

## Saranagathi

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ISSUE

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Dear Devotees,

The summer season brings warm South Indian weather to the Ashram, but with it, tranquility in the aftermath of the bustling winter season. In the absence of precipitation for most of March, Pali tirtham all but dried up and the Holy Hill took on a parched red-brownish hue. But on Rama Navami, the 31st, during the mahanasya japa recitation in preparation for Bhagavan's Punarvasu Day celebrations, Bhagavan's blessings poured forth in an abundant springtime rain and cool refreshing breezes.

This issue of *Saranagathi* carries the testimony of Rajapalayam Ramani Ammal and the story of Bhagavan's father, Sundaram Iyer. *Events from Sri Ramanasramam* include the Sri Vidya Homa on the 16th and the Maha Rudram celebrations 5th-7th March. For further glimpses of the Sri Vidya Homa and other events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/> or write to us at [saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.cfj](mailto:saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.cfj)

In Sri Bhagavan,  
The Editorial Team



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## Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

*Ignorance of the Self is the Cause of the Present Misery*

A woman wore a necklace round her neck but forgot it [was there]. She began to search for it and made enquiries. A friend of hers, [realising] what she was looking for, pointed out the necklace round the seeker's neck. She felt it with her hands and was happy again. [But I ask you,] did she get the necklace anew? Ignorance caused grief and knowledge happiness. Similarly, [in the case of] the man and the Self, there is nothing to be gained anew. Ignorance of the Self is the cause of the present misery; knowledge of the Self brings about happiness.—*Talks §63*





## Women Devotees Series: Rajapalayam Ramani Ammal

*RAJAPALAYAM RAMANI AMMAL, better known as Rajapalayam Ammal, developed a spirit of detachment and spiritual yearning when her parents passed away during her eighteenth year in 1944. It was then that she opened a copy of Ramana Vijayam, the Tamil biography of Bhagavan and there, seeing Bhagavan's photograph, underwent a profound spiritual experience. There was no question of asking her relatives for permission to go to Ramanasramam because hers was a conservative family descended from the Rajputs, whose womenfolk rarely, if ever, step out of the house. So she would have to wait. Later with the help of a sympathetic brother, she was able to come away and go to Bhagavan whose face she saw bright like a flame when she beheld it.*

From my youth I had very pleasant dreams and would sometimes see Lord Krishna or other familiar deities. But at the age of sixteen or seventeen, I had a dream in which I saw a strange sage-like person coming down a hill and was captivated by his grandeur.

I later came to realize that this sage was Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. After this, a persistent and long-recurring fear suddenly disappeared. Others noticed the change in me and commented on how I was now moving about more freely and unencumbered.

This was Bhagavan's first influence on me. Around this same time, while reading the *Jnana Vasishtha*, I had the experience of being enveloped in a bright white light. I thought to myself that if this is what happens just by reading about *dhyana*, how much more wonderful it would be if we practised it.

It wasn't until I was twenty that I got hold of a book on Bhagavan. In 1946, my cousin Kumaraswami Raja, the then Chief Minister of Madras, brought me Shuddananda Bharathi's *Ramana Vijayam*, the biography of Bhagavan. His wife, Mrs. Kumaraswami Raja, was very fond of me, and though other relatives prohibited me from reading spiritual books, she used to regularly supply me with them. The day she sent this book, I was sitting in the house with a friend, a headmistress, who though Christian, was sincerely interested in our religion. A boy sent by Mrs. Kumaraswami Raja stood at the front gate with the book. I got up and went to the gate to receive it but the moment I touched the book I lost body consciousness and my whole body became stiff. With effort I managed to return to my seat next to my friend. But noticing my difficulty, she commented that I shouldn't read books that make me so forget myself.

Everyone was complaining about me in those days, for most of the time I would only sit quietly, alert to my spiritual aspirations. Everyone thought I was simply idle. With difficulty I opened *Ramana Vijayam* to the first page and was greeted by the photo of the young Ramana. At the sight of the photo, I became speechless. My friend was somewhat alarmed at my condition. With great reverence I took the book and started reading. As I read, my eyes kept closing involuntarily, and I was drawn within, which I later came to know was meditation. Thus, in this way, Bhagavan taught me meditation. After reading the book, I knew I would leave home and have the darshan of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

It is the family custom that women never leave the house, not to mention the town. But by the direct





influence of Bhagavan himself, this book implanted in me the requisite *vairagya* to leave my house for spiritual fulfilment.

Because of my intense desire to go and see him, my younger brother was moved to help me. He was a very pious person, with a soft nature. With his help I secretly left home and found my way to Tiruvannamalai and reached the holy feet of Bhagavan. But after reaching the Ashram, I was overcome with a strong sense of guilt for running away from home. This feeling of guilt and a sense of bringing ill-fame to my respected family was uppermost in my mind when I first came

into Bhagavan's presence. I came near the well under a thatched roof where Bhagavan was sitting, but all I saw was a flaming fire. I thought to myself, "I asked for directions to go to Bhagavan and they have sent me to a sacrificial fire." It was only after a few minutes that I saw Bhagavan's comely form emerge from my visionary flames. It was only later that I realized Bhagavan had bestowed upon me the great boon of *jyoti darshan*. Next I heard Bhagavan saying to me, "You have now come home. Why don't you sit down?"

Coming from a family where women never go out, and having never gone out myself, I did not know how to behave in the company of others, and so I sat down right in front of Bhagavan, not really aware that nearby was a place reserved for women. For three days I kept sitting in front of him, all the while haunted by feelings of self-reproach for running away from home. On the third day, I heard Bhagavan telling someone: "I also ran away from home and at the railway station I was frightened that someone might identify me, catch hold of me and send me back home. I ran away like a thief."

Hearing Bhagavan say this completely rid me of my guilt and from that moment onwards I was free of such concerns. This was an act of pure grace directed towards me.

It is very strange that by those few words Bhagavan entirely removed all residual fear in me. Later Bhagavan said that sometimes you have to do a wrong thing to achieve the ultimate right thing.

*(to be continued)*

*The present article is freely adapted from the videotaped interview of December 1989 (published in THE MAHARSHI, Jul/Aug 1993) and short articles appearing in the Mountain Path (Jayanti 1989, pp. 109-10) and Moments Remembered (pp. 118-19).*

## Reality in Forty Verses

14. 'You' and 'he' — these appear only when 'I' does. But when the nature of the 'I' is sought and the ego is destroyed, 'you' and 'he' are at an end. What shines then as the One alone is the true Self.

— Reality in Forty Verses by Sri Bhagavan





## A Brief History of Sri Chakra Puja at the Ashram



Devotees know that at the time of the Kumbhabhishekam of Sri Matrubhuteswara in 1949, Bhagavan consecrated the Meru Chakra by his touch. Earlier, at the time of the installation of the Meru, those present saw Bhagavan inside the inner shrine guiding Sri Vaidyanatha Stapathi in his work. At the conclusion Bhagavan placed his hands on the Meru Chakra as well as the Matrubhuteswara lingam.

After Bhagavan's *mahasamadhi*, when the Vedic school had to close due lack of funds and regular Vedic chanting ceased, devotees feared that the spiritual atmosphere Bhagavan had bequeathed to them was in peril. Major Chadwick especially felt that neglect of the Meru at the Mother's Shrine was an indiscretion. With authorization of the Ashram Managing Committee, Chadwick set about soliciting funds to revive the school and to initiate the Sri Chakra Puja in the Mother's Shrine. In March, 1953, under Chadwick's stewardship, the Sri Chakra Puja commenced; the Veda Patasala reopened five days later. A year later a commemorative anniversary rite—an elaborate day-long fire-ceremony—was performed. Since then the Sri Vidya Havan has been an annual event and usually takes place on Friday in the month of March.

The Sri Chakra is a yantra formed by nine interlocking triangles, the four upward-pointing, which symbolize Siva (the masculine), and five downward-pointing, which symbolize Sakti (the feminine). The unique configuration of these nine triangles form forty-three smaller triangles, a matrix representing the multiplicity of the universe with Siva-Sakti at its centre (the bindu), the contact point between the physical world and its immaterial, transcendent source.

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Vidya Havan



This year's Sri Vidya Homa took place on Friday the 16th March beginning at 8 am with Kalasasthapana. Lalita Sahasranamam, Trisathi and other prayers were performed from 12 noon until 3 pm ending with poornahuti and arati at 3.45 pm. A procession to shift the consecrated kalasam into the Mother's Shrine was followed by abhishekam, alankaram and deepaaradhana at 4pm. Sri Chakra puja was performed in the Mother's Shrine the following morning.





## Sri Sundaram Iyer: Scion of Tiruchuzhi

**A**FTER the death of Bhagavan's grandfather, Nagaswami Iyer, Bhagavan's uncle, Venkatesa, bore the responsibility of taking care of the family. But within two years, Venkatesa left home to go on pilgrimage, and when he didn't return and reports of one donned in ochre robes reached the family, the responsibility fell to Bhagavan's father, Sundaram Iyer.

Family legend tells of a pronouncement made by an itinerant monk: in each generation, one male member of the family would become an ascetic and live by begging alms. This would prove true not only in Sundaram Iyer's brother, Venkatesa, but in a paternal uncle as well, and in the course of time, his second son.

Sundaram Iyer started earning for his family as a clerk at the tender age of twelve. Starting at a meager salary of two rupees per month, in time he familiarised himself with legal codes and became a petition writer. By 1880 he had earned a respectable reputation as a pleader in the court of the Sub-Magistrate of Tiruchuzhi, and as one who never got angry, who was always honest, upright and fair in his dealings with others, whether rich or poor. In time he came to be seen as a pillar of the community.

Having constructed a spacious house in his native Tiruchuzhi opposite the Bhuminata Temple in Karthikeyan St., his home was known for its hospitality, filled as it was from morning to night with clients, guests and visitors. Even strangers found themselves welcomed by the *vakil sami* as Sundaram Iyer was known. His house was often host to spiritual discourses, sermons and readings from the epics, which neighbours invariably attended.

Because Sundaram Iyer aided plaintiffs and defendants alike, he was revered even by local criminals who saw him as their protector and benefactor. It is said that robbers and highwaymen of the region would not attack his carriage simply out of respect.

Once after a meeting in an outlying camp, the magistrate of the area was traveling toward town. Speeding along the road, he overtook Sundaram Iyer's cart, which was also making the return trip from the meeting. The magistrate neither chose to accompany the *vakil* on the way back to town nor even merely stop to greet him but, amidst official pomp and jingling of bells, flew past and disappeared around the bend. What awaited him there, the poor magistrate could not have foreseen. Thieves surrounded his cart. The liveried servant protested in vain while the magistrate's fortitude and threats proved to be of no avail. The thieves snatched the dispatch box and were about to make their retreat when, from behind the hedge, came a shout, "Hey, hey! *Vakil sami* is coming!" The box was left on the road and the thieves took to their heels.

The magistrate waited for the other cart and got down from his own carriage with folded hands and apologised to Sundaram Iyer for having left him in the dust: "I now understand why the people love and esteem you. It is a lesson for me and it has made me shed my official pride and seek to learn humility."





Sundaramandiram in Karthikeyan Street, Tiruchuzhi

Another time there was a theft in the Tiruchuzhi police inspector's house. Jewels worth several thousand rupees were stolen. The inspector moved heaven and earth to trace the jewels but to no avail. The inspector's wife was inconsolable and repeatedly requested her husband to seek the help of Sundaram Iyer. Days passed and the inspector became desperate. Unwillingly he approached Sundaram Iyer, told him the facts and appealed to him to help him trace the criminal. Sundaram Iyer protested, saying that where the inspector had failed, what could a poor non-official do? Sundaram Iyer knew of the delicacy of trying to help the inspector and feared that the latter's suspicion might be turned against him if he tried to help.

The inspector swore by all that he held holy and sacred, and ultimately prevailed upon Sundaram Iyer to help.

Word got round that the *vakil sami* would like the offender to return the jewels. In short order they were brought intact and left in the custody of Sundaram Iyer. In the dead of night, the missing jewels were placed on the doorstep of the inspector's house and men were appointed to secretly stand guard from the opposite house until dawn. Early in the morning the inspector's wife opened the door and, to her amazement, found her box of jewels. —

*Sundaram Iyer passed away in 1892, leaving three sons: Nagaswami 14, Venkataraman (Sri Ramana) 12, and Nagasundaram (Chimmaswami) 6. (See P. K. Ramaswamy's recollections in MP July, 1980, pp. 134-5.)*

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sundaram Iyer Anniversary Day



The Anniversary of Sri Sundaram Iyer was observed on Monday, 12th March, 2012 in the Mother's Shrine at 10 am with puja and the distribution of prasadam.



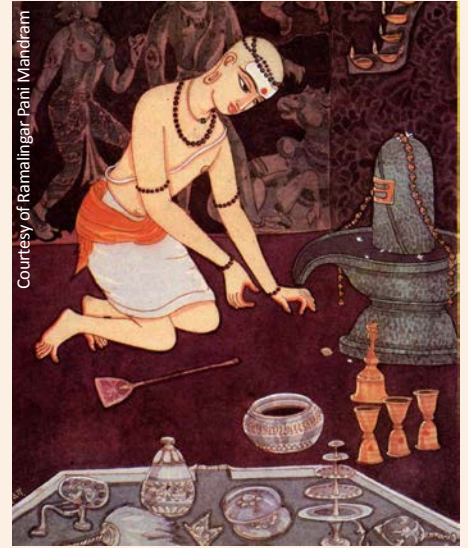


## From the *Periapuranam*: Appar

Jealous enemies plotted to destroy Appar, first by throwing him into a hot lime kiln where for seven days he was spared from harm by the burning flames. Next, a fierce warrior–elephant was set upon him but upon hearing Appar’s sweet songs, the wild beast became tame and gentle and humbly prostrated before him. Finally the saint was thrown into the ocean tied to a large millstone. But by the Lord’s intercession, the stone only floated, serving as a boat to lead the saint to safety.

Appar befriended Jnanasambandar and sang the Lord’s glory in every corner of the land. At long last he made the great yatra to Kailash where he strived to ascend the Lord’s abode even until the flesh of his bare feet was worn to the bone. He crawled until the flesh of his hands was torn away. So determined he was, he continued to climb on his belly. Meanwhile the Lord, having compassion on him, appeared before him disguised as a sage and sought to persuade him to give up his quest. But Appar’s resolution was unshakable. Finally the Lord revealed Himself to him in all His Glory, blessed him and restored his wounded body. In an instant Appar found himself healthy and strong and miraculously transported back to the Tamil land, where once again he continued his pilgrimage, singing the glory of the Lord with even greater zeal.

One day amidst the throng that surrounded Jnanasambandar, the aged Appar went unperceived and made himself one of the bearers of Sambandar’s palanquin. In the precincts of Thiruppoonthurutthi, Sambandar enquired gently: “Where is Appar?” Hearing this, Appar melted with love and answered: “I, your servant, blessed to bear your gracious feet on his shoulders, am here below”. When these words fell into his ear, Sambandar rushed down with palpitating heart, tried to pay obeisance to the aged saint, who however, anticipated this with his own adoration. To behold the two saints locked in embrace was indeed a blessed sight. (*Appar’s Aradhana Day this year falls on 17th April*)



Courtesy of Ramalingar, Pani Mandiram

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Maha Rudram



On 5th March, Maha Rudram commenced in the New Library auditorium with more than 50 young students and pundits from Ramanasramam and neighbouring patasalas participating in the three-day japam. The sacrificial yagasala fire burned each of the three days until the concluding moments, when a procession with the kalasalam coursed through the Ashram and within for abhishekam of Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam and Matrubhuteswara.





## Introducing the Kendras: Satsang Group of Washington D.C.



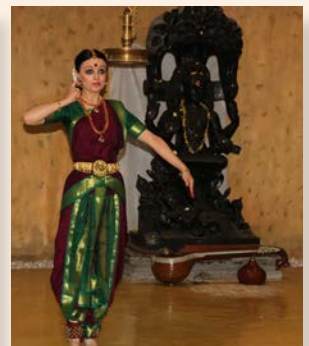
By the grace of Bhagavan, our Satsang group in the Washington, D.C. area has been meeting for about 12 years. Currently we meet the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of each month. Attendance varies between 15-30 devotees. But irrespective of numbers, the flood of grace never varies but flows ever freely and copiously from Sri Bhagavan to each of us, lifting us up and carrying us towards greater awareness of the Self.

Our group is somewhat dispersed geographically throughout the Virginia side west of D.C. and the Maryland side north of D.C., and

we generally rotate between two households. One devotee is responsible for choosing material for Satsang readings while another leads the singing. Our assigned "welcomer" is the contact person for newcomers and manages the Satsang email list and updates for the group.

The format for our meetings is as follows: 1) readings from Bhagavan's books; 2) group singing of *Upadesa Saram*, *Arunachala Pancharatnam*, *Aksharamanamaalai*, etc.; 3) "open mike" i.e., bhajans led by individuals (including children in our group) in praise of Bhagavan; 4) group singing of *Ramana Satguru*; 5) meditation; 6) readings from the chronicles of Sri Bhagavan; 7) and finally, on occasion, talks or discourses by visiting senior devotees. We conclude with the recitation of *Na Karmana* followed by pranams, arati, the distribution of kumkum and vibhuti during which we sing the arti hymn, *Vaazhga Swayam Prakaasam*. Our gathering usually concludes with a potluck dinner starting around 8 pm.

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Veena Concert and Bharathanatyam



The Granthalaya Auditorium was the venue for a Bharathanatyam presentation and veena concert on Saturday, 10th March, 2012 with Ms. Anita Ilic performing Bharathanatyam while Mrs. Jayalakshmi Sekhar as *nattuvangam* directed the dance together with vocalist, Mrs. Hemavathy Sethuraman and Mr. Sekhar, Chennai, on Mridangam. Mrs. Sekhar then gave a concert on the veena.

