

Saranagathi



eNewsletter from www.sriramanamaharshi.org

In this Issue

Dear Sri Bhagavan Devotees,

January was a busy month at the ashram. [Sri Bhagavan's Jayanti](#) was celebrated followed by [Pongal](#) and [Sri Vidya Havan](#). We hope you have been following the posting of reports on these events through the Ashram website.

In this issue, we carry an article written by Sri S.S.Cohen commemorating Sri Bhagavan's Jayanti celebration and highlighting the uniqueness of His message.

We continue our series on the different functions at Sri Ramanasramam and focus the spot light on the Ashram Vedapatasala and end with 'Reports from Sri Ramanasramam'.

We would again like to draw attention to some new additions to the website - [The Call Divine](#) &

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[Old Devotees Interviews](#). We welcome your feedback on how to improve the website further.

We hope to hear from you, about your [satsangs](#) and experiences of Him. Please email them to saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

Yours in Sri Bhagavan,

The Editorial Team.

The Essence of Instruction

*Better than viewing Him as Other,
Indeed the noblest attitude of all,
Is to hold Him as the 'I' within,
The very 'I'.*

– Upadesa Saram by Sri Bhagavan (Verse 8)

Ramana Sat–Guru

By Sri S.S. Cohen

An article taken from 'Fragrant Petals' (A Representative Anthology on Sri Bhagavan)

Sri Ramana Jayanti has come again, bringing cheer to thousands of Bhagavan's devotees, old and new, far and near. On this day they call to mind all he has done for them, all he is to them and how he has influenced their lives. Old devotees who had the rare privilege of a long stay in his physical presence (and their number is diminishing year by year) feel that since leaving the body he has not ceased to work the wonderful transformation in them that he began in life. Newcomers also feel his powerful support in their *sadhana*.

When Bhagavan used to say that the *guru* is not the body many failed to grasp his meaning; but as time passed and he continued to show them his Grace and support in their meditation the significance of these words gradually became clear, so that they eventually ceased to think of him as a person with a body to reminisce about. In this connection, the Bhagavata gives an apt illustration of the relation of disciple to *guru* in the story of Sri Krishna and Uddhava.

When Sri Krishna ended his mission on earth and was preparing to return to Vaikunta, his eternal abode, Uddhava, who was greatly attached to his person, appealed to him with tears in his eyes to take him along with him, saying: "I have strong forebodings, O Supreme Yogi, that after destroying the Yadava race you will leave the earth altogether. ... I cannot bear to be away from your feet even for a moment. Grant that I may be taken with you to your divine abode. . . . How can I now be separated from you?" (*Bhagavata, XI. 6*).

Krishna answered that it would be in Uddhava's own interest not to cling to Krishna's body but to stay on after him and practise Yoga in

the Himalayas, "after shaking off all attachments to your family and kinsfolk, keeping your mind fixed wholly on me."

"You must always remember, friend Uddhava," he continued, "that whatever is thought by the mind, perceived by the eye and ear and spoken by the tongue, is the creation of the mind and therefore illusory. ... By controlling your mind and senses you will see the world in your own self and your self in Me, the Supreme Lord. Possessed of this knowledge and immersed in the contentment of Self-realization you will experience no obstruction in life." (*ibid., XI. 7*).

Sri Bhagavan knew, like Sri Krishna, that nothing is more productive of the highest spiritual results than concentration of the mind on one's real nature, which is the absolute Reality, the Lord Himself, the Supreme *guru*. Attachment to and service to the outer *guru*, in the form of the Master, takes only a secondary place.

Bhagavan was often asked about the necessity of a *guru* for the attainment of Liberation and used to answer that the *guru* was necessary. And indeed, mere study of the Upanishads is unlikely to lead very far, whereas association with a Sage and absorption of his instruction based on his own experience may quickly bring about the requisite comprehension leading towards Liberation. No doubt some Sages, like Bhagavan, have attained the Goal without a *guru* in human form, but these were rare beings who had already in their past lives brought their *sadhana* so far that only a little further effort was needed.

There is no need to go into the detail about Bhagavan's teaching. It is simple orthodox Advaita Vedanta as taught in the Upanishads, the Gita, the Bhagavata and the writings of Shankara, Vidyaranya, Gaudapada and others. We find in it complete consistency in likening *jagrat*, the waking state, to *svapna*, the dream state. Both are changeable and impermanent, so that when one is on the other is off,

whereas he who dreams and wakes is the same person, present in both. There is a traditional story that illustrates this.

Once a king dreamed that he was a young man of the name of Chandu owning a prosperous grocery. One day Panji, a beautiful outcaste girl, came half-drunk to buy betel nuts from him. She roused his passion by her seductive demeanour (or misdemeanor) to such an extent that he decided to marry her, even though it would mean loss of caste for him. When she became his wife Panji turned out very vicious but Chandu overlooked all her faults owing to his infatuation for her. Her wants proved insatiable, ruining his business and driving him to take up work reserved for outcastes. This went on for twenty years, during which time he had three children by Panji, of whom the eldest, a boy, grew to be even more wicked than his mother. With his increased family Chandu had to take to dishonest means of livelihood to add to his income, and he suffered the consequences. He sank lower and lower till one day his son, in a fit of rage, hanged himself. The king's officers, suspecting Chandu of being the murderer, took him to prison and beat him mercilessly. He cried out so loud that (let us not forget that he was a king in his waking state) it woke his queen who was sleeping nearby. She got up and shook him and woke him too, thereby ending the ordeal of the dream Chandu. The king was so much shaken by his dream ordeal that he shut himself up in his apartments for several days and did not resume his royal duties till he had committed the whole experience to paper. His minister made it into a book under the title, *The Autobiography of Chandu*.

How, I ask, does this autobiography differ from those pertaining to and written in the waking state? His twenty years of suffering were real to Chandu, as also was his infatuation for Panji, his criminal life and the beating he received in prison. If you argue that the whole story was concocted in

the king's own mind, so also were all his waking experiences, like those of all of us. Dreams also have their time and space and natural laws, just as the waking state has. As for Chandu, he is the experiencer of the three states.

It is said that he who understands the ten verses of the *Mandukya Upanishad* has no need to study the other Upanishads because they show the world to be a state of the mind, just like the other two states, and also because what it leaves unsaid but inferred is as important as what it says. From its representing the three states as the only states through which the *jiva* passes in its apparent peregrination we have to conclude that death introduces no new state for the ordinary man but only retains what he now experiences, namely the conditions of dream and sleep or alternation of the two, till rebirth in a new body take place and restores the waking state also. The same applies to loss of consciousness due to drugs, anesthetics, fainting fits or the *laya* of *hatha yoga*, misnamed *samadhi*. But the Sage is above all three states both in this life and after death, being established permanently in *Turiya*, the Fourth, which is pure Consciousness, the nature of the Self, and from which there is no return to a body. He has freed himself from the pangs of birth and death for ever. Such a one was Bhagavan Sri Ramana.



Sri Bhagavan's Shrine on Jayanti Day

Vedapatasala

This article is part of the series covering the various functions at Sri Ramanasramam and the teams behind them. We have tried to cover the growth of the ashram Vedapatasala from 1934 till today.

History

The recitation of the Vedas, morning and evening, at Sri Bhagavan's shrine started under very interesting circumstances.

Initially, some Pundits began coming from the town and reciting the vedas before Sri Bhagavan, thinking, perhaps, that it was edifying for them to do this in the august presence of the Maharshi. Although everyone liked this, it wasn't performed with any consistency, depending mostly on the whim of the priests. The Sarvadhikari thought that the Ashram should have regular daily parayanas. With this in mind, a Vedapatasala was established in the Ashram around 1934/35. Krishna Ghanapatigal was the teacher at the Ashram Vedapatasala almost since its inception. The students, much like today, would come twice a day to recite before the Maharshi. Sri Bhagavan often commented on the value of listening to Vedic chants. He would sit alert and absorbed throughout the duration of these recitations.

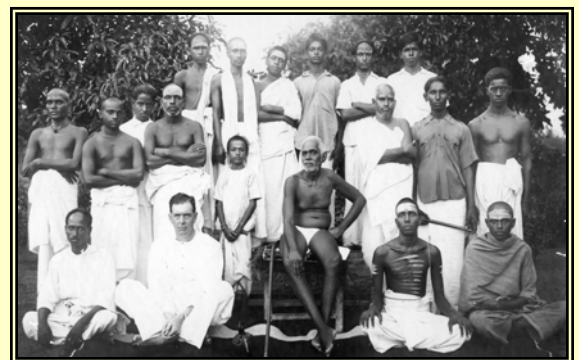
The years, 1936-37 saw a spurt of building activity in the Ashram. A new dining hall and an adjoining large kitchen were constructed to the north of the old dining hall. These were declared open by Sri Bhagavan Himself on 1st September 1938. A large store room was also constructed just to the east of the new dining hall. The Vedapatasala which was situated in a thatched shed west of the old hall, where the present dispensary is situated, was shifted in 1938 to a pucca single storied building well to the east of Bhagavan's hall.



Ashram Vedapatasala

Krishna Ghanapatigal was the teacher for almost forty years till his retirement in 1980. After attending the morning Vedic chanting along with the boys he would teach the boys till eleven. The teaching would resume at about 2 p.m. and continue till about 4 p.m. After Vedaparayana at 5 p.m. in front of Bhagavan he used to retire to his home for the night.

He was very orthodox in his ways. In the dining hall, the practice was that only after serving the Brahmins, the non-Brahmins and Sri Bhagavan were served. During the second serving, as the food had already once been served to non-Brahmins, it was considered polluted. Krishna Ghanapatigal felt unhappy and gently made this known to Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan immediately instructed that Ghanapatigal should be served food separately inside the kitchen, before food was served in the dining hall. He did not stop at that. Thereafter for some days before entering the dining hall for lunch, He would enquire whether food had been served to the Vedic teacher!



Major Chadwick (seated - 2nd from left)

After Bhagavan's Nirvana in 1950, the patasala was temporarily suspended, due to paucity of funds. In 1953, due to great efforts taken by Major Chadwick (Sadhu Arunachala), an ardent Western devotee of Bhagavan, the Ashram Vedapatasala and Sri Chakra Puja at Mother's Shrine were revived.

Early Students

Seshadri Sastrigal and Padi Agraharam Ramu were the first to join Ashram Vedapatasala when it was started around 1934/35. Later on Krishnamurthi (kittu) and Subramanian (Appichi), who went on to become the Ashram chief priests, became its students. When Seshadri once handed over a mug of water to Sri Bhagavan to wash His feet after returning from the Hill, Sri Bhagavan said, "Never do anything without being told. Attend to the work for which you have come."

In those days Patasala boys had to help the cooks serve food to devotees. Whenever Seshadri halted before Bhagavan a little more than he did for others Bhagavan chided him, "Don't play, go to the next leaf." Once Sri Bhagavan asked for some more buttermilk, which was unusual with him. Seshadri went inside the kitchen and brought a bucket of buttermilk, which was kept separately. Bhagavan after tasting it found it sour and asked for the reason. One of the cooks reported that it was buttermilk meant for the servants. Bhagavan asked, "We have so many cows. Isn't the milk which we get enough for all of us, why can't we serve the servants the same buttermilk too?"

It was customary for the Patasala boys to take turns and perform puja at the Mother's Shrine. One Karthigai Deepam Day, while Seshadri was showing the arati somehow the curtain in front of the Mother's Shrine caught on fire. After quickly dousing the fire he took the arati to Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan took the vibhuti with great devotion and applying it on his forehead asked in jest, "What? Has the *chokkapanai* been lit in the morning itself?" (*Chokkapanai* is a sort of bonfire lit atop a pole at every Siva temple in the evening of Deepam Day) How Bhagavan came to know about the fire was a wonder!

Today

The present teacher of the Ashram Vedapatasala, Brahmashri Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal has been teaching since 2002. Since then, 12 students have completed kramam after a period of 8 years. At present 17 students at various levels and ages are being tutored by him.

Generally the patasala boys get up around 4.30 a.m. and practice by reciting several times the lessons taught previously till they commit them to memory and can chant them verbatim with the correct intonation, rhythm and pronunciation. The early morning recital is called Brahma Yajna. After completion of the Brahma Yajna students have their bath and observe the morning rituals of sandhyavandhanam and samithadhanam before having their breakfast.

After breakfast they chant the first three pranas of Taittiriyanopanishad at Sri Bhagavan's Shrine from 8.00 to 8.40 a.m. Between 9.00 a.m. and 11.00 a.m. Vedic lessons (Krishna Yajur Veda) are taught. From 11.00 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. they perform afternoon rituals called madhyanikam.

Lunch is served at 11.30 a.m. and afternoon lessons commence at 1.00 p.m. and continue till 4.00 p.m.

The evening schedule begins with a recital of Vedas (Sri Rudram, Chamakam, Purusha Shuktam, Sri Shuktam, Durga Shuktam, Upadesasaram etc.,) at Sri Bhagavan's Shrine from 5.00 p.m. to 5.45 p.m.

Evening rituals from 5.45 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. are followed by an hour of Vedic lessons. After dinner at 7.30 p.m. the boys are taught English and Mathematics from 8.00 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. At 9.30 p.m. the boys retire for the night, thus concluding their daily rigorous schedule.



Sri Senthilnatha Ghanapadigal with his students

Lucy Ma Day

The death anniversary of Lucy Cornelsson (Lucy Ma) an ardent devotee of Bhagavan was observed at 10.00 a.m. on 31st December 2008. Her Samadhi was decorated with flowers offered to Bhagavan and *Aksharamanamalai* was recited in front of her Samadhi. After arati, prasadam was distributed.



Sivaprakasam Pillai Day

Sivaprakasam Pillai Day was observed on 12th January at 10.00 a.m in the New Hall. Selections from his compositions *Ramana Deva Malai*, *Vinnappam* and *Ramana Padamalai* were recited in front of his photograph placed there. This was followed by arati and distribution of Prasad.



Swami Ramanananda's Aradhana

The first annual ceremony of the former President of Sri Ramanasramam, Swami Ramanananda, was observed on 13th January according to the prescribed traditions. After *Rudra japam* and *Upanishad Parayanam* in front of his Samadhi, puja was conducted in all solemnity.



Ramaswami Pillai Day

The Samadhi day of this extraordinary and long standing devotee was observed on 14th January 2009 at his Samadhi in the Ashram. *Aksharamanamalai* was chanted by the devotees.

