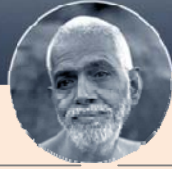


Saranagathi

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ISSUE

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Dear Devotees,

In this issue of Saranagathi we continue our series on inspiring women devotees of Sri Bhagavan with the first part of the life story of Echammal. Dinker Rai's account of how he was drawn to the Maharshi has been extracted from *The Mountain Path* archives. This is followed by Reports from Sri Ramanasramam.

Sri Vidya Havan was conducted at Sri Ramanasramam on 18th March 2011. To view pictures and video coverage of the event please visit <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/srividya2011.html>

Please send your emails to saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

In Sri Bhagavan

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Reality in Forty Verses

- On three entities – the individual, God and the world, - every creed is based. That 'The One becomes the Three' and that 'Always the Three are Three', are said only while the ego lasts. To lose the 'I' and in the Self to stay is the State Supreme.

Ulladu Narpadu by Sri Bhagavan (Verse 2)





Echammal



Echammal lived with her children and husband not far away from Tiruvannamalai. One night she had a dream, in which a young ascetic in loincloth 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 to dream interpreters, all they could say was, "God is blessing you." She had lost almost everything, so she wanted to go back to the village of her childhood, with her daughter, her lone surviving child. 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." It would seem that even before she came to him, Bhagavan had already cleared Echammal's past 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. Searching for solace, she left for north India. There she met sadhus, fed them and ate 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 was still burdened with sorrow.

When she returned to her 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 receive his grace." The very next day, she went to Tiruvannamalai. It was 1906, and Bhagavan was in Virupaksha cave. She went to have his darsan, and Bhagavan looked at her for nearly an hour. She stood with tears rolling down her cheeks in front of Bhagavan. Not a single word was spoken between them, but 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, Echammal served Bhagavan, but she still had a little worldly attachment. She wanted to bring up a girl, so with Bhagavan's permission, she adopted her own niece, 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 Ekadashi. I will not eat. Today vrata (a vow of fasting) has to be observed. 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?” Explaining it to Chellammal, Bhagavan told to her, “When you are in satsang, no ritualistic injunctions need to be followed” and coaxed Chellammal to eat.

As time went by, Chellammal got married and had a son whom 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 by then steadied herself by her association with 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, told her: “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 Self-Enquiry and meditated 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 pinch yourself 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 that 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.

She continued to feed Bhagavan after he came down from the hill for good. One day, when Echammal brought food for Bhagavan, the Ashram management informed her that she need not bring food anymore. 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 talked to the people 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, she ran back to Bhagavan immediately.

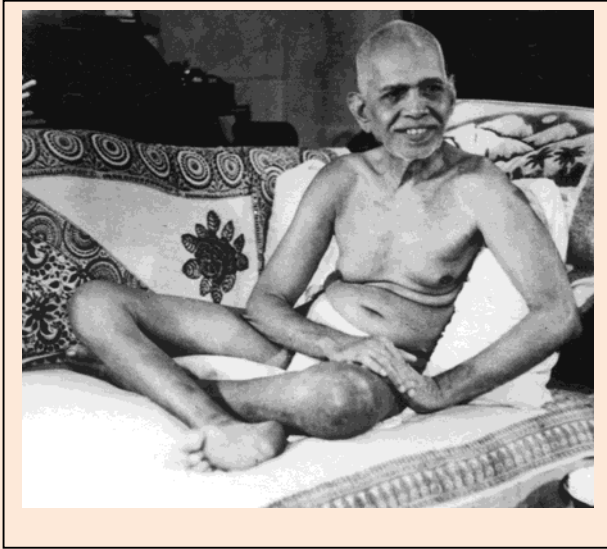
To be continued.





How I Came to the Maharshi

By Dinker Rai (*The Mountain Path, July 1967*)



I had a religious upbringing and was married at the age of fourteen; but soon after marriage I left home and began wandering about in search of someone or something called 'God'. In this first attempt I had some vivid experiences of sadhus. I returned home but the inner quest continued. I fell under the spell of Swami Vivekananda, Rama Tirtha and Prabhuddha Bharati and attended the 'Katha' of Swami Jayendrapuriji of Ahmedabad.

Again I left home and this time I made tapas at a quiet place near Mount Abu. However not enough food was forthcoming, so I left that place on account of hunger and began travelling from one pilgrim centre to another. I visited almost all the famous places of pilgrimage. However all this produced no result and again I returned home.

Now the 'householder' phase of life began for me. I almost forgot God, thinking that as I had not found peace

that way I would try another way of life. Twelve years passed during which I remembered God only when in trouble.

In 1942 I again turned inward, this time under the influence of Swami Madhavatirtha who had written a book called 'Bhagavan Raman Maharshi'. He explained everything to my satisfaction and with his blessing I went to see the Maharshi in 1944. I arrived in a powerful mood of anticipation. I had brought the best of flower garlands I could find from Madras. The Maharshi was at breakfast with the devotees in the dining hall when I arrived and I straightaway wanted to garland him, but he motioned me to put the garlands down on the floor. I did not then know that we were not supposed to touch his body, and my ego was hurt. I felt slighted. However I forgot all about this later in the day when I came in contact with him and received his blessings. I felt that he was all in all to us, father, mother, everything. He awakened love and devotion in me.

On my next visit I took my wife and two children with me. I knew that the Maharshi was very gracious with children, so whenever we left the hall we sent our children running up to him to touch his feet as he walked out, so that they should bring the touch back to us. After three days the Sarvadhikari called and asked me to stop this, as the Maharshi was very stiff-legged from rheumatism and might easily fall as a result of it. We then realized our folly and stopped the children doing it.

One of my visits was at the time of the Golden Jubilee Celebration or the fiftieth anniversary of the Maharshi's





arrival at Tiruvannamalai. That was a sight I shall never forget. He was sitting on a couch decorated with garlands and jewels. The best singers from all India were singing. There were large, colourful crowds full of devotion, such crowds, in fact, that police had to arrange and direct the movements of the people. Thousands of poor people were fed. And through it all the Maharshi looked solemn and serene, as though it did not concern him.

He would sit inscrutable before us. He wanted nothing from us. Once he said to a foreigner who asked him about it: "I am not idle. Every second my heart is active."

At first I used to trouble him by asking questions, and he always answered them. Once I asked him which yoga I should follow: Jnana, Karma, Bhakti or Hatha. He replied: "Yoga is derived from the word 'yuj' meaning 'unite'. How did a Jnani become an agnani, a karmi an akarmi, a bhakta a vibhakta? Discovering that is yoga."

Someone else once asked what is the greatest miracle in the world. The Maharshi answered, "The body. It is lifeless and yet acts as though living."

Gradually I stopped asking questions. I received my elucidations inwardly. And yet, of course, they were bestowed by him.

I could fill a book with incidents and remarks about him. I have seen his grandeur and at the same time his naturalness. I have seen him appear like an enthusiastic youth and at the same time like a bent and aged Rishi. I have seen him friendly and familiar and yet at the same

time aloof. I have seen him caring for squirrels, monkeys, parrots, peacocks and the cow Lakshmi. In the last days of Lakshmi, when she was old and ailing, he used to go daily to the cowshed and feed her with his own hands. I saw a great Maharani from my part of India, Smt. Shantadevi of Baroda, at the Ashram, and as soon as she saw the Maharshi she prostrated herself on the dusty ground before him. I have seen in him what I can never forget. The total of my visits to him adds up to 200 days, and yet I never had enough. Every May or June I used to go to see him, although it is the hottest time of the year, because that was when I could get away from my business. Sometimes I would leave my business specially to visit him.

The last time I visited him was shortly before he left the body. He was very thin and bent and had his arm in a sling. And yet he looked cheerful and impersonal as ever as he sat in the big new hall. Before leaving I went up to him to say goodbye. His eyes were shining as he looked at me, and he nodded very slowly. When I got outside the hall I suddenly burst out sobbing in a way I could not restrain. Even now I do not know why. A crowd of onlookers gathered round. My wife was at first astonished and then she too began weeping. It went on for about a quarter of an hour. Someone asked me what was the matter but I could not say. Afterwards when I received news of his passing away I could not believe it. I still do not. He is still there. Not only there but everywhere. He cannot leave us. He is still in our hearts as before. He is the Heart of our hearts.





Maharshi's Gospel: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi

Sadhana and Grace

D: If I surrender myself, is no prayer to God necessary?

M: Surrender itself is a mighty prayer.

D: But is it not necessary to understand His nature before one surrenders oneself?

M: If you believe that God will do for you all the things you want Him to do, then surrender yourself to Him. Otherwise let God alone and know yourself.

D: Has God or the Guru any solicitude for me?

M: If you seek either – they are not really two but one and identical – rest assured that they are seeking you with a solicitude greater that you can ever imagine.

Reports from Sri Ramanasramam

Maha Shivaratri at Sri Ramanasramam on 2nd March 2011

Maha Shivaratri was solemnly observed at the Ashram on 2nd/3rd March 2011. Quite a few devotees kept vigil through the night and many went round the Hill. In addition to the usual pujas, four special pujas are performed during the night (each preceded by an abhisheka). Ekadasa Rudra parayana is also done before the third puja.

Lighting of husk was done after performance of the first of the four pujas in preparation of VIBHUTI for our Ashram.

