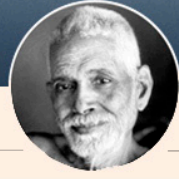


Saranagathi

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ISSUE

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Dear Devotees,

January has been a full month at the Ashram. From the 17th December to mid-January devotees gathered each morning in the Samadhi Hall for Dhanur Masa puja. The 8th of January was the official opening of the new library and auditorium which included a music programme that evening. On the morning of the 9th devotees gathered for recitation of Bhagavan's works heralding Bhagavan's 132nd Jayanti. The 11th of January hosted Swami Ramanananda's Samadhi Day. Pongal fell on the 15th with Mattu Pongal the following morning and the Tiruvoodal festival that evening. Lord Arunachaleswara came to the Ashram on the 17th in his customary post-Pongal rounding of the hill. On the 30th *ratha sapthami* puja was performed honouring the Sun's northern transit toward longer days.

This issue of *Saranagathi* carries the final part of the life-story of Maurice Frydman and an account of Lokamma, the kitchen helper who was blessed to be in Bhagavan's presence during the decades she stayed in Ramanagar. *Reports from Sri Ramanasramam* includes the Jayanti celebrations and Ramaswami Pillai's and Sivaprakasam Pillai's Samadhi Days.

For further news on the 132nd Ramana Jayanti, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/jayanti2012.html>

For details on other news and 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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Reality in Forty Verses

12. True knowledge is being devoid of knowledge as well as ignorance of objects. Knowledge of objects is not true knowledge. Since the Self shines self-luminous with nothing else for It to know, with nothing else to know It, the Self is knowledge. Nescience [not-knowing], It is not.

— *Reality in Forty Verses* by Sri Bhagavan





Women Devotees Series: Lokamma (part one)

LOKAMMA¹ became a widow when she was very young. Her greatest wish was to meet saintly persons and to gain freedom from samsara by their help. An uncle noted for his tapas initiated her into *panchakshara japa*. She would practice the japa day and night thousands of times and often had burning sensations in her body from the sheer power of the mantra.

She first saw a photograph of Bhagavan when she went to see a pious lady living at Tirumangalam. This lady was in the habit of visiting Ramanasramam, but Lokamma's relations would not permit her to go along with her.

Once when visiting a friend's house in Tenkasi someone mentioned the passing of the Swami at Tiruvannamalai. Hearing this Lokamma uttered a loud cry and then fell silent. She then told of a vision of Bhagavan standing before her with his walking stick in one hand and his water pot in the other. The vision was so real that she turned to the person who had given the report and asked how she could say such a thing when Bhagavan Ramana was standing right before them at that very moment. The

¹ Much of what follows is adapted from *Mountain Path*, Oct 1967, p. 342.

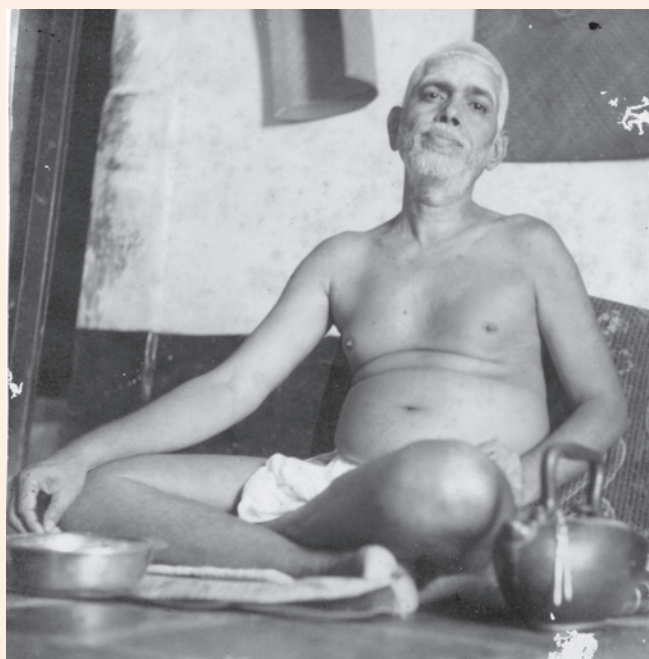
discrepancy was later resolved when it was discovered that the Swami who had passed away was Seshadri Swami, not Bhagavan. Yet for Lokamma, the moment to meet Bhagavan face to face had not yet come.

Later, at a time when her life was in chaos, she and her family made a pilgrimage to Rameswaram. She felt that her life as a widow was no longer tolerable and decided to put an end to it by jumping into the sea. Just when she had made up her mind to carry out this plan, she heard that she was to go to Tiruvannamalai in the company of some pilgrims en route to Tirupati. Her dream would at last be realised.

Soon enough she found herself at the feet of Bhagavan. He fixed his gaze on her with unwavering attention for about ten minutes. There was such splendour in his gaze that she was repeatedly compelled to close her eyes. "I was only looking and looking at Bhagavan with my eyes full of tears".² But what she had for so long yearned for was evidently given to her in those few moments, for her life was forever changed.

On this occasion she stayed and rendered service in the kitchen. When it was time for her to return home, Bhagavan gave her a copy of *Upadesa Manjari* (*Spiritual Instruction*). Thereafter she would visit Bhagavan and stay for months at a time, during which Bhagavan often gave her guidance.

² *Mountain Path*, April 1982, p.135.





Once Lokamma sent large quantities of the best quality parboiled rice from her village, Pattakurichi (near Tenkasi). Santhamma, not knowing how to utilise the half-boiled rice (only raw rice was cooked at the Ashram), in consultation with Bhagavan prepared idlies that day for breakfast. They were very much liked by everyone. Thenceforth idlies became the staple breakfast at the Ashram. Even today, Ashram idlies are acclaimed for their size, softness and taste. Full credit should go to Lokamma.³

When Lokamma came to the Ashram for good, her work in the kitchen, especially her knack for cooking,

3 Moments Remembered, p.2.

was greatly appreciated by Bhagavan. And as she had a natural gift for singing and a large repertoire, Bhagavan frequently made requests to her for songs, including Sri Muruganar's songs. If she forgot a word or a verse Bhagavan would join in to assist her.

Once devotees were discussing the nature of Sat-Chit-Ananda with Bhagavan in the hall, when, unaware of the topic of discussion, Lokamma entered and began singing a song beginning with 'Sat-Chit-Ananda'. Bhagavan marvelled at the coincidence.

(to be continued in the March issue)

Reports from Sri Ramanasramam: Ramana Grantalaya Opening Day



Ramana Grantalaya, the new Ashram library, officially opened on the morning of the 8th of January with the Ashram President, V.S. Ramanan and his family entering the new site together with devotees and lighting the deepam lamps at the shrine of Lord Dakshinamurthy. The very same evening, the library auditorium held its first public event: a concert with Ilayaraja and friends before a packed audience. This performance ranked as one of the best in recent memory, owing in part to the spacious hall and its fine acoustics. On the following day, Bhagavan's Jayanti, after the morning celebrations, devotees returned to the library auditorium to hear a veena concert by Bharadwaj Raman at 3pm, followed by a concert of Ramana music by Shakkubai at 4.45pm. That night, RMCL of Bangalore, relishing the new venue, treated devotees to a fresh and exciting repertoire of Ramananjali songs offered to Sri Bhagavan.





Maurice Frydman: A Retrospective (final part)

Born around 1900, Maurice Frydman was the eldest son of a poor Jewish family living in the ghetto of Krakow. His devout father worked in the synagogue and had always hoped that his son would become a rabbi.

The boy's intellectual gifts were evident from an early age. His facility for rapid learning was remarkable and he mastered the Cyrillic, Roman and Hebrew alphabets and became fluent in Russian, Polish, French, English and Hebrew before the age of ten.

Poland at this time was occupied by Russia and the Jews of Krakow suffered persecution under tsarist rule. Racial intolerance forbade Jewish boys to enter the Russian school in Krakow. But Maurice's exceptional abilities were recognized by his teachers. Having stood first among 500 boys in his high school final examinations, he sat for the Central Scholarship Examination and got 95%, standing first in all of Poland. He then received a

state scholarship and took a course in electrical engineering. By the age of 20 he had about 100 patents to his name for his electrical and mechanical inventions, among them, his "talking book". Soon he was picked up by laboratories and research institutes, and by 1925 had already travelled much of Europe, working in German, Dutch and Danish industrial establishments.

At the age of 25, however, what was to be his life-long urge came rushing to the fore: to "see God". He had studied the Talmud and other Jewish scriptures, yet Judaism did not satisfy his incisive, non-dogmatic mind. He converted to Russian Orthodoxy and became a monk, retreating to a solitary monastery in the Carpathian mountains in southern Poland. One day "Satan" tempted him to jump over a mighty waterfall to "prove his faith". He leapt from the 100-foot precipice. But as providence would have it he was uninjured owing to some shrubs in which his cassock fortunately became entangled.

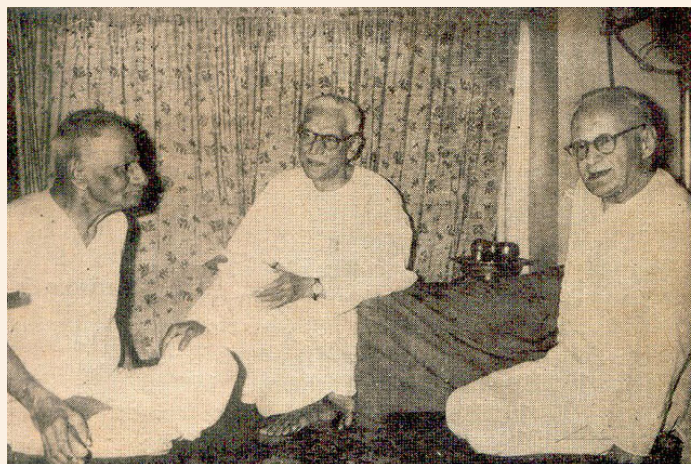
By 1926 he tired of orthodox dogmas and found his way to the Theosophical Society where he met Annie Besant and J. Krishnamurti. In 1928 when he was ready to emigrate to France in search of a job and "new adventures", he saw an advertisement in the *Paris Soir* about a new electrical factory being started on the outskirts of the city. He applied and was immediately hired; by 1934 he had become the plant's General Manager.

In 1935 Sir Mirza Ismail, the Dewan of Mysore, was touring Europe in search of engineering/managerial talent for the projected Government Electrical Factory in Bangalore. When he met Maurice at his Paris factory, the two immediately



Krakow, early 1900s





Maurice Frydman with Nisargadatta Maharaj in Mumbai

struck a chord and it was soon decided that Frydman would come to India.

It was in India that his spiritual longing truly awakened. His explorations led him around the subcontinent to meet with the great teachers of the day, and finally, at Bhagavan's feet, to a three-year stay at Ramanasramam.

After Bhagavan's Mahanirvana, Maurice involved himself in various undertakings around the country. By 1970 he was living in Mumbai and sitting with Nisargadatta Maharaj. Among other things, he translated and edited recorded talks with Nisargadatta Maharaj that were published under the title *I AM THAT* and soon became a modern advaitic classic.

In 1976, towards the end of his life when he was sick and mostly bed-ridden in his flat in Mumbai, an unknown woman turned up at his door. She introduced herself, explaining that she was a registered nurse and that she had been instructed by a man in a dream to come and offer nursing care to Maurice. The dream had been repeated and when she had the dream the third time, she decided to act

on it, mustering up the courage to come knocking. Though taken aback by her story, Maurice was won over by her sincerity and granted her entrance to his flat. After entering, her eyes landed on a photo on the wall of one whose name she had yet to learn. Seeing the photo of Bhagavan, the nurse exclaimed, "That's the man who came to me in my dream!"¹

Of Maurice's final days, Apa Pant had the following to say: "One day I received a phone call: 'The sage is dying', whispered a soft, sad voice over the trunk phone from Bombay. 'He is asking for you. Come as soon as you can.'

"So my wife and I rushed, with Avalokita our youngest, Maurice's favourite. When we arrived, Hilla Petit—an elderly Parsi friend, who helped care for Maurice, and her adopted daughter, Babulal, as well as the doctors and the nurse all complained that Maurice was refusing to eat or take his medicine. Hilla and Babulal were in tears. They implored me to 'make' Maurice eat and take his medicine, as if anyone could ever make him do anything that he didn't want to do! For Maurice's part, he only said, 'Apa, who is dying?'"

"The next day he drove everyone out of the room, ordering them to leave him alone with me. Then he said, 'Apa, I hear the music, I see the bright light. Who dies? No one is dying. This diseased body is keeping me away from that harmony and beauty. Do not let them keep me in this body. Go now in peace.'

"The next day as Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj and we sat at his bedside, he quietly breathed his last three breaths uttering these soft simple words — 'Hari Om!'"²

1 This anecdote is related by Ashram President, V. S. Raman-an. See also, *Moments Remembered*, p. 123.

2 This account is adapted from *Mountain Path*, 1991 pp. 31-6, 125-8.

Maharshi's Gospel

The Jnani and the World

Frydman: Is the world perceived by the *jnani*?

Bhagavan: From whom is the question? Is it from a *jnani* or *ajnani*?

Frydman: From an *ajnani*, I admit.

Bhagavan: Is it the world that seeks to decide the issue about its reality? The doubt arises in you. Know in the first instance who the doubter is, and then you may consider if the world is real or not.





Reports from Sri Ramanasramam: 132nd Ramana Jayanti



Sri Bhagavan's 132nd birthday, Ramana Jayanti, was celebrated in all solemnity and joy on 9th January at his Shrine—Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam. Chanting, song and puja graced the morning and the day which began in the early hours with Dhanurmasa puja, Manikkavachakar's *Tiruvembavai*, Andal's *Tiruppavai*, Muruganar's *Ramana Tiruvembavai*, Vishnu Sahasranam followed by Bhagavan's works. Devotees from near and far appeared in record numbers for the Mahanasya puja and more than three thousand partook of meals where no one was turned away. The early evening brought a special abhishekam beginning at 3:30 pm and music in the new library auditorium.

Reports from Sri Ramanasramam: Other Celebrations



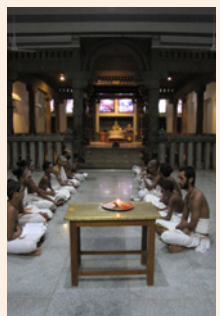
Swami Ramanananda's Samadhi Day, 11th January



Sivaprakasam Pillai's Samadhi Day, 12th January



Ramaswami Pillai's Samadhi Day, 14th Jan.



Dhanurmasa Puja Vishnu Sahasranamam

January hosted a number of special functions. On the 11th January the Ashram celebrated Swami Ramanananda's Samadhi Day at his shrine. The following day Sivaprakasam Pillai's Samadhi Day was celebrated with chanting and puja, and the 14th, Ramaswami Pillai's Samadhi Day was celebrated at his shrine adjacent to Muruganar's Shrine. The 30th was Ratha Sapthami, and puja to the icon of Surya in the Mother's Shrine was performed, marking the Sun's northern transit.





Reports from Sri Ramanasramam: Pongal Festival

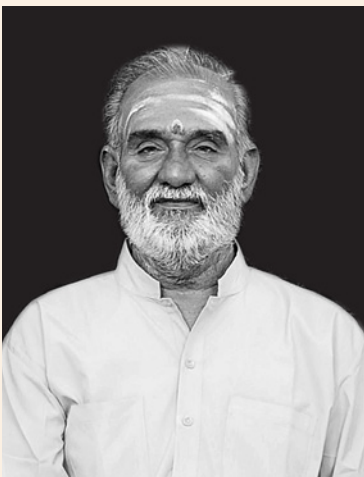


Makara Sankranti Pongal (15th January) falls on the first of Thai, the tenth month in the Tamil calendar and is traditionally said to coincide with the winter solstice, which marks the beginning of the Sun's northern transit. 'Sankranti' refers to the transit of the sun into a new *rasi* (zodiacal sign) and the beginning of a new solar month according to the Tamil calendar. The entry of the sun into Capricorn (*makara*) on the day of the winter solstice is the most important *sankranti* because it marks the beginning of the solar year. On this day according to Tamil astronomical calculations, the sun reaches the southernmost point of the ecliptic and starts its northern trajectory (*uttarayana*). From Pongal onwards, the days are said to grow longer and thus it is not surprising that this harvest festival is dedicated to Lord Surya, the bringer of agricultural bounty. This transition day is bright and full of cheer as the commencement of Thai is believed to pave the way for new opportunities.



Pongal is a three-day festival and actually begins the day before Makara Sankranti with Bhogi, the last day of Margazhi month when old things in the household are discarded. The third day of the festival is Mattu Pongal (16th January) when cows and bulls are honoured for their hard labour throughout the year. The festival ends with a procession of temple deities. Lord Arunachaleswara comes out in the early morning of Mattu Pongal, gives darshan to each of the large elaborately decorated Nandis and then starts on His way round the Four Streets. After three roundings, Lord Siva's tiff with Parvati is enacted in Tiruvoodal Street in the evening. The following morning Swami starts his circuit of the mountain, stopping in at the Ashram on the way. Devotees eagerly receive the Lord at the Ashram entrance when dhotis, sarees and garlands are offered and arati performed.

Reports from Sri Ramanasramam: Obituary



We regret to inform devotees of the demise of Sri M. S. Chandrasekhar, founder and president of Puduvai Ramana Kendram, Pondicherry, at the age of 75. Born on 15th August, 1937, and merged in Arunachala on Republic Day, 26th January 2012, Sri Chandrasekhar was a philanthropist who lived a life of service, hospitality and ascetic renunciation.

In his early years, Chandrasekhar had been a highly successful pharmaceutical industrialist but later opted to devote his life fulltime to Bhagavan. This took shape in the following ways: through Arunachala Aksharamanamalai chanting and the free distribution of printed verses; through regular processions in and around Pondicherry with the Ramana Ratham that he had constructed; and through the endearing hospitality he offered to all who came knocking at the Pondicherry Kendram-cum-residence. Devotees time and again testified to the warmth and cordiality they received on their visits to Puduvai Ramana Kendram, where they were allowed to leave only after a hearty breakfast or a sumptuous lunch.

Chandrasekhar is survived by his wife and two daughters and will be missed by all.

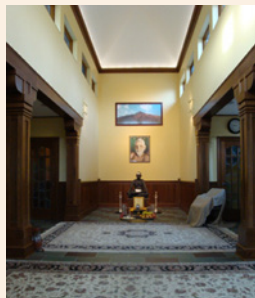




Reports from the Kendras: Introducing Arunachala Ashram, NY



Arunachala Ashrama, New York



New Meditation Hall, inaugurated the 14th January, 2012



Jayanti/Inauguration Day celebrations

Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center was incorporated in the state of New York in 1966, but actually had its inception 25 years earlier when Bhagavan Ramana entered the heart of his earnest devotee, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, in the hill station of Darjeeling, India. As he was poor, Bhagawat could not afford travel to South India to sit at the feet of his Guru. Ironically, he received a fellowship and the passage fare to attend graduate school in the USA in 1947 and had to content himself with only writing letters to Sri Ramanasramam. On a visit to Sri Ramanasramam in 1960, Arthur Osborne suggested to Bhagawat to start weekly meetings dedicated to the life and teachings of the Maharshi. From 1962 onwards, weekly meetings were conducted in Manhattan, which evolved into daily meetings. Around 1970 a handful of young, earnest seekers were attracted to Bhagavan's New York Ashram and began serving it with devotion and dedication. A country Ashram was opened in Nova Scotia, Canada in 1972. In 1987, the Manhattan Ashram moved to a rented house in Queens. The Ashram purchased a building in 1996, and then in 2005 moved to its present location. On January 9th, 2012, Bhagavan's 132nd Jayanti Day, a newly constructed shrine and meditation hall was opened to the public, and the inaugural ceremonies took place on the 14th of January. For the last 20 years, from the New York Ashram, a free bimonthly newsletter, *The Maharshi*, has been sent out to thousands of seekers. All English books published by Sri Ramanasramam, as well as photos, audio CDs and DVDs, are distributed from the NY Ashram.



Nova Scotia Ashram



Arunachala Ramana Mandiram, Nova Scotia



Ramana House, Miami

Reports from the Kendras: Nova Scotia and other North American Centres

In 1972, a beautiful country Ashram in Nova Scotia, Canada was founded. A temple, Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram, was inaugurated in 1975 on the Ashram property, which is situated in the picturesque, unspoiled Annapolis Valley. In 2009, "Ramana House" was opened in Miami, Florida. At all the three centers—New York, Nova Scotia and Florida—devotees gather three times a day for meditation. Visitors interested in joining the spiritual routine of any of the three Ashrams are welcomed. During the last 15 years, inspired by Bhagavan Ramana, a dozen or more satsang groups have been formed in the USA and Canada. They normally gather in devotees' homes weekly, biweekly or monthly. The San Francisco Bay group rents halls to celebrate the main events related to Bhagavan's life, which are well attended and well organized.

All these years, by His grace, Arunachala Ashrama has continued to serve sincere seekers in the West, and, as a blessed duty, continues to support the needs of Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, which has blossomed into a vibrant spiritual center, attracting sincere aspirants from the world over.

