

Saranagathi



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In this Issue

Dear Sri Bhagavan Devotees,

The Sri Vidya Havan at Sri Ramanasramam commemorates of worship of the Meru Chakra consecrated by the touch of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. This year the Havan was performed on Friday 19th March, 2010. The grand event went off well by Sri Bhagavan and Sri Matrubhuteswara's Grace.

The Ashram website carries [photos](#) and [video](#) of the event. A very moving interview of Smt. Hilda Kapur has also been added to the ['Old Devotees' Interviews'](#) in the website. Lastly we have introduced a 'Quote of the Day' which you may avail of.

This issue of Saranagathi carries an account of Sri Venkatarathnam who lived with Sri Bhagavan from 1944 to 1950 and served Him in His final years. This is followed by Sri Swami Ramdas's recollections in

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'How I came to the Maharshi' and finally, Reports from Sri Ramanasramam.

Yours in Sri Bhagavan,

Editorial Team.

The Essence of Instruction

*Body, senses, mind, breath, sleep –
All insentient and unreal –
Cannot be 'I',
'I' who am the Real.*

– Upadesa Saram by Sri Bhagavan (Verse 22)

Venkatarathnam By Neal Rosner (Published in 'The Maharshi' newsletter Sep/Oct & Nov/Dec 2007)

*Sri Venkatarathnam lived with Bhagavan from 1944 to 1950. During the last year he served as one of His personal attendants. Neal Rosner came to Sri Ramanasramam from the USA in 1968, attached himself to Venkatarathnam and diligently served him until his passing in 1976. Neal's immersion into the spiritual heritage of India under the guidance of Venkatarathnam is elaborately described in his book, *On the Road to Freedom: A Pilgrimage in India*. Neal now resides in Amritanandamayi's Kerala Ashram and is known as Swami Paramatmananda. In the following article, details regarding the life of Venkatarathnam have been extracted from a 25-page essay written about Venkatarathnam by Neal Rosner. He presented this manuscript to us thirty years ago at Sri Ramanasramam. We have also utilized some material from the above-mentioned book.*



Sri Venkatarathnam

THE following is what Sri Venkatarathnam personally told me about himself. He was born in Koduru, Krishna District on the 23rd of May 1921, and at the age of three months his father died of a diabetic carbuncle. At seven his Upanayanam was performed and from that day onwards he never failed to repeat the Gayatri mantra for even a day. Even when in Maharshi's service, he would not come into his presence without having done some Gayatri beforehand. From his seventh year till his last he performed the yearly Sraddha of his parents. He had deep faith in this and believed that the pitrus (departed ones) would bless him with good health and Brahmajnana. Even when he was physically in a serious condition, he would somehow struggle and do it.

He went to school in Gudivada, Hyderabad and Guntur in Andhra Pradesh. At this time he was somewhat

opposed to Hindu orthodoxy and even wrote a paper for the uplift of Harijans, about which he laughed while recalling later. He also now and then would go to see movies of the bhakti type only. He used these occasions at the cinema to test how his mind would react. A scorpion in Hyderabad once stung him, but being afraid to tell his elders, he simply bore the pain until they discovered it and sent him to a doctor. Whenever he had free time from his studies, he would either go to a temple or do japa, sometimes a lakh (100,000) in one day.

Unquenchable Thirst

For some unknown reason, when he was eighteen he started experiencing an intense, unquenchable thirst and was drinking nearly three buckets of water a day, although the quantity of urine passed remained normal. He went to many doctors and was even in the Madras Government Hospital for one month, but no one could find a cause or cure. Finally, when he went to Guntur, someone told him that there was a Hanuman Upasaka, named Sri Hanumandass Garu, and asked whether he would like to see him. He agreed and after going there, Hanuman spoke through Hanumandass' garb saying that Venkatarathnam had come and that he should go round a Hanuman Temple in Guntur 108 times daily for one month and he would become all right. This he did, and on the night of the 29th day he woke up and on one side of his bed was standing Hanuman

and on the other side was a thin, ghostly Muslim. From that time onwards he was free of the thirst.

Marriage Proposal

After this, Dass Garu initiated him into Hanuman's puja and japa. Later Hanumanji told Dass Garu that Venkatarathnam should go to Tiruvannamalai and serve Sri Ramana Maharshi.

After he graduated from school, he thought of using the money from a scholarship he was awarded to go and live in Tiruvannamalai, but his brothers wanted him to get married. A rich family who offered a big dowry and a lucrative post was arranged. Even though his mother knew his temperament she had to keep quiet since she was under the influence of her other sons. Venkatarathnam said that they should first ask his guru, Dass Garu, for permission. They searched him out and after finding him proposed their idea. Dass Garu said that it would be all right if Venkatarathnam got married. When the brothers returned thinking victory was in their hands, Sri Venkatarathnam objected, saying that according to Sastra, a brahmachari must first serve a Guru before entering into Grihastashrama (married life). No one accepted this evasive objection and so he told them that if such a thing is not written in the Sastras, he was ready to burn the Sastras. He asked them to immediately bring the Bhagavata and Ramayana and he would set fire to them. Naturally they did not want to be a party to this crime, and so they helplessly let him go to Arunachalam. He, however, told them that he would go only on an experimental basis and if it suited him there he would stay, otherwise he would return. At this time one of his brothers declared, "You will all see. He will become a sadhu for sure," and this came out to be true.

At Ramanasramam

Accompanied by a friend, he came to Sri Ramanasramam in 1944. On arriving there he found

that Siva Mohan Lal, an intimate brother bhakta from Hyderabad, was there. After showing him the Ashram, Lal brought him to the presence of the Maharshi and introduced him. Sri Venkatarathnam sat down to do japa, but strangely he could not remember his mantra even though he had repeated it so many lakhs of times. Suddenly, there was revealed in his heart an infinite Expanse of Pure Consciousness, the Atma, and this experience lasted for some time. He stayed for a few days in the Ashram and then returned to his mother, but all the way back in the train this same experience occurred again and again.

He told his mother all this and she said, "Better you go back to Bhagavan. It is clear that he wants you there with him. Only promise me that you will not take sannyasa." He promised and returned to Arunachalam with the blessings of his mother. He later said that it was only much later that he realized the depth of his mother's wisdom in making him promise not to become a sannyasi.

At the Ashram he was put in charge of the book depot. He later laughed when telling this because it seems that one astrologer had told him that he would get married and do business and he really thought this is what happened because he had married Sri Ramana and was selling his books. Afterwards he became an assistant of Sri Niranjanananda Swami, Sri Ramana's younger brother and the Sarvadhikari of the Ashram. Then he was put in charge of the Ashram library and the books that were kept for the personal use of Bhagavan. Bhagavan personally taught him to bind and stitch books and also to read and write Tamil.

Once, while demonstrating to him how to stitch a book, Bhagavan caught hold of his hands to guide him. While making the stitch, Sri Venkatarathnam's sacred thread got intertwined in the stitching thread and got stitched into the book by Bhagavan. It was an awkward situation and they both laughed.

How I came to the Maharshi

By Swami Ramdas (*Published in The Mountain Path, January 1965*)

In his early autobiography, In Quest of God, (published by Anandashram, Kanhangad) Swami Ramdas describes how he attained the Divine Vision through the Grace of the Maharshi. Years later he told this story to Dilip Kumar Roy who reproduced it in his latest book, The Flute Calls Still (published by Indira Niloy, Hari Krishna Mandir, Poona, and reviewed in our issue of October 1964). Since some parts of the story are more detailed in one account and some in the other, we have here combined them. We are grateful to both ashrams for permission to quote from their publications.

"Papa," I said, "would you mind telling us about your final Realization which they call 'Vishvarupa Darshan'?"

He readily acquiesced and gave a long description of his burning aspiration and yearning which had led him to Arunachala Hill, hallowed by the tapas of the peerless saint Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. I can give here only the gist of his long narration

One day the kind Sadhuras took Ramdas for the darshan of a famous saint of the place named Sri Ramana Maharshi. His Ashram was at the foot of Arunachala. It was a thatched shed. Both the visitors entered the ashram and, meeting the saint, fell prostrate at his holy feet. It was really a blessed place where that great man lived. He was young but there was on his face a calmness and in his large eyes a passionless look of tenderness which cast a spell of peace and joy on all those who came to him. Ramdas was informed that the saint knew English, so he addressed him thus: "Maharaj, here stands before thee a humble slave. Have pity on him. His only prayer to thee is to give him thy blessing."

The Maharshi turned his beautiful eyes towards Ramdas and looked intently for a few minutes into his eyes as though he was pouring into Ramdas his blessing through those orbs, then shook his head to say he had blessed. A thrill of inexpressible joy coursed through the frame of Ramdas, his whole body quivering, like a leaf in the breeze

Now at the prompting of Ram, Ramdas desired to remain in solitude for some time ... The sadhuras was ever ready to fulfill his wishes. Losing no time, he took Ramdas up the mountain behind the great temple.

Climbing high up he showed him many caves. Of these, one small cave was selected for Ramdas, which he occupied next day. In this cave he lived for nearly a month in deep meditation of Ram. This was the first time he was taken by Ram into solitude for his bhajan. Now he felt most blissful sensations since he could hold undisturbed communion with Ram. He was actually rolling in a sea of indescribable happiness. To fix the mind on that fountain of bliss, Ram, means, to experience pure joy ... He went on taking the Name in an ecstasy of longing when, lo, suddenly his Lord Rama ... appeared before him and danced and danced ... "Did you see him with closed eyes or open?" I interjected,

"With open eyes, as Ramdas is seeing you," Papa answered. "But it was not this momentary vision that Ramdas's heart craved. For he knew that a vision like this, was unlikely to last and so, when the Lord would vanish, Ramdas would revert to his darkness. Therefore he prayed for the great darshan, the Vision of visions, which comes to stay for ever so there is no more parting, namely the Vishvarupa Darshan, longing to see Rama always in everything; that is nothing less would satisfy Ramdas."

Papa paused and then resumed with a beatific smile: "And it came one morning apocalyptically – when, lo, the entire landscape changed: All was Rama, nothing but Rama – wherever Ramdas looked! Everything was ensouled by Rama – vivid, marvellous, rapturous – the trees, the shrubs, the ants, the cows, the cats, the dogs – even inanimate things pulsated with the marvellous presence of the one Rama. And Ramdas danced in joy, like a boy who, when given a lovely

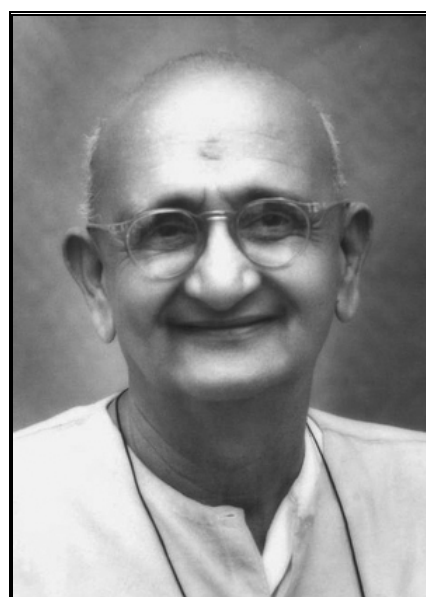
present, can't help breaking out into a dance. And so it was with Ramdas: he danced with joy and rushed at a tree in front, which he embraced because it was not a tree but Rama Himself! A man was passing by, Ramdas ran towards him and embraced him, calling out: 'Rama, O Rama!' The man got scared and bolted. But Ramdas gave him chase and dragged him back to his cave. The man noted that Ramdas had not a tooth in his head and so felt a little reassured: at least the loony would not be able to bite him!" He laughed out and we swelled the chorus. "And then?" I asked, after the laughter had subsided. "The bliss and joy came to be permanent, like a torrent rushing downhill till it finds a placid level of limpid purling stream. This experience is called sahaja samadhi, in which you can never be cut off from the consciousness of being at one with the One who has become all, in which you feel you are one with all because you have perceived that all is He, the One-without-a-second."

Finally we end with a comment made by Swami Ramdas – In 'Vision', the monthly journal published by Anandashram, about forty years later.

Ramdas went to Ramana Maharshi in a state of complete obliviousness of the world. He felt thrills of

ecstasy in his presence. The Maharshi made the awakening permanent in Ramdas.

Some people told Ramdas: "You went to Maharshi and you got illumination. Give us illumination like that." Ramdas said, "You must come to Ramdas in the same spirit and in the same state as he went to Maharshi. Then you will also get it. Where was his heart? How intense was his longing? What was the world to him at that time? If you come in that state it is all right."



Swami Ramdas

Reports from Sri Ramanasramam

Odhuvar of Sri Kapaleeswarar Temple

Sri Sadgurunatha Desikar, Odhuvar of Sri Kapaleeswarar Temple in Mylapore, Chennai sung selections from Sri Bhagavan's works, Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai and Thiruvachakam at Bhagavan's Shrine on March 11th 2010 from 8.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.



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