

Saranagati



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SRI RAMANASRAMAM
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Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

After the flame was lit on Karthigai night, 17th November, devotees went for pradakshina, recalling the Lord's words, "Circumambulating the Hill on Deepam is equivalent to performing crores of yagnas". For the following eleven nights, the flame burned brightly on the summit of Holy Arunachala, memorialising what Mahadeva says in *Arunachala Mahtmyam*, "Every year during Karthigai I shall appear in the form of fire on the summit of this Hill. Those who see that fire and meditate upon it, shall realise the great light within themselves".

This December issue carries part one of an article on the significance and origins of pradakshina and its relation to Karthigai Deepam (*see p. 2*). The write-up of the Maha Ratham's circuit of Arunachalaswar Temple on 14th November carries photos from Dev Gogoi (*p.4*) while the cover insert presents images of the Ashram shot by the six-man photographic team led by V. Karthik and Suresh Menon earlier in the year.

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

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Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Pradakshina

M.: Pradakshina round Arunachala is said to be as effective as circuit round the world. That means that the whole world is condensed into this Hill. The circuit round the temple of Arunachala is equally good; and self-circuit (i.e., turning round and round) is as good as the last. So all are contained in the Self. Says the Ribhu Gita: "I remain fixed, whereas innumerable universes becoming concepts within my mind, rotate within me. This meditation is the highest circuit (pradakshina)."

— Talks §212





The Origins of Pradakshina (part one)

Pradakshina is as old as Hindu dharma itself. Since earliest antiquity, pilgrims have circumambulated holy mountains, temples, rivers and shrines. Even before time began, a Puranic legend tells us of Lord Siva directing his two sons to go for pradakshina around the entire universe in order that they might gain worldly knowledge. Subramanyam, his younger, dutifully takes up the task and spends the next several decades circumambulating the manifest world on his peacock. But Ganesh simply walks prayerfully around his father, the Lord, saying that the entirety of manifest reality is contained within Him.

Such a story not only sets a precedent for pradakshina as a form of worship and, for that matter, a means to jnana, but reveals deep wisdom about the nature of reality and the divine: the universe has the Lord at its centre, and yet is contained wholly within It. Arthur Osbourne quotes Bhagavan praising the Hill in a similar vein: “Everyone must come to Arunachala [in the end]. As the moon derives its light from the sun, so other holy places [...] derive their sanctity from Arunachala. It is the heart of

the world. Know it to be the secret and sacred Heart-centre of Lord Siva.”¹ And in the *Suta Samhita*: “All the spheres of the vast universe are located in Arunachala. It [...] contains all in Itself.” “It is the inmost core of all beings..., the inmost...non-dual Reality. It is the Self. [And] there is nothing apart from It.”²

Aruna is ‘red-coloured’ or ‘fire-coloured’ while *achala* can be termed ‘hill’ or ‘mountain’ though, literally, it signifies ‘unmoving’. A common designation is ‘Hill of Fire’ but Arunachala could also be rendered ‘the *unmoving* Fire’.

As a pillar of flame, Arunachala is the pole connecting earth and heaven (*axis mundi*) around which all of creation revolves, and *in which* all the manifest universe has its source. This theme is recapitulated in the *Arunachala Mahatmyam* where we hear of Parvati coming to Arunachala to do penance by going around the Hill. Later she prays from the waters of Kadga Thirtam to be merged forever with Siva, the Pillar of Fire. Her prayer duly granted, *ardhanariswara* (the Lord with half female form) becomes Arunachala Siva, the primordial union of Shakti and Siva, Prakruti and Purusha, matter and spirit, as symbolised by the two basic elements of creation, water and fire, i.e. the earthly and divine transcendent.

When looked at more closely, *achala*’s relationship to ‘pole’ or ‘axis’ is very telling. Scholars say that the Sanskrit roots *dhr* (meaning ‘to support’, ‘to uphold’, ‘to establish’, as contained in the word *dharma*), and *dhru* such as in *dhruva* (meaning ‘firm’, ‘steady’, ‘pole’ or ‘axis’), are cognates³. Like dharma, the cosmic ‘pole’ (*druva*) is unmoving. It is the still-point, the transcendent Unmanifest Reality that resides at the center of the universe. Thus etymologically *dharma* and *dhruva* are related, and ‘achala’, the Unmoving, means the changeless Transcendent. Thus it seems clear why Bhagavan and the shastras would insist on Arunachala pradakshina — to go round the Hill is to not only to circumambulate and move toward dharma, but toward Being Itself.

Origins of Arunachala

Tracing the origins of pradakshina involves tracing the origins of Arunachala. It is not merely a question of first principles: the column of light signals the beginning of time; Arunachala’s genesis is the very story of creation.

¹ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge*, p. 49.

² *Glory of Arunachala*, p. 7.

³ See Rene Guenon’s *Lord of the World*, p. 10.





And yet, it is a creation that comes in the wake of terrible destruction. *The Arunachala Purana* tells how Brahma and Vishnu, ruled by pride, tussled with one another, wreaking havoc throughout the created order. As they “traded blows”, Nandi tells us:

The mountains were ground to dust. The cosmic shell exploded into fragments. The sun’s hot rays and the moon’s cold beams were blotted out. Even the celestial serpent Adisheshan writhed in pain, unable to bear the weight upon his head. The Gods [thought] the end of a world age must be at hand. Stars in their constellations and the massed clouds fell from the sky like falling leaves, as dust rose up and the tormented world fell into disorder. Bhagirathi and all lesser rivers ran dry while Mount Meru trembled, as the seven oceans turned to mud.

Viewing all this from above, the Lord was none too pleased with this state of affairs and resolved to settle matters decisively, once for all. The dramatic narrative continues:

At that precise moment, the Mountain of Fire exploded. The Gods and Rakshasas fainted away at the sound of the detonation. The Elephants of the Eight Directions vomited blood believing that the Sun itself had melted. Growing upwards through the earth, it expanded through all the realms of the Gods, bursting through the lofty vault of lotus-borne Brahma’s sphere. Going out beyond the universe’s enclosing shell it traversed the furthest limit of the vast ethereal region, looking to all the world like a Mount Meru of pure fire. Rushing out beyond all the worlds, far beyond

the reach of those twin horses who draw the sun’s chariot as he spreads the rays of the dawn, dispelling the enveloping sapphire-like darkness, it shone out like a bright beacon set on high, so that all the oceans glowed blood red as if the immeasurable submarine fire at the world’s end had spread abroad. Then in the midst of that scene, eclipsing the ruddy glow in the sky, [...] the Three-Eyed One rose up, his radiant red form all covered in white ash.⁴

When Brahma and Vishnu saw how the pillar shone, they fell to the ground in supplication, calling to the Lord: “In order that gods and men might worship You, let this pole of light become a simple mountain, concealing within itself all its fiery splendour.” Heeding their request the Pillar cooled and became a mountain of ordinary stone. Suns and Moons, *bhairavas*, *vidyadaras*, *devas*, *nagas*, *tapasvins*, *munis*, Brahmas and Vishnus gathered in such proximity that there was no place left to prostrate. Then the Lord announced, “In the month of Karthigai, in the constellation of Kritika, I shall appear as a bright beacon upon the summit of this Hill. Those who see that most excellent light will endure and prosper upon the earth” And the assembly’s wave-like cry—‘Hara, Hara!’—drowned even the roar of the oceans!⁵

— to be continued

⁴ See *Arunachala Purana* §107, §109-11, §119-20, §142, §157-59; (trans. Robert Butler), *Mountain Path*, vol. 44.3; vol. 48.2&3.

⁵ *Glory of Arunachala*, p. 219.

Wordwise: Pradakshina

प्रदक्षिणा

Pradakshina: “right-facing”; circumambulation from left to right of a person or object; auspicious, reverential, favourable, respectful; *parikrama*: “to step or walk round or about”; circumambulate, roam over, walk through. (see *Mon. Will.* p. 679; p. 592)

Pradakshina is worship by circumambulation—of deities, sacred mountains (e.g. Arunachala, Kailash), holy rivers (e.g. Ganga, Narmada), sacred trees (e.g. *vilvam*, *banyan*, *pipal*), holy plants (e.g. *tulsi*, *darbha*), sacrificial fires (e.g. *homa*) or shrines of saints (e.g. *samadhi*). Quoting the *Arunachala Mahatmyam*, Bhagavan says: “‘Prada’ [means] giver of boons, ‘kshi’, destroyer of karma and ‘na’, giver of jnana. Holy Arunachala is the primal Adi Linga; the path around its base is the sacred Yoni. [Thus] pradakshina of the Hill is [circuit] of the source of all Lingas! (see *Glory of Arunachala*, p. 246)





Karthigai Deepam: Maha Ratham, Thursday, 14th November

The eighth day of the Karthigai festival consists in the procession of the utsava deities in their respective chariots powered by the solitary efforts of devotees. Pulling the large vehicles by chain, one by one the chariots make their way around the four streets that encircle Arunachaleswar Temple.

During this year's Karthigai festival, on Thursday 14th November, Lords Ganesa and Subramanya left the Kalyana Mantapam in procession in the morning and were mounted on their vehicles in front of Raja Gopuram. By 10 am all was set and the procession



The Big Chariot moving up Tiruoodal Street

by their sheer weight, the inertia of the three-storied conveyance was overcome, all to the reverberating cries of the throng: *Arohara, Arohara!* Little by little, the Lord's Chariot would be initiated into movement and would gradually pick up speed as the crowd gathered momentum. Truly a sight to see! Decorated from top to bottom with flowers, festoons, and mango leaves, this colossal wooden car the size of a large



Working the levers to make a fresh start

began. Meanwhile Lord Arunachala mounted the Maha Ratham (the Big Chariot) and when Ganesa and Subramanya returned at 12.30 pm, the gargantuan vehicle began its progress in Car Street as swelling crowds cheered exultantly. The pulling of two long iron chains—one by the ladies and the other by gents—was coordinated with teams of youngsters at the rear who mounted giant levers and



Pulling the Chain

building and with wheels taller than the tallest man, traveled in pradakshina around Arunachalaswar Temple solely by the labour of thousands of human hands and the religious fervour that powered them.

The Maha Ratham returned late at night after which Goddess Parvati began her procession. Light rains fell on occasion but rather than a deterrent, devotees saw them as the Lord's bounteous blessing.





From Periapuranam: Anaya Nayanar

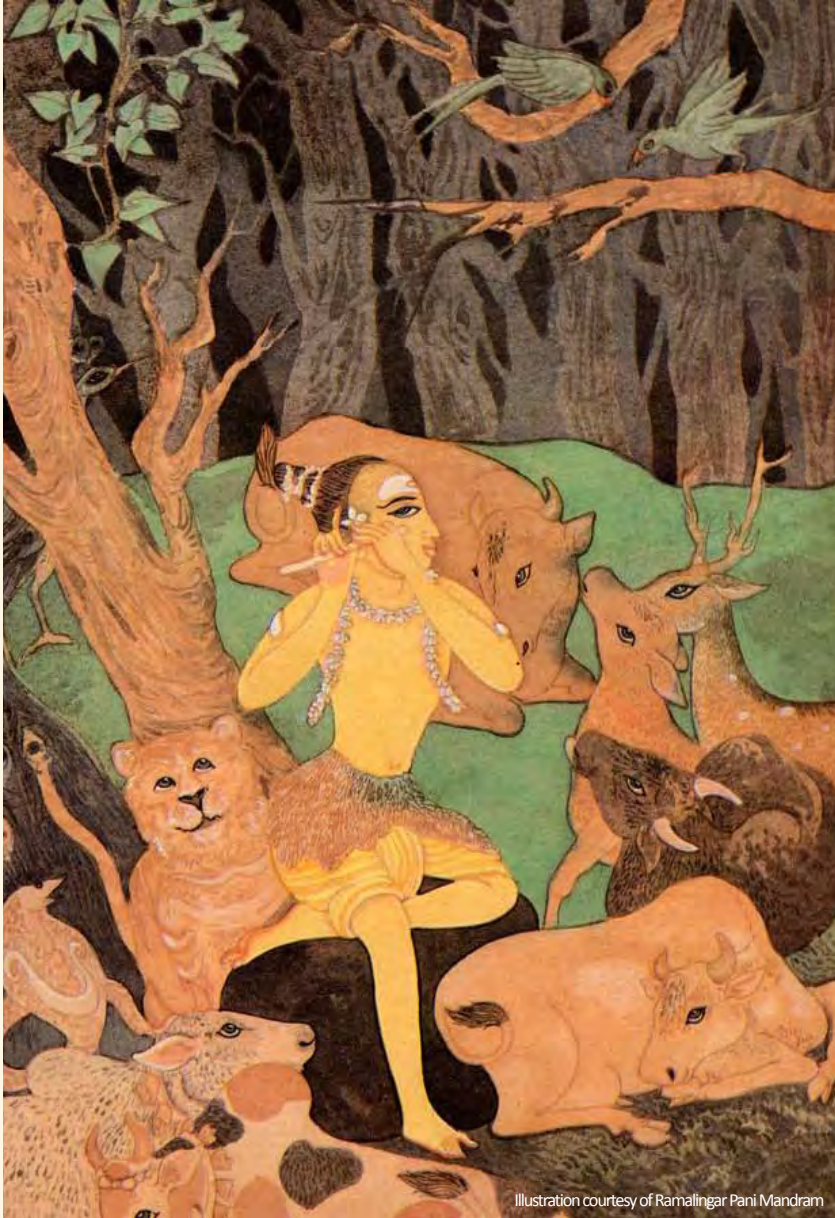


Illustration courtesy of Ramalingar Pani Mandram

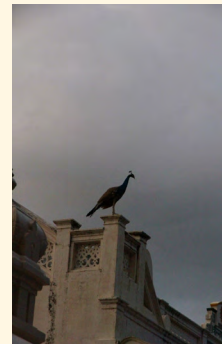
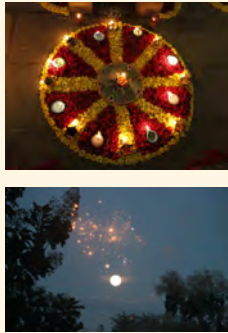
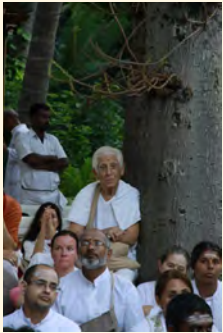
In the fertile region of Maenmazhanadu lived a young cowherd devoted to the Lord. One day at pasture, he met a sage and asked the saint to teach him how to better love and serve the Lord. The sage, detecting the boy's earnestness, initiated him in the *panchaksara* (*namasivaya*). The cowherd began his recitations and day by day the mantra deepened in him until he was able to meet the daily 32,000 repetitions suggested by his preceptor. As he continued his practice, he began to be filled with a profound love for the Lord until one day, his vision was altogether altered: he saw that all of creation was nothing but Lord Siva Himself. Filled with music and the desire to praise the Lord through song, Anaya cut a stick of bamboo, fashioned a flute and began to play hymns to Mahadeva. When he played the notes of the *panchaksara*, his herd forgot their grazing and followed him into the forest. As they sat underneath a *konra* tree, the other animals of the forest gathered round and were soothed by the spell-binding melody. A poisonous snake leaned lightly on the recumbent peacock; the forest tiger layed next to the timid doe; *nagas* emerged from their caverns below the earth while the *apsaras*, *gandharvas* and *charanas* of heaven stood transfixed, all caught in the same spell. At last Mahadeva himself appeared and there and then, beholding the sanctity of his devotee, granted him final and everlasting liberation. (*Anaya Nayanar's aradhana fell on the 28th November*)

Reality in Forty Verses

29. Cease all talk of 'I' and search with inward-diving mind whence the I-thought springs up. This is the way of wisdom. To think instead, "I am not this, but I am That", is helpful in the search, but it is not the inquiry itself.

— Sri Bhagavan





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mahadeepam, 17th November

The tenth day is the culminating moment of Karthigai Deepam. At the Ashram, devotees gathered under the open sky with an unobstructed view of the hill, as in Bhagavan's time, and awaited the lighting of the flame atop Arunachala. Meanwhile abhishekam, followed by an elaborate alankaram, was underway in Bhagavan's shrine amidst the refrains of the Krishna Yajur Veda in ghanam mode. After arati, priests and purohits went in procession, bearing the Ramana Mahalingam puja flame outdoors to join devotees gathered round the image of Bhagavan. As monsoon cumulus swirled about the summit, only a faint halo of golden light could be discerned, but this merely served to heighten devotees' enthusiasm as they waited in rapt attention, reciting Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai*. Tantalized by periodic glimpses of effulgence through the mist, at long last around 6.30pm, to the crowd's resounding cries, Arunchala's light emerged and the Lord revealed Himself in a clear bright Deepam flame.





Announcements: Ashram Website and Internet Radio



The purpose of this website is to serve those who want to follow Bhagavan's teaching by presenting his writings in many languages. Currently the website is available in English, French, German, Hebrew, Japanese, Polish, Romanian, Russian and Spanish and also in Indian regional languages Hindi, Tamil and Telugu. We offer Kindle compatible ebooks, — published by Sri Ramanasramam — through Amazon and Apple App "Sri Ramana Maharshi".

We request visitors to offer suggestions as to what additional resources can be provided through the website. Please write to ashram@sriramanamaharshi.org with your comments. Your suggestions will help us to serve you better.

We are working on introducing Internet Radio to the website in order to bring the Ashram closer to devotees. Listeners will be able to hear Vedic chanting, Tamil Parayana, readings from Bhagavan's works and sacred songs. Your suggestions about Radio programming are welcomed. You are also welcome to send us suitable audio files for broadcasting.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

16th December (Mon) Full Moon/Dhannurmasa
19th December (Thurs) Bhagavan's 134th Jayanthi

15th January (Sun) Pongal/Full Moon
16th January (Mon) Punarvasu/Mattu Pongal

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Arunachaleswarar Giripradakshinam



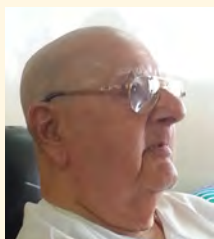
Sri Arunachaleswarar goes for pradakshina twice each year — two days after Deepam and on the third day of Thai (mid-Jan) just after Pongal. On 19th November, the Deepam procession, including the Lord of Adiannamalai Temple, halted at Sri Ramanasramam around 8am and was greeted by Ashram President V.S. Ramanan who offered garlands, dhotis, coconuts and fruits on behalf of Bhagavan's devotees. The accompanying temple priests performed arati and distributed prasad.





Obituaries: Sri Vennelakanti Sriramulu and Sri Sunil Damania

Born 24th June, 1940 in Ongole district, Sri Vennelakanti Sriramulu had the great good fortune of witnessing the jyoti (meteor) of Bhagavan's Mahanirvana when he was just a boy of ten. His later marriage to the grand-daughter of Sri Griddaluri Sambasiva Rao (who signed for Bhagavan in his will) and his decades of active membership in the Mumbai Ramana Kendra were the links that ensured a life devoted to Bhagavan and sangha seva. Ever immersed in Ramana Nama Smaranam, Sri Sriramulu had Bhagavan's holy name on his lips as he merged into the Feet of Arunachala on 19th October.



Sunil Damania of Mumbai, known to devotees as Sunilbhai, hailed from a devout family. His father, Ishwarlal Damania, was a freedom fighter and visited the Ashram from the forties with his young sons. Ishwarlal helped in acquiring Sundara Mandiram, Bhagavan's birthplace, in 1944 and supervised electrification of the Mother's Shrine and New Hall in 1949. The Samadhi of Sunilbhai's elder brother, Jagadish Swami, is inside the Ashram. Sunilbhai was untiring in his care of hospitalised devotees. In his late eighties with failing health, Sunilbhai made his final pilgrimage to the Ashram last July and attained the feet of Sri Ramana on 21-10-2013.

Announcements: RMCL's Global Online Contest and Fest

During December and January, RMCL—Bangalore is holding a *Global Online Contest and Fest* in connection with Ramananjali's 500th public offering and the centenary of the composition of Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai*. Open to all ages, the contest will be conducted online for various artistic talents such as music, dance, creative writing, photography and arts and crafts. The theme is 'Arunachala, the Magic Mountain' and entries should be based on Ramananjali songs. For more details, log on to events.ramanacentre.com or send a mail to ra-info@ramanacentre.com



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Your Talent
Our Theme
Our Songs

Contest Opens
18th Nov. 2013

Last Date:
18th Jan. 2014

Name your talent
We will show you the slot

