I am mature, I am so developed. He woke up from that. He never ever indulged in seeing visions again. Instead, he fully realized that the proximity and the presence of the Guru was enough to keep the stillness of meditation in his Heart. He threw himself into working hard in the store and the gardens. What you now see in *Ramanashram* or in the garden, is the hard work of two people, Ramakrishna Swami and Ramaswami Pillai, and the store as we see it now was perfected by Ramakrishna Swami.

The second incident occurred in his childhood, when Ramakrishna Swami had epileptic fits. It would happen all the time. When he was working in the store he had a very severe epileptic fit and lost consciousness. He lay like that for hours. He was carried physically to the *Ashram* dispensary through the old hall. Bhagavan was looking through the window at Ramakrishna Swami as he was being carried. After recovering for a few days, he came to Bhagavan and prostrated. Bhagavan asked, "Ramakrishna, how did you feel?" Essentially, Bhagavan meant, while you in that state of epileptic fits, how did you actually feel? Ramakrishna Swami told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I do not recall anything. I lost body consciousness and the environmental consciousness. I knew nothing." Bhagavan turned to him and then said, "No, No, No, it should not be like that. You should have held onto the inner awareness all the time. Even if you lose outward consciousness, you should never lose inward awareness." Ramakrishna Swami fully grasped that teaching. What was the effect of grasping that teaching? Afterward, he never had epileptic fits again.

Vaikundavasar

Now we are moving our focus to another beautiful, very bright, but simple person who had read in the scriptures that association with Holy men, that Guru *Seva*, service to a Master, is a sure way to attain spiritual perfection. He was searching for a real Master to whom he could dedicate himself, as he was not an educated man. He could not follow any scriptures or any of the other theology or religious injunctions. Fortunately, he was called and Bhagavan embraced him. Though uneducated, he was fully aware that service to a spiritual Master will lead one to the highest states of spiritual perfection. With just one look from Bhagavan, he understood that here was the Master—and not only Master, he repeatedly told me, but "Bhagavan was the divine in human form. He was not just a regular human being."

Once I pestered Vaikundavasar to give proof that Bhagavan had showered his Grace on him. He narrated the following: "I was appointed as personal attendant to Bhagavan and I was fully aware that I was serving not a human being but a God-man himself. One night at one o'clock, outside the *Ashram* boundary, Bhagavan walked behind the *Ashram* toward the hill and I went along with him. There was a sand bed between me and Bhagavan. He went further up, and after some moments in the pitch darkness my whole attention and gaze was on the side where Bhagavan had gone. All of a sudden, I heard the sound of

wooden sandals moving nearer and nearer, becoming louder and louder as it passed by. There was no one to be seen despite the sound of wooden sandals. I was awestruck. I had heard from Bhagavan about the invisible *Siddha Purusha* living on top of the hill. I began to sweat. When Bhagavan came near, he looked at me and said, 'So you, too, heard it,' and added, 'The *Siddha Purusha* who resides at the top of the mountain is none other than *Arunachala*. Rarely can he be seen. It is good you could feel him.'"

VIRUPAKSHA CAVE PATH

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Dr. M. Ananthanarayana Rao

Dr. M. Ananthanarayana Rao was a personal attendant of Bhagavan. In the fulfillment of Bhagavan's spiritual drama in earthly life, the last scene was well set. "For the physical body to drop, it has to catch hold of some disease," Bhagavan once said. Bhagavan was afflicted with one of the most painful forms of cancer, sarcoma on his left elbow. That was the beginning of the end of the physical body. Bhagavan's relationship with devotees is unique indeed. It is fascinating how the doctors were drawn to attend to him.

I am going to quote from Dr. Ananthanarayana Rao, with whom I was very close. For those who are interested aside from this, I would like to tell you that Swami Nityananda, before he was well known, came to Bhagavan in an ecstatic state as a youth. It was Bhagavan who directed him to go further to Kerala. Dr. Rao was the veterinarian there. He was very fond of sadhus and sanyasis. One day when he was returning from

the hospital, he saw a boy on the road, apparently in an unconscious state. He could feel that the boy was saintly. Dr. Rao took him home and gave him a bath and some food. The boy was Swami Nityananda. Dr. Ananthanarayana Rao showed me the photographs he had taken while holding the young Nityananda on his lap.

Bhagavan's *Leela* drew all these doctors to himself for what purpose? As the last scene is set, he was about to drop the body and the doctors were brought, forthwith. The best of surgeons came. Though I say S. Doraiswami Iyer influenced the surgeons to come, in each and every instance, it was grace that induced them to come. For example, I can share how Dr. M. Ananthanarayana Rao, who stayed until the last moment with Bhagavan's body, was drawn. Dr. Ananthanarayana Rao was a very reputed veterinarian. He was very renowned at that time throughout India. So, how did he come to Bhagavan? In 1929 he was traveling in a train between Pune and Bombay and he was to get off at the next station. Suddenly the person who was sitting next to him, who was also getting off with him, gave him a small photograph of Bhagavan and told Dr. Ananthanarayana Rao, "Here is a great sage in south India." He received it because he was very devoted to sages and saints and took it home. In the 1930s, he had to go to London for studies and forgot about this picture. In 1932, the government of India appointed him to conduct a medical survey study in south India. He remembered that photograph: "This is Tiruvannamalai—*Arunachala*." He told his wife, "We are going to meet a saint." He had a beautiful friend, Dr. Shiva Rao, who was also to serve Bhagavan. The three of them came.

Ananthanarayana Rao had seen many sages and many Holy men. When he saw Bhagavan face to face for the first time at *Ramanashram* in 1932, he felt, "Here is God in human form. This is how all the scriptures

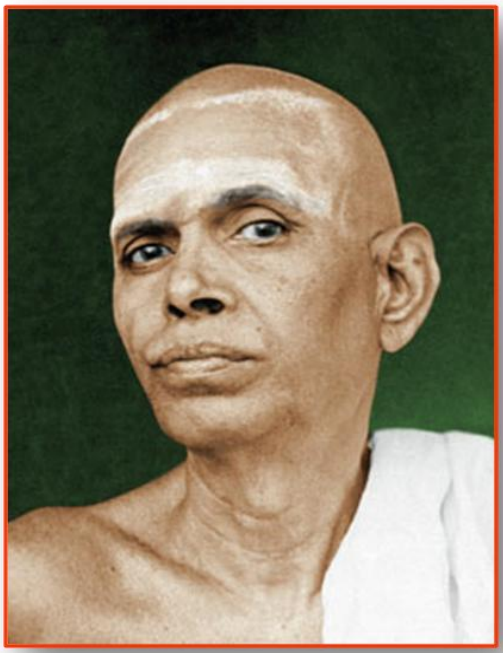
describe the Satguru Jivanmukta Siddha Purusha—a jnani." From what I had read, "Here it is in human form." He started coming to Bhagavan more often. On his second visit, it was not only the Divine form of Bhagavan, but also the teaching, Self Enquiry, *Atma Vichara,* that aided him as he sat in front of Bhagavan, for otherwise, what he had read was almost impossible to attain. He could realize the Self without effort while he was in that state of inner perfection. He practiced *Self-Enquiry,* and as years passed, he wanted to stay permanently at the feet of Bhagavan. In 1943 he built a house in front of the *Ashram* and stayed there. He grew a garden. He planted quick-yielding fruit trees for the sole purpose of offering the fruit to Bhagavan. And he did.

Bhagavan asked him to cut the very first fruit he brought into pieces. Bhagavan received the first piece and asked Dr. Rao to distribute the rest among those who were present. He brought fruit diligently, not for one or two days, but for three years. It so happened in all three years, Dr. Rao did not receive one single *Prasad* when he distributed the fruit. At the end of three years, after distributing fruit pieces he came back to Bhagavan with the empty plate. For the first time, there was anguish in his Heart. 'I have not received this Prasad from Bhagavan.' Bhagavan called him, "Ananthanarayana Rao, come here! I have been observing all these days. You have been distributing these pieces of fruits to everyone else, and not on a single occasion have you taken a piece. I have been observing that. So today also I have observed." Then slowly, from behind, came one piece of his fruit. He said, "The portion that you gave, I have kept one piece of it for you. Come and take it." Ananthanarayana Rao said, "Bhagavan offered it with his own hand. I received it and ate it, and it produced in me such a spiritual ecstatic experience that I felt Bhagavan had actually put me into that state." Ananthanarayana Rao

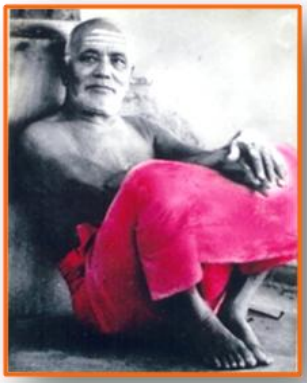
told me that he learned two lessons as an aspirant. One, an aspirant should develop dispassion, relinquishing material desires and the idea ownership for one's own self. The second lesson was having patience for the Grace to reveal itself. These two lessons he learned: dispassion and patience. When he had the practical experience of these lessons, in the moment itself, he prayed within his Heart, "Bhagavan, I want to perform personal service." In those days personal service meant massaging Bhagavan's body. He had a feeling that when one touches a Holy person, particularly the feet, one receives a spiritual benefit. In 1948, Ananthanarayana Rao had that privilege. Niranjanananda Swami called him, "Will you please attend to Bhagavan as a personal attendant?" He became ecstatically happy. When he went to Bhagavan, they said the personal service to Bhagavan is mostly massaging his limbs. When Ananthanarayana Rao came, he was given a share. Bhagavan equally distributed his limbs to the attendants who were present there: right arm to one, left arm to one, left leg to one, and right leg to one. Ananthanarayana Rao said, "See the significance even in this. Do not take anything for granted that a *Mahatma* does or says. Every word and every gesture has significance. The ultimate Truth will be there. It is not just a momentary fleeting experience." Ananthanarayana Rao massaged the left arm, which was not affected with cancer at that time. Later, from 1949 to 1950, every day he had to bandage the left arm and elbow, until Bhagavan's last moment. Ananthanarayana Rao told me, "Look at this. Even in this, Bhagavan was so careful. He gave his left arm, which I had to bandage."

He was inside the room, along with the other doctors, when Bhagavan breathed his last. After the *Maha Samadhi* of Sri Bhagavan, Dr. Rao went to live with his sons. Once he wrote to me emphasizing that the spatial

separation from *Arunachala* did not cause any division in his being ever rooted in *Arunachala*. "*Arunachala* is in my Heart, is the Heart," he wrote. His sons said that when their father died, his face glowed with an aura. His smiling face proved that he had defied the notion of death. Dr. M. Ananthanarayana Rao was absorbed in *Arunachala*.



Dr. R. Subrahmaniam



In 1930, Dr. R. Subrahmaniam was sent abroad by the government of India. His mother was devoted to Bhagavan. Instead of staying alone in Madras, she came and stayed with Bhagavan at *Arunachala*. She was very devoted to him. After one and a half years, when Subrahmaniam returned from abroad, he brought his mother into Bhagavan's presence.

An intellectual, he went to *Ramanashram* bookstall and purchased whatever English books were available. He brought one set of books and placed it before Bhagavan and then prostrated. Bhagavan bent down, touched every book with his hand, and before handing it to him, looked at Subramanian's mother and asked, "Is this your son?" Bhagavan imparted a look that pierced him through his Heart. With that look, Bhagavan conferred a deep communion: "Here is God! Here is my Satguru." Every week Subrahmaniam started coming and sitting in the divine presence of Bhagavan. Dr. Subrahmaniam told me, "When I came out of Bhagavan's presence, that one look of Bhagavan

transformed me completely." He brought the set of books that were so sacred to him, but he did not want to treat them as reading material. He went to the bookstall and bought one more set of those same books. He kept the first set of books touched by Bhagavan in his puja room, and every day he offered puja to them. He did not do it merely ritualistically. He read through all the books and practiced *Self-Enquiry*; he was living Bhagavan's teaching.

When I asked Sadhu Brahmaniam, "Have you put any questions to Bhagavan? Have you had conversations with Bhagavan?" He looked at me and tapped me on the back and said, "There was no need. Bhagavan's one look established me in that inner peace and happiness. To render it steady, I have his books, which give all the needed elucidations, the teaching of how to practice, what is that state, everything the intellectual mind needs is all there. Preceding that, the state was revealed by Bhagavan. One look of Bhagavan and these books were enough for me. No doubt ever arose in my mind." Dr. Subrahmaniam was appointed the post of the Director of Medical services and public health. That is the highest post in the government of India with regard to public health. He would jokingly tell me, "Do not be afraid. Bhagavan will give you the highest spiritual state and will also look after your physical and mental needs." Dr. Subrahmaniam said, "How beautiful that Bhagavan gave me that post, because in the last days I could command all these instruments from all the hospitals in Chennai, as the minister of health. Dr. S. S. Rajan was well known to me and he gave me an absolute free hand. I could bring, within the framework of rules and regulations, all the best of surgical instruments."

Radium was the top treatment for cancer, at the time. Dr. Subrahmaniam brought everything to the *Ashram,* including skilled surgeons. He served because, as he said, "I know Bhagavan is my one God. He is my Satguru, and how compassionate he was! He accepted me because I prayed, 'Please give me an opportunity to serve you.' He did all this until the last moment." Dr. Subrahmaniam said, "When the tiny tumor in Bhagavan's arm recurred after its removal in April 1949, S. Dorai Swami Iyer asked me to bring a competent surgeon from Chennai and do what was necessary." I responded promptly. Allopathic treatment continued for some months, with surgeries and application of radium. I felt blessed and fortunate that I could be of such intense service to Bhagavan for the whole year before his *Maha Samadhi* in April 14, 1950." He could narrate no more. He was choked with emotion.

Afterward, Dr. Subrahmaniam went into retirement and dedicated himself solely for the pursuit of *Self-Enquiry.* He built a cottage near Chennai and named it "Ramana Kuttir." I have had the fortune of visiting him in Ramana Kuttir. The first time I entered he said, "Come, come, Ganesan," and took me straight to the puja room. He commanded me to prostrate to those books which Bhagavan had touched. He added, "Before you go you should see this photograph in which six doctors, about whom I have spoken, are all there with Bhagavan. It was taken in 1949 behind the cowshed. How beautiful the divine is in human form, seated and surrounded by these noble devotees. Look at their faces just melting with devotion to Bhagavan." I was in touch with Sadhu Brahmaniam, through personal visits and correspondence, until his last day.

Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer

We are now going to share about a remarkable devotee born with a challenging nature. He would not accept "no" as an answer. It is essential to the nature of any spiritual aspirant that they have the special trait of preparedness to accept and face any challenges squarely and courageously in faith that the *Higher Power* (*Shakti*) will guide. We must have this courage to accept challenges, both physical and mental. But physical challenges, such as mental illness, cast doubts that assail us. Have courage. Be prepared to face everything with trust. What is mental preparedness? Having faith, faith in the Guru, or faith in God or the *Higher Power*! In his very first encounter with Bhagavan, at Virupaksha cave, Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer demanded of Bhagavan to tell him the essence of his teachings, the direct perception of Truth. It is best that we listen to Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer's own words.

"In 1907, along with my father, I went up the hill. It was crowded as the *Karthikai Deepam* festival was on. I was told a saintly *sadhu,* named

Brahmana Swami, was residing at the *Virupaksha* cave. When my father and I reached the cave, a person at the entrance sternly refused to allow us inside to see the Swami. I challenged his authority to say no. Fortunately, the Swami came out. I was thrilled to see him. Something prompted me to make an appeal regarding physical ailments and mental anguish. The Swami replied, "I am neither a medical doctor nor a soothsayer." I did not relent, but retorted, 'Knowing about your spiritual realization, I came to you. Maybe I am not destined to receive the cures.' The swami suddenly stopped walking; turned to me, and looked into me with piercing eyes, saying, "Develop an attitude of accepting such challenges with an inner resolve. Nothing can shake you." Then he raised his right hand in the posture of blessing. I felt pure rays of light emanating from it and enveloping me. This encouraged me with confidence to accept challenges with an attitude that the *Higher Power* is assuredly guiding me."

Iyer's visit was very significant for him. He was just a visitor, so when he climbed down from the hill and looked back at the four towers of the temple, with the sacred mountain residing there above and with such spiritual presence as Sage and the backdrop, it impressed him. An insight induced him to shift his residence to Arunachala. He started visiting Bhagavan every evening and staying with him during the night. There were only a couple of people staying with Bhagavan then and there were no restrictions. There were no spiritual dialogues, only casual talk. In due course, Bhagavan came to know that Iyer was interested in music. Bhagavan coached him with the nuances of how to compose lyrics. In Sanskrit it is called *kritis*. *Kritis* are not verses of poems but songs that can be put into music. He later composed forty *kritis* of

remarkable musical talent, bringing out the magnitude of Bhagavan and his teaching. One day he asked Bhagavan, "Jesus Christ, the Buddha, and other great sages came to the world to redeem sinners. Is there a chance for me?" Bhagavan turned his look toward him, steadily focusing his eyes on Iyer, and answered in English (as Iyer put his question in English): "Yes, there is." Iyer was visibly moved, and he felt thrilled to the core, then and there. It was not just a communication of words. It was something stirring the inner spiritual perception in a being. Forthwith, a *kriti* gushed forth: "You are my sole refuge. I have no one else to turn to." This *kriti* became very popular among the Tamil-speaking devotees of Bhagavan.

Iyer was a very poor sleeper. Yet, he persisted in spending the nights at Virupaksha cave. One night, as usual, he kept awake in the night. He saw Bhagavan was also seated, focusing his attention on Iyer for a full half-hour. Iyer experienced a burning current seemingly passing through him. Then he felt that his attention turned inward and merged in the Heart. He had not read about it; he was having his first authentic spiritual experience. For the first time, he understood that Bhagavan was not a pretentious Swami, but a true spiritual giant. That genuine spiritual experience helped him to establish firm Faith. Unfortunately he was dyspeptic, which means he could not digest food properly nor sleep properly. For years, he had not slept well. One night he expressed it to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I have this dyspeptic problem." Bhagavan again focused his eyes on him. Suddenly, Iyer felt his head become completely cool and calm, step by step by step.

One day Echammal brought many varieties of food made of *ghee* and

sugar which were difficult to digest. Bhagavan exclaimed, "Call Iyer, who is seated outside. Call him!" Bhagavan always shared food equally with others. This was very natural for Bhagavan and not a trait cultivated in the later years. He again asked Iyer to come and eat. Fully aware of his ailment, Iyer sent word that Bhagavan should forgive him as he could not eat those festive sweets. Bhagavan called him and said, "*Come*! Share it with me." Then, like a puppy, Iyer obeyed. He ate the whole feast—all difficult stuff to digest. The thought was not there. His dyspepsia disappeared completely. Iyer came every night to Virupaksha cave while his family members stayed in town. They objected to his staying at night with Bhagavan. That day, when Iyer told them that Bhagavan had revealed a real miracle, they too were blessed with deep faith. Iyer became the spiritual servant of Bhagavan, along with his family members. When this happened, the second song was composed: *How to express my gratitude for the cure graciously bestowed on me*.

Iyer was transferred to north India, to Beharampur. With a heavy heart he had to leave Ramana Maharshi. While staying far away in Beharampur, he had sores on his legs and feet, causing him a lot of pain. He had good medical treatment, including a surgery, but it was of no avail. Often he had to go on tour with such pain. He prayed reverently to Bhagavan: "Please help me." There was a knock on his door the very next morning. When he opened it, there were two *sadhus* standing there. They said, "We are on a pilgrimage to north India, and we are coming from *Arunachala*. Before leaving, Bhagavan told us to go to Beharampur and meet Iyer." Iyer received them with great delight. The guests noticed that Iyer was suffering from leg sores. In the night, of their own accord, they prepared an *Ayurvedic* paste, a very simple preparation with

tamarind and *sambarani* incense (sambarani is the essence of a tree) and applied it on Iyer's sores. In the early morning, not a single sore remained on his leg. Completely healed, Iyer was overwhelmed with emotional devotion. Like a spring gushing forth, another *kriti* was born. That was the *Saranagati* song. *Saranagati* song is very famous among *Bhagavan's* devotees. Its translation is:

I surrender unto you

Where else am I to surrender.

You who are perfect in Arunachala,

Which endows one with ultimate release,

Oh! Ramana! Rain cloud of compassion

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 cannot bear indifference any further.

Oh! Brahman itself! I surrender unto you.

Once I asked him to tell me more. It was not because of the song of prayer that the cure had taken place. The cure had already taken place, and if I had to write a song with my brain, I should have only sung, "Thank you, Bhagavan, for having cured me." The song says, "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 cannot bear indifference any further." Then, he started quoting from Bhagavan and other sages and saints and added, "Whenever you find saints, like Manickavachakar, Meera, Tukaram, making statements of prayer such as, 'bless this wretched dog,' understand that they are already blessed. It is not the other way around."

Then he quoted from *Bhagavan's* own *Eleven Verses to Arunachala*, verse 3*:*

Oh! Arunachala drawing me with your chords of Grace although I had not even dimly thought of you, you did decide to kill me outright. How then has one so weak as I am offended you that you now leave the task unfinished? You have not killed me. You have left it half done. Why do you torture me, keeping me suspended between life and death? Now fulfill your task of killing me and long survive me all alone Oh! Lord.

He asked me, "Why should Manickavachakar sing, 'I am the worst sinner. Please save me'? The Lord had already emancipated him." Then he quoted from *Aksharamanamaalai—Marital Garland of Letters:*

Bless me, I may die without losing hold of you, otherwise miserable is my fate Oh! Arunachala. Place your sacred hand upon my head and make me partaker of your Grace. Do not abandon me Oh! Arunachala. Oh! Arunachala unite with me to

destroy our separate identities as you and I and bless me with the supreme state of ever vibrant joy.

In 1922, Bhagavan had not accepted Iyer's definite death. Kapali Shastri, who was an eyewitness when that marvel took place, has written in his book, "*Maharshi* was living on the hill at *Skandashram*. A few of us would accompany him during *giripradakshina.* On one such day in 1922, before starting the *giripradakshina* we got word that supervisor Ramaswami Iyer was taken ill suddenly and was lying at *Virupaksha* cave. There was a response in Bhagavan. The Maharshi went down the hill to the place where Iyer was lying. Iyer was having an anxiety attack with violent palpitations of the heart. Maharshi sat near him, placing his hand on his head. Within five minutes, Iyer got up and looked quite normal. Maharshi stayed put. He did not get up even after an hour. I had olive oil in my bag at Skandashram, which I brought and rubbed on Maharshi's head. Then we all went back to Skandashram. When I asked Bhagavan what happened, he simply replied, 'Well, Ramaswami Iyer got up and I sat down. I was conscious when oil was rubbed. It was very pleasant.'"

He never said he performed miracles. From the Master's point of view, one's own Faith brings about the miraculous result. But later in 1942, Iyer was saved from certain death. His wife ran to Bhagavan and prayed, "Please save my husband," and suddenly, he woke up. I became a little skeptical. I asked, "Why are you always falling sick and Bhagavan is saving you from death?" He said, "What to do? Our Bhagavan is truly *Bhagavan*! It is not only me that Bhagavan has saved. Bhagavan has saved other sincere souls as well from the throes of death." He shared a list of

them with me: his own daughter, his friend Subramania Iyer's daughter, Jagadesa Shastri, Bhagavan's own sister's husband, and a few other names that I do not know.

Bhagavan took keen interest in the family of Iyer, and every member was totally devoted to Bhagavan. Iyer had five daughters and one son. One of the daughters was living in Mumbai. I set out to interview her for *The Mountain Path*. She was a very prominent musician, Lalitha Venkataraman. She shared with me the unique relationship all five sisters had with Bhagavan from his *Virupaksha* cave days. For all of them Bhagavan was literally God, not imagination or mere attribution. Every time the family had to leave *Arunachala* all of them would stand in front of Bhagavan and sing in chorus the *Saranagati* song. Repeatedly, that song was sung in the presence of Bhagavan for nearly two decades. Lalitha Venkataraman said, "*My* father was named and popularly known as *Saranagati* Ramaswami Iyer or *Saranagati Tata.* Rarely could I come to Tiruvannamalai after my marriage since my husband was employed in north India. Whenever I was in the *Ashram* I would sing and play on the *Veena*, and Bhagavan would listen keenly and smile. One day when I entered the hall after a long absence from Tiruvannamalai, he said, 'Look! Only this morning we heard her voice on the radio. Now, here she is!' I had recorded two songs about Bhagavan and one of them must have been broadcast that day.'"

She continued: "As a child I played with Bhagavan at *Virupaksha* cave, but it was my elder sister, Rajam, who as a child had been cuddled by Bhagavan. Bhagavan had on several occasions plaited her hair and played with her toys. My sister was so fond of Bhagavan that when she

got any tasty or interesting treat at home she would rush to Virupaksha cave and share it with him. Once, in the house, a special type of patty was brought and it was being hand pounded. The bran would make one healthy. When the pounding lady mentioned this to my sister, she took handfuls of the bran and ran to Bhagavan. Bhagavan noticing *Rajam's* appearance at an odd hour asked her whether she had brought something for him. She shared with him the bran and they both ate it. Bhagavan told her how this bran would be tastier if eaten along with certain other ingredients. My sister enjoyed intimate, sacred moments with Bhagavan. She knew she was always moving with God. She worshipped him every moment of her life." After a pause Lalitha Venkataraman said, "*My* elder sister, Rajam, was a good painter. Though she never learned painting from anyone or from any art school, her drawings and painting had a real life and a special quality. When she was grown-up, she did paintings of goddesses. She would show them to Bhagavan, who appreciated them very much. Once Rajam did a beautiful painting of *Varalakshmi Devi*—one aspect of the Mother Goddess, a deity worshipped by married women. When she showed it to Bhagavan, he asked, 'Why not print it and distribute it to families?' Rajam begged and borrowed money to have it printed. In the 1940s and 1950s this picture was religiously worshipped in many *puja* rooms of orthodox Brahmin houses." Lalitha Venkataraman then took me to the *puja* room upstairs and showed me two lovely paintings by her elder sister of Madurai Mother Meenakshi and the Saint Thiyagaraja. Then I remembered her painting in *Skandashram* of Bhagavan seated on a peacock, on which the signature, *Rajammal*, can be seen.

All his life, Iyer was a devout *bhakta*. He would start shedding tears at

the very mention of the word, *Bhagavan*, as everyone has seen. Iyer had the rare privilege of being present when Alagammal attained liberation at *Skandashram* in 1922. Iyer chanted *Rama Namah* while Bhagavan kept his sacred hands on Alagammal's head and Heart. Iyer witnessed the whole operation of the Grace of Bhagavan bequeathing liberation to his mother. Iyer was one of those who helped carry Mother's body down to where it is now. He remained with Bhagavan until the tomb was completed. On the tenth day, a *lingam* was installed. Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni composed an extempore Sanskrit hymn in praise of Alagammal. Iyer listened to it with rapt attention while seated in a corner among the crowd. Bhagavan called him and inspired him to compose a *kriti* in Tamil. He closed his eyes and the *kriti* was born. He noted it down on paper and passed it on to Bhagavan. Bhagavan asked him to come near him and sing it aloud. While singing it, Iyer was amazed to see how well the *kriti* had arrived. The words gracefully adjusted themselves.

When Bhagavan attained *Brahma Nirvana* in 1950, Iyer was another who saw the sign of the *Jyothi* of Bhagavan as a bright meteor disappearing over the summit of Father Arunachala.

Close admirers of Iyer, like the Tamil scholar K. V. Jaganathan, adored Iyer as a complete *jnani*. In the 1960s, K. V. Jaganathan, a celebrated writer in Tamil Nadu, requested of me, "Will you take me to Iyer's house?" Iyer was sick and bedridden. His house was opposite the Ashram. I took him there and the moment he saw the supine body of Iyer, he put his hands above his head and went round and round his body shouting, "*Ishwara,"* (God) with tears rolling down his face. He

started singing extempore verses of praises to Iyer. It was an impressive, ecstatic sight for me. On our way back, K. V. Jaganathan blessed me with these words, "Adore him! Seek Iyer's blessings. He is a Self-realized holy man hiding behind ordinariness. Do not miss this opportunity to receive his blessings. It will take you high in your spiritual sojourn." I was fortunate to receive Iyer's blessing.

Iyer passed away in Chennai. The last moments of Iyer were very peaceful. His body was adorned with serenity. His palms were closed over his chest, clearly revealed he was seeing Bhagavan with inner vision—tears were rolling down. Breath slowly came to stillness. Stillness… seamlessly in Stillness.

Saranagati, Ramaswami Iyer was dissolved in the Immaculate One Being!

Yogi Ramiah

Yogi Ramiah was a Yogic rock. Paul Brunton shared a realistic dramatic introduction to Yogi Ramiah in his book, *A Search in Secret India,* which made Yogi Ramiah very popular among Bhagavan's devotees all over the world. Let us go back to a time in the 1930s when Paul Brunton encountered a cobra raising its hood at the door of his hut, preventing him from entering. He was horror-stricken and could not move. At that moment a man appeared, well-built like a Buddha sculpture, and with a glance, took in the situation. He raised both his hands toward the cobra and entered the cottage. To Brunton's surprise, the cobra put its head down at the man's feet and allowed him to stroke its tail. Brunton asked, "Are you not afraid?" The man said, "What have I to be afraid of? I approached it without hatred and with love in my Heart for all beings." Paul Brunton was thrilled, so he asked, "What is your name, sir?" The man said, "Yogi Ramaiah."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Yogi Ramiah was the son of devout parents in Andhra state, very wealthy people. He enjoyed the goodness of life and rarely paid attention to his studies. At the age of eighteen, he happened to read a book on Saint Kabir. When he read about the illusion of the world, it struck him like a bomb in his face. He thought, what is this? He had been taking the world to be so true, but after reading the book on Kabir's life and teachings, there was a paradigm shift in consciousness. It was not just a thought, but an experience, exploding the falsehood of his previous mortal awareness. He wanted to know, what is this so-called Truth? He started searching for a Guru. Whomever he met, he would ask, "What is the Truth?" One Guru told him to chant "*Rama Mantra, Rama, Rama"* five thousand times every day. The young Yogi Ramiah asked, "What if I chant more?" Instead of asking, "Should I chant five thousand times?" he again asked, "What if I chant more?" The Guru said, "The benefit will be greater." Young Yogi Ramiah once again questioned, "What if I chant it continuously and uninterruptedly?" Instead of giving any reply, the Guru embraced him and initiated him into *Rama mantra*, *Rama, Rama*, which is called *Taraka Mantra*. From that moment onward, whatever work he was doing, Yogi Ramiah was uninterruptedly chanting *Rama Mantra*. Another Guru initiated him into *Hatha Yoga* and *Pranayama*. These traditional practices, *Hatha Yoga, Pranayama,* and *Japa,* enabled him to experience that the way the world appears is not true.

He wanted to go to Benares and spend the rest of his life in Kashi. On the way, he happened to meet the same Guru who had shared the mantra with him. The Guru asked him, "Where are you going?" Yogi Ramiah replied, "I am going to Kashi." "Go back," said the Guru. "Go

back to your village and pursue the practice continuously in the garden." Yogi Ramiah obeyed.

In due course, he had a vision of Lord Rama. When he pursued it even more powerfully, he experienced the vision of Rama disappearing and started feeling God as himself. He was puzzled. Why did Rama disappear? I feel God is within me; the Self is God. He wanted to know, so he set off and asked some scholars, "Can the subject and the object be different, or are they the same? Can they remain indistinct as one?" They all said, based on the scriptures, "No, the subject is different from the object." This did not give him any satisfaction. He went on searching and during one of those searches he came to Tiruvannamalai in the 1930s. Kavyakanta Ganapathy Muni was seated in front of Bhagavan when Yogi Ramiah raised this question. Yogi Ramiah did not know anything about Kavyakanta, Ramana Maharshi, anything at all. He was obsessed with his doubt, so he raised this question: "The subject and the object… can they be indistinct? Can they be together?" Kavyakanta told him, "Of course the subject is different from the object." This again pained Yogi Ramiah. He looked up at Bhagavan, who did not agree with Kavyakantha's reply, saying, "The subject and object are distinct to the ordinary man in the phenomenal world, but in the experience of *Samadhi* they merge and become one." This clarity made Yogi Ramaiah very happy. Instantly he took Bhagavan Maharshi as his sole guide and Satguru.

He was happy to stay with Bhagavan. Bhagavan was also paying added attention to him because he was a genuine Yogi. He ate once a day, only *dhal,* and nothing else. *Dhal* has to be cooked, so at ten o' clock in the morning he would just have a very limited quantity, and that was all for

the day. Otherwise, he would be doing yogic practices and *tapas* in the rock cave in *Pazhakutur,* which was his place of residence. He spent hours with Bhagavan. Yogi Ramiah was one of the few people who were freely permitted to be with Bhagavan anywhere, at any time. Bhagavan treasured him. Yogi Ramiah also loved Bhagavan's direct teaching of *Self-Enquiry* very much. He knew only one language, his mother tongue, Telugu, so Bhagavan, of his own accord, translated *Upadesa Saaram* and *Ulladu Narpadu* into Telugu so that Yogi Ramiah could follow and encourage serious aspirants to pursue *Self-Enquiry*. I asked, "Will you please tell me how you felt in the presence of Bhagavan?" Yogi Ramaiah said, "Sitting in the Maharshi's presence brings peace of mind very easily and effortlessly." He also said, "I used to sit in *Samadhi* for three or four hours at a time. Occasionally I felt my mind taking form and coming out from within, but by constant practice and deep meditation I coaxed it to enter into the Heart, where it merged. When the mind is absorbed in the Heart, the Self is realized. The result is peace. I conclude that the Heart is the resting place of the mind." He had beautiful conversations with Bhagavan which are printed in *Talks with Maharshi*. I would like to share page 442 with you:

Yogi Ramiah asked, "A Master is approached by an aspirant for enlightenment. The Master says that Brahman has neither qualities, nor stain, nor movement, etc. Does he not then speak as an individual? How can the aspirants' ignorance be wiped away unless the Master speaks thus? Do the words of the Master as an individual amount to Truth?"

Bhagavan replied: "To whom should the Master speak? Whom does he instruct? Does he see anything different from the Self?"

Yogi Ramaiah: "But the disciple is asking the Master for elucidation."
Bhagavan: "True, but does the Master see him as different? The ignorance of the disciple lies in not knowing that all are Self-realized. Can anyone exist apart from the Self? The Master simply points out that the ignorance lies there and therefore does not stand apart as an individual."

What is realization? Is it to see God with four hands, bearing conch, wheel, club, etc? Even if God should appear in that form, how is the disciple's ignorance wiped away? The Truth must be eternal realization. The direct perception is ever-present Experience. God is known as directly perceived. It does not mean that He appears before the devotee as related above. Unless the realization is eternal, it cannot serve any useful purpose. Can the appearance with four hands be eternal realization? It is phenomenal and illusory. There must be a seer. The seer alone is real and eternal.

Let God appear as the light of a million suns. Is it direct perception, *pratyaksha*?

To see it, the eyes, the mind, etc., are necessary, but they provide only indirect knowledge, whereas the seer provides direct experience. The seer alone is *pratyaksha*—direct perception. All other perceptions are only secondary knowledge. The present super-imposition of the body as 'I' is so deep-rooted that the vision before the eyes is considered *pratyaksha,* but not the seer himself. No one "wants" realization because there is no one who is not realized. Can anyone say that he is not already realized, or that he is apart from the Self? No. Evidently all are realized. What makes a person unhappy is the desire to exercise extraordinary

powers. He knows that he cannot do so. Therefore, he wants God to appear before him, confer all His powers on the devotee, and keep Himself in the background. In short, God should advocate His powers in favor of the man.

Yogi Ramaiah: It is all right for *mahatmas* like Sri Bhagavan to speak out so plainly. Because the Truth does not swerve from you, you consider it easy for all others. Nevertheless, the common folk have a real difficulty.

Maharshi: Then does anyone say that he is not the Self?

Yogi: I meant to say that no one else has the courage to put things straight like Maharshi.

Bhagavan: Where is the courage for saying things as they are?
Let us share further Ramaiah's account from *Talks*.

I asked Maharshi about contemplation. He taught me as follows: "When a man dies, the funeral pyre is prepared and the body is laid flat on the pyre. The pyre is lit. The skin is burned, then the flesh, muscles, and bones, until the entire body is reduced to ashes. What remains thereafter? The mind? The question arises, how many 'I's' are there in one body? One or two? If two, why do people say 'I' and not 'we'? There is therefore only one. When is it born? What is its nature? Enquiring thus, the mind also disappears. Then what remains is seen to be the silent 'I' and not 'we.' Then the next question is, 'Who am I?' The Self alone. This is contemplation. It is how I did it. By this process the attachment to the body is destroyed. The ego vanishes. Self alone shines." One method of getting mind-dissolution is association with the

wise, the yoga adepts. They are perfect adepts in *Samadhi.* Self-realization has been easy, natural, and perpetual. Those moving with them in close, sympathetic contact gradually adopt and absorb the *Samadhi* habit from them.

Later in another engagement with the Master:

Yogi: All actions take place owing to Shakti. How far does Shakti go? Can She affect anything without one's own efforts?

Maharshi: The answer to the question depends on what the *Purusha* is understood to be. Is he the ego or the Self?

Yogi: *Purusha* is *svarupa.*

Maharshi: But he cannot make any effort.

Yogi: Jiva is one who makes the effort.

Maharshi: So long as egoism lasts, effort is necessary. When egoism ceases to be, actions become spontaneous. The ego acts in the presence of the Self. Ego cannot exist without the Self.

From the Self, Shakti makes the universe what it is, and yet, the Self does not itself act. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "I am not the doer, yet actions go on." It is clear from the *Mahabharata* that very wonderful actions were affected by him. Yet he says he is not the doer. It is like the sun's relationship with the world.

After Bhagavan's passing, Yogi Ramaiah spent most of his time exclusively in penance, yoga and *mouna*. A few people in his village gathered with him. They wanted to be in his presence. He taught *Self-Enquiry* with everyone who stayed and asked them to follow the path of Bhagavan. Scholars reported to me that his last days were very peaceful and that he was fully conscious until the last moment. They saw his face was suffused with Yogic brilliance. His lips were constantly uttering the name of Bhagavan Ramana when he breathed his last. A *Samadhi* shrine has been built where Yogi Ramaiah's body was interred. Do not have any doubt. Faith is very important. Faith is not belief. Belief is based on the thoughts and imagination in the brain. Faith is the poem surging from the Heart. It is the Truth. There is no doubt that we all return. That is the essence of the sharing of these elders. Everyone was absorbed by Bhagavan, the infinite. Everyone is received by *Arunachala*.

RAMANASHRAM VIEWED FROM HILL

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Dr. M. R. Krishnamurti Iyer

Volumes have been written about the ascetic devotees of Bhagavan, such as B. V. Narasimha Swami, Muruganar, Sadhu Natanananda, Kunjuswami, and Vishwanatha Swami, as well as numerous illustrious scholars, including Kavyakanta Ganapathy Muni, Dr. Nyce, Grand Duff, Duncan Reese, Richardson, Munagala Venkataramaia, Arthur Osborne, Maurice Frydman, S. S. Cohen, and others. Only very rarely do we hear about the *grihasta,* devotees of Bhagavan who remained anchored in family life. Of course, Bhagavan showered his Grace and attention on all absolutely equally, with no partiality whatsoever in his outlook.

Devotees who were immersed in family circumstances, in effect "swamped" by their family members, were being ignored as devotees. Perhaps this is due to the austere Hindu culture, which totally identifies spirituality with austerities, renunciation and scholarly knowledge. I felt that integrating these devotees in my approach would be a missing link in the understanding of spirituality. Even before I came to *Ramanashram* in 1960, I started paying attention to the illustrious renunciates and distinguished scholars, but also to the family-burdened, close devotees of Bhagavan. I became close to two overlooked Ramana *Bhaktas*. The more I closely associated with them, the greater became my regard, respect and adoration for them, as I witnessed Bhagavan showering his

Grace and attention on them. Watching him do this thrilled me, since every such act was unimaginably unique, as I will now share. I had no hesitation in recognizing these family-oriented devotees as *jnani*s, Self-realized. How else can it be when you associate with a Master like Ramana Maharshi? Where is the doubt? Why do you carry your doubting mind wherever you go? How can you see, as Emmanuel said, with green glass in your spectacles? You see only green everywhere. If you are ignorant, you see everyone as ignorant. Fear gives you the impression that Bhagavan alone is *jnani*, Buddha alone is *jnani*, and Jesus Christ alone is *jnani*. These imaginings are absolutely not true. In the next two chapters I will share about two *grihasta* devotees, Dr. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer and Sub-registrar Narayana Iyer.

Dr. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer was popularly known to the early devotees as the *Ashram* doctor. He sowed the seeds for the future *Sri Ramanashram* dispensary by keeping his medicines in a small wooden box and locking it up in a cupboard, which he kept next to the entrance of the dining hall. Who was this M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer? If you look at him as a *jnani,* everything will be clear. Hailing from a reputed family from Mondi-Thanjavur district, M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer was an excellent gynecologist and was ranked very high in the elite among medical professionals in those days. From early on, his intense attitude and strong feelings for spiritual endeavor shaped his devotional approach. He could not control his strong feelings. His uncontrollable emotional eruptions became subdued when he met Bhagavan in 1927. For the first time in his spiritual pursuits, he found peace and solace. I find this exhilarating! The people who came to Bhavan were not elementary school students; they were all mature adults. They just needed the right switch to be touched. As the Buddha said, it took just

one push: "I have taken you to the threshold of Truth; now you will walk in." When these people came, Bhagavan just gave that little push; then they were present with him. That is why most of the elder devotees, about whom we are sharing, were spiritual servants to Bhagavan. One look from Bhagavan settled them into the normalcy of spiritual perception. Among them, M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer was one of those who continued visiting Bhagavan. As a result of his continuing visits, he saw Bhagavan in a very convincing way as his Satguru, the Truth in human form.

In 1933, M.R. Krishnamurthy came to Tiruvannamalai and took residence as a family man. I had the fortunate opportunity of associating very closely with him. He told me, "In those days, every day was a unique and spiritual day for me. It was not just spending twenty-four hours in a religious center like Tiruvannamalai; every moment was a spiritual experience, thus very precious and sacred to me. Bhagavan, the silent sun, like a pole star, was motivating me every moment of my existence." He did not stop there. Dr. MRK blessed me by advising us all never to be monotonous, but to take every moment as an invaluable gift from God, who is Guru Ramana. That is the spiritual state. Living in Tiruvannamalai, Dr. MRK became a very established doctor in the town, as well as in the surrounding villages. He was very active, working all the time, but yet, every Sunday at two in the afternoon, he would meditate at the feet of the Master--so much so, that he became known by *Ashram* devotees as the "Sunday doctor." Occasionally, Bhagavan would say, looking at M. R. Krishnamurthy in an ecstatic state, "Oh! Today is Sunday. It is all beautiful. It is all very beautiful." So Bhagavan's attention was not just a casual compliment. Dr. MRK told me, "When a Master directs attention to you, it has a spiritual influence,

even though it may only be a casual statement: 'Oh! Today is Sunday.' So I started more sincerely following Bhagavan's direct path of *Self-Enquiry*."

His wife, Subbalakshmiammal, his children—everyone--was brought into the sense of security, safety, comfort, peace, and solace. Subbalakshmiammal and her children were totally dedicated to Bhagavan. After Dr. MRK's meeting with Bhagavan in 1927, he no longer lived with his family. In 1933 he came to *Ramanashram* for permanent residence. Before that, he lived with his family in a small hut in a distant village. Because he was so spiritually intoxicated, M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer would quite often run away to *Arunachala* to be with his Master, leaving his wife and family alone. Subbalakshmiammal started to panic that her husband might renounce her and take to *sanyasa.* This was her constant fear. One evening this panic gripped her so terrifically that she wept continuously until she fell asleep in the night. Bhagavan appeared to her in a dream and assured her, "Subbalakshmi, have no fear. I am taking care of Krishnamurthy. Allow him to pursue his mode of practice. I am with you, protecting you. Give up all worries." In that dream, Bhagavan put his hand upon her and blessed her. After that, she had no more apprehension about her husband. The couple lived a very happy married life throughout—according to Subbalakshmiammal, without any friction whatsoever. Everything was perfect. Bhagavan expressed a gracious smile of approval to M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer's narration of this dream.

In 1933, Subbalakshmiammal and her children moved to Tiruvannamalai. She had to educate her children. She had no time for formal spiritual practice. Every member of the family was devoted to

Bhagavan in their Heart of Hearts. There was a big fanfare one day in the town where Subbalakshmiammal was standing in the street. A huge picture of Seshadri Swami was being taken around the streets with drums beating, pipe blowing, and all the fanfare. She looked at it, and immediately felt, "If I had a large picture of Bhagavan in my house, I could offer *puja* garlands daily." Then she went inside and bolted the door. Before she took even a few steps inside her house, there was a knock at the door. A man was standing there, an electrician, with a huge framed picture of Ramana Maharshi. He said, "I am coming from the next village, Porur. I have been instructed to leave this framed photograph in your house. I am going to the *Ashram* to have Darshan of Bhagavan, and then I will return." She was delighted. She took it inside, offered *puja* and garlanded it. When the children came from school, they were delighted. They were all shouting, "Oh! Bhagavan has come to our house!" After some time, MRK returned home as the children were calling in the street outside, "Daddy, daddy, daddy, Bhagavan has come to our home!" He became excited. Subbalakshmi said that she thought MRK had sent the photograph through the electrician, and MRK was speechless. Before MRK could even reply, the electrician came in and all were in ecstasy. He said, "I am an electrician. I was called here by Major Chadwick to do some electrical repair work in his room." After that he offered me money. So I asked Chadwick, "Will you please give me that photograph instead of giving me money?" He was delighted. He gave me that picture and I took it to Porur. Every day I worshipped it reverentially with *puja*. One day I started shouting spontaneously, "Go, go to Tiruvannamalai, to Avarangaru Street, and give this picture to Dr. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer. So I have come and I am leaving it." With great joy, he left. All the family members went to Bhagavan and narrated

the whole story. Bhagavan once again gave a benign smile of approval, appreciation and admiration.

Dr. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer's practice deepened through his totally complete attention and surrender to Bhagavan. Naturally, he could not put much attention on his medical profession and was not earning very much money. His classmate and very close friend, Dr. S. S. Rajan, was the Health Minister in the government at that time. He came all the way to meet MRK because he came to know that MRK was having financial difficulty. He said, "My friend, I can offer you a job in a government hospital, which will help you financially enrich yourself, at least offering a regular income."

MRK felt, "That spiritual force, which brought me to *Arunachala,* will also take care of my future welfare." He went regularly to Bhagavan, and the Master made use of him in his profession as a doctor. There are two occasions where Bhagavan used M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer for healing. Bhagavan once had hiccups. Dr. MRK was treating him, and the best of medicines could not cure him. Bhagavan's health was deteriorating, causing much anxiety to the doctor, until one day he felt Bhagavan might not survive. With tears in his eyes, he prayed, "Bhagavan, help me save you." Bhagavan was very fond of Subbalakshmi, so Bhagavan appeared to her in a dream and told her, "Why is Krishnamurthy crying? Ask him to give me this *Ayurvedic* medicine, which is just an herbal leaf." In the dream, she was a little puzzled. Bhagavan continued, "The leaf you need is there in your courtyard. You can pluck it, fry it in *ghee*, add some *jaggery,* pound it and bring it in the morning at four o' clock." In those days, women were not allowed inside the *Ashram* to see Bhagavan before five o' clock. They both went there and she was very hesitant,

but Krishnamurthy said, "Bhagavan has asked us to come at four o' clock… we must go." Bhagavan was waiting and extended his hand, took the medicine and the hiccups stopped.

The second incident is more significant. When MRK was studying medicine he had a professor, Dr. Srinivasa Rao, who was staying with Bhagavan and serving as a personal attendant. Initially, Dr. Rao was domineering. Once he examined Bhagavan for a stomach ailment and was convinced it could only be overcome by surgery. He went to Niranjanananda Swami, the *Sarvaadhikari,* and my grandfather and convinced them as well, so both of them wrote to Dr. Pandare, a very famous surgeon in Madras, and asked him to come. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer had faith in the traditional belief that a *jnani*'s body should not be mutilated, and that no surgical instruments should be used on the physical body of a realized person because it rejuvenates itself. Every cell is considered Divine. So MRK pleaded with Dr. Pandare to not do surgery. But all pleading failed. MRK prayed in his Heart, "Bhagavan, help me to save you from this very difficult predicament." That night, Bhagavan appeared to him in a dream, saying to him, 'Why are you worried, Krishnamurthy? Take two or three Ayurvedic oils, mix them up, and bring them in the morning. That will be the cure.' The whole night Krishnamurthy Iyer and Subbalakshmi prepared the oil and took it the next morning to Bhagavan, who drank it. The next day Dr. Pandare and Dr. Srinivasa Rao examined Bhagavan's stomach so that they could perform the surgery in the evening. When they examined him there was no symptom of any ailment. They were puzzled and surprised as to what happened to that ailment. Bhagavan said, "This morning Krishnamurthy came and gave me Ayurvedic oil, and everything has become all right." Dr.

Krishnamurthy Iyer said, "Unfortunately that earned much more enmity from my Teacher, Dr. Srinivasa Rao, because he thought I had vetoed his plan."

Bhagavan's respect and attention on Dr. Krishnamurthy Iyer as a doctor was greatly appreciated. The crowning credit that Bhagavan bestowed to Dr. Krishnamurthy was that Bhagavan would not take any medicine suggested by another doctor without the permission of Dr. Krishnamurthy. There is a moving incident where Bhagavan and Krishnamurthy Iyer had a mystical contact. MRK was excluded from the *Ashram* because he was opposed to surgery. Three surgeries had already been performed. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer was deeply hurt that the *Mahatma's* body was being mutilated, but he did not interfere. The fourth surgery was a major one. Dr. Radhachari and other great surgeons had come from Madras. They went to Bhagavan, saying, "Bhagavan, this surgery has to be done. All the instruments are coming from Madras." Bhagavan looked at them and asked, "Have you informed M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer?" Then all the surgeons went to M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer's house. Srinivasa Rao, the leader, spoke in a very friendly manner: "Do not obstruct this operation, Krishnamurthy, because we have all come. I know what Bhagavan means when he asks, 'Have you informed Krishnamurthy?' It means have we received permission from you before performing this operation? So come along with us and please do not say no. Tell Bhagavan that it should be done." MRK responded, "How can I do that?" They physically persuaded him to go to the *Ashram*. When they entered Bhagavan's presence, Bhagavan imparted a look to Krishnamurthy through which he expressed, "Do not say no!" Krishnamurthy Iyer was tormented. He understood it and said, "Yes, you can go ahead." After they all left, he was alone with

Bhagavan. Bhagavan communicated with him, "What to do, Krishnamurthy? Things will happen as they should. It is the will of *Arunachala*. Thy will be done." But he added one thing: "Stay with me throughout until everything is completed." This fourth surgery was to take place on December 19, 1949. From that night onward until April 15, 1950, when Bhagavan dropped the body, Dr. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer was there, not necessarily in the immediate presence of Bhagavan, but Bhagavan knew he was somewhere in the vicinity. He would go in while everyone slept. Throughout all the nights he was with Bhagavan. He told me, "Every night I went through heaven and hell simultaneously. To be with Bhagavan, my Guru, my God, was to be in heaven, but to see his body suffer was a true affliction for me."

MRK was a mystical man, and I have no hesitation in sharing his close relationship with me. I was in Varanasi. I was initiated by way of being branded on the back and it became infected. My father came and brought me back to Madras. At that time, my whole back was dreadfully infected and the doctors said that it required surgical intervention, otherwise the spinal cord could be affected and I may be paralyzed for life. Dr. T. N Krishnaswami, another devotee of Bhagavan, told me, "You will undergo the surgery immediately." I said, "Believe me; I will get treatment only from Dr. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer." Something prompted me to say, "I must."

My father said, "We have not been on talking terms with M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer, my father, Chinna Swami, or I, for two decades. How can I go and ask him to come and attend on you?" I said, "I do not know." Then my father took me to my old house. My mother told

my father, "Go to M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer." My father was very hesitant, asking, "How can I face him?"

MRK was standing outside as I was sitting there. "Yes," he said, "I will come, but under two conditions. While I am treating him, nobody should be inside the room and no one should put forth a time limit. The second thing is that no one should ask me what medicines or what treatment I am giving him." He treated me for two months, and I spent every minute with Dr. Krishnamurthy Iyer. He revealed to me so many things. He said, "*Arunachala* and Ramana are the same. Bhagavan has left the key of *Self-Enquiry* in *Arunachala*. The Bible says, 'Ask and it shall be given, knock and it shall be opened.' This is literally true. You ask *Arunachala*. You will be given the key to *Self-Enquiry*. Dive Within. Everything will be solved."

During his last days, he was a remarkable mystic. In the house, he had a mystical experience. He felt that the huge wheels on the big cart, on which *Arunachaleshwara* was being taken around the hill during the festival, were going to be broken, so he asked for them to be repaired. The committee members in the temple thought he was mad. They did not listen to him. When the cart came, it broke down near his house. For three days and nights he stood in the upstairs of his house and never allowed anyone to come in, for any reason. On the third night I was going around the hill and felt like going to his house to see him. His wife told me, "What to do? None of us have seen him. He is upstairs and we cannot trouble him. None of us can even knock on the door. He has bolted the upstairs." As we were talking like that, he walked in and said, "Has Ganesan come in?" He asked his wife to go. I prostrated at his feet. He was black from standing in the sun. He told

me, "Ganesan, *Arunachala* has called me. I am going. I bless you. Do not swerve from this path. *Arunachala* will save you. Stay here." After a few days he passed away. These are the spiritual pillars who give spiritual inspiration just by remembering their names and these incidents.

GIANT WOODEN DEITY CART

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Dr. Hafiz Syed

Now I want to share about another impressive person, Dr. Hafez Syed. He was a Muslim. In 1900, when Bhagavan was at *Virupaksha* cave, Satyamangalam Venkataramaia had sung five hymns in praise of Ramana. In the song, *Ramanastutipanchakam,* he sings, "Oh! Satguru Ramana, though now you are in a Brahmin's body you are always the reality transcending caste and creed." In the next verse, he says people from around the world are going to come to Ramana's feet, irrespective of their caste, religion, faith or the differences in belief. They are going to come to Ramana and see him as the reality.

This was a euphemistic statement in 1900 because the people from around the world had yet to come. In 1922, when Bhagavan came down the hill to *Ramanashram*, this cascade of people from many religions, belonging to many sects of philosophy, came to him, and each one of them had the experience of divine reality (*Darshan*). Hafez Syed was a staunch Muslim. He was a professor in the Allahabad University, head of Islamic religion. He had faith that Islam was the greatest religion, but he had no hatred for other religions. One of his friends gave him Paul Brunton's book, *A Search in Secret India*. When he read Brunton's book, he was so thrilled that he was prompted to go meet this Hindu Brahmin

Master. Somewhere during his educational tours, he met Maurice Frydman, who was also devoted to Bhagavan. Maurice said, "Yes, my Satguru Bhagavan Ramana is ultimate Truth. Go and meet him." He not only said that, but arranged for Syed's stay in *Ramanashram*. The person who received him at the entrance was none other than Paul Brunton himself, who welcomed him and ushered him into the presence of Bhagavan.

Syed's first meeting with Bhagavan took place in 1935. With one look from Bhagavan, Syed experienced the Truth. Then he had to leave. It was a very simple visit. Before taking leave of Bhagavan, he felt that he could achieve spiritual fulfillment and perfection only in the presence of Ramana Maharshi. He came again in 1936. In 1937, he came and fell ill while staying in the *Ashram*. During the month that he was bedridden, Bhagavan showered his affection like a mother. Bhagavan went into the kitchen and prepared *upma* by himself and then offered it to Dr. Hafez Syed. This melted him. Due to his professional commitments he could not come again for three years. In 1943 he came and built a house, and for all his vacation days, he and his wife stayed in that house. Bhagavan's presence was everything for him.

We cannot complete any account of Dr. Syed without mentioning his wife. She was a very devout Muslim lady with *parda*. She meticulously followed the injunctions of Islam and was very stringent, but her heart was drawn to this Brahmin Sadhu in front of *Ramanashram*. The Islamic religion prevents any woman from seeing another man. She would stealthily come into the *Ashram* and occupy a room, and then send word through her husband to Bhagavan, "Master, please come and see me." Bhagavan deviated from his conventions and would go to her room.

While Bhagavan stood there, she spoke to him through her husband. Bhagavan thus blessed her. He did not try to convert her, but conversion nevertheless took place. As the days passed, she started coming to the hall with *parda*, but eventually removed it. She felt so free with Bhagavan that she wanted to take him to her home. She was staying in a rented house in the next compound and wanted to feed Bhagavan sumptuously. She sent word through her husband, who already knew *Ashram* rules and regulations and Bhagavan's mode of daily life. He said, "No. he cannot come out of the *Ashram*. He has never gone out and taken food anywhere outside." She was persistent, going to Bhagavan day after day. Dr. Syed also went and told Bhagavan of his wife's wish. Bhagavan would listen, smile, and then walk.

Bhagavan would go up on the hill every day. Dr. Syed's wife stood in the way and said through her husband, "Bhagavan, you will come to our house and then take food." Bhagavan again smiled and then walked up. That night Bhagavan appeared to her in a dream and said, "Why are you so insistent, obstinate? You know I cannot come. I can dine only in the dining hall with the others. People have come from all distances and they are waiting. I cannot disappoint them. Yet you continue asking me to come there." Then he said, "'If you feed three sadhus, that will be equal to feeding me." Bhagavan did not stop there. In her dream he showed her three people who were living in the *Ashram* at that time, Dr. Melkote, Sadhu Prabhudananda, and Krishna Bhikshu. Dr. Melkote was a family man, Prabhudananda was a sanyasi, and Krishna Bhikshu was a Brahmachari. So later they all came and she fed them sumptuously, treating them as Bhagavan himself. After the food she offered them *beetle* nuts; it is called *beeda*. A Muslim woman should not give *beetle* leaves to anyone but her husband—not even her father or brother. The

only exception was a *fakir,* a saint. So she placed the *beeda* in each one's hand, although all three knew the Muslim custom. They went back to Bhagavan and narrated everything in detail. Bhagavan accepted it all and appreciated it in silence. Bhagavan's devotees intuited through his looks, his gestures and nuances whether he appreciated and adored or accepted.

Once I asked Dr. Hafez Syed, "What was it about Bhagavan that so strongly attracted and bound you to him?" He said that Bhagavan's sense of humanity was as great as his sense of pure spirituality. It was Bhagavan's conviction that the more spiritual a person is, the more human he is, as well. Dr. Syed's approach to spirituality was deeply devotion-based. He said, "One of the main teachings Bhagavan often emphasized was Self-surrender to God or Guru, because Bhagavan himself had surrendered to the Divine and reaped its fruits. However, the dominant feature of Bhagavan's philosophy was the unity of life, the oneness of Divine essence, which is the imminent Self of all. I have repeatedly heard Bhagavan say that there is One who governs the world and it is His task to look after the world. It is He who bears the burden of the world, not we. According to Bhagavan, devotion meant turning the mind inward to the Self. Dr. Syed had deep conversations with Maharshi, which are recorded in *Talks with Maharshi, Day by Day,* and *Letters.* I asked Dr. Syed, "Why ask questions all the time?" He responded, "When a God Man is available, humanity has to make full use of him by eliciting the ways and means of how to attain God, so I was never hesitant to put questions to Bhagavan." I would like to share at least one dialogue from *Talks with Maharshi*:

Dr. Mohammed Hafez Syed, Professor of Islam University of Allahabad asked: What is the purpose of this external manifestation, Bhagavan?

Bhagavan answered: This manifestation induced in you a question.
Dr. Hafez Syed: True. I am covered by Maya. How to be freed from it?
Bhagavan: Who is covered by Maya? Who wants to be free?

Dr. Hafez Syed: Master, being asked who, I know it is the ignorant me composed of the senses, mind, and body. After reading Paul Brunton's book three or four times, I have tried this enquiry, "who?" and have felt an elation lasted for some time but then faded away. How to be established in the "I" or the "I am"? Please give me the clue and help me.
Bhagavan: That which appears anew must also disappear in due course.

Dr. Hafez Syed: Please tell me the method of reaching the eternal Truth.
Bhagavan: You are already that. Can we remain other than the Self? To remain yourself requires no efforts since you are always that. And this is one good thing.

Dr. Syed asked, "I have been reading the five hymns to *Arunachala,* which you wrote in praise of *Arunachala,* and I find that the hymns are addressed to *Arunachala* by you. You are an Advaitin. How do you then address God as a separate Being?"
Bhagavan: The devotee, God, and the Hymns are all the Self only.

Dr. Hafez Syed: But you are addressing God, you are specifying this *Arunachala* hill as God.

Bhagavan: You are identifying the Self with your body. Should not the devotee identify the Self with *Arunachala*?

Dr. Hafez Syed: If *Arunachala* is the Self, then why should it be picked out from so many other hills? If God is everywhere, why do you specify him as *Arunachala*?
Bhagavan: What has attracted you from Allahabad to this place? What has attracted all these people who are seated here?

Dr. Hafez Syed: "Bhagavan, You!"
Bhagavan: "How was I attracted here? By *Arunachala*. The power of *Arunachala* cannot be denied. Again, *Arunachala* is within and without. The Self is *Arunachala*."

Dr. Hafiz Syed: When I am here my mind is pure; as soon as I turn my back on this, my mind hankers after so many objects.
Bhagavan: Are the objects different from you? There can be no objects without the subject.

Dr. Hafiz Syed: And how shall I know it?
Bhagavan: "Being that, what do you want to know? Are there two selves, for the one to know the other?"

Dr. Hafiz Syed: Again, I repeat, sir, how to know the Truth of all this and experience the same?
Maharshi: There is no gaining of anything new. All that is required is to rid the Self of ignorance. This ignorance is the identification of the Self with the non- Self (body-mind).

Dr. Hafiz Syed: "Yes. Still I do not understand. I must have your help. Everyone here is waiting on you for your grace. You yourself must have originally sought the help of a guru or of God. Extend that grace to others now and save me.

Before I came here I desired to see you very much. But somehow I could not find an opportunity to do so. In Bangalore, I made up my mind to return to my place. I met Mr. Frydman and others who sent me here. You have dragged me here. My case is like Paul Brunton's in Bombay when he was dragged here, having cancelled his passage home.

I hesitated at first on arrival. I wondered if I would be permitted to approach you and converse with you. My doubts were soon set at rest. I find that all are equal here. You have established equality among all. I dined with you and others. If I should say so to my people in U. P., they would not believe it. The Brahmins would not drink water with me nor chew *pan* with me. But here you have taken me and others like me into the fold. Though Gandhi is striving hard, he cannot bring about such a state of affairs in the country. I am very happy in your presence.

Should anyone desirous of spiritual progress take to action or renunciation?

Maharshi: Do you go out of the Self? What is meant by giving up?

Dr. Hafiz Syed: It is said that one should give up desire. But there are needs of the body that are irrepressible. What is to be done?

Maharshi: An aspirant must be equipped with three requisites. The primary is satisfaction of bodily wants without attachment to the body.

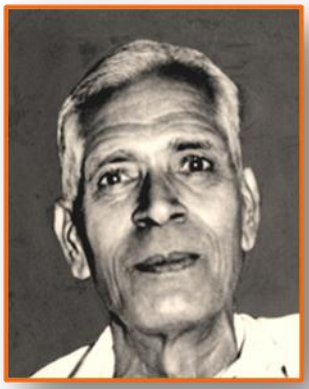
Dr. Hafiz Syed: There are two kinds of desires—the baser and the nobler. Is it our duty to transmute the baser to the nobler?

Maharshi: Yes.

Dr. Hafiz Syed stayed with his wife until Bhagavan dropped the body. Prior to that, when Bhagavan was incarnated, he knew full well that the stillness of *Arunachala* and Bhagavan are the same . . . they are not two. After Bhagavan dropped away the body, Dr. Syed could not stay at Ramanashram because of health and other reasons. He went home and practiced *Self-Enquiry* and meditation so studiously that he continued to feel that *Arunachala* and Ramana are the same, and that they exist in and as the True immaculate heart of being. Just as Bhagavan sings in one of the verses, "Oh *Arunachala,* Heart is thy name," Dr. Syed experienced it. It was reported that his last days were very, very peaceful. Bhagavan graced him and absorbed him into *Arunachala*.

How fortunate and grateful we are that we could remember these three devotees of Bhagavan. Coming back to the Self, which is the now, is the message of *Arunachala*. Stay here in the Self. Self is nothing. Agitation of the mind is nothing but noise. Even in the noise, you can always listen to the silence. The only effort we need to exert is to refuse to listen to the noise, and choose instead to listen to the silence.

Sub-Registrar, Narayana Iyer



Sub-registrar Narayana Iyer was a celebrated devotee of Bhagavan who received inestimable attention, care, love and blessings from Bhagavan. He was fortunate, and in my opinion, one of the most beloved devotees of Bhagavan.

In 1928, Narayana Iyer was employed as a Sub-registrar in Chetpet, which is about 30 miles from Tiruvannamalai. He was a free thinker, a confirmed skeptic who scoffed at *sadhus* and *sanyasis*, referring to them as the parasites of a healthy society. It was his good fortune, however, to have a very trustworthy and religious friend, Dr. V. Ramakrishna Iyer. Ramakrishna Iyer was the son of Tiruchuzhi Lakshmi Ammal. Lakshmi Ammal had been the playmate of Bhagavan during his childhood at Tiruchuzhi. It was only natural that when the son, Ramakrishnan, grew up, he became an ardent devotee of Bhagavan. Ramakrishna Iyer was an upstanding government doctor. He was also an entertaining conversationalist, known for his humor and light-heartedness. No matter where he was posted, he would visit Bhagavan as often as time permitted. Ramakrishna Iyer became a close friend of Narayana Iyer.

One day Ramakrishna Iyer asked Narayana Iyer, "Why don't you come to *Arunachala*?" Actually, in those days, Tiruvannamalai was called *Arunachala*; in fact, even the railway station was called *Arunachala*. In 1928, Ramakrishna Iyer invited Narayana Iyer, "Come along with me for the *Karthikai* festival in *Arunachala."* Narayana Iyer answered, "You know, Ramakrishna, I really do not like this paraphernalia of bejeweled Gods and Goddesses and parading them on the streets. I do not like such foolish things. But since you are my bosom friend, I will oblige you and come along." •

When they arrived in Tiruvannamalai, Narayana Iyer found that there was hardly an inch of space to either sit or stand, on account of that year's unusually huge crowds that had come to participate in the festival. Narayana Iyer said, "Ramakrishna, you said that you were going to *Ramanashram*. An Ashram means a vast open space with a lot of trees. I will come with you on the condition that I will not participate in the tomfoolery. And the other thing is if your so-called Swami happens to come, be assured that I will not prostrate before him." Hence, without hesitation, Ramakrishna Iyer took him along.

In 1928, the *Ashram* consisted of only a few thatched sheds. Bhagavan was coming out of a cottage. When he saw Ramakrishna Iyer, he paused and enquired, "Ramakrishna how is your mother? How is your family?" During the conversation, Narayana Iyer did not even look at Bhagavan because no introduction had taken place. (In accordance with the prevalent British custom, one could not talk to another if they had not been introduced to each other.) Ramakrishna Iyer then introduced Narayana Iyer to Bhagavan. Narayana Iyer was at once captivated by the

calm, serene and compassionate countenance of Bhagavan. The very next moment, he fell flat before Bhagavan's holy feet, unmindful of the uneven gravel ground, strewn with stones. However, he was in a state of dilemma because he had ridiculed *sadhus* and *sanyasis* all along, yet here he was prostrating before one!

He steadied himself thinking: "I have met two great people in my life - Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore - but neither of them can compare to this astonishing man, whose compassionate look is so arresting and bewitching that I can hardly take my eyes off him. I must keep myself in check because I do not want to get trapped by this man's looks. However, let me give this *swami* a chance. I will read some of his books."

He went to the book store, which at that time was only a small, open shelf. Bhagavan's *Ulladu Narpadu* (Reality in Forty Verses) in Tamil had just been published. Narayana Iyer bought the book to read so that he could "judge" the *swami* he had just met. He wanted to understand whether this man was worth his admiration. When he read the first verse, he couldn't understand a single word. He wondered what was happening. He thought to himself: "When I look at him, something is kindled within me beyond my control. I cannot determine what it is that is causing it. When I want to judge him, I cannot even understand a single word of what has been written by him in Tamil." He asked someone who was passing by, "Do you know *Ulladu Narpadu*? Do you know the meaning?" The person said, "I also do not know the meaning. But tonight, Bhagavan is going to read the verses and explain them.

Why don't you stay?" Narayana Iyer told himself, "I will give the *swami* another chance. I will stay."

That night, Bhagavan read the verses aloud in the most musical tone, making every word so comprehensible, so simple, that Narayana Iyer was left wondering if he was being hypnotized. "Whatever he is reading now," He thought, "I can understand; previously, I couldn't understand a single word." While his mind was in this kind of turmoil, Bhagavan focused attention solely on him in the midst of his reading. That was a time when there was a small intimate group. People started inundating the *Ashram* only in the 1940's. In those days, Bhagavan would often look directly at the person he was called to. Narayana Iyer was mesmerized, both by Bhagavan and the verse that he was reading. Narayana Iyer said, "While explaining verse 21 Bhagavan said, 'God can neither be seen with our eyes nor with our senses.' To see God is to be God is what the verse was saying. Bhagavan went on to explain what was meant by this. From the audience, a person called Dandapani Swami asked rather boldly, 'Is Bhagavan saying this out of his own experience?' It was a blunt question, but was answered with calmness and candor by Bhagavan: 'Else, would I dare say so?'"

On hearing this declaration, a strange sensation overtook Narayana Iyer. His entire frame quivered, and when he looked at Bhagavan in that state, he saw a glorious and luminous aura around him. Narayana Iyer experienced directly that "to see God is to be God." The thought that Narayana Iyer had was: if He, who all religions acclaim to be God, were to appear before me in flesh and blood, here He is! Narayana Iyer had an experience affirming that Bhagavan was God himself. Narayana Iyer

said, "From that moment onward, it was not my decision; I had become a lover of Bhagavan."

Narayana Iyer explained to me, "Ganesan, I refused to succumb to any form of intellectual conviction about God. Hence, Bhagavan had to give me an experiential one. He granted to me the experience that Bhagavan is God. I at once teased him with, "In Bhagavan's words, Narayana Iyer became God to experience God!" He embraced me as he said, "Yes that is the Truth! To know God, one has to become God. There is no other way."

Narayana Iyer shared a great deal with me. He also narrated something to me which may not be very pleasant. He said, "Your father and your grandfather were not as close to me as you are. I am not accusing them; perhaps it was because of my inability to meet their expectations of me."

I think it was the blessings of Bhagavan that Narayana Iyer narrated some of his experiences with Bhagavan to me. Perhaps Bhagavan wanted it all to be shared. On many occasions, Narayana Iyer came to the *Ashram* office, pulled me outside, and led me to the cowshed or to the foot of the hill. He would then share his stories with me. His refrain was always, "I did not deserve such pointed tenderness and liking from Bhagavan. Perhaps I did some good deeds in my past lives; in this life I have neither done *puja* nor *sadhana* to deserve Bhagavan's special attention."

Once I asked him to clarify what he meant by that and how he felt when he declared that for him, Bhagavan was God. It was not that I doubted

the experience; I just wanted to hear it in his words. He said, "Bhagavan is God himself, and in saying this, I do not refer to any of the gods of any religion, but to the universal principle of pure consciousness. I would not like to compare him to any of the past personages, as there is no meaning in comparing the incarnation of that one principle, which has no second. However, for our understanding, if we need to compare, then the comparison can be done with the advents of Buddha, Mohammad, or Jesus Christ." Narayana Iyer added, "Whenever I was talking to Bhagavan or sitting in his presence, there was the feeling that here is God sitting and talking. It is our greatest fortune that the supreme consciousness, appearing in the garb of a human body, graciously appeared at our level of understanding, and that he took on the remarkable task of interpreting to us the Truth of *atma Vidya* - the wisdom of the Self. Such mental clarity influenced me to understand Bhagavan and his teachings better and more clearly.

When I returned to the *Ashram* in 1960, I told Narayana Iyer, that I really did not have a full grasp of *Vedanta*. I was 23 years old at that time, and although I was equipped with an M.A. in Philosophy, and was acquainted with both Eastern and Western philosophical trends, I could not grasp simple *Vedanta*, the crux of Hindu religion. I struggled because it seemed complex and vast. Some guests of the *Ashram* had said, "Learn Sanskrit and study the works of Adi Shankara, then you will be able to grasp the teachings of Bhagavan." Narayana Iyer asked, "And what was your response?" I replied, "Narayana Iyer, I felt that doing *sadhana*--whatever kind of *sadhana*--was more important to me than gathering knowledge about different kinds of religions and philosophies."

Narayana Iyer said, "I was in exactly the same state when I put forth questions to Bhagavan. Listen how Bhagavan solved the problem for me in an instant. One time a few very educated scholars were sitting in the old hall, discussing portions of the *Vedas,* the *Upanishads,* and other Sanskrit scriptural texts. Bhagavan was giving them the correct explanation; it was indeed a sight to behold, remember, and adore! While watching, I was ridden with guilt and shame that I was so much less than these knowledgeable people who were fortunate enough to be sharing this kind of learning with Bhagavan. They had an enthusiasm for learning and a keen understanding of the subject. What was I compared to them? These were the thoughts in my head. I was a 'zero' as far as scriptural knowledge was concerned, and that made me feel miserable. After the scholars left, Bhagavan turned to me and said, 'What?' As he said this, he looked deep into my eyes, as if reading my thoughts. Without giving me an opportunity to respond, Bhagavan continued, 'This is only the husk. Book learning and the capacity to repeat the scriptures by rote are of absolutely no use. To know the Truth, you need not undergo this torture of learning.' Then he uttered the most beautiful sentence: 'Not by reading do you arrive at the Truth. Be quiet; that is the Truth. Be still; that is God.' Then Bhagavan very graciously turned to me again. But this time there was immediate change in his tone and attitude, for he asked me, 'Narayana Iyer, do you shave yourself?' I was bewildered by the sudden change in his questioning, which had become personal in nature. I answered in the affirmative. Bhagavan then continued, 'You use the mirror for shaving, don't you? You look into the mirror and then shave your face. You do not shave the image in the mirror, do you? Similarly, all the scriptures are meant only to show you the path to realization. They are thus meant for practice and attainment. Mere book knowledge and discussions can be

compared to a man shaving the image in the mirror.' This was a tremendous relief for me. After Bhagavan said these words, my inferiority complex left me once and for all. The other positive note about Bhagavan's statement was that, after that, I was able to be still and quiet. It almost became my own property."

While I was listening to Narayana Iyer, I fell into the same state of quiet and stillness. I, too, gave up the madness of acquiring more and more knowledge, and instead took to plunging inwards. Being quiet is the Truth, and being still is God.

As far as Narayana Iyer was concerned, I was an insatiable questioner. I wanted more and more. I wanted to know if he received an *upadesa* (a special teaching to establish one in Truth) from Bhagavan. I also wanted to know whether he had lived up to that teaching. Like all the other old devotees, he was affectionate towards me and always answered me readily. Narayana Iyer said, "Bhagavan did give me individual *upadesa*. The personal instruction of Bhagavan has always been of absolute value to me; it has become my second nature, as it were." What Narayana Iyer said then was very significant. "I exclaimed to Bhagavan that I knew nothing of *Vedanta*. I also could not practice certain austerities because I was a householder. I prayed to Bhagavan to help me by showing the way to reality. I also frankly told Bhagavan that his own method of Self-enquiry was too difficult for me. Bhagavan graciously turned to me and said, 'Narayana Iyer, do you know *Ulladu Narpadu - Reality in Forty Verses*? It imparts pure Truth. It deals with pure Truth and explains pure Truth. Continue reading it verse by verse. The words of the verses will vanish in due course, and pure Truth, *Sat* or *Ulladu,* alone will shine, as

the snake sheds its skin to emerge shining.' This is my *sadhana*, Ganesan, and I have been doing it repeatedly. I chant *Ulladu Narpadu* whenever I have any free time." I listened spellbound.

I once asked Kanakammal, an elder devotee of Bhagavan, about Narayana Iyer, and she had the following to say about him:

"Narayana Iyer was born in an affluent family, but he was perfectly humble. Narayana Iyer's wife followed his habits and shared his views; she lived her life as her husband wanted her to. When he was at home, he would most often be reciting *Ulladu Narpadu* at the top of his voice. He tended to the cows and did gardening, since these were matters that interested him deeply. The moment a cow gave birth to a calf, he paid total attention to both cow and calf. As the cow was giving birth, he would recite *Ulladu Narpadu*. In a light vein, Narayana Iyer's wife once told me that the exclusive privilege of receiving Narayana Iyer's attention during delivery was given to the cows, but was never, ever extended to her, the mother of his eight children!

Narayana Iyer's dedication to Bhagavan's teaching and instructions was meticulous and potent because in the book, "W*ho am I",* the only instruction Bhagavan gives is to astutely adhere to the teachings of the *guru*. Narayana Iyer was compassionate enough to narrate the following incident:

"I was sitting near Bhagavan's couch. I felt puzzled by the ancient teaching that everything one sees is *maya*, illusion. I wondered how Bhagavan, sitting on the couch with the wooden barrier between him

and me, could be unreal. I asked Bhagavan whether all of us could be unreal and non-existent. Bhagavan laughed and asked me whether I had a dream the previous night. I told him that I had one in which I had seen several people asleep. Bhagavan then said, 'Suppose I ask you to go and wake up all those people in the dream and tell them they are not real. Would that not be absurd? That is how it is to me now. Be assured that there is nothing but the dreamer. So where is the question of the people in the dream being real or unreal? Still more, of waking them up and telling them that they are not real! We are all unreal. Why do you doubt it? THAT alone is Truth.' After this explanation, I had absolutely no doubts about the unreal world - I constantly feel the Truth of their divine nature."

Another day, Bhagavan told Narayana Iyer, "Everything is unreal, like dream objects. However, at a certain stage, there exists Truth, or reality, and the world of unreality. There, the realized man's job is to awaken 'others' to the fact that what they see and feel is unreal, and that the only reality is one's own immortal being. This can be compared to an elephant dreaming of a lion, and suddenly waking up to find that the lion is unreal and the elephant alone is real. The elephant is the individual *(jiva)*, the dream is the unreal world, and the lion is the *guru* or the *jnani*. The *guru* is the link between the real and the unreal."

On another occasion Narayana Iyer told me that Bhagavan said, "There is no *jnani*, no realized person. There is only *Jnanam (*Wisdom)."

Narayana Iyer was posted as Sub-registrar in a place near Tiruvannamalai. He could not go to Bhagavan whenever he wanted; he

was like the suckling baby, longing to be back with the mother. As there were hardly any taxis or buses in those days, Narayana Iyer sometimes used lorries (trucks) as a mode of transport to reach Bhagavan and even to go back home. Once he came to the *Ashram* at 8:30 p.m. He had a house opposite the *Ashram*. He hurried into the *Ashram* without even taking his bath or his food. He had to stop at the *Ashram* office to pay his respects to the *sarvadhikari*, Chinna Swami, who was having a discussion with some people. Narayana Iyer was surprised, because normally the people in the *Ashram* went to bed at 8:00 p.m. The *sarvadhikari* called out to him and said, "Narayana Iyer, come here! Bhagavan has had an accident. He has broken his collarbone, so we have moved his bed outside between the old hall and the small well. You can prostrate before him from a distance and then go away. Do not disturb him." Narayana Iyer thought that if they had not mentioned that Bhagavan had a fracture, he would not even have gone there. But knowing that Bhagavan had a fracture how could he not? He went stealthily, like a cat, and prostrated before Bhagavan from a distance, obeying Chinna Swami's instructions. But Bhagavan called out to him, "Narayana Iyer, come here!" Narayana Iyer was surprised, because no one else had heard him approaching. Bhagavan further added, "Narayana Iyer, I can hear and identify even your most silent and noiseless steps!" Then, lying on the couch, he said the strangest thing, "Narayana Iyer, come and sit next to me." Narayana Iyer was one of precious few who have ever sat next to Bhagavan on his couch. (I know I was one of the others, but I was only an infant at the time - perhaps one-and-a-half years old). Bhagavan said, "The native doctor has said that the bandage should not be moved; I want to see you while talking to you."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Narayana Iyer was afraid that the *sarvadhikari* would tear him to pieces if he saw him sitting on Bhagavan's couch, but in a fraction of a second he overcame that fear and went immediately to Bhagavan. As he sat down, Bhagavan continued, "This morning I was going up the hill. A dog was chasing a squirrel, and so I put my walking staff between the two of them. I then slipped and broke my collar bone. A devotee, who is also a resident bone-setter, made a paste of leaves and black gram and applied it, with the plea that I do not move my arm." Narayana Iyer was much moved that Bhagavan paid so much heed to the plight of the squirrel, as well as to the plea of his devotee, the bone-setter.

Narayana Iyer very rarely missed coming to the *Ashram* on Bhagavan's birthday. But once, he was sixty miles away! He travelled by one lorry after ang lor8208.71 Tsat l as-3(t57110(he)-2(Tsre)5(a)chonce)8.71 Tsthe

It seemed so heavenly to Narayana Iyer, for he could not believe what was happening. He obeyed Bhagavan automatically. Bhagavan got up, looked for a newspaper and another leaf and wrapped up the rest of the almonds in them, tying it with twine. He had packed it beautifully, just like they do in restaurants. He gave it to Narayana Iyer, saying, "When you go home, Lalitha (Narayana Iyer's wife, of whom Bhagavan was very fond) and your children will ask, 'What have you brought us from Bhagavan?' Take this and give it to them." As Narayana Iyer narrated this, he wept copiously and said, "How can I not remember these special moments? Who will believe it when I talk about it?"

Narayana Iyer once told me something very beautiful. He told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I have been here many years. People meditate and then go into *samadhi*. I close my eyes for a minute, and my mind travels round the world ten times. And so many forgotten thoughts also leap up. I suffer, Bhagavan." Upon hearing this, Bhagavan said, "Why do you concern yourself about others? They may meditate, or sleep, or snore. Look at your Self. Whenever the mind goes astray, bring it back to the quest. There is a verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* which says one should check and bring the mind back to the Self, no matter to what side a restless and unsteady mind wanders." However, Narayana Iyer was not convinced about Bhagavan's reasoning. Then, Bhagavan, as the Mother aspect, further elaborated, "The child who was woken up and been given milk after it has gone to sleep says the next morning, 'Mother, you never gave me milk last night'. Similarly, you, too, have had your fill." Bhagavan's assurance to Narayana Iyer is also an assurance to every one of us who asks the question, *Who am I?,* that we are already immersed in

the grace, the realization, and that there is no more that we have to search for.

During the celebration of the first anniversary of Bhagavan's death, I was in the company of most of these old devotees who were expressing grief. They were crying because the comely form of Bhagavan had left them. Narayana Iyer sobbed and wept profusely. I embraced him and said, "Narayana Iyer, what is it that you are feeling?" He showed through signs that he could not speak at that moment. I told him to write his feelings down. He sat at the foot of the hill and wrote. These thoughts were published in *The Mountain Path* and also in my book, *Moments Remembered*. The following is the moving account of what Narayana Iyer wrote on that occasion:

Bhagavan! Bhagavan! O dear Bhagavan! Is this the day that you left us? I vividly remember the day when Sri Muruganar and I were last in the queue to see you on the evening of 14th April, 1950. Can I, like Saint Manickavachakar and Saint Tayumanavar, exclaim that my hair stood on end? I cried unashamedly, *'Vidirvithirthen'*. I wept in spasms, with uncontrollable breath. My friend Muruganar and I were the only ones there when we saw you. When I saw your prostrate body with closed eyes and upturned face, I didn't know what to do. But you turned and cast your look on the grief-stricken people who were weeping before you. Then you turned and closed your eyes. We were still weeping. Lo, you turned toward us and looked at us again. Was it a look of farewell, O Lord? Was it the last, the very last one? That recollection of your words of consolation "where can I go, I am here," are the words of eternal wisdom that have sustained us. How can I ever forget the

thousand instances of your love? The almonds that you specially fried for me by lighting the fire yourself, and the groundnut *kootu* that you asked Venkataratnam to keep for me, are still sweet on my tongue. When my friend, Professor G.V. Subbaramayya, pleaded with you to help me out of my official trouble, he said, 'Poor Narayana Iyer. Can Bhagavan not do anything for him?' Did you not say, 'What is the need for him?' During one of your last days, G.V. Subbaramayya implored, 'Give me protection, Bhagavan.' In one word, you said, 'I have given it.' At that time you saw me linking my arm with his, implying that I, too, was joining in the request. Countless are the instances of your grace on me. Lord, how can they go in vain? How many pages I have written that are smudged with tears! My obeisance to you, Bhagavan, I am ever at your holy feet with loving thoughts. My heart throbs along with the heartbeats of those who have assembled here to offer eternal love."'

When Narayana Iyer's eldest daughter was to be married, Narayana Iyer had no money for the betrothal. According to Hindu tradition, there is a ceremony and a *puja* for which a few things are necessary. Narayana Iyer's wife said, "Why don't you go and appeal to Bhagavan?" He replied, "I will never appeal to Bhagavan for gaining material things, my dear." She prayed to Bhagavan in silence, telling him of the importance of the betrothal, now that the daughter was grown up. The couple then went to see Bhagavan and prostrated before him. They did not breathe a word of the matter. The next morning, the postman arrived with a money order of fifty-one rupees. I myself have seen the carbon copy of this money order Narayana Iyer has shown it to me. It had come from Ahmadabad, which is more than a thousand miles from Tiruvannamalai. On it was written a single-line note, saying, 'Letter follows'. The couple

bought whatever they needed with the money. The prospective groom came and was received well, and the wedding was fixed. The couple waited anxiously for the letter that was to follow. The letter arrived later from a Gujarati gentleman in Ahmadabad. The couple did not know him at all! He wrote, "Dear Narayana Iyer, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi appeared to me in a dream and told me that I have to immediately telegraph a money order of fifty-one rupees. He also gave me your address. I do not know you, and I do not know what the money is for. But please do not refuse the money. Kindly accept it."

I, too, have seen the letter. Narayana Iyer, his wife and their daughter went before Bhagavan. They wept and prostrated before him, saying, "Bhagavan, what grace are you showering on us?!" Bhagavan read the letter as though someone else had showered the grace! He then focused his attention on them and said, "Why doubt? Where is the need for you to ask me?" This is what I want to share. It is not just for spiritual fulfillment that we have come to the Master. When the truly genuine Master is capable of sharing with us the most elusive thing itself - Self-realization - will he not fulfill our prayers for mundane things?

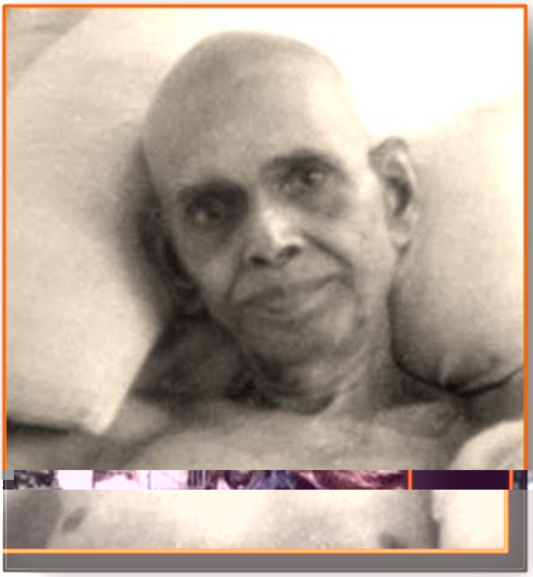
Devaraja Mudaliar once appealed to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, you have praised *Arunachala* - your Father - 'that He is ever gracious, compassionate and powerful enough to give us *Atma Sakshatkar*.' Does this mean that one can even make pleas for one's daughter's marriage or one's own employment?" Bhagavan smiled and answered, "If a person has the gift to grant Self- realization, is it difficult for him to grant your simple prayers, like getting a job or getting a son? If you have a billion dollars, is it difficult for you to give ten dollars? *Arunachala* can give you

a billion dollars; is not *Arunachala* capable of giving you a hundred dollars? If this is so, why hesitate to pray to Him for your mundane things?"

Bhagavan's advent to *Arunachala* served us all. As long as we attach our identity to the mortal form and name-body, suffering will continue. Have faith. Raise this simple question, who am I?, and be the silent answer you already are. That still silence is *Arunachala,* that silence is your true nature, God.

CAULDRON OF GHEE AFIRE ON TOP OF ARUNACHALA

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN



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WHERE CAN I GO, I AM HERE…

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami

We are going to share about a person for whom Bhagavan's physical body meant everything. He was such a clearly called person that Bhagavan revealed to him that *Arunachala*, the Hill, was sacred and the Lord Himself.

"One day I was walking up on *Arunachala* hill behind Bhagavan. He stopped and picked up a small stone from the path and held it out to me saying, 'Someone from abroad has written to ask for a stone from the most sacred spot on the hill. He does not know that the whole Hill is sacred.' Just as we identify ourselves with the body, Hindu mythology declares Lord Shiva has emerged as this hill. The stillness of *Arunachala* is as pure wisdom when approached with faith. It is out of compassion to those who seek the Father that he has revealed himself in the form of a sacred place visible to those with eyes to see and heart to know. The aspirant will obtain guidance and solace by staying near the hill."

That blessed cameraman, who had not only preserved and perpetuated our Father in human form, but was also instrumental in getting this revelation from Bhagavan Ramana, was Dr. T. N Krishnaswami.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Dr. T. N Krishnaswami was a very successful physician in Chennai. How he was drawn to Bhagavan is a fascinating story (*Leela*). A medical student in the 1930s, Krishnaswami was in his final year and the examinations were near. To get over the examination fever, he and his student-friends went to Vellore to take photographs of an ancient fort. When he reached Vellore, he was very disappointed that it was not such a fascinating subject for his camera. So someone there said, "Why are you disappointed? Go to Tiruvannamalai. There is a most beautiful and very ancient temple. It will be a feast for your camera."

He came to Tiruvannamalai along with his friends. Someone at the temple informed them that a saint was living at *Ramanashram* and said, "Why not go and take photographs of that saint?" But Krishnaswami was very honest, "I never felt that a *Sadhu* would be a fascinating subject for my camera." When he came to the *Ashram* with his friends, Bhagavan had gone up the hill and was just returning.

A camera was very rare in those days at *Ramanashram*. It was a jungle *Ashram*. So, one Seshu Iyer requested of him, "Bhagavan will be coming now. Do not go away, take some photographs." Seshu Iyer told Bhagavan, "This group has come from Madras. They want to take photographs of you." Bhagavan looked at them, particularly at Krishnaswami, the medical student, and said: "Is that so? Then let him." Bhagavan even posed for him. That was the beginning of innumerable photographs taken of him, yet one of the very first photographs was Krishnaswami's favorite one. One ochre-robed *Sanyasi* came running after the medical student and said, "We do not have proper photographs of Bhagavan in the *Ashram*. Now you have taken one. Why don't you

send us some prints so that we can make them available for devotees?" Krishnaswami was so fascinated by this *sanyasi* that all his life, he was very grateful and respectful toward him, and also obeyed his requests or commands. This *sanyasi* was the younger brother of Ramana Maharshi, Niranjanananda Swami, the *Sarvaadhikari.* The *Sarvaadhikari* had this particular photo hung on the wall of his office in front of him.

Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami, whom I interviewed in the 1960s, described the very first look of Bhagavan: "I thought I had successfully captured Bhagavan inside a metal camera, but very soon, I realized that it was Bhagavan who had captured me in his Heart, from where I could never escape." I asked, "How did you feel when you first saw Maharshi?" He said: "The Maharshi did not seem to take notice of anything around him. He wore a calm and distant look. His eyes were shining and there was something divine about his countenance." He returned to Chennai and developed the photos at his residence, and sent copies to the *Sarvaadhikari.* The devotees at the *Ashram* were very fascinated. After a few days they wrote to him. Dr. TNK said, "I had already forgotten all those things because, as a student, I had so many attractions and distractions." The letter from the *Ashram* conveyed, "We want to take a group photograph of Bhagavan with the others. Will you please come and take the photograph?" He felt, "What is this entire nuisance?" He confessed to me that in actuality, the next moment he was seated on the train with a camera hanging around his shoulders. When he entered into the *Ashram*, Bhagavan beamed a most beautiful, welcoming smile and said, "They want a group photo and they want you to take it for them." Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami was very happy to take the group photograph. Then something prompted him to ask Bhagavan, "Will you please give

me a special pose for a portrait?" Bhagavan agreed and sat in *Padmasana* for the photo. In the 1930s and 1940s, this photograph adorned countless homes of Bhagavan's devotees. Dr. TNK completed his medical course and became a reputed and successful doctor in Chennai.

Quite often he would say to his self, "I would like to go and see the Maharshi." Thus, visiting the *Ashram* became his routine. On one such visit, as he entered the hall, Bhagavan said, "We were talking about you just now. We have written a letter to you, but we have not even posted it. Perhaps you can receive it directly." Dr. TNK told me, "There were many coincidences like that; I had to either be there, or they would write to me. So week after week, month after month, year after year, I would take my camera and go there and take photographs of Bhagavan from morning to evening." So much so, that all photographs that we see of Bhagavan, almost 80 percent of them, were taken by him only. In the later years, other photographers were rarely permitted, for instance, G. G. Wellings from Bangalore.

Dr. TNK was drawn to Bhagavan like a spiritual magnet. I asked him, "What made you go to Bhagavan again and again?" He asked a counter-question, "What makes a baby go to the mother? Who tells a suckling baby to go to the mother? Bhagavan was like a mother for me. That is how I felt, and I kept on going again and again." Dr. TNK was known as the *Ashram* photographer. When asked to narrate how he took photographs, he said, 'Whenever I went to the *Ashram*, though I usually stayed there briefly, from morning to evening I made it a point to accompany the Maharshi and take as many pictures of him as possible. I used to wonder if such doggedness on my part would vex the Maharshi.

I have snapped him walking, sitting, eating, and cleaning his feet. I have also snapped him smiling, bursting into laughter, smiling at a child, in a meditative mood, in *Samadhi*. Once he was going up the hill when there was a slight drizzle, and he was offered a country-made Palmyra umbrella. I took a picture of him wearing this leaf on his head. I also took another picture of him using an ordinary umbrella. As I began to take that picture, the Maharshi expressed a very broad smile. Every photograph has a story behind it, though not all of them have been recorded." Every time I met Dr. TNK, I pestered him for more such stories.

The *Ashram* brought out a book, *The Maharshi,* with one hundred and seventeen illustrations. By then, the *Ashram* had plenty of Bhagavan's pictures taken by Dr. TNK, but they did not have a single proper photo of the Hill. Niranjanananda Swami asked him, "Why do you not take a hill picture for that book?" For Dr. TNK, Bhagavan was Father, Mother, Guru, God, everything. He approached Bhagavan and appealed, "They have asked me to take a photograph of the hill." Bhagavan said: "Before reaching Tiruvannamalai railway station on the railway track, there is a bridge. From there, if you look at *Arunachala,* the top of *Arunachala* and the temple will fall in a straight line. That will form a very special pose. Take that!" "When did Bhagavan see that?" Dr. TNK posed to me, and himself answered, "He had traveled only once at the age of sixteen on the train, and you should put yourself in Bhagavan's position; a sixteen-year-old boy coming in total ecstasy on the train, and he had noticed the hill before reaching *Arunachala* station! Despite his ecstatic state, a glimpse of the Hill from that bridge became deeply imprinted in his Heart." With sages, every movement, every

word, every gesture, assumes very great significance. For them everything is in the "now". Dr. T. N Krishnaswami is an important link in the history of Ramana Maharshi. Whenever I went to Chennai, I would go to his house, prostrate to him, and prompt him, "Tell me more about Bhagavan!" In addition, I would collect all the innumerable old negatives of the photos of Bhagavan that he had taken. One day, I gathered hundreds of these negatives, tucked and bundled them in a big cloth and brought them to the *Ashram*.

On one such visit, Dr. TNK seemed to be in an ecstatic mood. He turned down all his patients waiting for treatment and said, "Come, Ganesan. We will go upstairs." He talked about the glory of Bhagavan, the grandeur of Bhagavan, the majesty of Bhagavan. He said, "Not once did Bhagavan tell me, either directly himself, or indirectly through Niranjanananda Swami, or through attendants, to stop taking photos. He willingly responded in whichever pose I needed him to stand or sit. No one would believe it now if I told him, 'Turn your face, look up, and look sideways, keep the arms down, or keep the arms up.' He would obey instantly and willingly. Up on the hill when I was taking photographs of Bhagavan, no one was there except the attendants. If anyone would have been there and seen Bhagavan obeying me, they would have mistaken Bhagavan for a photo maniac. The real Truth was that he, as my Guru, was fulfilling my desires, my insatiable longing to photograph him, and that was all. Had Bhagavan not fulfilled every prayer of every devotee all his life?"

Dr. TNK told me, "Niranjanananda Swami once asked me to take Bhagavan's picture in the traditional Dakshinamoorthy posture, seated

in silence. Bhagavan agreed. A strange thing happened when he sat on the rock we had adjusted so that the hilltop would form a backdrop. Before Bhagavan sat on the rock, he asked the attendant and me, 'Which leg of the traditional Dakshinamoorthy is up and which leg is down?' We were puzzled. Bhagavan himself solved it: 'Does not matter, take two photographs—one with the right leg up and the other with the left leg up.'" Dr. T. N Krishnaswami took the photos as he was told.

Once I asked him, "Have you ever taken any picture of Bhagavan stealthily, without his knowledge or permission?" He said, "I had always sought his permission before taking the photo, except once. I wanted to take a photo of his feet, the Holy feet of the *Satguru,* so vastly extolled in our Hindu scriptures. I requested the attendant to sprinkle a few flowers in front of Bhagavan's feet. I hid my camera from Bhagavan's vision and pretended to bend down and prostrate. Suddenly I raised myself and took the photo." He added, "Bhagavan's figure was out of focus; only the feet were clearly focused. When I tried to slip out, Bhagavan beckoned me and simply smiled at me a little unusually, his eyes dancing, which meant, 'Do I not recognize your mischief?' This is the first time I have shared this. I have kept that photograph hidden ever since, venerating it only in privacy. Now I feel like giving it to you. I am offering you the negative. Maybe Bhagavan wants his Holy feet to adorn the devotees' homes and Hearts." I was deeply thrilled, because this was in 1967, when I was bringing out the *Ramana Pictorial Souvenir*. I was so delighted that I included it on the very first page of that souvenir publication!

Dr. T. M Krishnaswami Iyer was not only a successful photographer, but also a very successful medical doctor. He was very well-liked in Chennai. All the elite, particularly movie stars, singers, all the popular people who made up most of his patients, were friends. But having come to Bhagavan, having served Bhagavan, would Bhagavan leave him spiritually unrewarded? Would Bhagavan leave him to be merely a successful photographer and doctor? No. Bhagavan blessed him spiritually in the last days of his illness, asking Dr. TNK to stay with him and serve him. I once asked Dr. TNK, "Did you ever feel that taking photographs was not enough?" He told me, "Sometimes I wondered if it was ridiculous of me to pay so much attention to photography, given that Bhagavan's teaching was *I-am-not-the-body*. Was I not chasing the shadow and trying to perpetuate it? Somehow, as long as I was seeing him with my eyes, the teaching did not assume any importance to me. His person was seen and felt by me and I felt drawn and attracted to him. It gave me immense pleasure to take photographs of him. He was more important to me than his teaching. Every little movement, every one of his acts and gestures, was highly valued by me. Simply watching him always conveyed some Divine fragrance. No matter what he was doing, it was highly gratifying."

Since he had served Bhagavan during Bhagavan's last days, I asked him to describe the last moments of Bhagavan's earthly life. Tears flowed down his cheeks and he was choked with emotion. He could not utter a single word. I said, "Write it down and give it to me." This is what he wrote: "I had the rare privilege of being allowed to stay with the Maharshi during his last days. Knowing full well that his end was near, I was curious to see if he would leave any message for us. Would he speak

words of solace? Would he leave behind some directions for us? It was sad indeed to look at the suffering of the body, but the Mystery was his attitude about it. He described all the pain and suffering as though the body belonged to someone else. The question arose whether he was suffering or not. How could one describe the pain and suffering so accurately, locate it in the body, and yet remain unaffected by it? There was a severe intolerable headache, he said, as the body was going into a slow dying process, and his kidneys were failing. The Maharshi never described the symptoms in a subjective manner. On the evening of the last day, the Maharshi asked to be propped up in a sitting posture and assumed somewhat of a semi-*padmasana* pose. His breathing was becoming strenuous and heavy. The attending doctor put oxygen to his nose, but the Maharshi brushed the oxygen tube aside. There was a heavenly chorus of *Arunachala Siva* outside the room. Would physical death dare to touch him? No! It is impossible, everyone thought. A miracle will happen. The atmosphere was tense with emotion, fear and expectation. There was some weeping. Very gently the Maharshi seemed to gasp a little and the body became still. Synchronizing with the Maharshi's last breath, a meteor was seen to trail across the sky. We could scarcely realize what had happened. The physical form had left us once and for all. No more the beatific smile to greet us. No more the graceful form to adorn the *Ashram*."

Whenever I met with Dr. TNK at his residence, he would take me upstairs and talk about Bhagavan. "What did you do after Bhagavan dropped the body?" I asked. He said, "Bhagavan's body, which I had worshipped, was no more to be seen. This produced in me a severe jolt. I was shocked. Had I missed the opportunity of a lifetime to imbibe the

direct teaching from the enlightened one? I had done nothing in the direction of spiritual practice. Had I wasted all my time taking photographs? I should have engaged myself in trying to understand and practice his teachings in his very presence. No! I said to myself. This cannot be true. I was sure I had obtained some Grace from the Maharshi. He was somehow still here, only we had to learn to feel this presence as the substratum of being there without form. We would never be forsaken, for he had assured us himself that he was not going away. He is omniscient. Then I turned to study his teachings. I began to see the Truth in them. Some of the sentences touched me deeply and made me feel that I was in his presence listening to him. I took Heart, and the more I read the more intimate the Maharshi became to me. His teaching pulsated with life. I began to understand it and it became my own." When he said this, I immediately prostrated to him, held his feet, and said, "Doctor, bless me!"

I want to share with you two special incidents about Dr. TNK:

In 1965, a couple came to the *Ashram* from New York, Mr. and Mrs. Stafford. Later, I came to know that they were wealthy. Mrs. Stafford told me, "We are millionaires; my husband is a New York stock broker." She asked me, "Have there been any realized beings since Bhagavan?" I replied, "I can show you one, but can you recognize him?" She said, "Yes, if you show us, we will try to recognize." I said, "He is not here in *Ramanashram*. He is in Chennai." "Does not matter, we will come with you to Chennai." "But he will not be in ochre robes or clean shaven head. He will be in a Western suit." She said, "Please take us." I took them to Dr. TNK's residence in Chennai. I prostrated to the doctor the

moment I saw him. His whole house was filled with Bhagavan's pictures. He showed them around and offered to them, "I want to give you one of the photographs you see displayed here, so please choose one." In the huge hall, they picked a photograph that had never been seen in *Ramanashram* before. Dr. TNK immediately removed it from the wall and gave it to them. Then Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami told us, "There is a story behind this photograph. When my second son was to be given a name, a celebration and *puja* were arranged. I wanted to name him 'Ramana,' but my wife objected. She said, 'You should give him my father's name, as you have named our first son after your father.' I could not object to that, so I reluctantly agreed. While the celebration was going on, it was my role as the father to cover the child with a blanket and say the name in his ear. As I was doing so, this framed picture on the wall suddenly fell on my back, and I had a revelation as if Bhagavan himself was telling me, 'Give your son my name.' I forthwith named him, 'Ramana.'" Dr. Ramana Kumar later flourished as a renowned doctor in Chennai.

The second incident was when Dr. TNK was on his death bed. I shed tears when I went to see him. He asked, "Is this your understanding of Bhagavan's teaching? Look at me; I see Bhagavan beckoning me. I am going to him. Why should you cry? Come on. Wake up!" I said, "I have one doubt, Doctor. You are a millionaire. You have acquired many properties. People say that you are a cheat pretending to be a devotee, and that you are ever lusting after money. You own sixty houses in the city and you have no less than several hundred thousand rupees in every bank." The doctor smiled at me and said, "Yes. I own all this, but it does not own me." Then he said, "I am advising you not to pay any

attention outside yourself. Property or no property, it is all non-Truth. The Silence within you is the only Truth. Focus your attention on Truth. Bhagavan is beckoning me . . . Bhagavan blesses you, Ganesan." He remained with closed eyes for some time. Then, turning to me with great affection, he said, "Across from the *Ashram*, I have a building in which I requested Muruganar to stay. I am bequeathing that building to you. I know you do not have any money or property to lean on. You are rendering selfless service to Bhagavan. You should not suffer in the future for want of anything. Please accept it." I touched the feet of Dr. T. N Krishnaswami, by way of accepting his generosity. (Very recently, I have left a will surrendering it to the *Ashram*). After a few days, the *Ashram* Photographer merged fully and consciously with *Ramana Arunachala*.

ANURADHA

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Framji Dorabji

Framji Dorabji, the movie-theatre owner in Chennai, belonged to Zoroastrianism. The forefathers of Framji go back to Persia. They are known in India as *Parsees*. From childhood, he was devoted to sages and saints, for which his family members would tease him. Wherever there were *sadhus* and *sanyasis,* he would fall at their feet and serve them. His family teased him, "Framji, there is a great sage at the outskirts of Bombay. You should go see him."" He would then go there; taking fruits and money, but nobody would be there. His family members had tricked him. However, Framji later expressed, "I never felt hurt or got angry with them because those moments were very precious. I was thought of as a saint." Once he was actually cheated by a pseudo-saint he thought was genuine, a psychic person, and an expert in thought-reading.

While Framji stayed in the car, his friends went to the supposed *sadhu*, who asked them, "Why have you left your friend, Framji Dorabji, in the car? Bring him here." They were surprised, for, ordinarily, even friends could not properly pronounce the name, "Framji Dorabji," but the illiterate *sadhu* pronounced it absolutely correctly. When Framji met him, the *sadhu* did a psychic reading of his thoughts. Framji was very much impressed and thought he was a great man, so he started going to him on a regular basis. Eventually, the *sadhu* started extracting money. Once he asked for a huge amount, which Framji could never procure, saying,

"If you do not come up with that money I will curse you. Your whole family will be destroyed." Framji begged, "I cannot. It is not possible." When he returned home, he found that his elder daughter was sick and was getting worse. So Framji ran to the *sadhu,* saying, "Please reverse your curse. My daughter is dying." The *sadhu* said, "Unless you give me the money, I will not reverse the curse." When Framji went home, his daughter was dead, and his wife had become sick. He became panic-stricken and suffered greatly. His elder brother, Dadiba, who had read a review of *A Search in Secret India*, took pity on him, saying, "Brother! I have just read about a great sage in south India. Why do you not go and take shelter under his protection?"

Thus, Framji Dorabji, along with friends, came to Bhagavan in 1937. There were no private interviews with Bhagavan at that time, but one would be allowed to go with Bhagavan up the hill alone. Framji followed Bhagavan up the hill and cried out, "Bhagavan, this is my plight. I do not know whether my wife is alive or not!" Bhagavan stopped, turned, looked at him for some time, and then said: "They can go that far alone. There is nothing to fear. Protection is always. Go back peacefully." Framji's fear dropped immediately, like a cloak falling from the body. He noticed a word surging from his heart, "Master." He was the first person to call Ramana Maharshi, "Master, and my Master!" He repeated this often. When Framji returned to his family, they were surprised, because what had happened to him was undoubtedly a real miracle. His wife became well. Framji started going to Maharshi from far-off Mumbai.

Fortunately in 1942, Framji's business was moved to Chennai. He became the owner of a movie theatre, which afforded him the freedom to go to Bhagavan any time he chose. In the presence of Bhagavan, he saw there was no need for any doubt or questions. Bhagavan's presence was so clear: Divinity in the here and now. Whatever little bits of doubt he had would be cleared the moment he went into the presence of Bhagavan. If doubt was there, somebody else would ask the same question, and Bhagavan would answer. There was no need for him to put forth any intellectual question to Bhagavan. He understood that his was the path of faith and surrender.

He went to Bhagavan with his *Zoroastrian* clothes, which included a conical black hat that is part of their traditional garb. He would go in front of Bhagavan and prostrate while wearing that cap. In India, due to the influence of the British, one would remove one's hat in the presence of a supposedly superior person or officer. Hence, people told Framji, "You are insulting Bhagavan." When Bhagavan heard this, he said: "The *Zoroastrian* custom is to wear this cap when showing respect to a Holy man. Framji is only doing the right thing." Framji was surprised: "How did Bhagavan know that? Although a few *Parsee* devotees came to Bhagavan, none of them ever discussed our habits and customs with him."

When Framji was beginning to settle down in Chennai, a friend approached him and offered to get a large portion of land and buildings on the main street of the city for a very low price, from a distressed wealthy widow who urgently needed money. Framji could afford to buy that large property, and doing so would make him extremely wealthy.

However, he wanted Bhagavan's approval. He reached the *Ashram* and sat in the presence of Bhagavan, mentally appealing to him for his guidance in this vital financial decision. Time passed. After some time, a devotee asked Bhagavan a question. In the course of his long answer, Bhagavan took a long look at Framji and added, with a smile: "One is already burdened with past acquisitions. Why add more? It would only increase one's bondage." Framji dropped buying the property. Years later, he came to know that the one who bought it could not rest peacefully due to endless litigations!

Just as K.K. Nambiar brought a movie camera from America, which helped in filming the Maharshi's movements, it was Framji who arranged for Bhagavan to view the commercially popular spiritual movies of the time, about such spiritual luminaries as Saint Tukaram, Mira, Nandanar, and Ramayana. With the help of another devotee who owned a movie projector and huge screen, and with the locally available technical staff, Framji was able to show Bhagavan many movies. From this connection, I will share the following. I was fortunate to sit next to Bhagavan while Bhagavan was seeing the movies, screened in the dining hall of the *Ashram* in the evening. I clearly remember Bhagavan laughing, thoroughly enjoying the humorous scenes, shedding ecstatic tears at scenes in which the saint in the movie attained spiritual perfection.

Bhagavan proved to me that he was a "mirror." Whatever happened in front of him, he reflected fully and truthfully. Yet, like a mirror, when the movie was over, there was not a ripple of reaction in him to the movie's contents. When I reflect over it at this distance of time, I feel I

have been helped to grasp the true state of a *Jnani* in which, in that inner perfect state, nothing gets altered, whatsoever, by events happening around him!

It was during the last days of Bhagavan that Framji was standing in the queue to have *Darshan* of Bhagavan along with everyone else. As he stood in front of Bhagavan that day, he was chanting his scripture, *Zend-Avesta.* Bhagavan turned to him, smiling, and said, "Framji, it is not the rising Sun, it is the setting Sun!" At that very moment, Framji had been chanting the holy verses addressed to the rising Sun. The whole *Zend-Avesta* is in pure Persian. I once asked Framji, "Don't you ever feel any contradiction in following Bhagavan since you come from a very different tradition?" He said, "There was absolutely no contradiction. Quite to the contrary, the essence of the traditional strict injunctions of my religion and Bhagavan's teachings is the same. There is a passage in "*Day by Day with Bhagavan"* that is relevant to *Parsee* customs, though it has no reference to me." In the evening after parayana, Munagala Venkataramaia came and told Bhagavan, "It seems that Mrs. Talyearkhan and her guest, Sir Mirza Ismail, of Mysore, were sitting on the hill talking about Bhagavan and the Hill. Mrs. Talyearkhan told him, 'Bhagavan is a walking God, and all our prayers are answered. That is my experience. Bhagavan says that this Hill is God himself. Though I cannot understand it, since Bhagavan says so, I believe it." Thereupon, her *Parsee* friend replied, "I would take it as a sign, if, according to our *Parsee* beliefs, it would rain." For them, whenever a good omen is expressed, there should be at least a few drops of rain. Almost immediately there was a shower, and they came down from the hill, fully drenched, and told me about it.

Framji Dorabji guided me all his life, telling me about the greatness and efficacy of the sages and saints, quoting me their poems. He was almost an illiterate, but his heart was filled with knowledge of Saint Meera, Saint Tukaram, Saint Tulsidas, and Saint Surdas. At the mention any one of them, he would chant and then translate it to me. He advised me, "Follow their footsteps. Worship sages and saints." I became a little intoxicated by going after sages and saints. Perhaps that is why I have kept after all those old devotees of Bhagavan! I have met many, many *Mahatmas* (sages and mystics) over the years.

One day in 1965, Framji came to the *Ashram* and asked me to go along with him to Chennai. There at his movie theatre, after giving me tea and a chance to wash up, he told me again, "Jump into the car!" On the way, he commented, "At the *Ashram* I asked you to jump into the car. You did not ask where I was taking you. Here, also you did not ask me where I was taking you." I said, "Framji, I know you will take me only to a place that will elevate me!" He was happy to tell me, "Yes, I am taking you to the talk of a great sage, J. Krishnamurti." To be honest, I laughed to myself. I knew sages and saints addressed only as *Maharshi, Swami, Maharaj,* or *Baba*. I had never heard of a saint having an initial, such as "J."

Framji took me to J. Krishnamurti's talk at Vasant Vihar, Adyar, and Chennai. From a distance, when I saw J. Krishnamurti seated on a platform under a huge tree and giving the talk, I felt within my heart a revelation echoing itself: "Here is a true man!" This sensation prompted in me an ecstasy. Added to that feeling, the very first sentence that I heard from him caused another explosion within me: "If there is no Truth within you, Sir, take it for certain there is no Truth outside you!"

However much I contemplated this single sentence, I felt a complete conformity between this revelation and the Maharshi's own teaching of "*I Am"* as the Truth in its essence, depth and intensity.

Framji's daughter, Mrs. Soona Nicholson, who lived in Mumbai, took me to the sage of that large city, Nisargadatta Maharaj. Framji Dorab ji's son, Dorab Framji, introduced me to the teachings of Huang Po, Hui Neng, and other Zen Masters, by giving me authentic books on them and their teachings.

I want to share two reminiscences about Dorab Framji's early contacts with Bhagavan. When Dorab was a teenager, Father Framji brought him to Bhagavan, fresh from Mumbai. Both stayed at the *Ashram.* When he was taken in the morning for breakfast to the *Ashram* dining hall, Dorab did not like the *idlis* that were the daily menu. The next day, Dorab refused to go in for breakfast, but his father forced him. With great reluctance, Dorab sat next to his father. Surprisingly, when the dish was served, Dorab ate it with relish. The secret was, Bhagavan had observed that the *Parsee* boy disliked *idlis,* and had therefore instructed the cook to prepare a special form, coating the *idlis* with ghee and a thick layer of sugar. There was a famous *Parsee* delicacy that looked and tasted exactly like what Bhagavan had arranged for the cook to make for Dorab! How did Bhagavan know about such a *Parsee* delicacy?!

On another occasion, young Dorab was sleeping outside the hall in the pathway as Bhagavan was passing by. With an impulse to wake his son up in order to receive the blessings of Bhagavan, Framji rushed toward the sleeping Dorab. Bhagavan signaled to him not to do so and said in a soft tone, "Do not wake him. Allow him to wake up by himself." Is this

not a great revelation for us all, too? No one else can give awakening to another. Each one has to wake up to the Truth, on one's own, by diving within!

In my association with Framji and his family, I felt that when a Saint blesses a devotee with wisdom, with an aura of Truth, all the family members are also equally pulled in and blessed. This is true in the case of each and every true devotee. A true Master is pure alchemy, transcending and transforming mortality into immortality.

THE COOL SELF LIES WITHIN

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

H. C. Khanna

Dr. M. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer and Sub-registrar Narayana Iyer were both immersed in their family environments. They did not give up their families, but stayed with them in *Arunachala* and received Bhagavan's Grace.

H.C. Khanna was the third family man who could neither stay permanently in *Arunachala,* nor even stay for long periods, because he had to come from Kanpur, where he lived with his family. In those days, to travel from Kanpur to Tiruvannamalai took four days and was very difficult. The story of how Bhagavan went to him through a Mahatma, attracting him through grace, engaging him in Self-Enquiry, and blessing him with Self-realization, is absolutely fascinating. In the divine drama of this true story I enjoyed the good fortune of being very close to H.C. Khanna because Bhagavan had given me his to associate with all these old devotees, serve them, and receive their blessings. Bhagavan, in his own way, influenced me to become deeply fond of this devotee, (Harichand Khanna). I have shared before that the task of raising money for the *Ashram* was left to me. Mr. Khanna was a wealthy man. Working side by side with me, he helped and instructed me all the time. "Wake up, Ganesan! This is not your work. This is just one of the works." I owe so much to H. C. Khanna, whom I call *Pitaji,* which means "Father."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

H. C. Khanna was the tenth child in his family. From childhood he was brilliant, observing that although his father provided everything for his family, some people in the world were happy, many people were not.. He did a lot of research and figured out that if you have a secure financial base, you can be happy. He trained himself to be an insurance agent, at which he was extraordinarily successful and made lots of money. His work required him to travel, and in those times, there were no hotels or restaurants, like there are now. There were only government guest houses, which were reserved for the British rulers, there were very rarely Indians accommodated in them. Khanna knew not only how to accumulate money, but also how to make use of the money. He was able to persuade the manager and the attendants in the government guest houses to accommodate him wherever he went.

He told me that he enjoyed life. "I was so happy, having plenty of money, drinking and eating, enjoying travel, and having all the comforts." He married a deeply pious woman, Premavathy, whom he loved very much. One day he went to Lucknow and occupied the government guest house there. On that day he made an enormous collection. Because the bank system was not popular at that time, he collected cash until his entire collection box was full, and then he would return to the guest house.

There was an elderly watchman at the guest house. When Khanna stored his box there, the watchman commented, "Every time you give me thirty rupees," which was a large amount at that time. The watchman continued, "Sir, my wife is going to deliver and she is in danger. The doctor said that I must give him ninety rupees, but I do not have any

money. For the next three visits you need not give me anything, but please give me these ninety rupees now, so that I can give relief to my wife." Khanna was in such a joyous mood that he tossed three hundred rupees to the watchman and said, "Go get drinks and the best food. We will look into all your wailing and pleas later." Perhaps even his children do not know of how he ate, drank, and showed the watchman how much money he had collected that day, forgetting, in his intoxicated state, to close the box. He fell unconscious without even bolting the door. All these guest houses were in the outskirts of the town. When Khanna regained consciousness in the morning, his door was shut and the watchman was seated outside. "Hey," Khanna asked, "What were you saying about your wife having a baby?" The watchman replied, "How could I go, leaving you in this condition? You have so much money that thieves might come and loot you." "What about your wife?" asked Khanna. "I will go now and see, sir, but I did not want to leave you in this condition," said the watchman. That struck Khanna deeply. He had been thinking that satisfying his own senses was the purpose of his life. "Here, that man's wife was in danger, and I refused to give him the ninety rupees he prayed for, which he could easily have taken, so there must be something beyond sense gratification. There is something more to life. What is it?" Khanna started pondering.

He read the *Bhagavad Gita* and felt that unless you have a Guru, you will not know the highest spiritual Truth. But he could not formulate a method for himself, like *Who am I?* So he began searching for a Guru who could guide him. One night when he was at home with his wife, he bolted all the doors to his bedroom, all the iron doors and windows. Suddenly, at midnight, he felt as though there was someone inside the

room. He woke up and saw that a *sadhu,* whose legs were deformed, was seated inside the room. The *sadhu* said, "Come to me in the morning at four o' clock." He informed Khanna, "A great Mahatma is coming and you have to receive him. So lift me up and put me outside the gate." Later, Khanna woke his wife up and said, "Let us go and see him." The *sadhu* was waiting for Khanna and was thrilled when he arrived at three-thirty. Khanna felt that this lame *sadhu* was his Guru, but the *sadhu* said, "I am not your Guru. Ramana Maharshi is your Guru." Khanna had never heard Ramana Maharshi's name. He was awed by this *sadhu* who had come to his room the previous night, and now, he was prepared to surrender himself as a disciple.

Khanna wanted to know about Ramana Maharshi. He met one of Maharshi's disciples, Professor Bhatnagar, who said, "I know about Ramana Maharshi," and handed Khanna the *Upadesa Saaram*, which had the address and all necessary information about Ramanashram. Khanna's father came and said, "I will look after your children. I have read Paul Brunton's review of this book, *Upadesa Saaram*. Ramana Maharshi seems like a genuine sage, so you go."

In 1941, Premavathy and H. C. Khanna came to Bhagavan. When they entered the hall, Bhagavan conferred a look of grace seemed to imply, "Why did it take so long for you to come to me?" This look, I have been told by at least a dozen people, including my own mother, is *Darshan*. Immediately, Khanna knew that Bhagavan was his Guru. He started staying and visiting Bhagavan. He wanted Bhagavan to declare that he was his Guru, so one day he asked Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I need an outward Guru, and I want you to tell me that you are my Guru."

Bhagavan said in his own usual way, "The Guru is within." But Khanna Pitaji was a very relentless fellow. He said, "No, Bhagavan, you must say that you are my Guru." Bhagavan replied, "The outer Guru is saying the Guru is within." This was not merely a clever answer, as Pitaji told me when he mentioned this experience. He said, "I felt it. I was throbbing with such vibrations within me, and instantaneously, Bhagavan revealed divine presence to me. He gave me a piercing look deep into my eyes, and I had a true spiritual *Darshan*." They were joined in the substratum. Even though Bhagavan was looking at him, the experience was taking place within, proving that the statement, "the Guru is within," reveals the Truth of the immortal state of "I Am."

Because I was very close to Pitaji, I asked him, "How often did you go? After receiving this initiation, where was the need for you to go to Bhagavan?" He told me, "Though the Truth revealed by the Guru is supreme, it takes time to soak in and become totally one's own; time to mature, acclimate, and become established in the still substratum. The proximity of the outer Guru is essential in many relationships. So I came as often as practical. All forms of doubt were totally eradicated, and inner peace was the proof." I asked him, "How do you know that the inner guru is eradicating your doubts and maturing you?" He replied, "Inner peace is Self-evident and proves itself in the ease one feels."

I asked him, "Will you please share with me some of your dialogues with Bhagavan?" He said, "They are already printed in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*," which made me eager to read it. Khanna told me about a time when he had handed Bhagavan a piece of paper on which he had written something. After reading it, Bhagavan said, "It is a complaint."

Khanna replied, "I have been coming to you for a long time, and this time I have remained nearly a month at your feet, yet I find no improvement at all in my condition. My tendencies are as strong as ever, and when I go back, my friends will laugh at me and ask me what good my stay here has done." Turning to Khanna, Bhagavan said, "Why distress your mind by thinking that wisdom (jnana) has not come, or that the tendencies have not disappeared? Do not give room for thoughts. In the last stanza of *Tayumanavar*, the Saint Tayumanavar says much the same, as was written on this paper." Bhagavan had Devaraja Mudaliar read the stanza and translate it into English for the benefit of those who could not understand Tamil. It goes: "*Mind mocks me and though I tell you ten thousand times you are indifferent so how am I to attain peace and bliss."* Then Devaraja Mudaliar told Khanna "You are not the only one that complains to Bhagavan like this. I have more than once complained in the same way, and I still do. I find no improvement in myself." Khanna continued, "It is not only that I find no improvement, but I think I have grown worse. The Vasanas are stronger now. I cannot understand."

Bhagavan again quoted the last three stanzas of *Tayumanavar,* where the mind is coaxed to be the most generous and disinterested of givers and goes back to the birthplace within the source, thus providing the devotee peaceful bliss. He asked Devaraja Mudaliar to read out the translation of it that he once wrote. Khanna asked, "Illumination plus mind, which is *jivatma*—individual, and the illumination is the *paramatman,* the ultimate Truth—is it not Bhagavan?" Bhagavan assented and then pointed to his towel, saying, "We call this a white cloth, but the cloth and its whiteness cannot be separated, and it is the same with

illumination and the mind that unites to form the ego." Then he added the following illustration that is often given in books, "The lamp in the theater is the Brahman—the illumination, as you put it. It illumines the stage and actors. We see the stage and the actors by its light, but clear light still continues when there is no more play. Another illustration is an iron rod that is compared to the mind. Fire joins it and it becomes red hot. It glows and can burn things like fire, but still it has a definite shape unlike fire. If we hammer it, it is the rod that receives the blows, not the fire. The rod is the *jivatma* and the fire is the Self." Bhagavan helped devotees by revealing jnana-wisdom to them.

One afternoon, Khanna's wife appealed to Bhagavan in writing, "I am not educated in scriptures, and I find the method of *Self-Enquiry* too hard for me. I am a woman with seven children and a lot of household tasks, and it leaves me little time for meditation. I request Bhagavan to give me some simpler and easier method." Bhagavan looked at her with immense compassion and told her, "No learning or knowledge of scriptures is necessary to know the Self. No one requires a mirror to see that he or she is. Any knowledge is required to be given up eventually as not 'Self.' Household work and caring for the children's necessities are perfectly acceptable. If you can do anything more, at least continue saying 'I-I-I' to yourself mentally all the time as advised in *Who Am I?* Whatever work you may be doing, whether sitting, standing, or walking—do this 'I-I-I' *japa*. The reason we must do this I-*japa* is because 'I' is the sense of the nameless God. It is the first and greatest of all mantras. Even Om is secondary to it."

Mr. Khanna passed away in 1984, at *Ramanashram*. When he was here, I was very close to him, but he had a lot of commitments with his family. He went to Delhi because he wanted to attend a case where his property was involved in litigation with billions of rupees. He became very close and would confide in me. He said, "I want to go there, but I want to die at *Arunachala*." I said, "Pitaji, if you are going by train, you could die there and not in *Arunachala."* He said, "Give me time." In the morning, he came and embraced me, saying, "I have cancelled my trip. I will stay here. I do not want to take any risks. Let the case and the billions of rupees go to the dogs. I will stay here." Then the next question he asked me was, "You were by your mother's side, and you told me that your mother said something about Bhagavan instructing her to die consciously. Tell me, how did your mother die?"

I said, "My mother told me that one day when she was healthy, Bhagavan was talking as if to somebody else in the kitchen, but there were no two lady cooks, and it was meant only for her. She was very young at that time. Bhagavan made this statement, "If one dies unconsciously, there is definitely another birth. If one dies consciously, there is a possibility that there will not be any more births." So my mother begged of me, "Allow me to die consciously. Do not give me cocaine and other injections and make me unconscious. I do not know whether I will be born again or not. At least there is hope for me." She died most magnificently with full consciousness and happiness. Khanna said, "I will also die like that." On the last day of July, 1984, he felt that death was imminent, maybe a heart attack. The next moment he sent his wife, "Premavathy, go and call Ganesan. Call him to me immediately." He placed a chair in front of a huge picture of Bhagavan and sat down,

already merged with his master. Pitaji was a hero. He conquered the body and mind by faith in Bhagavan. His body was interred inside the *Ashram* next to Chadwick's. He was the only *grihasta*; all the other *Samadhis* are of *sadhus (*renunciates).

Truth is immortal life. Truth is real. Truth is not a concept. Do not search for Truth. You are already the nonphysical Truth, or *Arunachala,* as we call it. In the Tamil scriptures, it is given that a musk deer secretes a perfume which gives off an aroma. The musk deer is very fond of that aroma. However, it thinks that the aroma emanates from elsewhere, so the deer runs in search of it. Some of the scriptures say that the musk deer is sometimes seen dead, exhausted, because it was unaware that it was secreting that aroma itself. Running after Truth is similar. We are already and always the spiritual Truth. Stay as the Truth in the eternal "Now". Be no-seeking. Be nothing. Do nothing. Surrender and accept the here and now. By grace, *Arunachala*, the Self supreme, will absorb everyone the way an ocean receives each wave back. Staying in the Truth is being absorbed and established in *Arunachala*, the Self.

Sivarama Reddiar

The light, the flame itself, does not need any recognition. It is present for those who have eyes to see. The flame is not bothered by the eyes that cannot see.

Sivarama Reddiar was one whom I was able to serve when I came here in 1960. I was taking shelter not under shade, but under a cauldron of fire. The presence of Ramana Maharshi was felt; it was just that the body was not there. Sivarama Reddiar was in the book depot. He was in charge of the small room. My father said when I came, "You do not have worldly knowledge, especially with money." He said, "You work under Sivarama Reddiar." So I was posted under him, and I was just a spiritual novice longing to have spiritual experience. I started working, and within a few hours, I was so arrested by his personal serenity and the stability of his presence. I was not trying to measure whether he was spiritually realized or not.

Sivarama Reddiar came from a small town between Madras and *Arunachala,* called Acharapakkam. You cannot pass from Madras to Tiruvannamalai without passing through Acharapakkam. His was a family of land owners. Sivarama Reddiar owned a rice mill. The entire family was devoted to Achutaswami, a poet saint who wrote beautiful poems in Tamil on *Advaita Vedanta.* He and his songs were very popular. All the family members of Sivarama Reddiar were devotees of Achutaswami. I want to share about Achutaswami. When Bhagavan came here in the 1896, he went into Pathala lingam. He was removed by Seshadri Swami, and for a few weeks afterward, he sat out of the way

under the *illupai* tree within the temple premises. He was a sixteen-year-old boy lost in spiritual *Samadhi* (nonphysical existence). Achutaswami, who was elderly and had a lot of devotees at that time, came to Tiruvannamalai. As he entered the temple, he was drawn toward this boy who was seated first in the temple corner, then under a tree. Achutaswami could see the spiritual luster in this boy. As he had commitments, he could not stay there. The next year he came with two hundred devotees. While there, he searched the whole temple for the Brahmin boy he had seen there before.

Achutaswami was informed that the boy was at Guru Muhurtam, because it was *Karthikeya* festival time and the people wanted to see Bhagavan. The Brahmin boy, at that time, was not even sporting a loincloth. He was in ecstasy. They tied a loincloth on his waist and took him to Guru Muhurtam, which is on the outskirts of Tiruvannamalai. Achutaswami, along with two hundred devotees, went there to see this Brahmin boy. Actually, Bhagavan was hardly recognized at all at that time. Achutaswami was the second swami to recognize Bhagavan as a saint. He asked all his devotees to stay outside and he went inside. Bhagavan was in ecstasy and the ants were eating his back. Achutaswami had him sit on a stool, pouring water on all four stool legs so that the ants would not climb up while Bhagavan was seated there, lost in the Self. Achutaswami held Bhagavan's feet and prayed, "Please bless me with this state. I have written poems on this Advaitic state of oneness, but I have not experienced it. Please bless with me with that state." He did not say that he received *Darshan* but when he came out, the words that he spoke to his devotees demonstrated that he had received it. I have the highest regard for this Achutaswami. When he came out, his devotees wanted to rush in. He said, "What is seated there is a raging

fire. Do not touch him. Prostrate from a distance, pray in front of him, and come away." That was Achutaswami.

Sivarama Reddiar had matured spiritually through the influence of this Achutaswami's songs. From childhood, he had been particularly interested in *Advaitic* Philosophy. He started reading *Kaivalaya Navanita* and *Yoga Vashistam*, which were the two standard Advaitic texts in Tamil in those days. Bhagavan also referred to them quite often. One of the disciples of Achutaswami initiated Sivarama Reddiar into *Taraka mantra*, giving him the procedure to chant this *Taraka mantra*, which is called *Shanmuki Upasana*. It is said, according to this *Upasana*, you will see a light and there will be brilliance. Sivarama Reddiar practiced this for ten years, both at home and in a small forest in Acharapakkam, which he visited frequently for that purpose. He saw the brilliant light and it gave him great exhilaration and excitement, but somehow within his Heart of Hearts he felt, "I have achieved this, but it is not final." There was no fulfillment, but yet there was still a longing.

At that time his wife, who was twenty years of age, whom he loved tremendously, passed away. He told me, "When God took her away from me; I could no longer feel any joy in the world." It was not just a thought of sadness, which goes away after some time; he couldn't get over this deep sorrow. According to our Hindu tradition, any sickness or sorrow will reduce and eventually disappear if you go on a pilgrimage. Sivarama Reddiar believed this and told me, "I literally walked around India three times, visiting Holy places," but his sorrow did not diminish even a bit.

During these wanderings, he remembered his uncle who was the direct disciple of Achutaswami, and who was living in a place in Tiruvannamalai called *Ramanashram*. Sivarama Reddiar came to Tiruvannamalai in 1931 and stayed in the *Arunachaleshwara* temple. Every morning he would get up and go around the hill, passing through *Ramanashram*, which, at the time, was just a small *Ashram* in the middle of the jungle. He would stop by to see his uncle. He had deep regard for his uncle who tended the flower garden in *Ramanashram* behind the old hall. Every morning his uncle, Krishna Reddiar, would pluck flowers. Sivarama Reddiar assisted him every day, until one day his uncle took pity on him and said, "Come, I will introduce you to my Guru," and took him to Bhagavan. Krishna Reddiar told Bhagavan, "This young fellow is submerged in sorrow." Bhagavan focused his attention on the young man and bestowed a piercing look. In the twenties and thirties, most of the devotees whom I have met have repeatedly told me the same thing that the piercing look of Bhagavan would see right through you. It would see through every atom in your body, your mind, and your *Atma*. Bhagavan rendered this same penetrating look with Sivarama Reddiar. Sivarama Reddiar related to me that within a few minutes, the sorrow he had not been able to relieve by his own sincere efforts disappeared, like a cloth dropping, as he had thought for three years was impossible. He still loved his wife, but the sorrow was not there. He felt great happiness in his Heart and left to attend to his business at Acharapakkam.

In 1934, he got a call from *Ramanashram,* "Sivarama, your uncle has passed away. Please come." He came in the night as it was only sixty miles. Kunjuswami told him what happened to his uncle, and that his uncle's last rites were all performed with the instructions of Sri

Bhagavan, so Sivarama Reddiar felt that he should serve this Master. I asked Sivarama Reddiar, "Will you please tell me about your uncle?" He said that his uncle was one of the two hundred people who had come with Achutaswami, and who also had Darshan of Bhagavan in 1896, but continued serving his guru, Achutaswami, even after that. Achutaswami dropped the body a few years later, but before that, Krishna Reddiar held his Guru's feet and asked, "What about me?" Achutaswami said, "Go to *Ramanashram* and serve Ramana Maharshi. All that I have received, I have given you. If you need anything further, go to Ramana Maharshi." That is how Krishna Reddiar came to serve Bhagavan. He was a very hard worker with a sturdy body. He not only tended the flower garden, but also ran errands in the *Ashram*. One day Krishna Reddiar told the *Ashram* staff, "I am going to my native village, and I will be back." So he left and called all his relatives and told them, "Within a week, I am going to drop the body at *Ramanashram,* at the feet of my Master. I have come to take leave of you." Krishna Reddiar knew astrology and he knew when he was going to die. When he came back, he was healthy and there was nothing wrong with him, but on the seventh day he developed a slight fever, and by evening the fever had worsened to the point that he could not stand up. Ramakrishna Swami and Kunjuswami advised him to stay in one of the few cottages the *Ashram* had at that time. While Krishna Reddiar was lying down with high fever, they went and told Bhagavan. Bhagavan made the statement that Krishna Reddiar knew astrology. "He went home to take leave of his family members, and he has come back to merge with *Arunachala,*" were Bhagavan's words.

When Bhagavan's mother was seriously ill in 1914, Bhagavan wrote four verses appealing G

He said, "Yes, I had only one doubt." Then he told me about the *Taraka mantra* and this *Shanmuki upasana*. He practiced it for twenty years, up to 1931, but did not get any satisfaction. This was Sivarama Reddiar's reply: For twenty years, I had a haunting doubt–that was instantaneously dispersed by a few words from Bhagavan. I studiously followed the *Taraka mantra* and the *Shanmuki upasana* for ten years and experienced the light all around me, along with a sense of exhilaration. Yet, I had a deep doubt about the reality of that state. In 1934, I reverentially placed this doubt of mine before Bhagavan, and Bhagavan was gracious enough to say, "Yes. That is the state of *Nidhidyasana*. You heard the Guru instruct you, which is *sravana*. You assimilated his teaching, which is *manana,* and now you experience it, which is *nidhidyasana,* but this is still on the level of the *triputi*, the threefold reality of seer, sight and seen. You must go beyond that and find out who is the "*I"* that experiences the light and exhilaration. Light and exhilaration exist to someone. Find out who it is." Sivarama Reddiar continued, "Even before Bhagavan told me this, I had known theoretically about *triputi* and transcending the *triputi*, but only in the presence of the *Satguru* did I grasp it as a practical reality, a direct experience. Lo! The experience of "*I,"* transcending the *triputi,* descended on me, enveloping me in that supreme state of powerful silence. That was my final initiation, and that state of bliss still continues without a gap." Sivarama Reddiar closed his eyes and went into ecstasy and silence. I felt in his presence a great sense of reverence toward Sivarama Reddiar, who was thus profusely blessed by Bhagavan himself.

From 1934, he worked in the book depot as a manager. He did the very limited work of packing and selling by himself. This continued for thirty years, and I would assist him. It was like being in the light of a candle--

but not just an ordinary candle--because he was in that deep state. To experience the ultimate reality you have to be with a person who is already established in it, who is experiencing it all the time. I served him for four years. Please permit me to say just a little about myself, which will perhaps help. When I came here in 1960, I took three vows of my own accord that I thought were essential to a spiritual life. I would not touch money. I would not sign my given name and I would not look at or touch women. Very rarely, visitors would come to the book store. If a woman or a family came, I would get up and go away. I was the assistant, only writing the accounts; Sivarama Reddiar counted the cash. Because invoices required a signature in order to be legal under the British system, I would hand the invoices to him to sign. Sivarama Reddiar noticed all this. Realized people do not jump to conclusions and judge other people. He observed me for three or four months. Around nine o'clock one night, as I was sleeping in the open and he was sleeping under the thatched shed, he called to me affectionately, "Ganeshu, come here!" He had chronic asthma, so whenever he called me, I would rush to help him. I thought he was having another attack of asthma. He said, "Sit down next to me. I have been observing you all these months. You do not touch money and you do not sign any invoices, and whenever a woman of any age comes, you run away. What is the matter?" I said, "Reddiar, I have taken these three vows so that I can remain on the spiritual path." Sivarama Reddiar, "Oh, that is good, but you have practiced it enough. What is wrong with money? Touching money is not a sin. Attachment to money is." It was not an argument, it was not an instruction. It was sharing. Sharing is straight from the Heart of being. There is no contradiction, there is no opposition, there is no denial. You cannot even stay in the statement; it becomes yours.

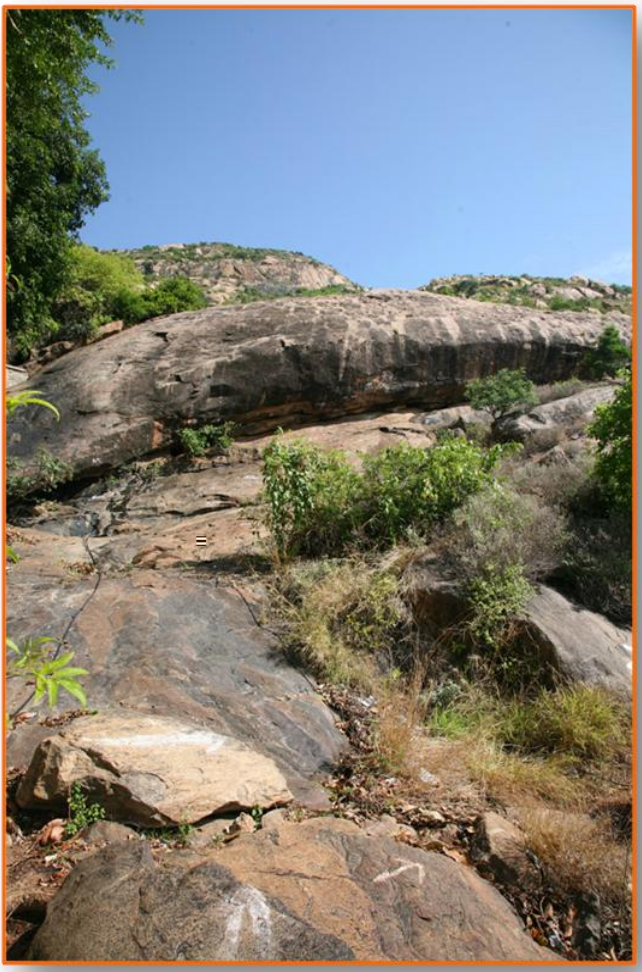
AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Secondly he asked, "What is wrong with signing your name? Were you born with the name? Your parents gave you the name. You should not be attached to the body. By giving up the name you have not given up your bodily attachment. Give up the idea that 'I am the body'. The 'you are the body thought' should go. Bhagavan bequeath you the name, 'Ganeshu.' See how holy that name is." From that moment onward I accepted the name, Ganesan. I was asked one time by very eminent people, "You are not going to marry for the rest of your life, so why do you not embrace *sanyasa* and wear the ochre robes?" Repeatedly people tried to persuade me to do this, including one of my sisters. I said, "Bhagavan never accepted formal, outward *sanyasa,* because when you want to take *sanyasa,* you are already a *sanyasi.* You are in that state of renunciation and detachment. Why should you then change your outward form or name? Bhagavan never gave *sanyasa* to anyone. Chadwick tried, Maurice Frydman tried, Muruganar tried, and Sadhu Natanananda tried, as did many others, but Bhagavan refused to give it to them." He asked, "You are already a *sanyasi;* why do you want ochre robes?" I said, "Bhagavan did not approve of taking *sanyasa,* so I will never take *sanyasa. T*he second reason is that Bhagavan gave me the name Ganesa, as I was born on that day of Ganesha, and if I take *sanyasa,* it will give me another name. I fully accept my name."

As for my third vow, Reddiar said: "When you ignore women, are you aware, Ganeshu, that you are insulting the Creator? The *Higher Power* created the dual appearance of male and female aspects—it is there in all creation—animals, birds, creatures, trees, plants, and even in rocks. By denying due importance to the female of the species, you are denying 50 percent of the principle of creation. Is it correct? Is it necessary? To transcend this obstacle, love all women unconditionally as mothers. The

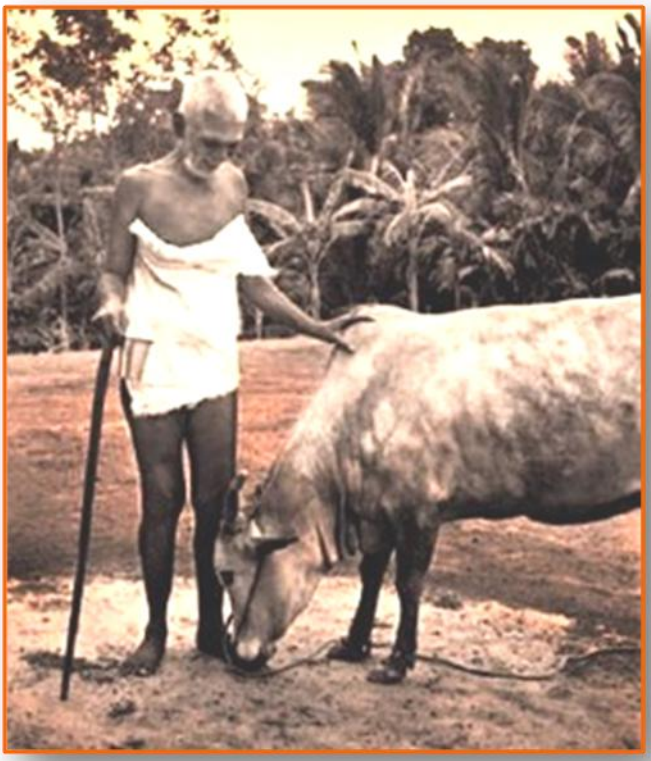
more deeply you love them, the greater the devotion that will well up in you as love for the Mother principle. Ignoring 50 percent of the work of the Creator, by itself, will become a very great impediment to your practice." I started intensely loving all women as my own mother!

In 1965, when Sivarama Reddiar became very ill, he did not want to be a burden to the *Ashram,* so he left. He called for his daughter. She came and took him to Uttarameru, her native village. I held his feet and cried profusely, "You are going away, Reddiar, you are leaving me!" He said, "Ganesa, *Arunachala* is Truth. Truth alone Is. Stay in *Arunachala* and all blessing will be accrued to you." Blessings and Grace are not personal property and are the only thing which you may share with everyone, equally. Anything outside you has limitations. This blessing, Grace, and love can be shared everywhere.



MOTHER'S ROCK ON ARUNACHALA

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN



SRI BHAGAVAN WITH COW LAKSHMI

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Janaki Maatha

Now I am going to share with all joy, with all reverence, with spiritual deep love, about three female devotees of Bhagavan. One was a saint, Janaki Maatha. The second was a Western lady, and with all reverence I state that she was not a scholar, like my revered friend Arthur Osborne, or a very clever journalist like Paul Brunton, or a poet like Muruganar, but just an ordinary Westerner suffering in the world, Eleanor Pauline Noye. Many devotees do not even know her name, but my Master keeps her in his Heart. The third female devotee was a queen, a real royal queen. Although all have dropped the body, they are still here in a very real sense. We should have reserved three seats for them. They are so alive!

First, let us consider and appreciate Janaki Maatha, the woman saint. When she first came to Ramana Maharshi she was already a majestic mystic, having had many psychic experiences. Swami Shivananda from Hrishikesh, who received blessings from Bhagavan, was a very well-known sage in India. He wrote the book, *Women Saints from India*. He refers to and extols this Janaki Maatha of Tanjore, and says she is one who constantly lives in the remembrance of her Satguru, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. The great sage unreservedly paid tribute to this saintly woman.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

What was the enchantingly, magnetic event that eternally bound Janaki Maatha to the Master, Bhagavan? One day in 1935, she followed Bhagavan Ramana during his usual morning short walk behind the cowshed and expressed her specific inner anguish. Bhagavan looked at her with great compassion and said, "You are in the position of a *grihasta.* You are expected to fulfill all the obligations demanded of you as a housewife, primarily those concerning your husband. Leave the task of your spiritual fulfillment to me. There is nothing wrong in the body, but the 'I am the body' idea, *dehatma buddhi,* has to be given up. You are ever the limitless Self. I am always with you."

Thus, she was spiritually guided, assured and blessed by Bhagavan Ramana. Mrs. Janaki Ganapathy Iyer intensely plunged herself into spiritual understanding. After that, she gave birth to many children. Most of you will understand her anguish. She was leading a perfectly harmonious life, which in no way detracted from her spiritual splendor. Mrs. Janaki Ganapathy Iyer soon turned into Janaki Maatha, the mother. Janaki Maatha had already experienced Kundalini Shaktipat and other supernatural powers by the time she came to Bhagavan. After meeting him, when Bhagavan told her, "You are the Self," every time she had this *Kundalini* experience, she immediately turned within. Bhagavan's one *upadesa* had her stay within as the Self. Many instances confirm that Bhagavan remained with her while she was going through her many difficulties; the spiritual path is often not a bed of roses. There is paradox and tribulation both in the world and in the spiritual pursuit. But Janaki Maatha overcame every obstacle just by remaining within the Self. She shone as a spiritual lighthouse and guided those ships that had lost their rudders. This lighthouse guided them back to safety and guided them as to how to surrender, how to make use of *Self-Enquiry.*

Bhagavan offered recognition and encouragement while he was in the body, and also his body dropped away, as I have come across in many instances. I shall share with you two such instances involving Janaki Maatha:

Mr. Osborne was the editor, and I was the managing editor of the *Mountain Path* in its third year, January of 1966. Mr. Osborne wanted to bring out a special issue dedicated totally to Ramana Maharshi. In every one of the previous issues, Osborne had included an article about a Saint, Mystic or Guru. However, for this January issue, which was called the *Jayanthi* issue, he decided not to bring in another saint. We agreed that the whole issue was going to be only about Ramana Maharshi. But Bhagavan wanted to recognize Janaki Maatha; it is very thrilling how these things take place. Of his own accord, Arthur Osborne insisted on including an article on Janaki Maatha. I doubt whether he would have ever known Janaki Maatha at all, had he not written an apt introduction to that article. This is what he wrote:

"It has become our custom to publish in each issue an article about some saint, Mystic or Guru. We had decided that this issue would be entirely dedicated to Bhagavan. But, just before it was time for the issue to go to the press we received chapters of a still unpublished life history of the ecstatic woman mystic, Janaki Maatha. She has a considerable following and is, at the same time, a wholeheartedly surrendered *bhakta* of Sri Bhagavan. So we decided to construct an article, by stringing together extracts from it." The second incident where Bhagavan granted recognition to Janaki Maatha was in 1967, when Bhagavan's shrine was consecrated. In the Hindu culture, when consecrating a shrine, a saint was supposed to come and touch it without any prompting. The board

of trustees called me, saying, "We want Janaki Maatha to come and touch the *lingum* on Bhagavan's shrine." In 1967, seventeen years after Bhagavan dropped the body, Janaki Maatha was invited. She arrived, and when the consecration was taking place she touched the *lingum* and went into ecstasy. In utter devotion to Bhagavan, she called aloud, "Hey Ramanesa, Ramana Guru, Guru Ramana, appa, Father Ramana," and the whole audience of several thousand people went into ecstasy.

Who was this remarkable Janaki Maatha? She came from a wealthy family and was the favored child. When she was three years old, playing on the verandah of her father's big house in Thanjavur, an old emancipated *sadhu* stood outside the house and asked, "Child, I am very hungry, will you please give me some food?" There was a ceremony going on in the house. Janaki's mother was informed because Janaki had the tendency to give away whatever she had. Her mother said, "Do not give the *sadhu* any food until the *puja* is over." While they were busy doing the *puja,* Janaki went inside and brought out plate after plate of the delicacies they had prepared to offer to God. She had the *sadhu* sit and made him eat, delighting to see him eat with such relish. After he had eaten, he embraced the child and requested that she put out her tongue. He wrote something on her tongue with his *sigiroff* and Janaki went into quivers of joy and ecstasy. After that the child was entirely different. She had two kinds of experiences, one purely psychic~~al~~ and the other spiritual. The psychic experience as that from that moment onward, she had miraculous *kundalini* powers. The spiritual experience was that the child who had been so playful became withdrawn and introspective. She was no longer interested in child's play. After that, her aspirations were Godward; her character, generous and saintly. People recognized a mystical quality in her. In a Hindu family, a girl is expected

to marry by the age of eleven. While Janaki's family was pressing her to get married, this child was instead becoming more spiritual and psychic. She did not want to have a conjugal relationship and was rejecting all this, much to her parents' displeasure. She had an elder sister. Two daughters had died suddenly. In Hindu families, if you are the younger sister and your elder sister dies, the younger sister will be married to the widower. They approached her, and she had no hesitation. When I asked her, "Why did you marry?" She replied, "I love children."

Janaki's husband, Ganapathy Iyer was a doctor, much older than she. He was being transferred from one town to another. Fortunately he was transferred to Tiruvannamalai, by which time she was longing to have a Guru. Although she could have a vision of any God or Goddess, there was no fulfillment for her in visions that came and went. She was longing for some ultimate spiritual fulfillment. Her only solace was that she remembered a verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* where Lord Krishna declares to Arjuna, "To him who worships me with loving devotion, and whose action is without desire or motive, if he is in tune with his *Swadharma* [allotted position and duty in life], I reveal myself through the Grace of a Guru."

So she was waiting for a Guru, and when her husband was transferred to Tiruvannamalai in 1935, she had only that longing. Bhagavan resolved it by just one phrase, "Leave the body to your husband and spirituality to me." Repeated visits to Guru Ramana hastened her spiritual perfection, which was very essential. It is not just one experience and then you are left free. It is after the genuine experience that you have the responsibility to yourself to continue having contact

with the same still silence, the Self. Janaki Maatha was constantly in contact with Bhagavan, as she herself shares:

"Bhagavan's presence influenced me experience the superconscious state wherein all the dualities welled up in the mind, only to be absorbed in the great silence. The external world appeared to be a myth and an empty dream. The only reality being the silence, within the all-pervading Self, the successive waves of latent tendencies accrued in the chain of prior births were totally obliterated, and at last, all the diverse manifestations of the one sank into the void, and the transcendental Self alone shone." When she had this experience in the presence of Bhagavan, she would be absorbed into *Samadhi* for three to four hours. The day came when her husband was transferred and she had to leave. Reluctant to depart from the presence of Bhagavan, she cried bitterly. Bhagavan granted her a look of compassion and tender love, repeating his assurance, "I am always with you." You will see this assurance of Bhagavan in almost all the sages, which means it applies to you and to me also.

As if in recognition of Bhagavan's assurance, "I am always with you," Janaki Maatha, who settled in Tanjore in 1946, was leading a spiritual life and also guiding aspirants. She was constantly having contact with the Guru, Bhagavan Ramana. Once, she sent a walking stick with a silver knob and a pair of wooden slippers with silver decor through Natarajan, her disciple, who later became Sadhu Om Swami. Bhagavan received them both, touched them, and then said, "I shall touch them and give them back. Let Janaki Maatha have them in her *puja*." So saying, Bhagavan inspected them and then offered them back. Janaki Maatha

revered them daily, and the Holy feet of the Satguru guided her to the Heart, *Arunachala.*

In the ritual of *puja,* as we have explained in one of the previous encounters, the sacred feet of the Guru are regarded as one's own Heart. Divinity is not outside. Like beauty, it is in the eye of the beholder. In 1967, when I met Janaki Maatha during this celebration, I knew she was a saint, so I put my head on her feet and said, "Janaki Maatha, please bless me." These are her words to me, which can also be applied to each one of us, as there is no personal possession in spirituality: "Ganesan, hold onto the two Holy feet of Satguru Ramana, the savior of all suffering souls. Putting his teaching into daily practice is holding his sacred feet. There are no sacred feet, per se, but practicing daily is truly anchoring one's Self in *Arunachala.* They should ever be embedded in your Heart-*Hrydaya.* Heart is Ramana." We are ever basking in her blessings

Eleanor Pauline Noye

I will begin with my own part of the story. I clearly remember the day when I was three years old and went to Bhagavan to prostrate before him. When I got up, Bhagavan said: "Ganesa, go! Your Noye is seated there. Sit on her lap." With great joy I ran toward an elderly Western lady and positioned myself happily on her lap.

She was Eleanor Pauline Noye. This is not the only incident where I was gracefully linked with her. There was another incident in the same year, almost at the same time. At lunch time, I went into the dining hall, where Bhagavan and the devotees were seated for lunch. I went straight to Eleanor Pauline Noye and insisted that I eat only from her leaf plate. The lady cooks were all orthodox people and most of the *Ashram* guests were all orthodox Brahmins. It is abhorrent for a Brahmin child to take food from the leaf plate of a Westerner, especially a woman. Brahmins came running and lifted me up to save me from the so-called pollution. I was adamant and threw a tantrum, creating a scene. Bhagavan's attention was drawn, and he comprehended the whole drama with a single look. With a cool and calm tone, he told the lady cooks: "Bring a plate of food, put a spoon into it, and show it to the child. He will come along with you. His insistence is not to eat from her plate. Ganesan has never seen anybody eat with a spoon; he too wants to eat with a spoon!" As the only Westerner staying at the Ashram at that time, Eleanor Pauline Noye was indeed eating with a spoon. I followed the cooks like

a puppy. Bhagavan looked at me and remarked: "See! Your wish is fulfilled!" He turned to the cooks and others and said: "Now, your problem is also solved!"

Bhagavan drew aspirants from all sectors of humanity. In every one of my sharings with yearning aspirants, I would pose a question, "How did you come to *Arunachala,* and how did you come to know of Bhagavan?" They would generally reply, "Somebody gave me an article about *Arunachala*, so I came here." I would ask, "You read so many articles. Does this mean that you go to all the places that you read about in those articles? Why have you come to *Arunachala*?"

They would then say, "Now I understand. It is not the printed words that brought me here but, truly, a *Higher Power*. One may say that it was Bhagavan that called me here." Every devotee who has been attracted to Bhagavan has been brought here by the same *Shakti*, Thy Will, Father, or *Higher Power*. The same *Higher Power* drew Bhagavan, Himself, to silent *Arunachala*! Surrender and the *Leela* of the Holy Spirit will place you in the heart of the infinite Father.

In 1939, Mrs. Noye was living in California with her twin sister. She had a crisis in her life. She suffered mental anguish and as a result, had many sleepless nights. The ache was so intense that even though she was poor, she decided to travel around the world on a ship. Due to her very unfortunate health condition, her doctor advised her not to go. "Why do you insist on traveling?" The doctor asked her. She then revealed the Truth, "I want to know my Self."

Her ship's destination was Calcutta, but when it docked at Chennai, for no known reason, she decided to get off. She took a room in Hotel Connemara but did not stay there. The staff there advised her to go to a hill station, Kodaikannal. They arranged for a taxi. She reached Kodaikannal the same day and liked it. She asked some of the staff if there were any Seers or Saints living nearby. One of them immediately replied, "Yes! There is! Ramana Maharshi of *Arunachala*! He is the greatest Seer in India!" The answer came not from an aspirant, not from a scholar, but from a staff person working in the hotel. Those of us who have been to India are aware of how people work in Indian hotels. It was remarkable that a hotel staff member would mention Ramana Maharshi of *Arunachala*, because in 1939, he was not that well known. Yet an alert desk clerk said, "The Maharshi is the greatest Seer."

Immediately Mrs. Noye left for *Arunachala*. When she arrived at the *Ashram*, my grandfather, Niranjanananda Swami, welcomed her with great joy, and she was taken directly to Bhagavan. This is what she wrote: "I felt the atmosphere was filled with Bhagavan's purity and blessedness. One feels the breath of the Divine in the Sage's presence. When he smiled, it felt as though the gates of the Divine were thrown open. I have never seen eyes more alight with Divine illumination. He greeted me very tenderly and made some enquiries about me, which put me at ease. His look of love and compassion made a benediction that went straight to my Heart. He knew how much I needed him. I was immediately drawn to him. His greatness and kindness was all-embracing. His silent influence of love and light was more potent than words can ever be. Everyone who comes to him is blessed. The inner peace, which is his abode, is felt by all."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

From that moment until she took leave of Bhagavan a year later, her eyes barely stopped shedding tears. So, too, was Bhagavan's attention on her continuously and uninterruptedly. The moment she arrived in his presence, he would immediately turn his attention on Mrs. Noye—it was unbelievable, but true. Such a wonderful relationship was unique in the pages of the book of Bhagavan's life. Her melting tears of joy were matchlessly phenomenal, so all the old devotees loved her, too. In the beginning her tears were due to anguish, sorrow and suffering but later on, again only tears, but tears of inexplicable joy and spiritual fulfillment. The amazing fact was that after she met Bhagavan, she slept soundly for the first time in many years. She had been taking sleeping pills to sleep, which she was able to discontinue taking from then on. She attributed it to the direct blessings of Bhagavan on her body. When I asked her, "How is it that you could stop taking medicines?" She quoted from Bhagavan's own words, saying, "I received the *medicine of all medicines*—the unfailing Grace of Bhagavan." Bhagavan, in one of his poems on *Arunachala*, addresses *Arunachala* as "the medicine of all medicines!"

She felt that she had to travel and see all of India. Thus, she traveled to Kashmir and other places, and when she reached the Calcutta shipyard—her port of departure for further destinations—she suddenly felt the pull of a powerful influence that changed her plan and she rushed back to Arunachala. Bhagavan welcomed her with a glorious smile. Of her second stay, Mrs. Noye picturesquely describes her experience: "My love blossomed into deep devotion, and I was filled with ineffaceable peace. The things [worldly objects] which had seemed so vital before were no longer of any importance. I could see things in their correct perspective. The heartaches of yesterday and the thoughts

of tomorrow faded into insignificance and finally, into complete oblivion."

She remained there for eight more months. One day she picked a rose. A devotee asked her, "What is it?" "This is a rose." "What a beautiful rose!" Mrs. Noye said, "Yes, this is for Bhagavan." But when she entered the hall, she didn't have enough courage to offer it directly to Bhagavan. In front of Bhagavan, there was a footstool; she placed the rose on it. Bhagavan looked at her and asked her, "What is that?" "It is only a rose, Bhagavan." 'Will you give it to me?" She came and gave it to him. Bhagavan touched it to his eyes, his head and his Heart. On seeing that simple splendor, she felt immediately: "Oh Bhagavan! May you always be my Father! May you always be my Mother! May you be my God! May I always be your child?" The day of her departure came. On that day she stood in front of Bhagavan, crying profusely. Bhagavan assured her, "I am always with you, Noye."

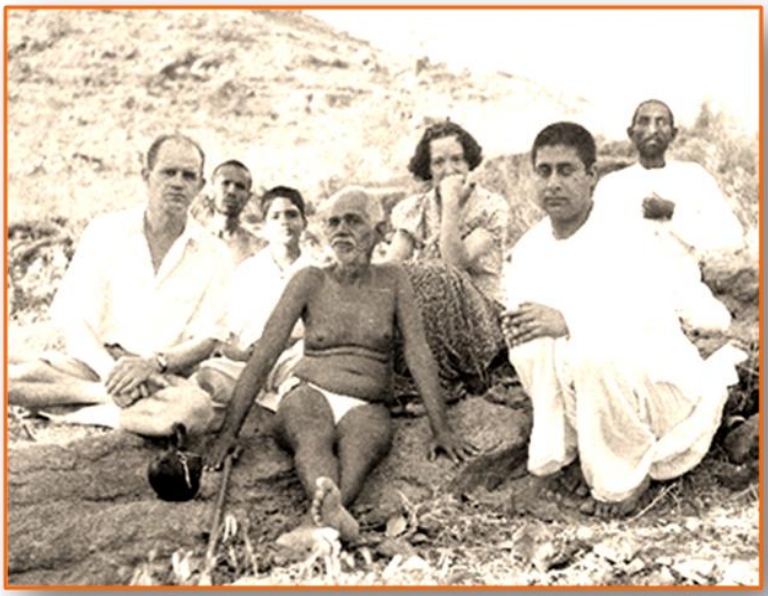
When she went back to her home in America, she stayed in touch with Bhagavan through correspondence. I want to share this—Mrs. Noye would write four letters: one addressed to Bhagavan, one to Niranjanananda Swami, one to Krishnaswami, Bhagavan's attendant who was very kind to her, and the fourth one for me. Every time a letter arrived from Mrs. Noye, Bhagavan was moved to tears while reading it because she would write in her letter, "Bhagavan! I am writing this letter to you with tears rolling down my cheeks." In those days, it was very rare for Indians to travel to America. Whenever someone went to America, Bhagavan instructed them, "Go and meet Noye."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Finally, she wrote a letter, when Bhagavan was no more, in which she said: 'Bhagavan! You have taken me to your Heart. I am in your Heart.'

This great lady who came to Bhagavan with so much anguish, suffering and sorrow, successfully completed her spiritual journey in the enfoldment of Bhagavan's Grace, Arunachala's Peace!

ELEANOR NOYE BEHIND BHAGAVAN



AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

THE HUMBLE HUMAN FORM OF BHAGAVAN

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Suri Nagamma

A memorable day, all over India, is when people celebrate the 'Festival for Bulls and Cows'. They decorate the bulls and worship the cows. That particular morning, I went straight to the shrine of Cow Lakshmi, so picturesquely situated in between the Holy Hill and the Old Hall of Sri Bhagavan. I offered prayers, remembering Lakshmi's last day when Bhagavan sat next to her, putting his hands on her and easing her into repose, thus allowing her to remain peaceful. I was standing next to Bhagavan on that day in 1948. After Bhagavan left, the cow remained absolutely withdrawn, with closed eyes, for more than half an hour. It was Suri Nagamma who took the head of Cow Lakshmi on her lap. Cow Lakshmi breathed her last, thus comforted on Suri Nagamma's lap. It was she who reported the Cow's passing to Bhagavan. The next year, in 1949, was the first Memorial Day for Cow Lakshmi. For some reason, Suri Nagamma had to go away to her native village and could not come exactly on time, even though she knew the date of the anniversary.

Bhagavan was asking the attendants, "Has Nagamma arrived? Tomorrow is Cow Laksmi's anniversary day. Has Nagamma been informed?" The next day, too, Bhagavan made the same enquiry, "Has Nagamma arrived?" She did arrive, but a little late. Nagamma went straight to Cow Laksmi's shrine, and only afterwards, went to Bhagavan. The first question Bhagavan asked her was, "Did you go to Laksmi's

shrine?" I recollected all this when I was standing in front of the shrine of Cow Lakshmi. The "triangle" of Sri Bhagavan, Cow Lakshmi and Suri Nagamma is ever indelibly inscribed in my heart!

A hundred years ago in India, children were married at a very young age, even as young as two or three. Most of these children were under-nourished, and as a result, the child mortality rate was very high. If the female child died it was kept quiet, and when the boy to whom she was married grew up, he would be married again. However, if it were the male child who died, the girl would have to remain as a widow for the rest of her life. The elders of the house would shave her head and she would not be allowed to dress in finer clothes. She could not participate in any functions or even move out of the house. Widows were shunned by society. Nevertheless, if one were to search for the positive in all of this apparent cruelty, it is that the child would be in the safest position if she wanted to be a spiritual seeker, saved from society, free from the temptations of the senses and mostly isolated. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa once said, "I would like to be born in my next birth as a child widow. When you are a child widow you are saved from all forms of temptation, and you are given exclusive time to dedicate to yourself. There are no attractions and distractions, so one could apply all of one's time to spiritual *sadhana*."

Suri Nagamma was born in an affluent family, but lost both of her parents at a young age. Subsequently she was married, but lost her husband within twelve years of marriage. She had great ambitions to be a most dutiful wife, like Mother Sita, so when her husband passed away it was an immense shock to her. For three years she shut herself in her home and rarely saw anyone. In addition, she was totally malnourished.

In spite of this entire calamity, whenever someone would come and speak, or sing to her about sages and saints, she felt that there was some relief amidst the suffering. She started to read about saints in order to fulfill, at least mentally, the longing to associate with them. This was the first seed for Nagamma to flower, not just into a beautiful tree, but into a garden full of flowers.

Since she was not permitted to attend school, Nagamma learned Telugu, her mother tongue, on her own. She made great efforts to study the Indian epics such as *Ramayana, Mahabharata* and *Srimad Bhagavatam*. She was particularly attracted to the chapter in the *Bhagavatam* wherein the Lord appears as the child, *Kapila,* and teaches his mother, *Devahuti,* how to realize the Self. This was a turning point in Nagamma's life and she began to read other spiritual texts as well, all the while nursing a longing to meet and serve a genuine sage. Once, she had a beautiful dream in which a *Siddha Purusha* resembling *Dakshinamurthi* appeared with a brilliant light surrounding him. She wanted to rise and prostrate to him, but she woke up. Disappointed, her longing to meet and serve a holy sage increased.

Nagamma had three brothers, one a lawyer and the other a banker. The youngest brother was an invalid and it fell on Nagamma to care for him. Until 1923, she took care of this brother. For twenty-five years she suffered inwardly, as she longed to be a spiritual seeker but society had tied her down. When her brother died, her family did not want her to live alone in the village, and so she moved to the city of Vijayawada to live with her lawyer brother. This move was a blessing in disguise, as in the city she could come in contact with *sadhakas* and also gain access to more spiritual texts in Telugu.

In 1949, Nagamma's brother, D.S. Sastri, who later went on to translate her Telugu books into English, wrote a letter to her saying that during his business travels he visited *Arunachala* and had the opportunity to meet the authentic sage, Ramana Maharshi, and that from then on, his whole life had been transformed and transcended. He told her that she should also go to visit him and stay for a while, and he whole-heartedly offered his support both emotionally and financially. Nagamma was skeptical about this "strange *sadhu*", but did not want to disobey her brother. She arrived at *Ramanashram* in July, 1941. From her very first *Darshan*, Nagamma was spellbound and awestruck. Bhagavan looked intently at and through her, and she was overwhelmed by an inexplicable feeling of peace. She realized that the *siddha purusha* that she saw in her dreams thirty years ago was Ramana Maharshi. Sensing her wonder, Bhagavan smiled at her. Nagamma felt that she was face-to-face with God and decided that *Arunachala* would be her permanent home.

Since Nagamma had not come prepared to be a permanent resident of Tiruvannamalai, she had to return to her native village to gather what she needed. When she went to take leave of Bhagavan she cried, as she did not want to go away from him. Bhagavan replied, "I am always with you. Wherever you go, whatever you do, I am always with you." Nagamma became ecstatic and from then onward she saw Bhagavan in everything. She was filled with joy! Even her relatives felt that all these years Nagamma had been a sorrow-stricken figure, and now, for the first time, they could see a being full of happiness.

FEEDING THE POOR AT RAMANASHRAM

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Within three months Nagamma returned to *Arunachala*, as she could not bear to be separated from Bhagavan any longer. She stayed in town, as there were no residential places near the Ashram and women could not stay there after sunset. Fortunately, she was able to rent a house next to Echammal, who would eat every day only after serving Bhagavan first. Living next to this saintly woman proved to be great *Satsang* for Nagamma, who was encouraged by Echammal to speak freely with Bhagavan. In fact, Echammal specifically told her that when she spoke to Bhagavan, she should ask for nothing less than Self-Realization! One day, Nagamma prostrated to Bhagavan and with a trembling voice said, "Bhagavan, please help me to attain *mukti*." Bhagavan, in all his compassion, turned to her and nodded his head in agreement. This response of Bhagavan's was very strange, as his usual response to this question was, "Who wants this mukti? Who is asking this question?" or he would simply keep quiet. When Nagamma told Echammal about this, Echammal replied, "What a fortunate woman you are—Bhagavan has already given you *abhaiyam* (protection)!" Nagamma asked her what she meant by that, and Echammal explained that from now on, there would be no more births or deaths for Nagammal. "Bhagavan has taken you over. There is no more fear for you, and that is liberation!"

Bhagavan focused all of his attention on Nagamma. Like a good student, Nagamma also plunged into Bhagavan's teaching of Self-enquiry. At times she was able to go deep into meditation, but she also confessed that thoughts or illusions would sometimes cloud her meditations. "Particularly when I was seated in front of Bhagavan and meditating with closed eyes, these thoughts would cloud me, and when I would open my eyes Bhagavan would be focusing his attention on me."

As she poetically states, "Bhagavan scared all my thoughts away from me."

Nagamma was a gifted poet and talented writer. In those days, women would not approach Bhagavan and converse freely with him, though Bhagavan himself did not impose any such restrictions. Especially on crowded days, this was even more the case, so on these instances, Nagamma would send a note to Bhagavan expressing her occasional doubts regarding meditation. Bhagavan would admonish her, "Why do you take notice of these doubts? Who notices them? By noticing them they strengthen. Plunge within!" In her poetic language Nagamma would say, "Every time Bhagavan looked at me, it enriched my inner striving. He steadied it without any frills. It was like water flowing onto dry land, allowing it to flower and blossom. My spiritual life was like that."

The following incident, which Suri Nagamma recounted to me, involves *Amrita Nadi* (the immortal nerve), which is extolled by some Yogic texts and Hindu scriptures in the same manner as *Kundalini*. In 1942, a Tamil scholar began discussions with Bhagavan about the *Amrita Nadi*, which is a psychic imagination that there is a nerve equivalent to Self-realization. Bhagavan seemed very interested in the discussion and replied to all of the pundit's questions, describing in detail the function of the *Amrita Nadi*. Hearing all of this, Nagamma felt very inadequate as she did not know anything about it. After the pundit left, she approached Bhagavan and asked him about the *Amrita Nadi*, but before she could finish her sentence Bhagavan abruptly replied, "Why do you worry about all this?" She quietly said, "Bhagavan, you have been discussing this for the last four days, so I thought I should also learn

something about it through you." Bhagavan said, "The pundit was asking me what is written in the scriptures and so I was giving him suitable replies. Why do you bother about all that? It is enough if you look into yourself as to who you are." Bhagavan smiled compassionately at her.

Two or three days later there was again a discussion about the *Amrita Nadi,* and this time, Bhagavan stated that *Amrita Nadi* was only a notion, a mere concept. Nagamma interjected and asked Bhagavan if consequently, all matters relating to *Amrita Nadi* were also concepts. Bhagavan replied with great emphasis, "Yes, what else is it? If it is not a mere notion, what else is it? If the body itself is a notion, will that not be a notion as well?" Then Bhagavan looked at Nagamma with great compassion and at that moment, all of her lingering doubts were cleared. By narrating this incident, Nagamma has stressed the importance of going back to the Source when spiritual doubts arise.

Each devotee possesses a different nature that is inborn and Bhagavan always took this into consideration when nurturing an aspirant. This inborn nature is not an obstacle to spiritual *sadhana*—it is only thoughts which are the obstacles. Bhagavan guided Suri Nagamma throughout her spiritual journey based on her innate nature, which was that of a poet or writer. After Nagamma came to Bhagavan and realized that he would be her Guru, the verses, songs and poems started to pour out extemporaneously. At first, she was shy to present these to Bhagavan, but another Telugu lady began singing these to him and Bhagavan appreciated them immensely. A few days later, after hearing about Bhagavan's words of encouragement from an attendant, Nagamma placed a few more verses before Bhagavan, who provided her with a

welcoming smile. He said, "These are four verses written as a prayer to me. The second verse is amusing. After I left *Skandashram* and settled down here, I had no monkeys to serve me. So Nagamma pleads with me saying, why not accept my mind which is a monkey for doing service to you? Tie it down or chastise it, but see that it does service to you. That is the idea. Adi Shankara in "*Sivananda Lahiri*" wrote a very similar verse: O Shiva! You are a *Bhikshu* (beggar). Why not tie down my mind, known to be a monkey to a stick, and go about begging? You will get alms in abundance." Bhagavan went on encouragingly to say that there was a great Telugu scholar who came to the *Ashram* and told Bhagavan that he had many spiritual articles by Nagamma in various Telugu journals. Bhagavan agreed with the scholar and said that Nagamma was indeed donating spiritual knowledge to the public by contributing articles to journals, magazines and newspapers. What wonderful support for Nagamma!

One day Bhagavan was in the hall when he heard someone saying that there was no one to manage the Telugu manuscripts. Bhagavan immediately suggested that Nagamma, being proficient in Telugu, could write them down. When the large bound notebook arrived, Bhagavan himself handed it to her. From then on she became the official Telugu writer, copier, and custodian of the writings in Telugu. In due course, Nagamma's relatives, friends and Telugu-speaking devotees suggested that she record her conversations with Bhagavan, since they did not have the good fortune to be in close proximity to Bhagavan as she did. Nagamma was reluctant to do so, but her well-wishers were insistent. When her brother, D.S. Sastri, came to visit the *Ashram*, he gave her a big notepad and requested her to send him letters, detailing the happenings around Bhagavan. She started writing the letters from

inspiration. After four of these letters were completed she had an urge to read them in the presence of Bhagavan, who appreciated them very much. It was these letters that were compiled in the book, "*Letters from Sri Ramanashram*." This book is perfect for devotees, as it brings out Bhagavan as a human being, as well as bringing out his greatness as a Master.

Nagamma finished the first volume of "*Letters*…", and began the process of writing the second volume. One day some members of the office staff came and told her not to write any more letters. Not only this, but whatever she had previously written, that was also to be handed over to the management. Nagamma was utterly dejected, but felt that she should obey. However, before handing the manuscripts over to the office, she took them and placed them before Bhagavan. With tears streaming down her face she asked Bhagavan to do what he liked with them. Bhagavan called Sri Rajagopal Iyer and asked him to give them to the office. Hearing about this, great devotees such as Muruganar, Kunju Swami, Viswanatha Swami and others were very upset that Nagamma would not be continuing to write. In spite of their goading for her to proceed, Nagamma refused to oblige. Kunju Swami went to her one day and explained the reason for the management's harsh stance. He said, "You must understand, Nagamma, that there are sufficient reasons for the *Ashram* authorities to ask you to stop writing. Sometime back when Paul Brunton, Munagala Venkataramaih, and others wrote likewise, some people copied their works and published the pieces under their own names. Hence, there is some meaning behind the office preventing you from writing. You have no mercenary intentions, do you? Why then do you hesitate? Even if it is banned for the time being, this writing of letters, if resumed, may be of great benefit to future generations. Is it

not a common experience for obstacles to be encountered in doing any good work? You should not stop writing just because of these obstacles."

Nagamma was still not convinced, so she consulted two great Telugu scholars, Chintadikshatulu and Sitarama Sastri, who, like Kunju Swami, were full of encouragement. In fact, Sitarama Sastri pointed out that Nagamma had an innate ability to understand the inner meaning of Bhagavan's words which many other devotees could not, and so it was her duty to share this with the rest of humanity. Thus, feeling reassured by these words, Nagamma resumed writing. But every time the office would ask her if she was writing, she would lie and deny it. One day, unable to bear the guilt of dishonesty any longer, she felt she needed to go and report this to Bhagavan. When she entered the hall, Bhagavan was narrating an incident to some devotees about his childhood in Madurai, and how he had lied to his aunt when he had left home. He spotted Nagamma, and looking at her continued, "It is not that we speak the lie, but some force makes us say so. Even Adi Shankara took to *sanyasa* only after telling a lie to his mother." This permanently washed away any hesitation left in her, and the result is "*Letters from Ramanashram*."

During Bhagavan's later days, every year during the festival of *Ugadi* (Telugu New Year), Nagamma had made a tradition of presenting Bhagavan with a new loincloth the evening before for him to wear on New Year day. In 1950, which was to be Bhagavan's last year, Nagamma went to give Bhagavan the loincloth, but was uncertain as to whether it would be accepted since Bhagavan was suffering and very weak. However, Bhagavan asked his attendant to specially set it aside so

that he could wear it the next day. The following morning, when Nagamma went to see Bhagavan, he asked if it was *Ugadi* day, and also if it was *Vrikriti*. That was the last conversation between Nagamma and Bhagavan.

On Bhagavan's last day, Nagamma, like the other devotees, had to stand in line to have her last *Darshan* with him. Finally able to catch a glimpse, she saw him with eyes closed, and began to cry out uncontrollably for him to bless her. Bhagavan opened his eyes, and through them seemed to plead, "Please allow me to go. This body is suffering." With a heavy heart, and weeping inconsolably, Nagamma consented. Bhagavan smiled benignly.

After Bhagavan dropped the body, Nagamma returned to her native town. I was fortunate enough to bring her back to the *Ashram* in 1980 to stay, and she wrote her reminiscences, "*My Life at Ramanashram*", originally written in Telugu and translated by her brother into English. Nagamma became ill and her relatives took her home. She was removed to Bangalore and hospitalized there.

I could not go there to take care of this "gem of an old devotee" of our Master. However, I requested my very close friend, A.R. Natarajan, to attend to her, which he did very well. When Suri Nagamma passed away in 1980 at Bangalore, under my requests and representing *Ramanashram*, A.R. Natarajan attended to the last rites, including carrying the body to the burial ground, for which I will ever be grateful to him. Aspirants all over the world will remember her for the benefit they derived from her written works.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

I am indebted to Suri Nagamma and in deep reverence for taking care of Cow Lakshmi in her last moments. Cow Lakshmi was the pet animal child of Bhagavan, just as, perhaps, Suri Nagamma was his pet human child. I feel a compelling necessity to remember Cow Lakshmi while sharing about Suri Nagamma. Though Bhagavan treated all forms of animal bodies with equal love, kindness and grace, it is no exaggeration if I say Cow Lakshmi, a non-human yet sentient being, did get the fullest emancipation to the high state of perfect inner equilibrium. Undoubtedly, Cow Lakshmi was the most fortunate saintly being, for Bhagavan felt at-one-ment with her and acknowledged her liberation by his touch in her last moments, just as a few decades back he did with his mother, Alagammal, at *Skandashram*.

Suri Nagamma has given a vivid description: "When Bhagavan came to the cow-shed on the last day of Cow Lakshmi, he went straight to the sick Lakshmi and sat on the hay by her side. Then, slowly he lifted her head with both hands and placed it on his thighs. He gently passed his one hand over her face and throat. Then placing his left hand on the head, he began pressing with the fingers of the right hand from her throat down to her heart. Lakshmi remained calm, devoid of all bonds to this world and the pain in her body, as though she was in *Samadhi*."

As reported earlier, after Nagamma informed Bhagavan of the death of Lakshmi, Bhagavan came to the place and lifted her head in both hands, saying, "Lakshmi! Lakshmi!" Turning to the devotees he said, "Because of her, our family has grown to this extent." In 1926, she came as a calf and Bhagavan named her "Lakshmi". She was very much attached to Bhagavan. The cow-shed was built only after her arrival, paving the way for the Ashram's growth to plenty and prosperity. Bhagavan's voice was

choked with emotion. He further added, "Did you notice her right ear is up?" (In the case of people who die in Kashi, it is said that Lord Shiva will whisper in the right ear. Thus, every dead body in Kashi is blessed by Lord Shiva with Liberation.) Bhagavan's indication that Laksmi's right ear was up has remarkable significance. It was the proof of her Liberation. In addition, Lakshmi's tomb was constructed under Bhagavan's guidance and personal supervision, following the injunctions referred to in the ancient text, '*Tirumandiram*', wherein details are given as to how the body of a realized being should be interred into a tomb. Bhagavan wrote a verse, an epithet in Tamil, confirming that Lakshmi attained '*Mukti*'. Later, when Devaraja Mudaliar asked Bhagavan whether he had used the word '*Mukti*' to indicate her death, Bhagavan firmly said that the verse confirmed her final spiritual emancipation.

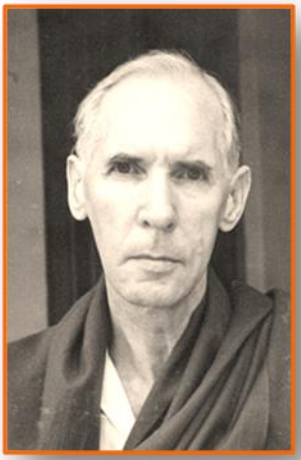
Cow Lakshmi and Suri Nagamma are absorbed in Bhagavan Ramana.

Once, when someone requested, "Bhagavan, I want your Grace," the silent sage replied, "What is, IS only Grace."

V. GANESAN

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Arthur Osborne



We are now going to share about a person whom I want to literally exaggerate in terms of praises and adorations. We are going to share about Arthur Osborne, who came to Ramana Maharshi very late in 1945. He stayed with the Master for five years. Without any hesitation I humbly declare that Arthur Osborne was and is the spiritual collaborator of Bhagavan Ramana. Just as Swami Vivekananda was the collaborator for Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Arthur Osborne was undoubtedly the spiritual collaborator for our beloved Master Bhagavan Ramana.

Bhagavan's teaching emerged from and was couched in the Hindu mode or motif. Though his spiritual message was destined for all of humanity, Arthur Osborne was the British voice, a Western voice, or you could even call him the modern voice, to carry on and broaden Bhagavan's direct teaching of *Atma Vichara—Self-Enquiry* throughout humanity. We are going to share how Bhagavan attracted him, and how he ripened in that particular, single direct teaching of *Self-Enquiry* during Bhagavan's physical existence.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Beauty and the Divine are always in the eye of the beholder. Bhagavan was a divine presence for those with eyes to see. In his Divine presence, every fiber in Osborne was transformed into spirituality. After Bhagavan dropped the body, it was Bhagavan who prompted Arthur Osborne to carry on this mission through dreams, as we are going to share. From childhood, Arthur Osborne was drawn to Bhagavan in his own mysterious, mystical but simple, natural and yet powerful way, for the unique purpose of sharing this direct teaching of Ramana's Path, *Self-Enquiry*.

Bhagavan attracted the aspirant and then bestowed on the aspirant the purity of love through his look. I am going to share with you, in this whole drama of Arthur Osborne and Ramana Maharshi, how I also had a significant part to play. I was not aware that I was being called. You will be surprised when we go through all this and I request you to please ponder it and evaluate, as there is no need for me to connect and explain things that are self-evident.

Arthur Osborne single-handedly shouldered the responsibility of upholding the direct teaching of Bhagavan through his own living and his brilliant writings. Arthur Osborne combined intellectual clarity, intuitional experiences, and the poetic ability to express what he had experienced. It was as though the direct teaching of Bhagavan was edified and simplified in the prism of this direct devotee's true understanding. Arthur Osborne offered to Bhagavan his complete devotion and attention, together with his many and varied skills. All this he shared without any reserve and without any thought of himself. I feel

uplifted over the privilege given to me, now, to sincerely venerate Arthur Osborne, who exudes a transparent presence of Bhagavan and is a primary Voice of Bhagavan.

I entered into *Ramanashram* in 1960, and who was there to welcome me under the *Illupai* tree? It was Arthur Osborne, standing there with open arms as if Bhagavan himself was receiving me, with a smile of appreciation and acceptance of my decision. You will be surprised to know that there were only ten people occupying the whole *Ashram* at that time. I had given up this material seeking mortal life and was ready to plunge into the reality of spiritual life. That one look, that one smile of Arthur Osborne influenced me to flower into total dedication to spiritual life. He said, "Welcome, Ganesan! We all knew that you would return here to your spiritual home. *Arunachala* is our home and Bhagavan is our mother. Ask *Arunachala*, ask our Master Bhagavan, only one boon: 'Reveal to me Self-realization.' Do not ask for mundane things, because he will certainly give whatever you ask. He is a great giver. If you ask for a wife, a house, property, power, and position, he would most assuredly give it to you in great measure, but if you ask for Self-realization only, then He will keep you here in *Arunachala*. His very being is Self-realization. Be happy!"

Who uttered these words? Not just an average person. Of course, all these things are true, but were uttered by one who had stayed here, unmoved from *Arunachala*, keeping *Arunachala* in his Heart. He had realized the Self and was established in it. These are glorious words and I request you to hold them in your Heart. Great men's Truthful words

endure forever throughout time, under all conditions. Stay in the state of *Arunachala*, the pure Self.

Arthur Osborne was born in London in 1906. His father was a school headmaster and his mother was a simple, pious woman who was interested in poetry and gardening. Osborne inherited these two traits from his mother. Growing up, he wanted to be a gardener, but his father enrolled him in Oxford, and he came out brilliantly, with ten gold medals. He fulfilled his parents' desires, but all his life, he remained a lover of poetry and gardening, as you will see. Most of his spiritual experiences, other than those that happened in the presence of Bhagavan, took place in the garden. From his childhood he sought for a purpose and a deeper meaning of life. He told me that even as a small boy, when other children were playing happily, he-felt that worldly living appeared meaningless. From childhood, he felt life as one single solitary whole. He had no support for this feeling and could not share it with anybody else. The words of Jesus Christ were his only support and crutch: "He who seeks shall find." He told me that this influenced his entire life as a seeker of Truth. He was thrilled when he came across the work of the French philosopher, Rene Guenon, *Being Is One.* Osborne immediately felt that this teaching was the Truth. His restlessness and discontent over the futility of worldly living fell off, with the realization that life has, after all, a spiritual meaning. This is what he said: "If being is One and there is no other, then, *who am I?* I cannot be any other than that One being. Therefore, to realize one's true being is to realize the identity with the absolute One being. This was the beginning of my quest, from which I never swerved or turned aside. This was even before knowing anything about Bhagavan."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

He went to Poland and met Lucia, fell in love with her and married. Both of them had similar aspirations in life, as she was also probing for the Truth. They were guided by Rene Guenon to another Guru who gave them a very rigorous practice of rituals and chanting incantations, which they were following very meticulously. During that time, Osborne, being a keen intellectual as well as an aspirant, studied and even practiced simultaneously, the tenets of Sufism, Buddhism, Christianity, and *Vedanta,* gaining mystical erudition in all of them. He was, thus, very well equipped. He had three children, Kitty, Adam, and Noona. He got a job at the University of Bangkok and took his family with him. He was in contact with Rene Guenon's group wherever he and his family went. Some of the members had sent a photograph of Ramana Maharshi and two books to Osborne in Bangkok. Of course, they warned him that Ramana Maharshi was not a Guru and did not give initiations; hence, he had no disciples. Both Osbornes were captivated by the picture of Bhagavan, which kindled in them a keen yearning to travel to India and meet Ramana Maharshi.

The Osbornes went first to Kashmir where they were met by David MacIver. He owned a cottage opposite to *Ramanashram*. After spending a few weeks there, Osborne had to go back to Bangkok. Fortunately, David invited Mrs. Osborne and the three children to go to Tiruvannamalai with him, because by the time Osborne returned to Bangkok, the Second World War had broken out, and he was arrested by the Japanese and put in jail for three-and-a-half years. Arthur Osborne's only solace was Bhagavan's picture and the two books that had been sent to him by Rene Guenon's group. When the Japanese came to arrest him at the university campus, he was prompted by an

inner urging to take only these three things, even though he had not taken Bhagavan as his guru, and they guided him while he was in prison. He did not even take his clothes or anything else. While there, he created and tended a very nice garden. His personality and his talks in prison drew many people to him, among them, Louis Hurst, who came to Bhagavan after the Second World War.

Far away in Tiruvannamalai, Mrs. Osborne had already had Bhagavan's *Darshan* by then. The moment she saw Bhagavan's eyes—Bhagavan bestowed a pointed look—she felt absolutely transformed. Bhagavan took care of Mrs. Osborne and the children and paid special attention to them. Mrs. Osborne was able to correspond with her husband in prison, writing to him about how Bhagavan's eyes had the innocence of a small child, together with the unfathomable wisdom and immense love of a sage. Meanwhile the children prayed to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, we are writing letters to our father but we do not know whether he is alive or not. Please keep him alive and bring him back soon." While Osborne was in prison, prominent British prisoners were sometimes taken away and executed. When the special force came to take Osborne, everyone knew that he was going to be shot. Osborne told me, "The last thing I looked at was Bhagavan's picture and the two books. When I was taken in front of the firing squad, I closed my eyes. I did not pray to Bhagavan, but Bhagavan's picture came to my mind and for some unknown reason, they released me and put me in a concentration camp."

While he was suffering there, his children were constantly praying to Bhagavan back in Tiruvannamalai for their father's safe return. Bhagavan never gave an answer until the war ended. The day Osborne was released, along with the first batch of forty prisoners, Bhagavan finally answered the prayers of Osborne's son, Adam, reassuring him, "Yes, your father is coming back." When he came to *Arunachala*, he was in a different mental state because of the torture in the concentration camp. Intellectuals were tortured to brainwash them. When Bhagavan was told about Osborne's imminent return by train, his attendant, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer, on seeing Bhagavan's concern, asked, "May I also go?" Bhagavan replied, "Yes, you also go." So Bhagavan's representative was there when Osborne was brought back to *Ramanashram*. The only person he could recognize in his weak mental condition was his wife, so she came crying to Bhagavan. Bhagavan told her, "Bring your husband morning and evening and have him sit where I can see him." This happened until he was completely all right, and even afterward. Osborne told me, "Bhagavan saw to it that I sat where he could see me. One day, when two or three people came and sat between me and Bhagavan, he asked them to sit elsewhere so that he could see me, which was very, very unusual for him."

Bhagavan did not reveal himself to Osborne on the very first day. Some days later, on a festive occasion, Bhagavan concentrated his attention on Osborne and the change came with all its immensity. This is how Osborne described it later in one of his books: "Sri Bhagavan sat up facing me and his luminous eyes pierced into me, penetrating intimately with an intensity which I cannot describe. There arose from within, a quietness, a depth of peace, and an indescribable lightness and happiness." What he told me in person was, "Two search lights came

into my body and then divinized every cell in it. That was the first initiation and the first realization." After this, Osborne began to understand what the grace and blessings of a guru could be. It was this *Darshan* by look that vitalized him and influenced him to follow Sri Bhagavan's teaching of *Self-Enquiry*, a quest for which his intellectual bent of mind was perfectly suited. Bhagavan poured his love and attention continuously on him. He was also very meticulous and regular in his practice, coming every morning and evening as he went deeper and deeper inward. He fully understood what Bhagavan meant by saying that the only function of the outer guru was to invoke and awaken the inner guru. He was again informed that Bhagavan was not a guru, and he never gave initiation or accepted disciples. He now felt that if Bhagavan was not the guru, then the word, "guru," had no meaning.

The constant practice of *Self-Enquiry* began to awaken in Osborne an awareness of the outward manifestation of the Self as Bhagavan, while simultaneously manifesting inwardly as the Self within. Osborne understood and said that the hollow theory that Bhagavan was not a guru had simply been evaporated by the full radiance of his grace. This initiation and its consequences changed the course of his life. He could no longer practice his earlier methods of *sadhana*. He was a little disturbed about this and sought Bhagavan's permission to drop them. Bhagavan immediately said, "Yes, all other methods only lead to *Self-Enquiry*."

Osborne was staying with Bhagavan when the British government announced that all released British prisoners of war in India would be accommodated in Britain with all comforts. The British High Commission sent letter after letter to the Osborne family about this, but they did not even show these letters to Bhagavan to ask him his opinion. They were certain that they did not want to leave Bhagavan and go anywhere else. When the last ship was to leave India for Britain, the British High Commissioner sent a telegram to alert them. Mrs. Osborne told me personally that she did not even feel like taking this telegram to Bhagavan, because it was already confirmed for them that Bhagavan was their sole refuge, and that there was no other worldly life than staying with Bhagavan.

Since he was a family man and had to earn a little money, he got a job in Chennai as an editor at a reputed daily newspaper, though he did not want to go. Before he left, one of his friends presented to him an oil portrait of Bhagavan. He brought it to Bhagavan, who took it into his own hands and said, "Osborne is taking *swami* with him." Osborne told me that the portrait looked at him with the love and compassion of a guru, and spoke to him more profoundly than all the other pictures of Bhagavan. Whenever he wanted to make a decision, he would first look at the portrait that adorned his room and only then decide. Every holiday and day off, he would rush back to Tiruvannamalai to Bhagavan and his family. When he came, Bhagavan would pay special attention to him. Once, when Bhagavan had already had his second operation on his arm, Osborne came unexpectedly in a friend's car. Bhagavan was taking rest on the dispensary verandah. Usually Bhagavan was discreet in showing outward signs of his grace, but this time, taken by surprise by

Osborne's unannounced visit, Bhagavan gave himself away. His face lit up with pleasure and love on seeing Osborne on the steps. He looked at him for quite a while, with indescribable tenderness and grace. Mrs. Osborne and A. Bose, who were standing immediately behind Osborne, felt that they had never seen Bhagavan look at anyone in quite the same way. Osborne himself felt transformed. The graciousness of Bhagavan's reception melted Osborne's heart and awoke a feeling of gratitude for receiving such a great reward for such a little effort. It reinforced even further the bond between this great disciple and his guru.

Bhagavan continued to bless Osborne to be deeply and steadily rooted within the heart. The purpose of the outer guru is to awaken the inner guru. On the fateful day when Bhagavan passed away, Osborne was there. It did not fill him with sorrow. Instead, it only plunged him within. He said he felt the presence of Bhagavan within him-- his grace more abundantly and his support more powerfully. He stayed at *Ramanashram*, constantly going to Bhagavan's shrine. One day, Bhagavan appeared to him in a dream. In the dream, Osborne was in the old hall, and Bhagavan asked him to come near the couch. Osborne went and knelt before Bhagavan, and Bhagavan put his hands on Osborne's head in blessing. At that moment, Osborne had a feeling that Bhagavan was asking him to write about his direct teaching. Osborne then wrote seven articles that were later brought out as a book entitled, *Arunachala Ramana*. Every one of us, every aspirant, would be wise to read this book. That was the beginning, and soon a cascade of books started coming from Arthur Osborne: *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge*, *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi, The Teachings of the Maharshi in His Own Words, The Incredible Sai Baba, Rhythm of History,*

Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism, Gautama the Buddha, The Question of Progress, and a few more.

After working in Chennai for some time, Osborne had to take a job in Calcutta in 1952. During holidays he would come rushing from Calcutta to stay in *Arunachala* at Bhagavan's shrine. Osborne had his second awakening in Calcutta. This is how he described it: "I was alone in my Calcutta room when I woke up and sat up in bed. I was just my Self, the beginning-less immutable Self, and I thought that nothing had changed. There was no excitement, no joy, or ecstasy. In the wholeness of simple being, there was the thought that it is impossible ever to be bored. The mind seemed like a dark screen which had obstructed consciousness and was now rolled up and pushed away. It is the mind that craves activity and feels bored when it does not get it. The Self is untouched by activity and abides in its pristine state of simple happiness. I do not know how long the experience lasted, but in any case, it was timeless and therefore eternal. Imperceptibly, the mind closed over again, but was less opaque, for a radiant happiness continued. The afterglow continued for several weeks, fading out only gradually."

When Osborne was in Calcutta, all of his friends were talking about the Sai Baba of Shirdi. He had read one or two articles about him. Some of his friends wanted him to write an article on Sai Baba, but he was reluctant to do so. That night, Bhagavan appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to write about Shirdi Sai Baba. When, in the dream, Osborne confessed that he did not know much about Sai Baba, Bhagavan instructed him to go to the shrine and that Sai Baba would

himself tell him what to write. Bhagavan specifically said, "Sai Baba should be known to the Western world, so you must write." This was the inspiration for him to go to Shirdi and write the book, *The Incredible Sai Baba*.

In 1958, he returned to Tiruvannamalai and never again left. From 1960 on, I had the unique privilege to be with Osborne almost constantly. It was purely Bhagavan's grace that we came together. Osborne was always very affectionate toward me. In the 1950s, when he wrote *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge,* there was a committee of seventeen members in the *Ashram* at that time who said that they would publish it. But at the last moment, they had to back out and he was therefore very disappointed. T. K. Sundaresa Iyer and I were there when Osborne came out after meeting with the committee. We told him that maybe Bhagavan wanted him to publish it outside of India so that it could reach a wider circle. Subsequently, he sent the manuscript to Rider & Co., London, who eagerly published it.

From 1956 onward, I knew that there was something great about Arthur Osborne. I was very close to him, and whenever I left the *Ashram* to find a job, Osborne would say, "I know for certain, Ganesan, that you will come back. Your place is in Bhagavan's abode." In 1963, there was a financial crisis in the *Ashram.* The *Ashram* was struggling. When I was working earlier in Mumbai, I learned that by bringing out a journal, one could raise funds by collecting advertisement revenues. I was handling the *Ashram* correspondence, along with T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, and many letters would come enquiring if the *Ashram* was still running, and if

Bhagavan's teaching was maintained there. I felt that if we started a yearly bulletin from the *Ashram,* it would serve the manifold purposes of giving information about the *Ashram*, as well as making the teachings available and raising funds by collecting advertisement revenues. Since Osborne was a brilliant writer and my close friend, I could ask him to correct the language and help produce the journal. With that thought, I went to Mr. Osborne's house and explained to him about the idea of a yearly bulletin and how it could bring financial benefit to the *Ashram* while also keeping devotees informed about the present workings of the *Ashram*. I sought Osborne's blessings and active cooperation. He listened with keen attention and at the end, held my hands and shed tears of joy. It was very surprising to me, as I had never seen him so deeply moved. He said, "Ganesan, you do not know what a blessing you have brought me today. A few weeks back I had a dream in which Bhagavan appeared. When I knelt before him he handed me a few copies of a magazine and said, "Take it." I understood that he wanted me to be an editor and I had to obey my master's commandment. But where would I fit in, in India? My elder brother was a reputed editor of the British magazine, *The Economist*. Was I to seek employment under him? I was pained at the thought of leaving *Arunachala*. But if that is how Bhagavan would have it, I was even prepared to leave *Arunachala*. Now I know what Bhagavan meant. What a joy!"

He continued with great enthusiasm, "You know, Ganesan, during the lifetime of Bhagavan and afterward, I was asked by many to run a journal for the *Ashram*. I repeatedly refused and said that Bhagavan's teaching was only meant for practice. It is also so precise and concise, one cannot write about it continuously in a journal, month after month.

I knew I disappointed many devotees, but I stood firm. Now, Bhagavan has commanded me to broaden his teaching of *Atma Vichara* through this magazine. So, Ganesan, we are going to start it." I was thrilled by his enthusiasm. Osborne himself decided the name of the journal: *The Mountain Path*. The *Mountain,* he said, represented *Arunachala,* and the *Path* represented Bhagavan's direct path of *Self-Enquiry*. I followed with the task of fixing the subscription fee. "We were completely at sea about it. Incredibly, the next day we received a money order of five rupees from an elder devotee, H. R. Chadda of Calcutta, who wrote that it was for the annual subscription for the *Ashram* journal. More details follow in my letter." Yes, Bhagavan had decided what the annual subscription should be, and we were happy that although the format of the magazine had not yet been decided, the subscription fee had already been fixed! A few days later, Chadda's letter arrived: "I had lost touch with the *Ashram*. Bhagavan, whom I met in the late thirties, is my guru, and he is still my All. The other day he appeared to me in a dream and showed me a journal, and I saw very clearly 'Rupees 5' written on the cover. I take it that there is an *Ashram* journal. Please enroll me as a subscriber." Next, another devotee, Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami, handed over a check for one hundred rupees for the first lifetime subscription. This is how *Mountain Path* started. Osborne and I became very close while collaborating on it. He worked very hard to collect articles, and he himself wrote most of them. My efforts to raise funds for the *Ashram* by collecting advertisement revenues were crowned with success.

The *satsang* I had with Arthur Osborne is filled with fond memories. He guided me more through his silent presence than through words. One day I went to him with a personal problem. I was harassed by a dream,

in which a black apparition descended and sat on my chest and throttled my throat. I was alone, I could not breathe, and I did not know what to do. I was neither afraid nor curious to know what it was. Its strangulating grip was tightening. I felt I could not breathe and that I was going to die when suddenly, "*Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaaya,"* started sounding repeatedly by itself from within my heart. To be honest, I never believed in *japa* or *mantra* in those days. This came of its own accord, "*Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaaya,*" obeisance to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. The black apparition disappeared and I woke up. I could not make out whether it was a dream, my imagination or reality. The next morning, I went quickly to Mr. Osborne and described the whole experience to him in the minutest detail. After listening carefully, he patted me on my back with a smile and said, "Ganesan, this is genuine spiritual experience. You are fortunate. You have been given the *mantra: Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaaya*. This is what they call *ajapa japa.* I shall tell you about my own experience."

"While Bhagavan was embodied, those who belonged to the circle of Rene Guenon were drawn to Sri Bhagavan like iron filings to a strong magnet. Among this group, David MacIver was fortunate to stay with Bhagavan under his guidance and translate into English the works of Sri Bhagavan, as well as works such as *Tripura Rahasiya, Advaita Bodha Deepika,* and other books recommended by Sri Bhagavan. Then, attracted by a yogi near Trivandrum, David took him as a guru and settled down there. David, who was very fond of me and my wife, felt very strongly that we should also become disciples of his guru. His contention was that for spiritual fulfillment a spiritual guru was absolutely essential. Since Bhagavan had never claimed to be a guru, we

should leave him and follow a guru who was prepared to accept us as disciples. There was a spate of correspondence between us regarding this, and all these letters from and to David MacIver were shown to Bhagavan without fail."

"My replies claiming Bhagavan as my only guru, and that if Bhagavan is not a guru, then the term *guru* has no meaning at all, were all approved by Bhagavan with a nod of his head. One day, I received an unpleasant letter from David, warning me of dire consequences if I did not immediately leave Ramana and go over to his guru. I had not yet shown the letter to Bhagavan, but I was terribly upset over it. I thought I might show it to him that evening. That afternoon, I was doing some weeding in the garden when suddenly; I heard a thudding sound behind me. Some animal-like presence jumped down from a tree and approached me from behind. In no time, it was on my back. It felt like a bear, as it had a lot of hair. It was holding onto me with its hind legs and gripping me around my chest with its hands from behind. For me, Ganesan, there was neither any curiosity to know what it was, nor any fear. There was just a calm detachment. Undisturbed, I continued with the weeding. Noticing my indifference, the animal started increasing its size and weight. Soon, I had to bend forward owing to the burden on my back. The weight became unbearable. But still I was undisturbed and felt no fear. Suddenly, it gripped my throat with its hairy hands and started choking me. I was becoming breathless as its grip tightened more and more. Even this did not produce in me a tinge of fear. I remained mentally fully alert and undisturbed. I felt I could breathe no more, the grip still continued to tighten, and without any trace of fear I felt I was going to die. Then the miracle took place. At the thought of death, I

heard within me the sound, *Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva.* Although I was not making the sound, something else within me was doing it. The intensity, volume and speed of the *japa* increased and it was a delightful experience to hear within a *japa* pronouncing itself, while at the same time being aware of the grip of death. As the *ajapa japa* continued, the grip on my neck started loosening and the size and weight of the animal grew less and less. Suddenly it jumped off from my back and started running back toward the tree. I could hear its steps rushing away as it climbed the tree and disappeared. Immediately, I returned to my normal senses while the *ajapa japa* continued uninterruptedly. The next day, when Bhagavan was returning from his stroll up on the hill, I met him and showed him the letter, narrating to him what had happened the previous evening without omitting a single detail. Bhagavan listened to me, and when I stopped, he said with his benign smile, 'That is all they can do. Everything is all right.' By "they," he must have meant the guru who was a past master in black magic who made David write me that threatening letter. Bhagavan is a *purna jnani*, a complete and perfect sage. When you come under the protection of a perfect *Satguru*, even a bad experience caused by black magic is a blessing in disguise. I thus had the good fortune of being initiated into the *ajapa japa* of *Arunachala Siva*, and you got the fortune of being initiated into the *ajapa japa* of *Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaaya."*

The closeness I enjoyed with Osborne was remarkable, and we continued successfully collaborating on *The Mountain Path*. It was fast becoming a reputed, spiritual journal. It brought erudite aspirants–such as Douglas Harding and Wei Wu Wei into contact with Sri Bhagavan's teaching, and subsequently to *Ramanashram*. Many reputed writers,

including Robert Linssen, Joel Goldsmith, Lama Anagarika Govinda, Harindranath Chattopadyaya, Dilip Kumar Roy, and Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan, wrote articles of wisdom in the journal. Osborne's remarkable ability in presenting Bhagavan's teaching of *Self-Enquiry* is clearly seen in his brilliant editorials, as well as the numerous articles he wrote under his various pseudonyms—Sagittarius, Abdullah Qutbuddin, Boddhichitta, Saidas, Sabbastian Qubbins, and A. Rao. He contributed articles on Christianity, Buddhism and Islam in each issue of the journal. When accused of using *The Mountain Path* for preaching Christianity and Islam, he explained calmly, "Ganesan, I am a staunch Christian and I still remain so. For some time, I was in love with Islam and went to the mosque along with other Muslims after being converted. I have studied Buddhism and stayed in Buddhavihara and I know Buddhism thoroughly. I therefore know the difficulties that Christians, Buddhists and Muslims have in practicing the teachings of Bhagavan's *Atma Vichara*. By such articles I am only building a bridge through which all can reach our beloved master and gain his guidance on his direct path of *Self-Enquiry*."

The Mountain Path was now well established and commanded respect and recognition from all over the world in spiritual circles. The main aim of starting an *Ashram* journal was more than fulfilled and a steady flow of new visitors, mostly young aspirants, came to the *Ashram*. Many projects like the completion of Sri Bhagavan's *samadhi* shrine, the meditation hall, the centenary celebrations and a number of guest houses became a reality, thanks largely to the good news spread through the pages of *The Mountain Path*. It helped to generate a flow of funds strengthening the activities of the *Ashram*.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

In 1968, I was introduced to a new dimension of Osborne's spirituality. I was going to Osborne's house at all times of the day, but for one week I had to be away. After I returned, when I went to his house I found him stretched on his bed reduced to "skin and bones," all in just one week's time. Then I noticed the change and the transformation in his face and I was wonderstruck. It glowed with a bright and beautiful aura. My inner voice told me, "Osborne has realized." This was his final realization. He opened his eyes and gave me a warm welcome with a lustrous look. He said, "Ganesan, I am saved. *The Mountain Path* will go on, do not worry." I sat next to him, overwhelmed with joy. I held his hand and sat gazing at his radiant face. I spent half an hour with him, then went home and announced to my mother, "*Amma,* Mr. Osborne is realized. Please go and see him. His face shines with light." She went to Osborne's house in the evening and confirmed what I had told her. Although Osborne's physical condition improved after a few days, he spoke to no one. His attention was totally drawn inward and he showed signs of interest only when Bhagavan or *Arunachala* were mentioned. Even *The Mountain Path*, his pet project, did not seem to interest him. It was like what St. John of the Cross had said, "There comes a time in the life of a spiritual aspirant when activity is taken away from him so that he can wholly go inward." I started telling all my friends about Osborne's change and urged them to go and see him. Some were skeptical and some were delighted. I took T. P. Ramachandra Iyer and a few others and they confirmed, "Thank you! Arthur Osborne is realized. It only proves that if one is sincere, Sri Bhagavan's grace will transform one here and now." Just before this, when I went and told Mrs. Osborne about it, she said, "Oh! He has only had a heat stroke." She did not know he had deep and complete Self-realization. Just before it happened, Osborne had called me and handed over nine full issues of

The Mountain Path, to last up to July 1970. Perhaps, knowing that he was to drop his body in May 1970, he edited all the nine journals before he had Self-realization. He was a *jnani* who was fully devoted to his *karma*. He completed his *karma* and simultaneously, was established in *Jnana.*

I was like a delighted child in the proximity of Osborne. My friends would pull my leg, "Do not carry it too far, this hero worship of Osborne." This did not matter to me because they did not know how I enjoyed his *Brahmin* state. I remembered what Osborne used to say, "At last, life has a meaning and a purpose. It is tremendously exhilarating to realize the Truth of One 's Self." His words had come true in his life and it was revealed to me to see that every word uttered by Bhagavan, and by every one of these old devotees, is absolutely true.

Just before he dropped his body, Bhagavan told his attendant, "*Santosam*," which means "thank-you." When Osborne was in Bangalore and his end was near, he could not speak at all. As a ritual farewell, Mrs. Osborne went around the prostrate body of her husband. Suddenly she heard Osborne's voice clearly, "Thank-you." Osborne's body was brought to Tiruvannamalai and interred in his garden. I went there all the time and I was heartbroken. The July 1970 issue was the first issue that I brought out without Mr. Osborne. He would place every issue that was brought out in Bhagavan's shrine, and only then would he himself go through it or give it to me and the others. That was the first issue when Osborne was not there. When I released it in front of Bhagavan's shrine I was weeping. That day, Osborne appeared to me in a dream. He said, "Ganesan, give me my journal." He then took this July 1970 issue, went through every page, and patted me in appreciation.

That was the closeness with which Osborne and I lived and worked together. Osborne lived the Master's teaching and attained the ultimate Truth of *Atma Sakshatkar*. His very first words to me when I returned to the *Ashram* in 1960 were, "Ask, but ask only for Self-realization and that will retain the state of *Arunachala*. *Arunachala* is 'That' within, which the Heart is."

I would like to share as a tribute to Arthur Osborne, some of his brilliant writings:

It is tremendously exhilarating to learn for the first time, the Truth of the one Self and the possibility of Self-realization. At last, life has a meaning and a purpose. It is not a question of whether there is a God apart from you, but whether there is a you apart from God. We ask *Who am I?* But is there one? First, we presume that there is an I, and then we ask who or what it is. There just Is. Not I, he, it or anything, but just Is. We try to divide up this simple Is by pronouns I, he, you, and by this and that, but is it really divisible? I feel being, and use the word "I" for it, but that does not mean that there is any separateness about it, because you also feel being and you also use the same word "I" for it, because it is the same being. Why should the quest be necessary? Why should a man not grow into his true, natural state like a horse or an oak tree? Why should man alone of all creatures, be tempted to misuse his faculties and need to curb his desires in order to grow to his true breadth and stature? This involves the question, what differentiates man from other creatures? Many creatures have countless abilities greater than man, in one direction or another. What distinguishes man is his

Self-consciousness that he is not only a man but knows that he is a man. He is conscious to a man. It sometimes happens that a person has an experience of a pure being. He just Is and feels the fact of being. Also he appreciates later that this is the pure consciousness. Thoughts can be suspended, but even when they occur they do not interrupt the still peace of consciousness. But he feels sometimes, no bliss about it. This occurs to him as a sort of grievance. He feels that something must be wrong either with the teaching or himself. The explanation is that it is the case of the mind eavesdropping. Who feels no bliss? I. But that I have no business to be there at all. He is a mortal spying on God. Being not only feels bliss but Is bliss. Only the absence of the reporter, I, is a necessary condition for it. Even a life of disinterested activity is not enough to dissolve the ego sense. It usually needs to be reinforced by a stronger and more forceful campaign. This can be either surrender or enquiry. Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* enjoins surrender. Sage Vashista in *Yoga Vashista* enjoins *Self-Enquiry*. Sri Bhagavan said when he was asked, "There are two ways. Ask yourself *Who am I?* Or submit. The mind acts as though it Is the ruler or owner of all the faculties. It has to abdicate and surrender them and itself to the pure being or Self, or has to look inward to see what is true Self or being.

His poem titled *Ramana Satguru*:

Love makes man kin with the beloved
Such have I know him of the lustrous eyes
Him whose sole look pierced through the heart
Wherein the seed was sown of wisdom

Deeper than in the holy books of Truth alone
Not to be learned but to live.
Truth, in it the hour
To sprout in the dark wintry earth
And grow vibrantly
And then come to power
To slay the seeming Self
Give it birth or to devour.
Heart of my heart seen outwardly as a human form
To draw my human love
Lord Ramana, guru, the risen sun
The Self manifest, the guide of all who rove lost and alone
With tangled thoughts and vain imagining
Back to pure being which your radiant smile
Full of compassion of my wanderings tells me
That I always was though lost this while in a world of things.

Some points of interest:

In following Bhagavan's path of enquiry, Mr. Osborne combined with it true devotion and selfless service. *Jnana* went hand in hand with *bhakti* and *Nishkamya karma*. He was very regular in attending the chanting of the *Vedas*, *Veda Parayana,* in front of Sri Bhagavan's shrine, both in the mornings and in the evenings. He affirmed that listening to it helped in meditation. He was a towering example of an ascetic living a family life. In all those years, I never saw him angry at any time, under any circumstance. It was unbelievable. He never demanded anything or any extra privileges for himself as editor. When I handed him a new, printed

edition of the journal, he would always have the manuscript of the next issue ready and hand it over to me forthwith. He took out three subscriptions for his family even before the journal was published and insisted on paying for them, rejecting my plea that he was the editor, and hence there was no need to pay.

There was a lot of opposition to him. It was not as if it was a bed of roses for him. He was a Westerner. He did not know Sanskrit and Hindu traditions. In the *Ashram*, the whole atmosphere was filled with that culture. Many did not accept him editing the journal. It was Bhagavan who guided me and had my father agree to that. My father was harassed to ensure that Osborne did not become the editor. At every stage, Osborne and I had a lot of troubles. Once, I wrote to him that I wanted to resign and this was his reply: "Dear Sri Ganesan, I am glad to hear that the work is going on well. We must not be too upset with people's criticism but, at the same time, we must examine it to see if anything is justified and, if so, try to correct ourselves. As long as the work is done as a service to our Bhagavan, it may continue, whether people are helpful or not. Perhaps, people who criticize do not realize how much work has to be done. After all, you know that in the *Ashram* there are people who criticized my work on the journal. In fact, you hold the three posts of office manager, advertisement editor and chief sub-editor in page-making. I cannot think of anyone else who could combine them with such enthusiasm and ability. So you will continue doing Bhagavan's work, whether people criticize or not. For us, what is necessary is a constant examination of motive. Do I want to dominate, or do I want to serve Bhagavan? Do I want to impress X, Y, Z or do I want to serve Bhagavan? Do I want to win praise or to serve Bhagavan?

Best wishes for the work you are doing."

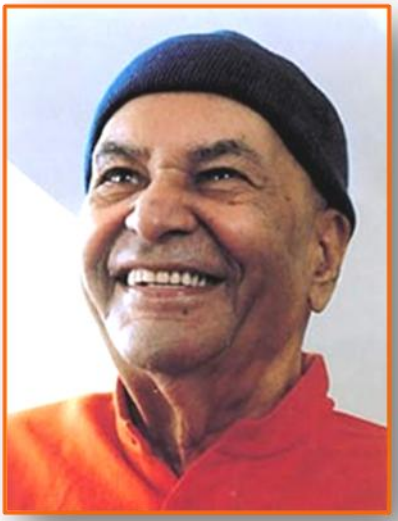
In a reply to another letter, he wrote, "As for some people being jealous, I expected that. Human nature is such that nothing can succeed without provoking jealousy. They may even try to create animosity between us. Our best policy is not to take notice and just concentrate on doing Bhagavan's work to the best of our ability, and maintaining a high standard in every way so that people have nothing to criticize. With all best wishes, may the grace of Bhagavan support you in your efforts."

I have never come across anyone else in *Ramanashram* who had such physical, mental, psychical, and spiritual experiences, all of which were blessed by Bhagavan. Whenever I praised him he would reply, "Long live Bhagavan. It is all due to Bhagavan." He would show an article he had written and then say it is all due to Bhagavan: "I did not write. I only held the pen and it was Bhagavan who wrote it." He is a giant of a spiritual personality, who not only struggled hard to get it, but also had it confirmed by the master. He demonstrated to me and other devotees that he was totally established in that state—which is a great encouragement for us all that it is possible. When I said to another elderly devotee in the *Ashram* that Osborne's life confirms that it is possible, he rebutted my statement saying, "No! 'It is possible' is a very weak term you are using. It is a certainty. Self-realization is a certainty."

Arthur Osborne's Son, Adam with Ramana Maharshi

As Shared by V. Ganesan

Papaji



The *Katopanishad* says, He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained. To him this atman reveals its divine nature, suggesting that the Self emerges as a person ripens and the aspirant blossoms.

After Bhagavan realized *Brahma Nirvana* (dropped the body), three eminent devotees undertook the mission of sharing the Truth of nonphysical existence with the world. Arthur Osborne distributed the Truth about Self-realization through *Self-Enquiry* with his scintillating writings. Robert Adams shared the Truth by dwelling in the Heart of Silence.

Another such person within whom grace emerged was H. W. L. Poonja, also known as Papaji. Just as a rose never loses its freshness and captivating fragrance, similarly you can read about Papaji umpteen times without losing interest. He first experienced the Self at the age of eight. Here is what Papaji has to say about the experience:

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

"One evening, I was sitting in the company of my mother and some other relatives. I suddenly experienced something that made me supremely happy and peaceful. My eyes closed and the body became immobile. I was aware of what was going on around me and could hear everything that was taking place around me. People around me made attempts to bring me back to my normal state. It was such an overwhelming experience that I remained in a state of bliss for two days. I was totally conscious of my surroundings but was unable to communicate. There was total inward happiness."

Papaji's mother realized the state her son was in, and wanted to help him. Hence, she gave him a picture of Lord Krishna when he came out of the state of bliss. He took to the picture of Lord Krishna at once. His mother encouraged him to worship Krishna and soon, he became a devotee of the Lord. His devotion was so ardent that he soon had visions of Krishna. Krishna appeared before him and he would find himself playing with Krishna. Krishna appeared in the same form as the picture whenever Papaji desired it. The people of the house were a witness to his playing, but they were never able to see who he was playing with.

At school, the picture of the Buddha held his fascination. It was a picture of an emaciated Buddha who had Self-realization. Papaji made a detailed study of the life of the Buddha. During his teens he went on to experience spiritual matters because the *atma* gracefully shows the way. He was in a blissful state because he experienced the demigods outside of himself. Yet all the while, he yearned for the tranquility and peace

that he had first experienced when he was eight years old.

At the age of sixteen, Papaji's parents arranged his marriage, as was the practice in Hindu households. With marriage came the responsibility of taking care of the family, so his father urged him to start earning a livelihood. Papaji joined the military academy to be trained as an officer. However, he was distracted from his studies by the presence of Lord Krishna, who charmed him to play with him and worship him. However, Papaji was not satisfied with momentary happiness. What he longed for was to be permanently one with God and be blissful.

This steady urge to be eternally with God became so compelling that he was forced to go in search. He left his family with his father and went in search of someone who could show him the way to God, and allow him to dwell with God permanently. He toured all over India, meeting *sadhus* and swamis in *Ashram*s. His constant questions were: Have you seen God? Can you show me God? The replies that he received always disillusioned him. Feeling disheartened, he returned to Punjab. Yet, the fire of yearning within him was still burning. He fed *sadhus* who came to his home and posed these burning questions to them.

One day, a *sadhu* knocked on his door. The *sadhu* was received with respect by Papaji and fed well. When asked the usual questions, the *sadhu* smilingly replied, "I can show you a *swami* who can answer your questions." Punjaji immediately asked, "Where is he? What is his name?" The *sadhu* answered, "His name is Ramana Maharshi, and he is in *Arunachala,* in an *Ashram* called *Ramanashram* in Tiruvannamalai." The

sadhu gave him directions on how to reach the *Ashram*. Papaji was elated that he was at last going to meet a *swami,* who would show him the way to God.

At that time, Papaji was very poor. One day, while scanning the newspaper, he saw an advertisement for the post of manager in a military canteen in Madras. Papaji met the qualifications. He was the right person for the post. When he went for the interview, he was told, you do not have to join immediately. Join after a month. They even paid his travel expenses.

Papaji was already thirty-four years old when he reached Madras in 1944. He was excited and eager to see the *swami* who would answer his burning questions and show him God. At *Ramanashram*, he left his baggage in the common dormitory and went to the old hall where they said the *swami* was seated. He peeped through the window and was totally disappointed and enraged by what he saw. He told himself, "The same *sadhu* who visited me at my home in Punjab is seated here! He gave me his own name and address and is now seated on the sofa! He is a cheat; I will not stay here even for a minute." Such was his anger!

Papaji ran back to the dormitory and hurriedly picked up his baggage. He was fuming and frustrated. However, an old devotee, Framji Dorabji, told him, "You have not been here even for an hour. Why are you going back when you have come from such a distance?" Papaji narrated what he had seen and concluded, "This *swami* is a cheat. He gave me his own name and address and said that he would show me

God. I know he is a cheat. I know it!" Framji said in a concerned voice, "There is some mistake here. Bhagavan has not left *Arunachala* for thirty-five years!"

Papaji continued to fume, but Framji Dorabji induced him to partake of lunch. He told him to have Bhagavan's *prasad*. After having his lunch, Bhagavan would retire to the old hall. People were told not to disturb the Maharshi between eleven-thirty and two-thirty. Papaji attempted to follow the Maharshi, but Krishnaswami, the attendant, prevented him from following. Bhagavan, who was already in the hall, told Krishnaswami, "Allow him to come inside."

Papaji recounts what happened: "I approached the *swami* in a belligerent manner. I asked him, 'Aren't you the man that came to see me in my house in Punjab?' The Maharshi remained silent. I repeated, 'Did you not come to my house and tell me to come here?' Again the Maharshi made no answer. Since he was most unwilling to answer, I moved on to the main purpose of my visit. I asked him the questions that I had come to ask: 'Have you seen God, and if you have, will you help me to see God? I am willing to pay any price for the answer, even give my life. But your part of the bargain is that you must show me God.'"

The *swami* answered, "No, I cannot show you God. I cannot help you see God because God is not an object that can be seen. God is the subject. He is the seer. Do not concern yourself with the objects that can be seen. Find out who is the seer." He then added, "You alone are God."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Bhagavan advised Papaji to find out more about this "I" that is so desirous of seeing God. "Then, he looked deep into my eyes in such a way that my entire body began to tremble. I felt a shiver running through every inch of my body. My hair stood on end, such was the intensity. Believe me; I became aware of the spiritual heart. What I am referring to is not the physical heart, but the heart that is the source and support of all that exists. This heart opened up and blossomed in the Maharshi's presence. I have never had such an extraordinary experience before. I had not come in looking for any kind of experience, so when it happened, it took me by total surprise."

However, even this experience could not convince Papaji for long. He still yearned to see God physically in spite of this spiritual experience. He wanted to be with God. In his words, "I did not want to *be* honey. I wanted to *taste* honey." Hence, he left *Ramanashram* and went to Adi Annamalai on the other side of the hill. There he played with Lord Krishna until he had to go back to Madras to join duty. Out of respect for an elderly man, he went to *Ramanashram* to take leave. When Papaji went before Bhagavan, Bhagavan asked, "Where have you been? Where have you been staying?" It was unusual for Bhagavan to ask such questions. Papaji replied, "On the other side of the mountain." "And what were you doing there?" continued Bhagavan. "I was playing with my God, Sri Krishna," replied Papaji smugly. Papaji replied confidently and in a proud and superior manner because he was convinced that the man he was talking to would never have had such an experience. "Is that so?" Bhagavan asked, looking both surprised and interested. "Very good," he commented. "Do you see him now?" He questioned. "No sir, I do not," replied Papaji. "I see him only when I have a vision."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Papaji was still feeling pleased with his self because he was certain that Bhagavan had never been granted the power of such vision. "So, Sri Krishna comes and plays with you and then disappears," observed the Maharshi. Then the profound statement, "What is the use of a God who appears and disappears? If he is a real God, he should be with you all the time!"

Even the profundity of this statement did not convince Papaji. He returned to Madras and joined duty. He was still attracted to the external god and continued playing with his vision of Krishna. After his return from work, he would sit all alone and chant the name of Krishna twenty-five thousand times every day. He then doubled this to fifty thousand times. Early one morning there was a knock on the door. Lord Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, and Hanuman appeared and presented him *Darshan*. Soon afterward, they disappeared. He found that he could not concentrate on the *japa* that he did every day. In fact, he could not even read his usual religious books because his mind had become free of thoughts. This state of thoughtlessness puzzled him. At that point, Ramana Maharshi appeared smiling in the *puja* room. He then remembered that this was exactly the state of quietude that he had experienced in Bhagavan's presence. He said to himself, "I will go and ask him what has happened to me. Everything has stopped. I cannot perform any of the religious practices that I was doing."

He went to *Arunachala* and the same miracle happened yet again. He went at lunch time and sought the Maharshi. Krishnaswami stopped him, but Bhagavan told him to let Papaji in. This is what happened

when he sat before Bhagavan:

"I sat before the Maharshi and began to tell him the story of my life. For twenty-five years I have been doing *sadhana*. I have repeated the name of Lord Krishna up to fifty thousand times a day. I have been reading spiritual literature also. After Lord Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, and Hanuman blessed me with their presence, I have not been able to carry on this practice. I can no longer meditate or even read books. I do feel calm deep inside; however, there is no desire to seek God any more. My mind refuses to engage itself in the thought of God. What has happened to me? What should I do?"

The Maharshi looked at me and asked, "How did you come here from Madras?" I saw no reason why he should ask me that question, but I answered politely, "By train." "What happened when you came to the station at Tiruvannamalai?" he continued. "When I got off the train, I handed over my ticket and engaged a bullock cart to bring me to the *Ashram*." "When you reached the *Ashram* and paid the driver of the cart, what happened to the cart?" asked the Maharshi. "I suppose he went back to town," I replied, still wondering where all these questions were leading. The Maharshi then explained: "The train brought you to your destination. You got off because you did not need it anymore. Likewise, with the bullock cart, you got off when it brought you to the *Ashram*. You now need neither the train nor the cart since you are here. They were the means of bringing you here. That is what has happened to your *sadhana*, meditation, and *japa*. You do not need them anymore. You

yourself did not give them up. They have left you of their own accord because they have served their purpose. You have arrived."

"He looked at me very intently. I could feel that my entire body and mind were being washed and rendered pure. I could feel him looking intently into my heart. I felt every atom of my body being transformed by his spellbinding gaze. A transformation was taking place in my body. The old body was dying atom by atom and a new body was being created in its place. I then understood that I knew that this man who had spoken to me, was in reality, what I already was, and what I had always been. There was a sudden impact of recognition as I became aware of my Self. I used the word re-cognition intentionally, because as soon as the experience was revealed to me, I also knew that this was the same state of peace and happiness that I had been immersed in as an eight-year-old boy in Lahore, even though it may have occurred only by default. The silence in the presence of the Maharshi re-established me in that primal state, but this time it was permanent.

"The 'I,' which had until now been a seeker for a god outside of itself (because it wanted to go back to that original childhood state) perished in the direct knowledge and experience of the Self, which the Maharshi had revealed to me. I cannot describe the precise experience, for as all books on the subject matter rightly say, no words can convey the experience. I can only talk about peripheral things. I can only say that every cell, every atom in my body leapt to attention as they all recognized and experienced the Self that alleviated and supported them. I was aware that my spiritual quest had come to an end. However, the source of that knowledge will always remain indescribable."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

This was the real and final awakening of Papaji. The Maharshi advised him in that experience to ignore the appearance of God, and to enquire instead into the nature and source of the One who had this desire. This desire to clasp an external God dropped of its own accord.

Papaji has been kind enough to share this experience with aspirants. He observed, "In hindsight, I could now see that the question, '*Who am I?*' was the one question that I should have asked myself years before. I had the direct experience of the Self when I was eight years old, and then spent the rest of my life trying to return to that state. My mother thought that my devotion to Lord Krishna would help bring back that experience, but it somehow brainwashed me into undertaking a quest for an external God, whom she believed would give that one experience that I longed for so much. In the course of my spiritual quest, I have met hundreds of *sadhus*, swamis and gurus, but none of them revealed to me the simple Truth in the way the Maharshi did. Not one of them had said, "God is within you. He is not separate from you. You alone are God. If you find the source of the mind by asking yourself, '*Who am I*,' you will experience divinity in your heart sky as the Self. If I had met the Maharshi earlier in my life, listened to his teachings, and put them into practice, I could have probably saved myself years of fruitless external searching."

This applies to everyone. We should plunge ourselves right away into the quest of the Self by asking the question, *'Who am I?'* The Maharshi became Papaji's *Satguru*. Papaji continued working in Madras and other places. During holidays, he would come to the *Ashram* and reap the benefits of the Maharshi's presence and proximity. He would follow Bhagavan everywhere, whether to the cowshed or up the hill, because he had understood the significance of the *Satguru's* presence.

Papaji narrated to me how he had comprehended the importance of the *Satguru's* presence by listening to a dialogue that a devotee had with the Maharshi. A devotee asked Bhagavan, "What are the different aids that one can turn to for Self-realization?" Bhagavan replied, "The teachings of the scriptures and the teachings of realized souls." The devotee further asked, "Can such teachings be in the form of discussions, lectures, and meditation?" The Maharshi answered, "All these are only secondary aids; the essential aid is the Master's grace." Papaji said, "I understood this fully, and hence I made full use of the Maharshi's presence."

In 1947, India gained independence and was partitioned into India and Pakistan. According to Papaji's account, a month before the Indian independence in 1947, "Devaraja Mudaliar had told me that Punjab, where my family was, would soon become a part of Pakistan." "Why do you not go and fetch them?" he asked me. "I am not going," I replied. "I cannot leave the company of the Maharshi, my *Satguru.*" Devaraja Mudaliar then told this to Bhagavan. The Maharshi called me and said, "There will be a lot of trouble in the area that you come from. Why do

you not go there at once and bring your family back here?" I replied with great confidence, "My old life was only a dream, Bhagavan. I dreamed that I had a wife and a family, but when I met you, you ended my dream. I don't have a family anymore. I only have you." The Maharshi opposed me by saying, "But if you know that your family is a dream, what difference does it make if you remain in that dream and do your duty? Why are you afraid of going if it is only a dream?" I explained the real reason behind my reluctance to go. "Bhagavan, I am far too attached to your physical form. I cannot leave you. I love you so much that I cannot take my eyes off you. How can I leave you?" The Maharshi gazed at me and then said, "I am with you wherever you are." "From the way he spoke to me, I could see that he was determined that I should leave."

"This last statement was the blessing that I received for the trip I was going to make, and also for my future in general. The silent '*I*', which is my master's real divine nature, was also my own inner reality. How could I ever be away from that 'I'? I accepted my master's decision and prostrated before him. For the first and the only time in my life, I touched my *Satguru's* holy feet as an act of veneration, love and respect. He did not normally allow anyone to touch his feet, but this was a special occasion and he did not object. Before rising, I collected some of the dust from beneath his feet and put it in my pocket to keep as a sacred memento."

Papaji went back to Peshawar, and indeed it was a miraculous journey. He told me, "The *prasad,* which was close to my heart, saved me and

instilled in me guidance at every instance." Unrest and trouble were already brewing in Pakistan. The trains were full. The carriages were segregated into ones for the Hindus and ones for the Muslims. Papaji sat in the carriage for Muslims. Bhagavan prompted him to sit in the carriage for Muslims. There were not many people in this particular carriage. After arriving at another station, all the Hindus in the carriage for Hindus were butchered mercilessly. Papaji was safe; he reached his destination and brought back his family, thirty-five of who were women. Another miracle took place, and this again he attributed to the *prasad*. When he and his family members reached the Indian border, they learned that this would be the last train to leave Pakistan because the train tracks had been destroyed.

Papaji eventually settled in Lucknow and continued working diligently to support his family until 1996. He was firmly established in the Self, but outwardly he continued working day and night to support his family. Our scriptures state that only a *purna jnani* (a fully realized man) can be a true *karma yogi*. Papaji felt that being in the Self was the only reality; everything else was a mere dream.

Papaji went to spiritual retreats on the Ganges. While he was at home, he hosted S*atsang* and sharings. What started as a small group soon became a large circle. The *Vedas* say it is not through knowledge, austerities, or spiritual practice that you can taste the Self. It can happen only when there is direct experience of the Self. Papaji had been fortunate enough to gain this experience from Bhagavan; hence he was sharing it with all those who came in contact with him. In other words,

he gave back what his master had given him. Therefore, he too was a great master without declaring himself one. He had no institution and never collected money. With his hard-earned money he was feeding people. When I was the editor of the *Mountain Path* in 1993, I was eager to collect articles about those who had realization in Bhagavan's company. However, people in the *Ashram* were against publication of the article on Papaji. In fact, even my friend Anuradha raised a question, "You can write about Kunju Swami and Annamalai Swami, with whom you have had direct experience. But have you had any kind of experience with Papaji? Are you going to publish the article in the face of so much opposition?"

V. GANESAN AND PAPAJI

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

I replied, "Why don't you go and find out for yourself?" Anuradha, being a practical and determined person, immediately planned a seven-day trip to Lucknow to visit Papaji. This bold woman went straight to Papaji. She had booked her return ticket, too, planning to stay there for seven days. Although she enjoyed the dancing, the singing, and the *bhajans,* she did not feel connected. The day of her departure dawned, and yet she felt nothing. Before leaving, Anuradha met Almyra, Papaji's Meera. Almyra was very affectionate toward Anuradha. When she heard what Anuradha had to say about Papaji, she said, "Unless you spend twenty-one days with a sage, you cannot evaluate him, you cannot understand him. Why don't you stay longer?"

Anuradha left for the station. As Grace would have it, the guard of the train refused to let her board the train, even though she had a confirmed ticket! She had to return to Papaji. She found that the *satsang* was going on at Papaji's house. Anuradha sang in the Satsang and had a wonderful experience. At the end, Papaji remarked, "Anuradha has been singing *Ramana Satguru* every day. I am very fond of it. Why has anyone not learned it from her?"

Papaji and Dr. Yamuna came to her room one day. Papaji sat on the bed while Anuradha and Yamuna sat on the floor. Papaji looked at her compassionately and said, "Anuradha, what did Ramana Maharshi say about his dreams?" She got irritated and replied, "Papaji, Bhagavan very rarely had dreams. It was in the form of going into the temple and entering *Arunachala*." Papaji leaned toward her, patted her on the cheek, and said, "Did he not say that what you see and indulge in outside of

yourself are all dreams?" She became silent and stayed in that state of quietude, with absolutely no thoughts. Even after Papaji and Yamuna left, she continued to be in that state for three hours. When she returned to the *Ashram*, she said, "Publish the article."

1995 was a period of turmoil and restlessness. There was a lot of criticism and opposition. It was time to relinquish my position in the management and I sought the advice of one old devotee after another. Every one of them—Annamalai Swami, Yogi Ram Surat Kumar, and the others—encouraged me to take the journey of the spiritual path within. I wanted to consult Papaji also. Hence, I went to Lucknow. Papaji was the epitome of compassion, which included reprimands and criticism that could shake you out of your prior conditioning.

I fell at Papaji's feet exclaiming, "There is so much opposition." Papaji looked at me very affectionately but firmly and said, "Even if the whole world opposes you, Ganesan, you go ahead. You have been guided into this spiritual step. We are all with you." He embraced me, saying, "Dive deep within. Plunge into that state of silence and stay in that state of *I am*." At that very moment, the only great attachment that I had was toward *Ramanashram.* It dropped like a cloak from the body. Now I feel that *Arunachala* is wherever I go. No matter what country I am in, whatever state I am in, whether happy or unhappy—that state of inner silence is ever-present. No kind of qualification or maturity is necessary for you to turn within. Go within and ask yourself *Who am I*? Then *Arunachala*, the Self, will take over completely.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

When I started touring the world from 1990 onward, I met and stayed with devotees whom I had never met at the *Ashram*. In many of their homes they had three pictures prominently displayed. They were pictures of the *Arunachala* hill, Ramana Maharshi, and Papaji. Many of these devotees stated that Papaji had provided them the personal experience of the state of "I Am."

I would also like to share an experience of my friend Lathaji, who came to Papaji at her father's friend's insistence. She had a tiff with her father because he wanted her to take up the medical profession against her will. She wrote a long letter to Papaji seeking his advice. In the *satsang* at Papaji's house on that day, Lathaji's letter was picked up by him. It was customary for the person whose letter was chosen to sit before Papa. Lathaji looked at Papaji expectantly because she assumed he would ask her about the matter.

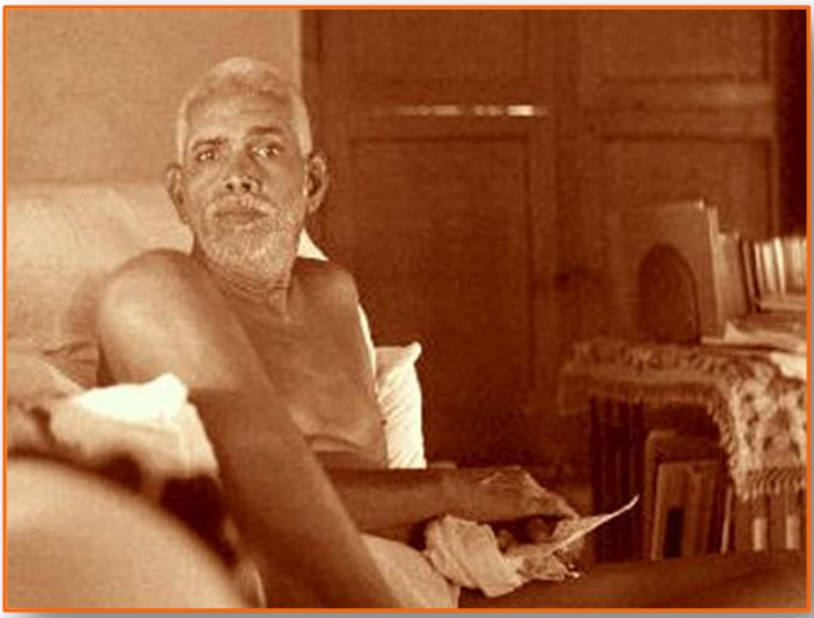
However, he put aside the letter and looked at her, saying, "Ask me something." She felt cornered and was undecided. She looked around, and a poster on the wall declaring, *"Be Still"* caught her eye. Hence, she asked, "How should one be still?" She had not intended to ask the question, but Papaji's look compelled her to ask. Papaji said, looking at her, "I just showed you how." Lathaji later said that she and the other people in the audience suddenly found themselves in that state, when least expecting it.

A wealthy man once wanted to give Papaji a donation of one million dollars. With all sincerity, he approached Papaji and said, "I would like

to give you a gift. Please accept it and bless me." Papaji said, "Yes, I accept it." Everyone laughed because it was such an enormous amount. Papaji gleamed as he took the check and then tore it into pieces. He told the man, "This is my blessing."

Papaji loved Chinna Swami because he was Bhagavan's descendent. Once, when my father was traveling through the Central Station in Madras, he ran into Papaji. He prostrated before Papaji at the station and put before his feet an offering of two hundred Rupees. He was such a humble man! When I went to Lucknow, he received me with much warmth. At the *satsang*, he said, "Now Ganesan will speak." Papaji was the personification of compassion and affection. A poem written and published in the book titled *Be Still*, describes this big Heart of *Arunachala* well:

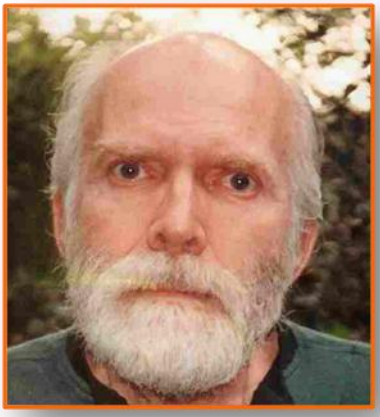
In this age of Kali Yuga
Sri Ramana established silence and Self-Inquiry In the sattvic realm.
For this he is called the Maharshi.
Sri Punjaji tossed the flame of silence
Into the marketplace.
He said the secret burning of non-abidance
Brews in the land of activity.
And the world is catching fire now
For this he is called Papaji
Beloved father of all.



FIRST, FIND OUT WHO YOU ARE

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Robert Adams



In 1992, while traveling from San Diego to Phoenix, I had to pass through the Los Angeles airport. I saw an elderly American lady in the distance coming straight toward me through the crowd. She asked me, "Are you from India?" When I said, "Yes," she very affectionately added, "This evening at a friend's house, a very pious man is giving a talk on your Hindu spirituality. Since I am going there, I would like to take you." Thinking that it would be some Hindu swami giving the talk, I asked her, "What is the name of that pious person?" She answered, "Robert Adams." I told her that I was giving a talk that evening in Phoenix and asked her to accept my apologies.

She seemed rather disappointed and said, "It does not matter, I am so sorry you cannot come, but will you at least permit me to give you a few transcripts of his talks and go through them for me?" I said that I would, so she handed me a bunch of computer-printed papers, which I then began reading on my flight to Phoenix. The very first page grabbed

my entire attention. I found it so interesting that I read the entire manuscript at once! I was thrilled! I was swimming in joy.

As the editor of the *Mountain Path*, I was interested in all of the 1993 issues with stories about aspirants who had experienced Self-realization in the presence of Bhagavan. After reading Robert Adams' manuscript, I was particularly interested in publishing the story of his experience of Self-realization, so I asked him to contribute an article. I knew that new aspirants pursuing Self-realization would find personal accounts like his, similar to what so many other devotees had experienced in Bhagavan's presence, tremendously encouraging in their own pursuit of *Jnana Marga,* the path of Wisdom. In reply, Robert Adams graciously sent me a long letter:

"I am Robert Adams. I was born in New York in 1928, and from the very beginning, as far back as I can remember, when I was in a crib, a little man with a grey beard and white hair, about two feet tall, would appear before me at the other end of the crib and speak gibberish to me. Of course, being a child, I did not understand anything he said. When I was about five or six years old, I told my parents about it and they thought I was playing games. I told my friends and they chuckled. So I stopped saying anything about it. The apparitions of the little man stopped when I was about seven."

Robert Adams also added that he did not know what to do. He didn't want to tell anyone about these unusual experiences, nor about the even stranger experiences that followed. Whenever he wanted something, whether a pencil, or a chocolate, or even a particular item like a violin, it

would appear whenever he uttered the name "God" three times. In the classroom, if someone wanted a pencil, he would say "God" three times and the pencil would appear, and he would give it to the person who needed it. The same thing happened during tests. He didn't like to study, so when he sat down to take a test, he would utter "God" three times and the answers would appear before him, and he would write them and pass. On one final mathematics examination, for which Robert had not studied, while holding the question paper he said, "God" three times, expecting the answers to be given to him as always, but suddenly something altogether different happened:

"Subjectively, the whole room appeared filled with light more brilliant than the sun. It was a beautiful shining warm glow and the whole room, along with everything and everyone, was immersed in the light, and all the children seemed to me mere particles of that light. I found myself melting into radiant Being-Consciousness. I merged into immaculate awareness. It was not an out-of-body experience. This was completely different. I realized that I was not my body. What appeared to be my body was not real. I went beyond the light into pure radiant consciousness and I became consciousness, and my individuality merged into pure and absolute bliss. I became the universe. The feeling is indescribable. It was total bliss and total joy."

After this experience, Robert Adams' life was not normal. As a teenager, maybe fourteen or fifteen years old, he felt the need for guidance. Some of his friends suggested that he go to Joel Goldsmith, a famous Christian and true mystic. Joel Goldsmith had been in correspondence with Arthur Osborne and me. In every issue of Mountain Path you will

find brilliant and original articles by Joel Goldsmith. He heard Robert's story and advised him to go to Paramahamsa Yogananda, who was in Encinitas. He said, "He will guide you." Robert Adams went to Encinitas, full of interest, ecstasy, and excitement, and was instantly captivated by the spiritual splendor and aura of Paramahamsa Yogananda. Robert told me that although he was just a teenage boy among many other people who were there, the moment he set foot on the grounds outside, Paramahamsa called his secretary and said, "There is a young boy. Call him in." Robert prostrated to Paramahamsa and said, "You are my Guru." Paramahamsa said, "No. I am not your Guru. Your Guru is Sri Ramana Maharshi. Ramana Maharshi is not well; you should go to him immediately."

After leaving Paramahamsa, Robert happened upon a copy of *Who Am I?* in the philosophy section of a library. Ramana Maharshi's picture was on the cover. When Robert saw the image, his hair stood on end because he recognized that face as the same one he had seen in his crib as a toddler. He wasted no time finding his way to Bhagavan. Here he describes his first encounter with the Maharshi:

"When I was eighteen years old I arrived at *Arunachala*. I took flowers and a bag full of fruits and offered them at his feet. Bhagavan looked at me and smiled and I returned the smile. The very first look of the Maharshi engulfed me in a flood of light, peace, quietude, and bliss and it opened an inner eye. I instantly recognized the meaning and purpose of all my experiences, that I was never a body and that I was ever the unborn Self, the eternal silence. The Maharshi exuded compassion, love, and bliss on the very first day. He looked at me and asked me whether I

had eaten breakfast. When I said 'no' the Maharshi had the attendant bring fruits and porridge for me to eat. I lay down and went to sleep in the old hall and when I woke up; the Maharshi guided me to a little shack and asked me to take rest. In the evening, also, he sent food. I ate and again went to sleep. Maharshi paid keen attention to what was needed for my body to rest and relax."

The next morning Robert went to the old hall to meet Bhagavan. What happened in the presence of the Maharshi guided him deep within. The silence and quietude of Bhagavan engulfed him. When he entered the hall, Bhagavan's attendant, Krishna Swami, was pestering Bhagavan with complaints about people at the ashram. After tolerating this for a while, Bhagavan looked sternly at Krishna Swami and said, "Remember the purpose for which you came here. Attend to it. Keep quiet!" This was the very first *upadesa* (instruction) Robert got from Bhagavan. Although it was directed to Krishna Swami, Robert felt it was actually meant for him. For the next three years, his focus was within and he stayed in the state of silence and quietude, never outwardly indulging himself in other people's affairs. Inwardly, he was established in quietude during this period, and outwardly, in non-indulgence. There was no need for him to talk further to Bhagavan or to anyone else. That is why nobody knew Robert Adams, even though he stayed at *Ramanashram* for three years. Afterward when I clarified this, one or two said that there was a young mad fellow by the name of Robert Adams. To that extent, he followed Bhagavan's teachings of non-indulgence with others. He was not talking, and was doing *sadhana* all the time and remaining in that state. Bhagavan dropped the body, and even that did not affect him. He was not affected by the physical disappearance of Bhagavan because he was continuously

seeing Bhagavan only as the Omniscient Self. Even when Bhagavan was associated with the body he experienced only the transparent Self, so in the absence of the body, he did not feel sorrow or suffering, but went deeper and deeper into the stillness of Self (*Arunachala*).

Bhagavan appeared to him in a dream and directed him, "Go to Benares. There is an old swami. Stay with him." This swami was ninety years old, and Robert sat in his presence every day. Conversation was unnecessary. One day the elderly *sadhu* said to the people around him, "I know my death is approaching in three days, and I have not completed my mission. But when I die, there will be a teenage boy on the road that will also die, for no apparent reason, and I will occupy his body and continue with my mission." On the third day, when the elderly swami was in the street, a young fourteen- or fifteen-year-old boy was crossing the road and suddenly, he had a fit and died. After fifteen or twenty minutes, he woke up and disappeared into the forest. This provided Robert the conviction to be the Self, not to be distracted with the appearance or disappearance of the body.

He roamed India for several years, meeting with sages and saints. Again, Bhagavan appeared in a dream and guided him, "You go back to your country and spread this teaching of *Self-Enquiry* to aspirants in America." Bhagavan was very adamant: "Do not start an institution. Do not be a guru. No publicity! If More than fifteen people gather around you, then remove yourself from that town but continue to share the teaching." He traveled in an RV. Nobody knew of his spiritual stature because he sought no publicity. Only a select few knew. By the time he arrived in Hollywood, he was deeply affected by Parkinson's disease. He was

unable to move, so he had to stay there. A woman named Mary and her friends took care of Robert and helped him disseminate Bhagavan's teaching of *Self-Enquiry*. Satsang with him was so powerful that when he came and sat in the hall, he just looked at everyone for twenty minutes, wordlessly inviting them to go into silence. It did not matter how many people were there. Often the Great Dane Robert had named Yogi was also present. After meditation, Robert would speak for a few minutes.

When I wrote to him asking him if I could meet him, he wrote back to me, "You can meet me in Los Angeles." At the same time, the President of the *Course of Miracles*, Dr. Tara Singh, was at *Ramanashram*. He invited Anuradha and me and to stay at the *Course in Miracles* headquarters in Los Angeles. He also offered to arrange for us to meet Robert Adams. We became very good friends with Tara Singh. Anuradha and I were thrilled to accept Robert's invitation to join him for lunch, because we so deeply admired and respected what he was doing spiritually—without an institution or even a house.

It was not only a meeting for lunch, but was a blessed opportunity for us to reminisce about the Master, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, who not only shared wisdom, but insisted on everyone coming to *Ramanashram* to share food, as well. When he approached the restaurant we could see only Robert's back, but that was more than enough to convey the spiritual aura, the peace, the stillness, the friendliness--everything was so palpable even from such a long distance. We found him delightfully humorous. I asked him again and again to tell me more about Bhagavan. I wanted to hear the stories directly from his lips. He again recounted how he had seen Bhagavan in the crib, as well as other

experiences he had had with the Maharshi, even though he had already written them to me. Then he invited us to a *satsang* at Mary's house that evening. When we arrived, we found seventy people in attendance, all sitting in calm silence. There was a special seat for Robert because of his frail condition, behind which was a picture of Bhagavan. When Robert came and sat, he simply looked at everyone for twenty minutes. He invited them into complete silence, or *Samadhi.* Afterward, he took the microphone. He had already arranged a chair for me and introduced me warmly: "I welcome my Master Ramana Maharshi's grand nephew and his secretary, Anuradha, and I want him to speak." After I spoke for nearly half an hour, he took the microphone from me and said, "Every word Ganesan has spoken today, I entirely agree with."

I want to share one small but significant incident from my time there. After Robert and I spoke, I sat at his feet. A friend of Robert's for more than twenty years, John Wilkins, asked "Robert, I want you to tell me: what is Truth and unTruth? What is reality and unreality? I do not want you to quote scriptures or make tall claims. You must make me experience this right now at your feet." I was thrilled to be sitting so close when Robert responded. He smiled quietly for a few moments and then suddenly he became very serious as he looked at John and said, "Who are you?" John thought at first that Robert was asking this because ~~of~~ his Parkinson's sometimes caused him to be forgetful. So John said, "I am John Wilkins." Then Robert beamed the most gracious smile and said, "'I AM' is the Truth and John Wilkins is the unTruth. That 'I AM' is the reality and John Wilkins is the unreality." At this, everyone went into perfect repose (*Samadhi*). Robert invited me to come again the next year, but told me that he might be moving to Sedona, where he felt Destiny was calling him to go. The following year,

Anuradha and I did indeed visit Robert in Sedona, staying in a house he had arranged for us. As he had done the previous year, Robert asked me to speak at nearly every *satsang,* listening with rapt attention. Anuradha felt so grateful to Robert that she wanted to serve him in some way. She said to him, ; "I want to do something for you. Please tell me what service I can render to you." He said, "You can cook *Ramanashram* food for me! I was very fond of the food in *Ramanashram*, so it would please me greatly if you would make it for me." Anuradha was very happy to do this for him. She asked our host to hunt for the proper cooking vessels to make South Indian dishes, suggesting that anyone who provided one could also come for lunch. Initially, Robert said that only six people were coming, but the numbers grew quickly as more and more people offered to bring the necessary vessels. Every two hours, Robert Adams, who was a very humorous Master, sent word to Anuradha telling her that six more people were coming. So, just like that, the guest list grew to sixty people! Anuradha and her helpers were up all night preparing the food. Since Robert had asked for *Ramanashram* food, Anuradha was very firm that it had to be *sambar*, *rasam*, three vegetables, yoghurt, *payasam*, and *pap pad*. Everything was made to order. Remembering that Bhagavan had always insisted on being served last so that everyone else could be fed, Anuradha knew that Robert would also want to be served last.

The lunch was scrumptious and delicious. Anuradha served Robert, who took three or four helpings and was thoroughly delighted. Everyone there, including myself, was very happy to see Robert eating with such relish. After the meal was over, Anuradha approached him innocently and asked, "Robert was it like *Ramanashram* food? Was there anything

missing?" Robert said, "Yes. It was all perfect and delicious, but one thing was missing: the banana leaf!"

That day everyone wanted Robert to conduct a *satsang* after lunch. Robert said, "I am not going to talk today. Only Ganesan is going to talk, and he should talk only on the topic that I give him. Your topic is Bhagavan and the monkeys." I spoke about this for twenty minutes or longer. Until then, I had never put all the stray incidents together as a collective account of Bhagavan's relationship with the monkeys, but when I did so, everyone laughed and laughed. Then someone in the audience said to Anuradha, "Now that we have heard about Bhagavan from Ganesan, we would like to hear about Ganesan from you." Robert interjected, "Anuradha, let me give you the topic: Bhagavan and Ganesan." After relating a few incidents from my childhood relationship with Bhagavan, Anuradha added, "As a child, Bhagavan was known as "golden hand," *thanga kai*, because whatever he touched, flourished. At *Ramanashram,* Ganesan is called "funeral hand," because it is he who lights the funeral pyre for anyone who dies at *Ramanashram* and *Ramana Nagar."* This naturally evoked much laughter. Robert pretended to become very serious and shouted, "Run away all of you who are afraid of death, run away! The funeral hands are here!" I was sitting in front of him by then because I loved to be at his feet. He bent over and told me, "Ganesan, extend your hands, I am ready." Everyone appreciated the humor in this.

That remarkable *satsang* ended with singing and dancing. Before Robert left, a devotee named Sharmila started singing and everyone else joined in. Much to our delight, Robert got up and danced to the tune. He was

usually dressed in a T-shirt, jeans and upturned golf cap. He was a very humorous, simple, and natural person, always making jokes, mostly on himself at his own expense, as we saw when he asked to take my "funeral hands" at the luncheon. It was my idea to sing, "Hit the road, Jack, don't come back no more, no more, no more," as he left us that day.

On my way back to *Ramanashram*, I received an international phone call while I was resting in Benares at the Krishnamurthy Institution. It was Robert Adams. He said, "Ganesan," but could not continue, so his assistant, Richard, spoke to me. He said, "Robert is very insistent that you should come to Sedona and spend three months with him. He has also invited Anuradha, knowing that you cannot come alone, and he will make all the arrangements. Sharmila will pick you up and the other devotees will look after your other needs." When I got home there was a letter waiting for me in Robert's own handwriting, "Ganesan, please come and spend three months with me."

At the exact time Anuradha and I landed in San Francisco, Robert dropped the body in Sedona. With deep emotion, I recalled his words to me at our last *satsang* in Sedona: "Take me in your funeral hands." I now understood that he had meant this literally. I felt that Robert still had something he wanted to convey to me. The message of *Self-Enquiry* has to pass through and the message of "I *Am*" is to be shared, so I went back to Sedona along with Anuradha and Sharmila. We spent three months there as guests, not in one home, but in three or four. Robert's followers wanted me to join in their *satsang* sharings, and I did so with an emphasis on pure *Self-Enquiry*. By enquiring one can reach into that

quietude and silence, that silence which Bhagavan had revealed to Robert. The silence which Robert had revealed to all of them was to continue. Is that not why Robert requested me to be there for three months? My own lesson from Robert was to take the whole world, all the happenings outside of myself, to be just a dream within the mind of God (*Arunachala*). That awareness was deeply implanted in me by Robert. That was his divine gift (*prasad)* to me.

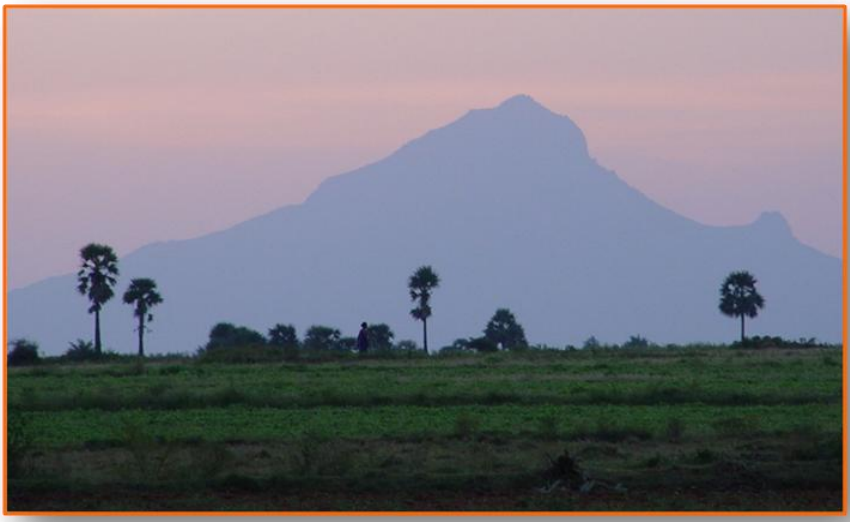
I want to share with you how Robert's good humor persisted even in his last days. He was sick and bedridden. A young fellow named John was attending to him, knowing full well that Robert was a realized Master. Robert's wife was not in favor of John's attention to her husband. She was always giving him trouble and driving him out of the house, but John was there to serve Robert because Robert could not move. One day Robert wanted hot water, so John went to the kitchen where Robert's wife was drying a pan. She got so angry she threatened to throw the frying pan at John. John was literally frightened and shouted, "Robert! Robert! She is trying to kill me! What should I do? Please guide me!" Robert, who was lying down, very calmly said, "Duck!" On one side of the coin Robert was absolutely serious, and on the other side of the coin, he was absolutely humorous.

The highest teaching in the world is Silence. There is nothing higher than this. That is what *Arunachala* stands for. A devotee who sits with a sage purifies his mind just by being with the sage. The mind naturally becomes quieter, even when no words are exchanged. In Silence, boundaries dissolve. Silence is the ultimate reality, and everything exists in this omniscient silence. Silence, where nothing is happening,

transcends time and space. A brand new pristine dimension of nothingness is revealed. That is where all the peace and capacity is Self-evident. That is Truth; that is who you really are. In the deep silence where there is no good and no bad, and no one is trying to achieve anything… there is just being, pure being. The only freedom you will ever have is when the "I am the body" idea is transcended to reveal your immortal Self.

And the other side: You are real. What you and the world appear to be is an illusion. The real is the substratum of the illusion. Identify with the real, not with the illusion. Do not accept anything as you see it as the reality. The only freedom you have is to awaken from this daydream, for this is only a mortal dream and you shall awaken and be free. There is actually no such thing as birth and there is no such thing as death. Nobody is born, nobody dies, and nobody prevails in between. Nothing that appears exists as it is seen and cognized. Only the Self (God, Substratum, *Arunachala*) exists, like the screen on which a movie is projected. All this is the Self, and the silent state of "*I Am*" is that. You are absolute reality, the movie screen, "That." You are awareness, emptiness, *Satchidananda*. That is your true inherent nature. It is that present silence that hosts and watches thoughts that is the Now. Relinquish doership and abide in the Self. Be at peace and be free. Empty your mind, become still, and everything will happen of its own accord. There is really nothing you have to *do*. Just be still. Be still and know *I Am God*. The state of *I Am* is the immortal Self. Accept that and be free. All is well!

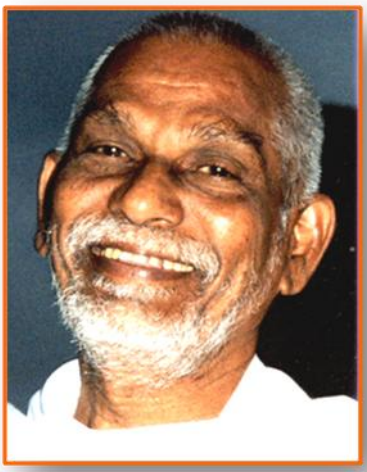
AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN



A MOUNTAIN OF SILENCE

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Lakshmana Swami



Of all the elder devotees of Sri Bhagavan about whom I have shared, only one is still living in *Arunachala* (2010), Lakshmana Swami.

From his teenage years, Lakshmana felt a very strong need to grasp Self-realization. He studied spiritual and religious books and did intense *pranayama.*

One day when he was in college, he was flooded with a beautiful spiritual experience: "There was light everywhere and suddenly the mind became one-pointed and still. There was a flash of light within, and the Divine Light outside showed its full munificence. The light encircled and engulfed me. I lost all consciousness of the body. Apart from the strange quietness, there was total inner stillness. The effulgence drove home the veritable fact that the Self is God, within and without the temple of the physical body. My joy knew no bounds, as I realized that the Self had become my Guru."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Even though he had this beautiful spiritual experience, it started wearing off. He thought that he needed a Guru in human form to establish him in that state. When he was attending a class in college, his lecturer called him and mentioned the name of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Even just hearing the name gave him a thrilling experience. On another day, when he was passing through the main lecture hall, his English professor, Prof. G. V. Subbaramayya, was giving a talk on Sri Ramana Maharshi, standing in front of a large picture of the Maharshi as he spoke. However, Lakshmana Swami could not hear because the hall was so crowded, and the professor's speech was not very audible. But Lakshmana Swami *did* hear the words, "Sri Ramana Maharshi," whenever they were mentioned. Hearing the name and seeing the image of Sri Bhagavan afforded him another great experience: "There was hope that there was someone here in human form to whom I could go for clarification and become re-established in that state of the immaculate Self."

In 1949, Lakshmana Swami came to Tiruvannamalai; the time when *Kumbhabhishekam* to the Mother's Shrine was being performed at the *Ashram*. There was a huge crowd. He was only able to glimpse Sri Ramana Maharshi. He could not talk to him and was able to stay only for a few days, but during that time, he purchased *Who Am I?* in his mother-tongue, Telugu. As he immersed himself in reading it, his mind started sinking and he found himself in a state where there was no thought. But still he was not deeply interested in *Self-Enquiry*. Suddenly the *Nama*, '*Hare Ramana'* appeared in him as *japa,* playing constantly in his mind. After a few days, he returned to his village. His practice of deep meditation and *pranayama* established within him a state of seclusion.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

From his home in the village, he went to the seaside and built a hut. There, he started practicing his *sadhana* seriously and continuously for five months. However, he became ill and had to be brought back to his village. He kept the picture of Bhagavan's smiling face with him at all times. Despite all sorts of treatments for the next two months, he did not regain his health. Looking at Bhagavan's picture one day, he received a message from Bhagavan: "This body can be saved with medicines, but what about the ego that is like a tiger's jaw eating you up?" This reminded him powerfully that he must go back to his Guru Ramana.

Thus, he returned to *Ramanashram* in September 1949, when *Navaratri* celebrations were going on. Again, there was a large crowd. Bhagavan himself became very ill. From the Nirvana room, he would be brought to the New Hall, near the Mother's temple, where he would be seated for two to three hours, beginning around three o'clock. On the last day of the *Navaratri*, there was a lot of fanfare was going on, with chanting and ringing of bells. Lakshmana Swami was standing outside the Nirvana room as Bhagavan was coming from the New Hall. Although Bhagavan walked with extreme difficulty, he raised his head and imparted a look of grace with Lakshmana Swami, who swooned into ecstasy. The final spiritual realization dawned. As he described it, "I unexpectedly found that all my thoughts had disappeared, except for the primal 'I'-thought. Then, '*Who Am I*?' spontaneously appeared within me and as it did so, the gracious smiling face of Bhagavan appeared within me in relation to the right side of the chest. There was a lightning flash and a flood of Divine Light shining within and without. Bhagavan's face was smiling with more radiance than that of innumerable lightning flashes fused into one. In that amenable bliss,

tears of joy welled up in unending succession and they could not be resisted." For nearly six hours, Lakshmana Swami could not move from outside the New Hall, where he was seated, even when the deity was taken in procession and ~~so~~ many other things were happening around him. He remained unmoved in that state of total quietude.

He remained immersed in silence throughout the night. The next day, he went to the New Hall, wrote a note in Telugu to Bhagavan and handed it over to him. Bhagavan read it aloud: "Bhagavan! In your presence and by the quest, 'Who Am I?' I have realized the Self. I need your blessings." Bhagavan looked at him and smiled, nodding his head in approval. Then he spoke two sentences to Lakshmana Swami, which were his last words: "Where are you coming from?" Lakshmana Swami replied, "From Gudur." "Is it not in Nellore district?" Lakshmana Swami nodded. Lakshmana Swami was already rooted in the state of the Self; the Master's spoken words steadied and firmly established him in the Inner Felicity of Self-realization. For the next thirteen years, Lakshmana Swami did not speak a word. He stayed in a hut in Palakothu.

On the day Bhagavan dropped the body, Lakshmana Swami was cleaning his room. The picture of Bhagavan that was hanging on the wall suddenly fell down. Lakshmana Swami thought that it must have fallen as a result of mishandling. He picked up the picture, reverentially wiped it with his hands, and hung it back on the wall. It fell again. He understood that something had happened with Bhagavan's body. In a moment, he went into *Samadhi*, losing his body-consciousness; he was plunged into the Self, into Silence. For nearly three hours he remained in that state of beatitude.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

When he regained consciousness, he went to *Ramanashram*. Bhagavan's body had been removed from the Nirvana room to the outside of the New Hall, where it was kept for the public to have *Darshan* and pay their last homage. He went near the body of Bhagavan. Though he felt sad that Bhagavan had finished with the body, he did not feel any suffering. He did not cry, as he was filled with the presence of the Self. Bhagavan was ever the omniscient Self reflecting divinity to all who approached. Bhagavan was never exclusively the body. As such, the disappearance of life from the body of Bhagavan did not affect Lakshmana Swami. He went back to his village. Studiously, he plunged himself into the practice of silence, seclusion, meditation, and *pranayama*. He abstained totally from talking

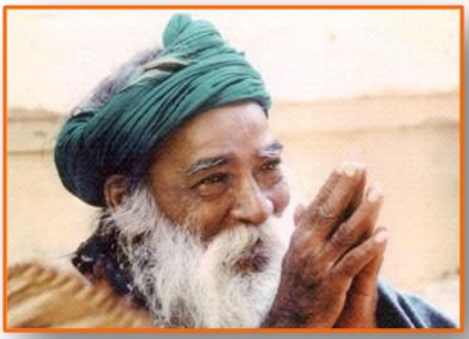
In 1990, feeling that the Master's direct teaching should be shared, Lakshmana Swami established an *Ashram* in the vicinity of Ramana Nagar, a place to practice and share *Self-Enquiry*. He observed seclusion, silence, and meditation, neither meeting nor talking to people. But in his very presence, in the silence itself, aspirants experience a spiritual aura. David Godman's book on Lakshmana Swami, *No Mind: I Am the Self*, is an excellent guide for aspirants.

Sri Ramana Maharshi said: "The only function of life is to realize the Self. All other activities are a waste of time." Let us become one-pointed and plunge within and recognize this Self. Let us also adhere to the words of guidance of Lakshmana Swami: "Just keep quiet, and Bhagavan will take care of everything."

BHAGAVAN'S LAST DAYS AT NEW HALL

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Yogi Ram Surat Kumar



For all traditional Hindus interested in attaining emancipation from the cycle of birth and death, the most important and sacred pilgrimage center is Varanasi (Benares) or Kashi. At Kashi, Mother Ganges, having originated in the peaks of the Himalayas and forcefully moving down the plains, makes a turn toward the north, toward her source. Throughout time immemorial, Hindus have been drawn to this vibrant and mystical city, and it is here that the story of an important mystic, saint, and devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi begins.

Near the town center of Kashi is a small village by the name of Nardara. Many pilgrims who aim to complete a circumambulation of Mother Ganga often rest in the small villages that lie on the banks of the river. The local villagers pay special attention to these *sadhus*, *sanyasis* and pilgrims, and this was especially the case with Yogi Ram Surat Kumar's family. Growing up in this environment, surrounded by pilgrims and *sadhus* alongside the banks of the mighty river, had a deep impact on this

young boy. He would sit with them at night around the *Dhuni* (fire) and listen with rapt attention to stories of saints and sages, and mythological epics such as the *Ramayana* and *Maharabharata*.

One of the *sadhus*, named Kapadia Baba, played a particularly influential role in young Ram Surat Kumar's life. Kapadia Baba was a tall and imposing figure who, before taking *sanyas*, had been an erudite and scholarly judge. As a judge he had overseen a case in which his only son-in-law was convicted of murder. Without any hesitation, he issued the death sentence on his son-in-law after finding him guilty. He then realized the futility of worldly existence and took *sanyas*. He started performing *Ganga Pradakshina*. In the course of his spiritual pilgrimages, he often stopped to spend a day or so in the company of young Ram Surat Kumar.

Ram Surat Kumar's life was dramatically shaped by an incident that occurred when he was just sixteen years old. One day, while drawing water from the well for his mother, he noticed a sparrow sitting on the other side of the well, looking intently at him. Playfully, Ram Surat Kumar tossed his rope at the bird, inadvertently hitting it and causing it to fall. Mortified, Ram Surat Kumar took the bird to the Ganges and poured the sacred water on it in an attempt to revive it, crying, "Please do not die! Please do not die!" But his efforts failed.

This traumatic event led him to contemplate deeply on life and death. He enquired, "Where has the beauty of this bird gone? Where has the flying power of the bird gone? The wings are there, but it has lost the power to fly. What is that force behind the bird's now lifeless body that allowed it to be active and fly just a minute ago?" He wept as he sat

there on the bank of the Ganges. The death of the bird was the first vital shock he received from life, and it sharpened his awareness about creation, life and death.

Heavily burdened by this sorrow and guilt, he sought out Kapadia Baba for consolation, crying to him, "I am unable to bear this guilt!" Kapadia Baba told him to go to Kashi and stand in front of Lord Vishwanatha. Upon doing so, the young aspirant experienced a flash of brilliant light and felt for the first time a Divine ecstasy that made him forget everything: his depression; his body; the world; even time and space. He was engulfed in Divine energy. Later, wandering the *Ghats*, he experienced a scene in which his dead body was brought to the funeral pyre and burned to ashes, later to be immersed in the sacred river. In that moment of spontaneous illumination, he experienced the body as apparition, not reality.

With this quietude he went to Kapadia Baba, who directed his attention to mastering the *Tulasi Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita,* from which he was able to quote freely for the rest of his life. Focused as he was on spirituality, he became indifferent to day-to-day life, as his parents and relatives noticed with great concern. In an effort to rekindle his interest in life, they arranged for young Ram Surat Kumar to marry. He settled initially into the life of a householder, and although he worked as a headmaster in a school to support his family, his inner quest was a yearning for God.

Kapadia Baba returned at this crucial stage in his life and instructed him to seek a Guru. Ram Surat Kumar was surprised, as he had always assumed that Kapadia Baba was his Guru, but Kapadia Baba told him to

travel to South India, specifically mentioning Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Aurobindo. Following this directive, Ram Surat Kumar arrived in *Arunachala*. The first sight of the Holy hill that welcomed him on his way to Ramanashram filled him with joy. Bhagavan was seated on the platform and the whole atmosphere was filled with silence and peace. Ram Surat Kumar entered and sat in front of Maharshi, who bestow on him a *Darshan* gaze. He was plunged into a deep meditation. After a long time, he opened his eyes and saw that the sage was focusing his glance of Grace on him continuously with compassion and love. A joyful smile was visibly dancing on Bhagavan's face as he bestowed that direct spiritual experience.

He was drawn into Ramana Maharshi's path of *Self-Enquiry* and this repeatedly led to states of *Samadhi*. When he had to return to his village he prostrated and silently prayed, "Bhagavan, please pour Grace on me to make me your own and keep me ever at your Holy feet." Despite the fact that Ram Surat Kumar did not say this out loud, Bhagavan understood it, nodded his head, and said, "S*aree*" (Tamil for "yes"). Later, Yogi Ram Surat Kumar confided in me that this was the first Tamil word that he learned, using it frequently thereafter in his own life. Ordinarily "*saree*" can be translated as "yes," but on this occasion, when Ram Surat Kumar surrendered to his Master; it took on the significance of "Yes, I have already accepted you."

During the summer of 1949, Ram Surat Kumar came back to Bhagavan and saw that his arm was painfully afflicted with cancer. Bhagavan was available only for a few hours. This concerned Ram Surat Kumar greatly until he heard a devotee say, "Bhagavan, I am hurt to see that you are suffering from pain." Bhagavan laughed and said, "The questioner has

been listening to the teaching for many years, which emphasizes 'I am not the body' and still he says I have got pain. Is this the way to grasp the teaching? Am I really the body?'" This answer and explanation struck a deep chord in Ram Surat Kumar's heart because of his prior experience in Varanasi.

After Ramana Maharshi attained *Maha Samadhi*, Ram Surat Kumar was troubled and turned to TK Sundaresa Iyer, a guest of the *Ashram*, who guided him to another saint, Swami Ramdas of Kanghangad. His initial visit was disappointing and he returned to the Himalayas, but was slowly and gradually called back to Swami Ramdas, eventually returning to *Anandashram*. He read Swami Ramdas' book, *In Quest of God,* and was deeply moved. On his third visit, Swami Ramdas welcomed him back with a big smile and the two shared a heart-to-heart laugh.

One day Swami Ramdas turned to him intently and asked, "What do you want from me?" Ram Surat Kumar asked for initiation and Swami Ramdas agreed, on the condition that he should chant the mantra continuously for twenty-four hours without ceasing. Swami Ramdas asked him to be seated and uttered the sacred mantra of *Sri Rama Jaya Rama Jaya Rama Om* three times. This sent Ram Surat Kumar into ecstasy and a Divine power and force poured into his being. The *japa* went on continuously for the next three days without a pause. He attuned to the mantra and this established him in the final state of absolute quietude where he transcended the limitations of body and mind once and for all. When he later recalled this he stated repeatedly, "This beggar died at the Holy Feet of Swami Ramdas in 1952, and from that point only God existed for this beggar."

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Ram Surat Kumar remained at *Anandashram* for some time after this, but the divine ecstasy that he was experiencing became a distraction to other guests and they complained to Swami Ramdas, who asked him to leave. Ram Surat Kumar said: "Where will I go, I do not know how to live in this world, am I to beg?" Back came the response: "Yes, be a beggar!" Swami Ramdas further added: "Under the shade of a banyan tree only bushes and thorns can grow, and another big tree has no room. So go away." Ram Surat Kumar then decided that he would go to *Arunachala* and announced this to Swami Ramdas, who was immensely pleased and gave him a woolen shawl that became a trademark of Ram Surat Kumar's attire even in the hot summer months at *Arunachala*.

Ram Surat Kumar, in his ecstasy, traveled across India for seven years, from 1952 to 1959, visiting shrines of realized saints and remaining established in the state of *Samadhi* before arriving permanently in Tiruvannamalai, where I first met him in 1959. I was spending time with my Teacher, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, and noticed a disheveled, unkempt "madman" seated in front of me. As that thought flashed across my mind, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, understanding my thoughts, turned to me and said, "He is not a madman, he is a Yogi. Ganesan, he is a *siddha purusha*. He is hungry, so go inside and mix up some rice and give it to him." Food was scarce in the *Ashram* during those days, from 1959 to 1964, and despite the *Ashram* being in financial difficulty, I made it a point to try and feed Ram Surat Kumar whenever possible. Later, he told me that it was T. K. Sundaresa Iyer who named him Yogi Ram Surat Kumar and that name remained with him from that point on. He remained in *Ramananagar* (area around the *Ashram*), living in a small hut and walking all over the hill, much like his Master, Ramana Maharshi. While I was walking around the hill, I would often have a chance to see

him in the burial ground jumping from one tomb to another, chanting *Sri Rama Jaya Rama Jaya Rama*. During those years I had many occasions to have contact with Yogi Ram Surat Kumar. I did not know that there was a spiritual cord binding Yogi Ram Surat Kumar and me. In 1962, he went to town to live, staying either in the temple or sometimes under a punnai tree near the railway station.

I lost contact with him after that point, having immersed myself in the *Ashram* activities and being actively involved with the *Mountain Path*. I would sometimes catch sight of him over the years during my frequent trips to Madras when I would go by the bus station. He would suddenly appear and hand me a flower and then demand from me, "Ganesa, please give me a rupee." For several years I did not see him, but in 1980, I had contact with him again. The centenary celebrations were done in the Ashram with big fanfare, visitors, celebrations, and *pujas* at the Ashram. A group of us toured all over the world singing Bhagavan's songs. One day Yogi Ram Surat Kumar met me and said, "Ganesa, the local people in the town of Tiruvannamalai are not in favor of what is happening at *Ramanashram*. They are saying that it is a Brahmin institution and there is only *Sanskrit* there. During Bhagavan's lifetime *Parayana* was being practiced in Tamil and the *Collected Works of Bhagavan* was being sung in Tamil. So start that again." I tried to, but there was nobody who knew the entire collected works by heart except two or three old devotees, so I avoided meeting him again as he was so persistent.

He solved this dilemma of starting *Tamil Parayana* in his own unique style! My friend, Anuradha, had settled in the *Ashram* in 1983, and my brother Mani had resigned his job and moved permanently to

Tiruvannamalai to help me. Together they were helping me manage the *Ashram* as the activities had grown significantly. During the *Karthikeya* festival in 1983, Anuradha, Mani, Kanakammal (another old devotee of Ramana Maharshi), and myself were near the temple witnessing some of the religious ceremonies. Suddenly and out of nowhere, Yogi Ram Surat Kumar appeared and caught my hand. With authority he said, "Ganesa, this beggar has been sending word to meet you and ask you again to start Tamil *Parayanam,* and you have been avoiding me." He was in his garb of several shawls, carrying a coconut bowl, sun sticks and a large fan. Anuradha was quite frightened initially with this vision of a madman suddenly accosting me, as this was her first *Darshan* of Yogi Ram Surat Kumar! I admitted that I was avoiding him, as I was unable to find someone to take on the colossal task of learning all the collected works and teaching others to do *Parayanam*. He instantly turned toward Anuradha and said: "Why, she will take up this task!" He then disappeared into the crowd as abruptly as he had arrived. Anuradha, still quite stunned by his disheveled sight and the familiarity with which he addressed me, asked, "Who is this madman who comes and accosts you and commands and gives orders to you? What is this Tamil *Parayana* to which he is referring?"

Some power must have influenced Anuradha because she started learning the *Collected Works* from Kunjuswami and Kanakammal. She started singing in Bhagavan's shrine, and many of the women were attracted to her singing because nobody at that time had read Bhagavan's collected works in the original. Whenever Kunjuswami was teaching her, he would say that she must learn it by heart, otherwise he would not teach her. She then learned the entire poems in the collected works by heart and taught the other women, particularly Ramani, my

brother, Mani's, wife, who was very eager to learn, Yogi Ram Surat Kumar took a keen interest in their progress. Several years later, Anuradha completed and prepared six days of *Parayana.* Yogi asked her, "How many days?" She said that six days were ready. Yogi asked her, "What about Sunday?" Anuradha, who was very quick-spirited, replied, "Sunday is Sabbath day!" Yogi Ram Surat Kumar burst into peals of laughter and said, "Oh Sunday will be a rest day!" To this day, there is no *Parayana* on Sunday.

After that meeting our next interaction was in 1986, when I was collecting articles of the reminiscences of devotees of Ramana Maharshi for publication in the *Mountain Path*. Anuradha remembered that Yogi Ram Surat Kumar had mentioned that he also met Ramana Maharshi. So we (Anuradha, librarian Jayaraman, and I) set out to him. Since we were not planning on taking notes, we had decided to record the meeting, but did it secretly. Jayaraman had tested the recorder to his satisfaction outside Yogi Ram Surat Kumar's room before we entered and were seated. However, as soon as Jayaraman tried to operate the recorder in the room, he was unable to do so! Yogi Ram Surat Kumar then started angrily narrating an earlier incident in the day after he had been photographed without permission and said, "Ganesa, people have no courtesy these days. They try to photograph or record this beggar without asking him." As Jayaraman and I exchanged a look, I mentally apologized for this indiscretion. Immediately Yogi Ram Surat Kumar's mood changed, and he fell into a state of great ecstasy as he recalled his interactions with Ramana Maharshi. The incident that he recalled is still fresh in my mind: a devotee asked Bhagavan whether a disciple can take another Guru if the Guru drops the body before the disciple has Self-realized. Bhagavan replied, "No, there is no need because the Grace and

blessings will continue." Anuradha promptly asked Yogi Ram Surat Kumar, "If that is the case, why did you go to Swami Ramdas after the Maharshi's Nirvana?" Yogi explained that the Divine fervor he had experienced in Bhagavan's presence began to subside after he left him and went to stay in the Himalayas. He had begun to see that a *Higher Power* began to express itself, using him as an instrument. Bhagavan had shaped him to that high state, but after Bhagavan's Nirvana he needed a Guru in the body and saw no conflict in going to Ramdas.

I had the fortunate fate of interacting with Yogi Ram Surat Kumar on several occasions after this. It is no exaggeration to say that he continued to play a pivotal role in my life. The following is an example where he specifically stepped in and resolved a crisis. In 1987, I was caught up in a problem involving a printing press. I was trying to print Ramana Maharshi's books locally at a lower cost so we could reduce the price in the bookstore. A local printer offered to take on the responsibility of printing locally if I could help purchase a press. The bank approved a loan on the condition that I was the guarantor, so I agreed without fully understanding the consequences of this. Unfortunately he defaulted on the loan, and the bank manager was pressuring me to repay the loan. I had never handled money before, had no personal assets, and was bewildered about the situation. As the pressure mounted, I even contemplated suicide. Anuradha, seeing my increasing desperation and depression, suggested that we take this problem to Yogi Ram Surat Kumar.

We met at his house, and Anuradha began by saying, "Ganesan is going through a lot of stress with a printing press issue and has said that he wants to commit suicide." Quickly came the response: "Ganesa, what

did our Master Ramana Maharshi teach us? You have to inquire into the source of thoughts and eradicate the mind, not the body. Tell me what the problem is." Anuradha explained the issue in detail. One of the hallmarks of Yogi Ram Surat Kumar was his intense and complete involvement in a predicament once he engaged himself in it. He reviewed all the details, and after a thorough analysis of the issue, he remained silent for a moment and then took out his cigarette packet cover. He wrote "Om" on it and gave it to me. He then said, "The person who will help you is one of my devotees, Janardanan, and this is his address." Janardanan came to Tiruvannamalai when I contacted him, and without so much as looking at the printing press, said, "My master, Yogi Ram Surat Kumar, has asked me to take this press off your hands. I will pay the entire amount of the loan and take the press." I felt instantly relieved, but my relief was short-lived, as his partners refused to endorse the idea. It took another seven months for him to finally take the press and clear the loan. I felt terribly harassed during this time, and finally, when things were about to clear, Yogi Ram Surat Kumar asked me, "If this problem is cleared, Ganesa, what will you do and where will you go?" I replied that I would go to Varanasi, as it has a special spiritual significance for me. He was very pleased to hear that, so with his help and the help of Krishnamurti's nephew, I retreated to Varanasi for an entire year. Even there, I could feel his mystic hand helping me with the bed and board arrangements. I had a cottage right on the banks of the *Ganges* and spent my year there cultivating a sense of quietude and dispassion. Ultimately, he was guiding me by freeing me of the continuous involvement in the *Ashram*. For the first time in nearly thirty years, I felt a new sense of freedom and that I was being weaned away from attachment to duties at *Ramanashram*.

When I came back to Tiruvannamalai, Yogi Ram Surat Kumar said, "Mother Krishnabai is on her death bed. Go and see her." It was Mother Krishnabai, in 1960, who had guided me to bring back all the old devotees of Bhagavan and attend to them. After twenty-seven years of doing this "service," I returned to report the progress that I had made. I stayed with her for two months. During that time, building on my practice in Varanasi, I asked her to release me from further duties in the *Ashram*. Mother asked me, "How many old devotees still remain in the *Ashram?"* I said I had brought back almost fifty old devotees, attended to them, and completed their funeral services. Only two, Kunjuswami and Ramaswami Pillai, were left. On hearing this, she said, "Ganesa, you have more work to complete, but I assure you that Bhagavan will make you 'a nobody' and establish you in that state of quietude."

It was 1989 when I returned to *Ramanashram*. Three years later Kunjuswami passed away, and at the end of 1994, Ramaswami Pillai passed away. The next day I was released. I had already published in the *Mountain Path* that I was relinquishing all forms of responsibility to *Ramanashram* and showed that issue to Yogi Ram Surat Kumar. He read it and then said, "Ganesa, do me a favor." He held my hand and took me to *Ramanashram* to meet Sundaram, my brother, who had already become the President. He told Sundaram, "Do not be afraid, Bhagavan is managing this Ashram. Everyone will help you. Be bold; because the *Ashram* activities will continue without interruption." He encouraged Sundaram and allowed me to leave. Soon after, Yogi became intensely involved in building his own *Ashram*. Whenever I would go and stand in front of him, he would say, "Ganesa, we have spent a lot of time together. Go back to *Anandaramana* (the name of my house) and put

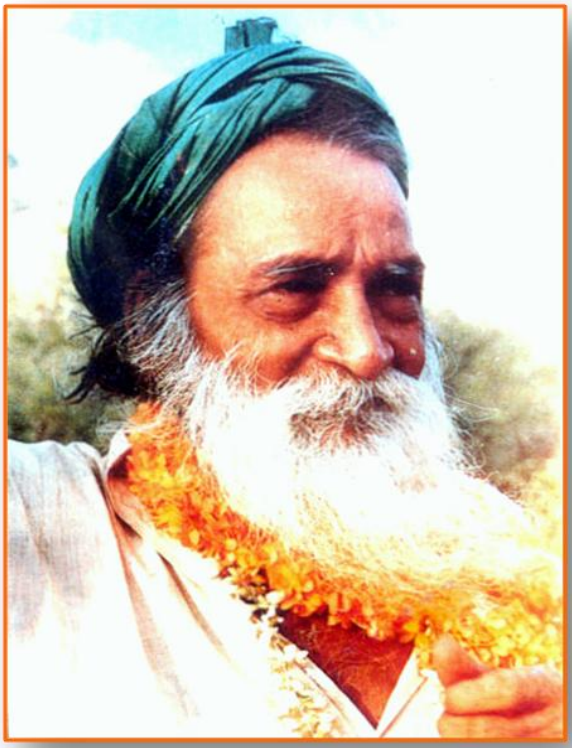
Ramana Maharshi's teaching into practice." This served as a constant reminder to me of the ultimate state in the spiritual quest. It was his constant prompting to share the teaching first, and then put it into profound practice, which deepened my spiritual life. There was always the grace of Ramana Maharshi and the blessings of old devotees, but it was Yogi who molded my adult life in many ways. Even my traveling and sharing of Ramana Maharshi's teachings in the United States were at his instruction.

In 2001 he dropped the body. I was with Yogi Ram Surat Kumar in his last days. As I mentally prayed from a distance, he raised his hands and blessed me. After he dropped the body, I was among those who carried his body to be interred, praying that I want to offer you something. Suddenly his close devotee, Devaki, requested that I inter the last coconut shell, fan and sticks. He continued to fulfill my desires even after he dropped the body!

I want to end this chapter with a recollection that still brings tears to my eyes. One day (it was a Thursday, which in Hindi is translated as *Guruvar*) I went and prostrated to him and said, "Today is *Guruvar*." He lifted me up, saying, "Ganesa, your Guru is Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi." Then, with tears' of ecstasy he exclaimed, "This Beggar's Guru is also Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, Ganesa."

Yogi Ram Surat Kumar was one of the greatest of devotees who were established in the silent state of *I Am*. I am so happy that I could share with you this very great mystical devotee of Bhagavan who merged with *Arunachala,* who lived *Arunachala,* who expressed *Arunachala,* who shared

Arunachala, and who influenced several beings to be established in *Arunachala.*



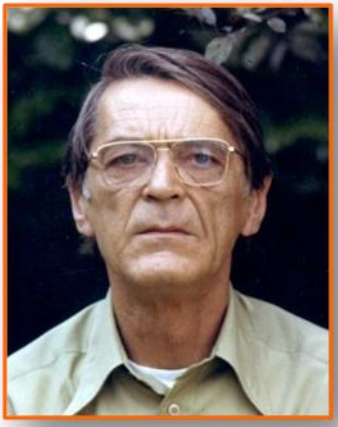
YOGI RAM SURAT KUMAR

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

ANURADHA, V. GANESAN WITH YOGI RAM SURAT KUMAR

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Wolter Keers



In 1985, Wolter Keers invited a group of friends and others to his house and delivered a talk on the direct teachings of Sri Bhagavan. As they were leaving, he said, "Please stay." He informed them that he was going to drop his body. This was not in a cave in Tiruvannamalai, but a room in Holland! Wolter first stood a large picture of Ramana Maharshi on the floor. He then put a cushion in front of the picture and lay down. He smiled joyfully, and in a trice the body gracefully dropped away! The people gathered around noticed that Wolter's head was touching the feet of Bhagavan in the picture. It was a beautiful culmination to a life of surrender!

Wolter was certainly a great person because he relinquished his body just as a *Videha Mukta* would do. The Hindu scriptures make a distinction between two kinds of Self-realization, *mukti* and *Videha mukti*. When a person is in a state of *jiva mukti*, he is in a state of oneness, even when he is alive. People who look at someone in that state can only understand intuitively that here is a realized being. A

Videha Mukta is one who is completely established in a blissful state at the time the body drops away.

I was in close correspondence with Wolter in my role as the managing editor of *The Mountain Path*. Arthur Osborne was the editor of *The Mountain Path* until he passed away in 1970. After that, the editorship was taken up by scholar devotees, but I took on the responsibility of collecting articles for the issues. This is how my association with Wolter developed, although I also had the privilege of meeting him personally. He always obliged me by submitting his articles promptly, each one steeped in his individual and personal experience of being consciously immersed in the Self. What I am presenting here about Wolter Keers has been obtained from these writings, which were compiled and edited by David Godman, with our deep gratitude.

According to Bhagavan, God, the Self, and the *Guru* are synonymous and identical. God, or the Self, fills a vessel with divine wisdom. This happens right from the devotee's childhood days. Most people have been attracted, in some way or another, to Truth, or toward God, or have had an experience transcending the body and mind. Wolter Keers was undoubtedly one such person who was spiritually mature and Self-realized.

Wolter Keers was born in Holland in a clergyman's family. They were devout Christians. Wolter himself said that such families were rarely found. At the age of five, Wolter had a remarkable experience, which he later recognized as spiritual. A family friend was visiting and was conversing with them all. Being five years old, Wolter was not interested

in any of the conversation. However, his ears perked up when he heard the word, "British India." The child was thrilled for some inexplicable reason because he realized that there was something mysterious about it. The child had no comprehension of the word, but it was a spiritual experience of some kind. This was Wolter's first spiritual experience.

One day, Wolter was playing outside in the field with mounds of sand. By chance, he saw a hedge that had pink flowers with fluffy balls. Suddenly, everything, including the hedge, the flowers, even his body, disappeared into the light. Everything around him was light and brilliance. True, he belonged to a family of theologians, but he couldn't bring himself to discuss this extraordinary experience with any of them or ask for an explanation.

Until he was twenty-one years old, Wolter did not comprehend that these were early spiritual experiences. One day, he was seated next to an elderly man on a bench. The man was reading a book, when suddenly, for no reason at all, he read a passage out loud. Wolter did not pay attention to the words, but again everything merged into the same kind of light, just as it had happened at the age of five.

In the Hindu scriptures, such a state of transcending the world and everything in it is called *Nirvikalpa samadhi*. Wolter had experienced this state three times before he was twenty-one years old. This time he was brave enough to ask his family for an explanation. He told them, "This has happened to me repeatedly." His family brushed his questions aside, saying, "These are bizarre experiences. Do not pay any attention to them." Wolter was disappointed at their response to his totally sincere

questions. He then asked his friends. None of them could understand, nor did they share his thirst to learn more about these experiences. Hence, he started reading widely, but he found no book that provided an acceptable answer.

Wolter had a strong feeling that there was some reality in the experiences; he also felt that the experiences were actually the source of one's existence and even one's body. He understood that this was the substratum on which all existence, the world and everything else in it, was based, and that was the still silence.

His efforts to find an answer met with no success. Then a thought inside him whispered, "Perhaps you must seek a master who will be able to help you." With the advent of this intuitive feeling, the guru also started playing an active role. Within a few days, an elderly lady came to Wolter's house and lent him two books. She said, "Wolter, read these books." Well, we know Wolter's attitude toward books; he was most disappointed with books. But his respect for the woman compelled him to pick up and read the books. One of the books was *Jnana Yoga* by Swami Vivekananda. The other one was *The Secret Path* by Paul Brunton. As Wolter read the first book, he entered a state of ecstasy because for the first time, a monk, a Hindu monk, was affirming the Truth of his mystical experience. He plunged into the book with great vigor because he found that it confirmed the reality of his spiritual experience. This was something that neither his relatives nor his friends had been able to do.

The book also revealed that it was a common phenomenon for real

aspirants to have this kind of spiritual thirst right from childhood. The crowning glory of the book was that Swami Vivekananda confirmed that the tradition of sages and saints is still a cultural trait in India. Wolter knew immediately that his master was in India and that he need not search anywhere else. With this great feeling, he started reading the second book, by Paul Brunton, in which he found a picture of Bhagavan. After the first few pages, he knew that Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi was his *guru,* his *Satguru.* He took this picture and placed it where he could see it as he practiced the various kinds of meditation that he was already involved in. He felt the glow of grace and presence from the picture.

The book stated that in relation to the human body, the spiritual centre, or core sense of being, is on the right side of the chest. One should concentrate on that. So this was what Wolter did. He received confirmation of the fact that Ramana Maharshi was his *guru.* However, he was anxious about one thing. The book by Paul Brunton was many years old. He wondered whether his guru would be available in the body. This was the only craving that he had—to see Bhagavan physically. When he meditated on the heart center, it seemed to him that the photograph of Bhagavan responded in a mystical way, assuring him, I am here. You will come to me. Do not worry.

Wolter couldn't go immediately for innumerable reasons—there was World War II, the German occupation, and the fact that he had no money. He was unable to leave for India until early 1950. The moment he set foot on the Indian soil, he left for *Arunachala.* Rhoda McIver was his host. It was she who took him to Bhagavan. He entered the *Ashram*

with a feeling of awe, respect, and intense longing to meet the divine Guru. He was thrilled with gratitude when he stood in Bhagavan's presence. He went before Bhagavan and said, "Thank-you, Bhagavan. You have answered all my prayers. I wanted to see you in your physical form."

Later, Wolter described his first *Darshan* of Bhagavan: "I saw Bhagavan sitting on a chair in the small passage that connected his room with the hall. This is where he met visitors and devotees. The mere sight of him made me tremble all over. It was not because of nervousness or uneasiness. It was because I had come face to face with the divine. The recognition affected me so much that my body shook involuntarily. I looked at this being that had been the focus of all my dreams, hopes, and expectations for so many years. There could have been a letdown, a disappointing realization that I had come so far just to see an ordinary man sitting in a chair, but this was not so. As I gazed at Bhagavan, I felt I saw God sitting there. I felt I was seeing in that early morning, a pure light that had taken human form. It was more radiant than anything I had ever seen before."

Bhagavan turned his attention on Wolter and smiled at him. Wolter felt that the smile meant, "So, finally you have arrived," affirming that Bhagavan had been guiding him even from that picture in his house. He later described the experience: "Waves of ecstasy inundated me. I feasted my eyes on his form. I looked and looked, soaking up every emanation of this radiance. Long, long ago, when I was very young, I had believed that God was a magnificent being who had a human form that radiated light and goodness. I had long since abandoned this

childhood belief, believing it to be a fairy tale told only to credulous children. Yet, now this childhood belief turned out to be true. Here before me was a human form that seemed to be made of light itself. How do I describe what I experienced on that first morning? God was manifesting before my eyes, revealing his presence to me as a radiating, blazing, penetrating light—a light that went right through me like an x-ray."

The beauty of this description is that Wolter is talking about this experience before even knowing that the sacred mountain *Arunachala* is the hill of the holy fire. Hindu Mythology says that *Arunachala* is wisdom itself. Bhagavan confirms it. It symbolizes the silent, still Self, the state of 'I *Am,*' and it is formless. *Arunachala* (Self) is wisdom. *Arunachala* shone through human form to reveal the Truth about *Arunachala,* the wisdom of the natural state of 'I *Am*'.

At the time, Wolter did not know that he was one of the messengers who would assist in the awakening of this wisdom in other aspirants. Western Europe eventually came to know of Ramana Maharshi through Wolter. This was his very destiny, and he talked about it without even knowing. Bhagavan is not about lyrical or poetic exaggeration. Any writer or editor has the ability to write flowery language about the master. Wolter said, "Every word I utter is my true spiritual experience. Nothing that comes from my brain can write poetry. It is all horse language." Only Wolter could write like this.

Wolter remained in the presence of Bhagavan. He was seated before Bhagavan, knowing full well that he was in the presence of divinity. He

says about the experience: "Those first few days were the fulfillment of everything I had ever hoped to find. In fact, I can say it was much more than that. I had experienced lucid, radiant moments in my years of practice, but nothing had prepared me for the possibility of coming into contact with even a portion of this presence of light. No part of my imagination had even conceived that such an experience was possible. There was a radiant power and energy in Bhagavan's presence that effortlessly swept through my mind and matter. His grace silenced my mind, filled my heart, and took me to realms that were beyond the phenomenal. In his radiant presence, it was so evident that I was not the body and not the ego, and no such analysis was needed. The light radiating from Bhagavan filled my being, sweeping away all the darkness from me in a stroke." For weeks on end, he sat in the presence of Bhagavan, experiencing these waves of ecstasy. He felt the radiance of light when he was in the presence of Bhagavan, but it seemed to wear off when he went back to the cottage. Hence he strongly felt, I must ask Bhagavan to establish this radiance or ecstasy permanently. Bhagavan himself should end the waxing and waning of this experience.

One day, he sat away from the physical presence of Bhagavan, but he could still see Bhagavan. He was bombarded with thoughts. "What is the use, Bhagavan, of your radiance if it can be available to me only in your company and leaves me the minute I leave you? Tell me!" Bhagavan, however, did not easily give in to demands. Wolter waged not a war of words, but a war of the heart. He applied the perseverance that was characteristic of him even as a child. This is something that we can learn from Wolter. Perseverance is a most positive trait for us all. It is not enough to have the experience just for a few days.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

After some time, Bhagavan slowly turned his attention toward him and smiled, asking without words, "What do you want?" Wolter was almost in tears because his prayer to Bhagavan had been genuine, sincere. After some time Bhagavan looked at him again, focused his gaze, his blessings, and his grace so powerfully that it touched Wolter's heart. Bhagavan seemed to be saying to him, "Wolter! You are looking for your glasses and they are right on your nose!" Wolter was thrilled by the experience and felt wave upon wave of ecstasy. He surmised that this permanency can never be obtained from outside. Anything that is outside is impermanent; it will come and go. The permanent thing you are seeking, Bhagavan, your guru, makes it appear like an everyday experience when he says, "What you are searching for is right under your nose!" Wolter felt that he had received the answer from the ever-present inner *guru* as he was under Bhagavan's intent gaze.

This is how Wolter describes what that experien*ce* felt like: "Suddenly, Bhagavan's eyes emitted light and fire. I can think of no other way of describing that immense explosion in his gaze. His powerful look went straight into me, burning away everything that made me think that I was different and separate from him. I felt the right side heart center begin to get warm. The heart center got warmer and warmer as he continued to gaze at me until I felt it to be a hot, fiery ball glowing inside. It felt as if Bhagavan was charging it with some immensely powerful spiritual electricity because as he continued to look at me, I had the unmistakable feeling that this heart center was some kind of spiritual dynamo that was emitting sparks of light and energy. I felt as if some enormously potent electric apparatus had been suddenly transplanted into my chest. I sat rigid and straight. My eyes were glued to his. Fire flowed from his

glowing eyes and into the core of my being. How long this *Darshan* lasted I cannot say. This was beautiful. I had received what I had come for. There was a complete transformation inside out, and it all happened without a word being spoken. That consummation through silence was clearer and more direct than any explanation that could have been given in words. Bhagavan had taken me to the limit of my readiness. I felt that the infusion of grace that Bhagavan had blessed me with on that day would do its own work in its own time. I had received my parting gift from him and I could have asked for nothing more valuable."

Wolter went back to his country, even though he was aware that Bhagavan was to soon drop his body. He did not stay because he knew that Bhagavan was not contained in the body. Bhagavan is the silent, still clear light of the heart, the immaculate bedrock; ever fresh in every moment. After his return, he went back to a master in Kerala with whom he spent some years. But all the time, it was Bhagavan who was his spiritual backbone, the nerve, the root, on which all his activities were founded.

In the 1970s and '80s, Wolter visited Nisargadatta Maharaj regularly and listened to his *advaitic* teaching. Yet he held on to Bhagavan, his Satguru in the heart, feeling his presence in the form of divine light. He toured Europe widely, giving many lectures. He edited and published many spiritual magazines, focusing on the practical side of spiritual teaching. External activities need not hinder us from plunging within and being the Self that we always are. Wolter Keers was an outstanding example of such a person. Many of us feel that if we are actively involved in something, we cannot pursue realization. Wolter, a *Mukta purusha*, was

more involved in activities *after* attaining realization.

I was fortunate to be in correspondence with such a beautiful devotee. I once asked him, "Wolter, what did Bhagavan mean to you?" This is what he said:

"What does Bhagavan mean to me? I am asking myself that. What has Bhagavan meant to me and what does he still mean to me? I find that it is impossible to give a neat answer to this question. Well, this is just it. Sri Ramana Maharshi was, and is, the unimaginable and therefore the indescribable. Bhagavan was not the frail, old dying body that I saw reclining on the sofa, but the unimaginable; he was egoless and filled with pure radiance; and the body, however much we loved its appearance, was merely like a glittering diamond reflecting the eternal that really is. 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 Christ or the Buddha. Jesus Christ or the Buddha were images in my head formed on the basis of the beliefs I had been brought up on, and all the stories I heard and read later. Ramana Maharshi, from the first moment I saw him, was anything but an image. He was a bomb--exploding the myth of my life within a few minutes and without a word. His famous question, *Who am I,* Immediately had a totally new color. It was only three or four years later that the full impact of what his silence had revealed to me became clear. Bhagavan never gave anyone the possibility to believe that you as a separate person, the ego-I, 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 forth the questions? Who came to see him? Who wanted to realize?"*

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Once Bhagavan asked someone, "How do you know that you are not realized?" Bhagavan asked the counter-question, "How do you know you are *not* realized?" If you ponder over it, you will find that this question is like an earthquake. Who says so, indeed? Pondering deeply over this question, one cannot but come to the conclusion that Sri Bhagavan told us the plain and naked Truth when he said, "The Self is always realized." When it is seen that every perception, whether sensory or mental, is nothing but a movement in still consciousness, a movement in clear light, then from that moment on, every perception chants the glory of this clarity, just as one can see a wave, any wave, as a song of the sea. Whatever I understand now is entirely my good fortune in meeting the right person, the embodiment of Truth, at the right time in my life. I received all of it free. I never had to pay a penny. Authentic teaching is always free except in one way. You pay for it with the depth of your personality. This implies that you must be prepared to give up everything that you have ever considered as your Self.

Bhagavan 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 beings. Bhagavan has never 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 and receiving. Even though for a long time I had thought that he had given me his love, and that I had given him my heart, it was the naked confrontation of illusion and Truth in which illusion could not withstand. 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. He saw me as 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. Bhagavan was what he was, and Bhagavan is what he is and because of that I can say certainly now, I am what I am. Does it not mean to say that just being who he was; Bhagavan enabled me to realize the timeless, unthinkable unimaginable, *I Am*? Bhagavan is the everpresent stillness; Bhagavan is the silence. These two last sentences could become the obvious foundation of every one's life. Every moment we must remember That within which everyone abides.

The greatness of this *Mukta purusha*, Wolter Keers, is that he lived from his childhood for the Truth. He strove for it, and when he sought it, the guru came. As it says in *The Secret Path*, when the disciple is ready, the guru will appear. This is the basic principle that made Wolter understand that Bhagavan was his guru. Because Wolter was not attached to the body, he did not stay at Ramanashram even when he knew that Bhagavan was going to give up his body. For Wolter, the light of nonperishable Truth, not the perishable physical body and mind, was the message. It was the Truth that *Arunachala*, the Self, means, the Truth that is discovered within each one of us, in and as the spiritual heart. Destiny brought us Bhagavan, who appeared to reveal this simple Truth to all who were called to the Truth of the illusory nature of Maya, and the Truth of our eternal immortality.

This *Videha Mukta* relinquished his own body effortlessly, with a smile on his face, making sure his head was touching the feet of Bhagavan.

Some of my friends would always ask me why all the sages are male. There is no male or female in sainthood. Wisdom is genderless. A woman sage told me, "Go and serve old devotees." These very devotees would ask me when they dropped their bodies, "How can we repay you?" The repayment was in the gratitude and feeling of ecstasy that I had. Each one of them has said, "Go and share this with others. Narrate the experience that you have had in our presence."

Spirituality is nothing but experience of nonphysical existence . . . In order to learn a language; you need to learn the letters of the alphabet, then the words. But no amount of words, books or techniques or even practice that are recorded in the chapters mean anything. You must experience it as your Self. There is no other method. It is the shortcut. There is no other short cut.

Arthur Osborne once told me what Bhagavan had told him: The whole course has to be suffered through. When you are suffering, you will not experience suffering; it will be only delight. This sharing of the *Human Gospel of Ramana Maharshi* is to help establish our faith that Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is the voice of *Arunachala*, the true boundless and deathless state of existence, and that each of us is Bhagavan in that sixth sense or substratum.

Let us together pay respect to this *Videha Mukta* from Holland. Let us also understand that each one of us is a *jiva Mukta*; and that we should completely surrender to the Mystery to become a *Videha Mukta.*

The *'I'* merging with the silent state of *I AM* is the whole theme of this sharing and *Human Gospel*. There are many devotees about whom I did not share. This does not mean that they are insignificant. All of us are chosen. Becoming aware of this calling and our rising to that calling, is to live by the Master's teaching, or have faith in the *Higher Power* and to put these teaching into practical practice. *Sravana-* listening is very important. The act of empathic listening is of great magnitude.

I am very fortunate to have been in the presence of so many sages, seers, mystics and saints. Each one of us is a continuum of God. Because of this temporary identification with the body and the mind, the experience of the silent state of "I AM" may be clouded over with mental activity. However, Truth is available to us all the time. Allow experience to happen. Accept the experience as reality. Do not go back to clinging to the body and mind. Once, when somebody told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, I want Grace," Bhagavan said, "What is, IS only the Grace… please don't obstruct it." By way of identification with the body and mind we obstruct that Grace, that awareness, with a carnal outlook. There is only one Truth, and that is the pristine state of 'I AM.' God declared to Moses, "I AM that I AM.' Bhagavan says, "*Arunachala,* thy name is Heart," and who needs clarification for the heart? The still state of 'I AM' is the heart sky. To wake up to that 'I AM' depends on grace because no movement can make it happen. The outside is the reflection of the inside. Let us be silent and peaceful now, as the state of pure existence without boundaries. 'I AM' is the Truth, the beginning, the middle, and the end. 'I AM' is Grace and blessing. We are already filled with 'I AM.' Bhagavan says you are already filled with Grace. The Guru's Grace is always here as God's presence. One has only to awaken

to That. The only effort that Bhagavan accepts is the effort to relinquish the "I am the body idea". That is all.

NAGALAKSHMI AND FAMILY
GANESAN ON BHAGAVAN'S FAR LEFT

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

Nagalakshmi

The Upanishadic declaration, "Self chooses the Self," was quite evident from the lives of Poonja ji, Robert Adams and Yogi Ram Surat Kumar and their relationship with Bhagavan, and how they came under his spiritual influence. In this last chapter, we are going to share about Nagalakshmi, who happens to be my dear mother. Nagalakshmi was an ordinary village girl who lived far away from Arunachala. She was very playful and might have studied up to the third or fourth grade. At the age of thirteen, she was married to my father, T. N. Venkataraman, Bhagavan's nephew. My mother was already related to Bhagavan. My mother's father was Bhagavan's mother's brother, though I did not know at the time about that relationship with Bhagavan. When she was married, through Bhagavan's sister, Alamelu Ammal, who was the foster mother for my father, Nagalakshmi came to know, for the first time, about the significance of Bhagavan as a Sage. During the marriage, she expressed to Alamelu Ammal, her mother-in-law, "I want to see Bhagavan." The mother-in-law gave her a copy of *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* in Tamil [at that time, an abridged version], and told her, "When you memorize all the verses I will take you to Arunachala to see Bhagavan." My mother learned by heart, the whole *Collected Works* within a few weeks, though she did not understand the content of it, she did feel it,

did intuit it, spiritually. The marriage took place in 1929; and the next year, my mother was taken to Bhagavan. She was fourteen years old when she had the very first *Darshan* of Bhagavan. Bhagavan imparted to her a divine glance and my mother told me that the content of that look conveyed to her in silence, "Did it take so long for you to come to me?" The indication is obvious that they have already been called. However, Bhagavan treated all as his spiritual kin. If Bhagavan's spiritual status was colossal, his human relationship was equally wholly impeccable. He treated his sister with the greatest of fraternal affection, his mother, with reverential filial affection. And, he treated us grandchildren only like grandchildren—he commanded us, "Hey! Come here. Sit down," not as Bhagavan nor as a teacher, but as a simple, natural grandfather, gently directing his grandchildren.

In those days, it was the custom that the father-in-law should not talk freely to the daughter-in-law. It was such a strict relationship. Therefore, Bhagavan was very stern in his relationship with the daughter-in-law. However, through his look, through his presence, Bhagavan was sharing with my mother the spiritual bliss and thus, deepening her spiritual maturity. For my mother, the written "Word" came first and the teacher came later. But, she had to go away as my father got a job farther South in India. She prayed to Bhagavan that she be filled with blessings and his continued spiritual presence.

My mother gave birth to seven children. In 1934, the first son was born. When this child was taken to Bhagavan, he named him 'Sundaram,' the current President of *Ramanashram*. In 1936, I was born. When I was brought to Bhagavan, he said: "He has not given me the trouble to name him because he is born with a name." It was true, as I was born

on Lord Ganesa's birthday. He named me, "Ganesan." Likewise, it was Bhagavan who christened my younger brother as 'Subramanian' and the four sisters: "Lakshmi," "Alagammal," "Manalam," and "Sarasvati." In 1938, when I was two years old, my whole family moved to *Arunachala* and was living in a house situated in the town, Tiruvannamalai. Though my mother was totally involved in family life, she told me that she never wasted even a single moment. She was deeply spiritual, inwardly. She trained all of us to look at Ramana Maharshi as *Bhagavan,* "God" and imbibe his powerful spiritual presence, though none of us then could understand what it meant.

Bhagavan, seated in the hall, would be very stern with her. The lady cooks in the kitchen wanted her to receive Bhagavan's blessings. Bhagavan would come into the kitchen between twelve and two, in the afternoon. Those child-widows, who worked in the kitchen, would come to the *Ashram* from town by five in the morning, and would leave only at six that evening, giving them no time to see Bhagavan or to go into the Hall and listen to Bhagavan's words of wisdom. Bhagavan, therefore, would go into the kitchen and share with them the spiritual teachings, in the guise of giving them advice on what food was to be cooked for that night. They kept my mother with them, for they were eager for my mother to also have opportunities to listen to Bhagavan. No sooner than he would enter the kitchen; they would ask my mother to prostrate to Bhagavan. My mother shared with me, in later years, the three pragmatic pearls of wisdom that were granted by Bhagavan expressively to her.

My parents and all of us were staying in town, since women were not allowed to stay in the *Ashram,* at night. When families came to

Ramanashram, the women and children would be sent to our house and my mother would look after them. Of course, ours was not the only house like that. There were a few others, like that of Echammal's, where women devotees would be sent. Once, when my mother was very young, a young woman came along with her parents. She had lost her husband at the very tender age of nineteen, almost the same age as my mother. Her parents were pouring all their affection on their daughter. She and my mother became good friends.

One day, both of them went to the Ashram pool and swam—my mother was a good swimmer. After the bath, that lady wore a beautiful *sari* and my mother, just out of appreciation, told her friend, "Your *sari* is very beautiful." It was just a factual comment. When this family went back home, after a few days, the young woman sent a parcel containing two similar *saris,* addressed to my mother. In those days, all the postal letters and parcels addressed to devotees would be given to Bhagavan and Bhagavan would distribute them to all the devotees, who felt it as *Prasad*. That day, when Bhagavan came into the kitchen, he appeared very stern and his face was very forbidding. Looking at my mother when she prostrated, he said, "We have come to live in the Ashram. We should feel happy with what we already have. Many wealthy people visit the Ashram wearing costly clothes and jewelry. We should not be disturbed by such glamour; but, on the other hand, seeing them wearing, we should feel that we ourselves are wearing them. Leading a desireless state is the best course to live here. Then one can live undisturbed by external additions, subtractions, attractions and distractions. Be contented. Never aspire for that which is not yours."
My mother started crying and the cooks took her position and pleaded with Bhagavan. They said, "Nagu is not at fault as she did not ask for

the *saris*. They sent it themselves without a request. Bhagavan! She is crying." Bhagavan then turned to her and said, "It is all right. This has been said for the good of yourself." All her life, my mother adhered to it and also imparted it to us.

All these instructions happened in the kitchen, spontaneously. My mother lived a life of a wife, attending to the guests and rearing the children as a responsible mother. Yet, she was totally aligning herself to Bhagavan and his teaching. Her body and mind were attending to the duties allotted to her, however her heart was always tuned to the state of *I Am*, the still, inward silence. This is vouchsafed by senior devotees, like Kanakammal who moved with my mother.

One day, Bhagavan told my mother, "Very great *vairagya—purushas*—very disciplined ascetics, living in the Himalayas, also saints and sages visit Arunachala to go around the Hill. Their spiritual luster attracts people toward them. Thus, they take the form of beggars or madmen, so that they will be left undisturbed. So, whoever comes in front of your house, claps their hands, and wants food, whatever you have on hand, without hesitation or delay, share it with them. Do not judge them." My mother adapted that instruction of Bhagavan all her life. Beggars and *sadhus* coming to our house were never turned down.

The third *upadesa* was not only very significant, but also was solely for my mother. Bhagavan came to the kitchen and Bhagavan was in a serious mood. Old devotees have told me that it was very difficult to even go near him, when rarely, he was in that mood. The cooks were hesitant to go near Bhagavan. Like, child Prahalada was ushered in front of Lord Vishnu who had taken the form of a lion-man, the cooks

pushed my mother in front of Bhagavan. She prostrated. Bhagavan, for no known reason, started saying, "If one dies consciously, there is a possibility that there is no birth for the soul. Though, it does not mean that all those who die consciously will not be reborn. One has to remember while actively alive that one should die consciously. For that, one should pursue relentlessly practice of a surrendered life. The Guru will never forsake one who has thus fully surrendered."

These three *Upadesas*: the first one is, "How to live." The second, "How to apply oneself to life," and the third, "How to relinquish the world": are very valuable, indeed, for all aspirants. The cooks were delighted, and addressed my mother, "Because of you, we also have received this teaching. Bhagavan has never spoken of this to anyone else. It is exclusively for you. So, preserve it in your heart. My mother adhered to it until her last moments of earthly life." My Mother understood Bhagavan's teaching in two dimensions: one was to, learn all the verses of *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* by heart. The holy words of the Master have their own power. Thus, she would make us studiously read the *Collected Works*. The second was, Bhagavan giving importance to going around the Hill—*giri pradakshina.* Mother put it into practice, until she became seriously ill and bedridden. When I came to the *Ashram* in 1960, I would attend to all the works in the *Ashram* till eight o'clock at night, and then go home, have food from my mother and go around the hill. For years and years, I have been doing it, all alone. My mother is my original *upa-Guru.* She showed me Bhagavan in my crib by singing Ramana-lullabies to me. I did not know Bhagavan, Guru, Self, but those lullabies extolling Bhagavan had driven my awareness to the lotus feet of my Master me, in later years. When I was one and a half years old my mother would keep me on her lap and push me, so that I would crawl

and reach Bhagavan's sofa. I tried to climb up and the attendant would forcibly pick me up and then toss me into my mother's lap. This was happening repeatedly, and one day I just went there and climbed over the sofa. Bhagavan saw all this and, lest I should tumble down, held me with his left leg and he placed the bottom of his right leg on my head saying, "He has been making efforts all along to achieve this. Only today, there are no hurdles. So, he succeeded." So Bhagavan was shown to me—the touch of his Holy feet on my head, everything—was Bhagavan's *Prasad* because of my mother. My mother showed the real *Bhagavan* and would always say to me, "I gave birth only to your body. Bhagavan is your mother." This is the way she influenced me to have that true *Bhagavan*-awareness.

In 1965, my father had a stroke and his entire right side was paralyzed. Dr. T. N Krishnaswami came and examined him and called me aside, saying, "Ganesan, this is his second stroke. The first time I did not tell anyone. If there is a third attack then it could be fatal. So, please take special care of him." I was struck by that and ran to my mother and told her. She was unperturbed and said, "Go to Bhagavan's shrine and pray there." I went and prayed and told Bhagavan what had happened. Bhagavan's shrine was merely a thatched shed and everything else was in the open. I would sleep outside in front of Bhagavan's shrine on just a mat without pillows, cover, bed sheet, or anything. I enjoyed those days of yesteryear. Bhagavan has appeared to me in my dream four or five times, and every time it was very clear, just like in the waking state. It was not a vague dream. Bhagavan said, "Ganesa! Why are you crying?" I said my father was going to die and that could not be borne by me. He said, "There is nothing to worry." Then, Bhagavan put out his hand and there were three woodapples (a fruit, native to India). He gave one to

me and said, "Give it to Venkatoo. Ask him to eat." The second he shared with me and said, "Give this to Nagu and ask her to eat." And, the third one he shared and said, "You eat yourself. Everything will be all right." I woke up. It was two o'clock in the morning and I ran home and told my mother. We tried next morning to get woodapples but we could not succeed. After a few days, they could be bought and we followed Bhagavan's instructions exactly. My father died recently at the age of ninety-three, of old age, and without a stroke or heart attack. I told Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami, and for all heart patients, along with the regular medicines, thereafter, he added the woodapple also as a medicine.

In 1980, she had asthma and there was no proper treatment. She was suffering so much that she was admitted to the general hospital. Even oxygen was unavailable and the doctors called me aside [I would sleep along with her in the night instead of going around the hill at eight-thirty. I would go and sleep in her room and at four o' clock AM, I would go to the Ashram]. The chief doctor called me and said, "It is very dangerous. Your mother will die. Take her to a bigger hospital in Chennai." I thought he was talking in a low voice but my mother heard our conversation. She called me. "What did the doctor say?" I had to tell her that the doctor had warned me. She said, "Give me two boons." I gave her my word. She said, "The first boon is, under any circumstances, do not remove my body from *Arunachala*. My *Guru,* Bhagavan Ramana, came to *Arunachala* in 1896, and he never left this place and dropped the body only in *Arunachala*. Allow me that destiny. Do not under any circumstances—whatever the cause, whatever the problems—do not allow my body to be removed. The second boon is, that I shall die consciously. Please allow me that, because if I die

consciously I may not have a rebirth. However much the body or mind shouts, do not allow these doctors to give me morphine or any sedatives. Let me suffer outwardly. Consciously, I will be indrawn and merged in Silence." Till the end, I maintained these two boons that I granted her. All the doctors were saying, "You are an educated fool. You say you love your mother, but look at her condition. You are a *rakshasa*-demon." I just bore everything.

Before she died, I prostrated to her and prayed, "Mother! You are going to leave me. What will I do?" I cried profusely. She said, "Do not cry. Be happy! Anyhow, the body has to die one day. Do not pay attention to this body. Shift your attention from my body to the pure state of being. It is only the body that is suffering. Inwardly, I am immersed in peace. The being transcends body and mind. Cling to the ever free being and allow the body and mind to wither away as they should. If you do not pamper them, the body and mind will remain your servant. You be the master of them by paying attention only to your inner being, *Arunachala*. I bless you."

And the second blessing she gave was, "Bhagavan will bless you. I gave you only your body. Bhagavan is your true mother." The third blessing was, "Faithfully serve Bhagavan by practicing his teaching. His Grace is his teaching only." When I cried profusely, she happily assured me, "Bhagavan's Holy Presence is continuously felt by me. Ganesa! That is enough for me." She died in 1986. I carried my mother's body to the grave and burned her body according to her wish. She was one of the devotees who was fully realized. Consciously, happily in the midst of all of her kith and kin, she breathed her last, at the holy foot of Sacred *Arunachala*.

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

This is what two old devotees have said about her. Kunju Swami was alive then and said, "We guests of the Ashram, irrespective of disparity in age, looked upon her only as our own mother. In fact, only after Nagalakshmiammal's coming to the Ashram in 1938, did the material prosperity of the Ashram increase. Hence, she is our *Mahalaksmi*—Goddess of Prosperity and Wealth." The mystic French woman, Mrs. Theresa Regos, who was living up on the hill in the mango-grove cave had this experience, "I was living up on the hill and on that day, suddenly remembered Nagalakshmi, your mother, and a brilliant light engulfed me and spread all around. I felt she has realized oneness with *Arunachala.* Nagalakshmi merged with *Arunachala*, the eternal Self." I am very fortunate to have been in the presence of so many sages and saints. Each one of us is, in Truth, God. Because of our outlook, identification with body and mind, experiencing the grace of *I Am* only seems to be mystically hidden.

This invisible divine substratum is yours to discover. Now!

Namaste,

V. Ganesan

BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI'S SAMADHI

AS SHARED BY V. GANESAN

"The appearance of God will happen inside us only. It is not something external to your internal force. When the mind is turned towards inside, then God will appear as pure consciousness for you. The vision of God happens in mind only. In what form that God will come into sight depends on one's perception of mind only. Anyhow, it is not the ultimate stage. In that state, still the duality is there. It is just like seeing God in dream. After the appearance of God, the inquiry starts within and it will lead to experiencing the power of true Self. The final destination is Self inquiry only."

~Sri Ramana Maharshi~