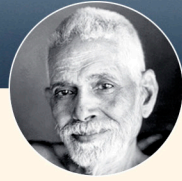


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

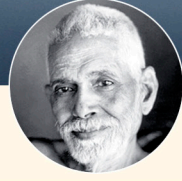
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Photos: S Gopalakrishna, L Sivasubramanian and Dr. Carlos Lopez



Saranagati



FEBRUARY 2022
VOL. 16, NO.2

IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

As we go to press, the Omicron variant is on the rise in Tiruvannamalai, and many seem to be exhibiting symptoms. The Ashram soldiers on in the midst of it all, making every effort to remain open for more than forty hours per week.

This February 2022 issue continues with the life story of Mahalakshmi Suryanandan (known affectionately as Maggie-ma) who was peacefully absorbed into Arunachala Ramana on 17th December after a brief illness. It continues with part two of the Ramana Reflections piece from last issue.

At the end of the month, 30 January being Martyrs Day, KVS sang at evening puja the *bhajan Vaishnav janato* very dear to Gandhiji.

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,
Saranagati

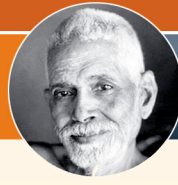
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Calendar of Ashram Events

12th February (Sat) Munagala Venkataramaiah Day
14th February (Mon) Punarvasu
15-16th February (Tue-Wed) Full Moon
21st February (Mon) Sundaram Iyer Day
1st March (Tue) Mahasivaratri
13th March (Sun) Punarvasu

17th March (Thu) Full Moon
18th March (Fri) Srividya Havan
2nd April (Sat) Jagadish Swami Day
9th April (Sat) Punarvasu
14th April (Thu) Tamil New Year/Nirvana Room
16th April (Sat) Full Moon





IN PROFILE

Mahalakshmi Suryanandan (part II)

In the first segment, we saw how Maggie's father had led the family to Bhagavan and heard Maggie's early impressions of the sage. From that time onward Bhagavan became one of the key features of the life of the family. Maggie writes:

On our first visit, Appa did not tell us that we were going to see a Maharshi. But the sudden darshan of Bhagavan made an impact on me which is permanent and can never be erased. Here I should confess that from childhood, I had a fear of death and wanted to know all about death. Bhagavan's Death Experience impressed me a lot... [After this first visit] we came [as a family] at least once or twice a

year from 1940 to 1950. [We usually] stayed in the Morvi guest house and had darshan of Bhagavan sitting silently in the Dhyana Hall. We observed him stroking calves in the gosala or talking to the monkeys, feeding the peacocks and squirrels, coming down from the Hill, reading letters and newspapers, or talking to devotees, especially pandits, Vedic scholars and philosophers, answering their questions and clearing their doubts in spiritual matters, sometimes enquiring about the well-being of old devotees. We always had lunch with him in the dining hall.¹

According to custom, the accessibility to Bhagavan was greater for Maggie's father as there were restrictions pertaining to women in the Ashram:

Appa had visited the Ashram many more times than we had and sometimes came alone or with friends. In those days, women and children had to leave the Ashram in the evenings after 6 pm. Amma and we [three] sisters would return to the guest house earlier. After dinner in the Ashram, Appa spent most of his time talking to Muruganar, Devaraja Mudaliar, K.K. Nambiar, D.S. Sastri, Arthur Osborne and other devotees. We used to love doing Giri Pradakshina. In those days, there were only a few people doing the circumambulation of the Hill and the Arunachaleshwarar temple was never overcrowded. In fact, many a time, Appa used to say, 'Today, we are blessed with special darshan only for us.'²

Maggie was impressed by a report her sister Santa gave about Bhagavan on one of their visits. She says:

Once Santa happened to see Bhagavan, who had just finished having his morning bath and the sun's rays were falling on him. She said his whole body was shining like gold.³

In these early years with Bhagavan, Maggie was preparing for college:

On Saturdays and Sundays unmindful of the ensuing examination, I used to sit before Bhagavan without any worry or anxiety about the questions to be answered the next day. But during the night I prepared and finished the study and got ready for college. I came to Bhagavan to charge my battery. What I gathered about Bhagavan is that he is very simple, effulgent and glowing. He wore the body like a garment.⁴

Maggie passed her exams and joined Queen Mary's College, the first women's university in Chennai, where great women freedom fighters such as Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Lakshmi Sahgal had attended.

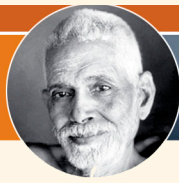
1 Random Memories, p. 46.

2 Ibid., p. 47.

3 Personal conversation, also Random Memories, p. 48.

4 Video Interview.





Gandhiji In Madras

In February 1946 when Maggie was in Queen Mary's College, Smt. Manjubhashini and Smt. Sarojini Varadappan asked her to be a volunteer for Gandhiji's upcoming 3-day visit to Hindi Prachar Sabha, T. Nagar on the occasion of its silver jubilee. This was no small matter, since as early as she could remember, Gandhiji had been nothing short of a towering legend in the Swaminathan household. Maggie's father had been impressed by Gandhi as early as 1915 when Gandhi had returned to India from South Africa. He was visiting Madras to solicit support for the Indian civil rights movement in South Africa. The nineteen-year-old K. Swaminathan had been assigned the task of escorting Gandhi to various places in Madras—the Catholic Archbishop's residence, the Anglican Bishop's house next to St. George's Cathedral, etc. KS suggested they take a horse-drawn buggy but Gandhi declined saying that it would cost two rupees whereas the tram would be only a few paise.

The 1946 visit was a memorable one for Madras because it would turn out to be Gandhi's last visit to that city. This was also the occasion when Gandhi suddenly boarded a local city bus. Gandhiji had wanted to inspect the ornamental gates of the Hindi Prachar Sabha and walked out onto Thanikachalam Road but when realising that the other gates were far away, he suddenly flagged a corporation bus destined for Mylapore and rode to the next gate. During this time, Maggie got the opportunity to see Gandhiji at close quarters over the course of the three days and met large number of great Gandhians not least of all Sri Pyarelal, the personal secretary of the Mahatma.

Women's Welfare organizer

The following year Maggie wrote her final B.Sc. exam and resumed her voluntary service in Srinivasa Gandhi Nilayam (a branch of Women's Indian Association) which was very close to 'Dharmalayam'. That day, Smt. Ambujammal called her and said, 'This lady, Smt. Parijatham Naidu, Director of Women's Welfare, wants you to go and see her in her office at Rajaji Hall, Mount Road, on Monday.'

Maggie was resistant and didn't want to go, but her father compelled her, saying, 'Maggie, when Smt.



Gandhiji's last visit to Madras, February 1946

Ambujammal, whom you admire so much, asks you to go and see that lady, you have to go'. She went on the appointed day and received a job offer. The following day she was appointed as Women's Welfare organizer in Madras city. She writes:

I worked happily in the department for nearly 20 years as the job enabled me to do service to the weaker sections of society. I worked as District Welfare Officer in Bellary and Anantapur districts (on a leave vacancy for 3 months), as District Officer, Tirunelveli Dt, went on deputation to State Social Welfare Board, where I worked as the Office Secretary, first under the Chairmanship of Dr. Mrs. Muthulakshmi Reddy and then under the next chairman, Smt. S. Ambujammal. Then I worked as Superintendent, Service Home, Tambaram for three years.⁵

Through her professional work for underprivileged women, Maggie-Ma developed a strong advocacy for women's needs and their role in society. This commitment, as she articulated it herself, connected her even stronger to Bhagavan:

Bhagavan Ramana is the only Maharishi, who has given 'Mukti' (Liberation) to the mother and erected a shrine for her and named it Matrubbhuteshwara Lingam. He is, as far as I know, the only one who has elevated a widowed woman to this supreme status.⁶

Bhagavan's Illness and Mahanirvana

In February 1949, Bhagavan underwent surgery in the Ashram dispensary to remove a small growth on his arm, but the diagnosis of cancer was alarming for devotees. When friends of Maggie's father inquired as to why their family was always going to Tiruvannamalai

⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

⁶ Ibid., p. 46.





during the hot summer, rather than to the Nilgiri Hills, her father responded: ‘Those hills will be there, but how long Bhagavan will be in the body, we do not know.’

Further surgeries ensued. After a fourth surgery on December 19th, doctors decided that the only way to save Bhagavan’s life was by amputating his arm. Sri Bhagavan declined saying, ‘The body is itself a disease. Let it have its natural end. Why mutilate it?’⁷

Maggie described an experience of her sister Santa who by then had become a medical student:

Santa was in the 2nd year of M.B.B.S course in Madras Medical College in the year 1949 or so. At that time, Bhagavan was operated on for cancer. When we went to the Ashram, soon after that surgery, Dr. C. Raghavachari who performed the procedure allowed Santa to be in the room and see the wound being dressed by him. The treatment took more than half an hour during which a large amount of blood and pus were removed, the wound cleaned and bandaged again. Bhagavan remained very calm and only smiled. He never exhibited any sign of pain or uneasiness but remained as if the treatment were going on to some other person. We, however, were horrified and felt pained as if the operation were happening to us.

After the dressing was over Santa came running to where I was standing not far from the dispensary and said with a lot of emotion, excitement and tears in her eyes, ‘Maggie, I tell you, Ramana is no human being, he is certainly God himself! He was just looking somewhere, unconcerned as if somebody else’s wound was being cleaned, tightly bandaged, and did not utter a word. There was absolutely no movement or shake of the arm as if it was a log of wood.’⁸

⁷ *Saranagati* March 2013, p. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48; Video Interview.

The fateful moment came only a few months later and the girls’ father would write, ‘Gone is that beaming smile with which you used to be welcomed into his presence. Gone is that kind mood which you used to take for an assurance that Bhagavan [had] taken cognizance of your matter and all [would] be well with you thereafter. With what affection would he not enquire about your journey? With what sympathy would he not enquire about any who may be ailing in your family and about whom you may have written to him already. Those who have had such experiences, find the cruel separation of this Mahanirvana all too hard to bear.’⁹

Following Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana, Dharmalayam became home to weekly meetings of the Ramana Bhakta Sabha, where Maggie and others were called on to sing. Gathering with devotees was the only balm that could soothe the burden of grief the family felt during these months following Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana.

Compositions and Singing

Maggie’s accomplishments with singing were known to all who knew her. She set Muruganar’s songs to music very early on and was among the first to sing *Sri Ramana Sannadi Murai*, urged on by Devaraj Mudaliar. She eventually sang in front of Muruganar himself, winning his appreciation.

Maggie set *Aksharamanamalai* to classical Carnatic music which she sang in the Ramana Bhakta Sabha. Till then

⁹ *Saranagati* March 2013, p. 5.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Chinnaswami Day



Niranjanananda Swami (Chinnaswami), Bhagavan’s younger brother, was the first Sarvadhikari of the Ashram and devoted his life to building up the Ashram. On full moon day, Monday 17th January, a handful of devotees gathered at his samadhi to observe the anniversary of his passing in January 1953. —





it had only been sung in the familiar form. She and her younger sister Dharma along with Sulochana and others got together and revised the tune which went through many versions. In preparation for the opening of the Delhi Ramana Kendra on 1st September, 1974, (which was inaugurated by Sri B.D. Jatti as his first public function after becoming the Vice-President of India), Maggie-ma, Dharma, Sulochana, Neela Mahalingam and Durga Balasubramaniam refined the tune and presented it to Professor K Swaminathamn, A.R. Natarajan and a few committee members. Further changes were made and the final version was performed by the group at the opening ceremony.

For thirty years, Maggie-ma led the monthly singing each Punarvasu morning in the New Hall. The women's singing group could be heard rehearsing each month at Maggie's house in Ramana Nagar in the days leading up to Punarvasu.

Maggie went on to get married and to live a happy married life with her husband P.R. Suryanandan until his demise in August 2012. She wrote six books, four of which consisted of her compositions in praise of Bhagavan, among them, her well-received *Ramana Glory Be To Him*. She battled cancer in the mid-1990s and at times, managed the suffering caused by the disease with light humour about how she was blessed to have the same illness that Bhagavan had had.

Late in life, Maggie-ma anthologised her walk with Bhagavan, saying: *[I experienced] Bhagavan as a mother and child.*



In his presence I had not bothered to ask any questions but there was no problem, no ideas, as I felt only peace and indescribable happiness.'

Maggie-ma passed away peacefully on 17th December, 2021, in Chennai. —

(series concluded)

Sri Bhagavan's Ayurvedic Recipes

Bhagavan's medicinal recipes, which he wrote in verse, have been broken up for readers eager to see Bhagavan's classical Tamil up close.

Ashta Churnam

*Paṅgunava māmiḷagu paṅgēzhu cukkumā
miṅuperuñ cīrakamu minduppu tippili
paṅgumaindu cīrakamūñ rōmamiru paṅgutūl
poṅgumaṅgi murpiḍiney poḍiyodaṅṅa muṅṅavē.*

*Paṅgu-navamām miḷagu paṅgu-ēzhu cukkumām
iṅgu peruñ-cīrakamum induppu tippili*

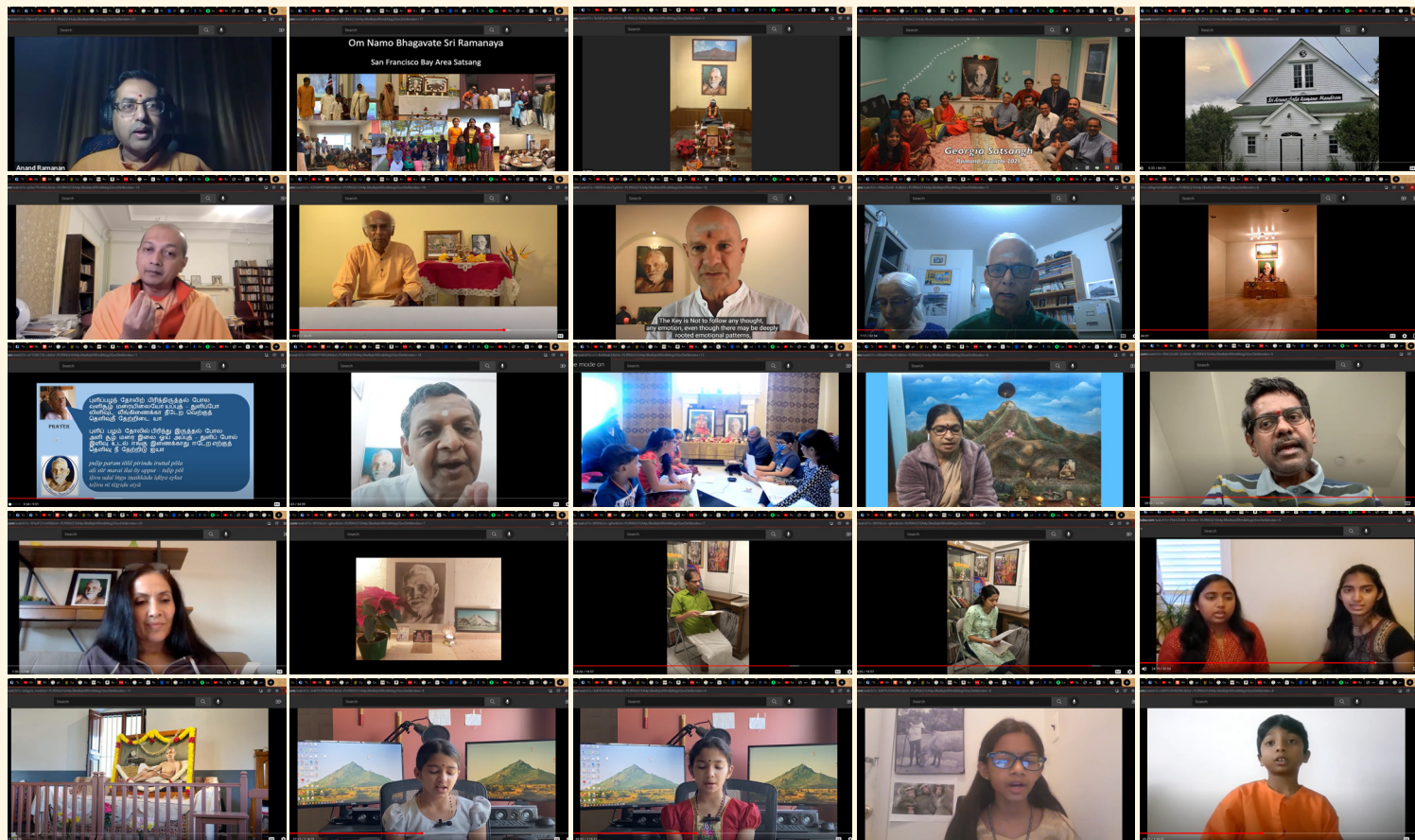
*paṅgum-aindu cīraka-mūñru ōmam-iru paṅgu-tūl
poṅgum-aṅgi murpiḍi-ney poḍiyodu aṅṅam uṅṅavē.*

Ingredients: Black pepper (9 parts); dry ginger (7 parts); asafoetida (5 parts); anise seed (5 parts); rock salt (5 parts); long pepper (5 parts); cumin seed (3 parts); Bishop's weed (2 parts).

Preparation: Clean all the above ingredients well and grind them into a fine powder. Add a little powder to a handful of cooked rice mixed with ghee and eat a mouthful.

Benefits: Cures indigestion, poor appetite, stomach ache and also relieves flatulence. —





Sri Bhagavan's Global Online Jayanti Celebrations 2022

With the global pandemic still menacing international travel, devotees from around the world came together online to celebrate Bhagavan's 142nd Jayanti. The Global Online Jayanti celebrations this year took place at the beginning of this Ashram Centenary year, starting Sunday morning 2nd January and continuing up to the morning of the 3rd. The concluding talk came from the Ashram President, Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan in an address from

Ahmedabad. All the programmes were telecast live via the Arunachala Ashrama YouTube channel as well as the Sri Ramanasramam YouTube channel. Participants included New York Arunachala Ashrama, Washington DC, Toronto, Nova Scotia, Paris, Ohio, Michigan, Houston, Tampa, the International Spanish Language Satsang, Austin, North Carolina, Georgia, Los Angeles, San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle and San Diego. Speakers included Swami Sarvapriyananda, Sri Mohan Ramaswami, Dr. Carlos Lopez and others. For video recordings of events go to: <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfRKkQ1EA4p3BwBqtXRrmBAbg2iSocDel> —





RAMANA REFLECTIONS

Tracing the Upward-Leading Path (part II)

In the first segment, we made preparations for the climb. We explored the meaning of the mountain path and considered what taking it would entail.

As we take our first steps, we find ourselves unavoidably bringing some of our worldly habits with us. Though we may hope to shed them little by little, we know that if we fail to do so, our trajectory up the mountain could turn horizontal and instead of climbing upward toward the summit, we would merely amble about on the hillside. We come to see that the cause for such meandering is not accidental but is born of the fear of heights, the fear of transition and the fear of giving up what must be given up.

We may discover that we are taking non-essential steps. Reading the lives of saints and other sacred literature, for example, or studying and reflecting on the teaching, are useful only insofar as they inspire us to take our own steps. We want to avoid becoming armchair-hillclimbers who only observe others venturing up the hill but do not do so themselves, like the accountant who in tallying his wealthy employer's formidable assets, proudly imagines them as his own.

If we find ourselves living in storyland, inhabiting a virtual reality of thought, and casting ourselves as characters in the story, we fail to appreciate that what we truly are is beyond name and form, beyond speech and narration, beyond images and themes. When we find ourselves becoming mere spectators of the journey, we will have fallen victim to a trick of the ego. As the ego wants to avoid its own destruction, it attempts to forestall a genuine ascent and coaxes us into by-ways that resemble the mountain path. It clings to the status quo because spiritual growth is threatening. True spiritual growth is non-reversible and ensures that we will never be able to return to deluded ways of thinking and living. The deluded mind, however, is unable to envision a time when it would not want the option of returning to its former delusions.

It's not a question of whether we fear the path of enquiry—it is guaranteed we do. We sense that once we see through our illusions, our life in its present form will be forever altered. Mustering the courage for the path begins with baby steps and in time, we come to see enquiry as non-threatening and the upward-leading path as the means for complete healing and genuine happiness.

But suppose we discover that we have lost long years on an armchair ascent and instead of climbing the mountain we are vicariously following a make-believe path? Here, we would be tempted to condemn ourselves. But this is just another trick of the ego. Ego knows that if we condemn ourselves for being poor seekers, real progress can be forestalled. Yet, if we see self-condemnation as a narcissistic impulse, we avoid the trap, and even avoid condemning the condemner. In a friendly way, we take distance from the ego by neither denying mistaken steps nor censuring them. We simply identify mistaken steps, make the necessary adjustments and carry on.





Fear of the Mind

When we identify fear at work within us, we do not condemn ourselves for being fearful. The Greek word for 'fear', *phobos*, means to 'run away from' and gives us a clue about the nature of fear: fear is in the mind.

Bhagavan urged us to face our fear because the demon we run away from grows larger and more daunting by our running away from it. On the other hand, the demon we face squarely diminishes in stature on the spot. If we resist enquiry and the upward-leading path it may be because we fear what it will reveal about us.

The Scottish psychologist R. D. Laing spoke of three universal fears: the fear of death, the fear of other people and the fear of our own mind.

But why should we fear our own mind?

Among other things, the mind will invariably show us the transient nature of things. The so-called ego is there to insulate us from the hardship of this fact. The only true safety is Reality and yet, Reality is poignant. We really don't want it because seeing it up close through enquiry is disconcerting. We hope that when Bhagavan talks of Self-realisation, he is referring to realisation of the personality, thereby allowing us to retain it. The upward-leading path, however, leads us to see that all we cling to is inexorably taken from us in the course of time, including the personality.

As for whether or not to make the climb, Søren Kierkegaard cites the only two options:

To dare is to lose one's footing for a moment; not to dare is to lose one's whole life.

Conditioned Responses

Fear has diverse origins. Its ability to appear out of nowhere can catch us off-guard. Studies of mice and other animals have a lot to reveal about its roots. For example, predispositions to fear can be inherited. In

one study, mice were conditioned to fear a strong scent (acetophenone) by accompanying it with an electric shock. The offspring for two generations exhibited innate fears of the scent without ever having received an electric shock.

Similarly, cows enclosed in electric fences would not go near fences. Later, after placing them in conventional enclosures, they would still not go near fences nor would two generations of their offspring even though the latter had never experienced an electric fence.¹

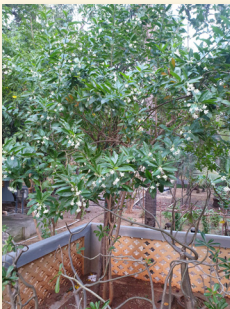
Why this is important for the climber is that uncomfortable feeling states that arise in enquiry may be born of epigenetic inheritance from our parents and grandparents². They can also be born of early life traumas or of samskaras from previous births. The point is, negative mental states are often related to some unhealed past experience.

The data would suggest that we carry epigenetically the residue of our parents' and grandparents' traumas without conscious awareness of them. If trauma can be transmitted epigenetically, then its effects could be passed on to offspring without direct knowledge of it.

Unconscious memories of traumatic events from early life are likewise important. As an example, consider the following report from someone sitting in silence before Bhagavan's sofa in the Old Hall. When another devotee entered the hall wearing a strong scent of rose oil and took a seat, the meditator noticed a tightening in the belly and wondered why it should appear so suddenly. Next came a strong feeling

1 Closer to home regarding epigenetic inheritance (samskaras) from former generations is the Ashram monkeys' response to Bhagavan's tiger skin and head when it was laid out for airing. Though never having seen a tiger before, they perceived grave danger and reacted strongly.

2 Defined as changes in a chromosome without alterations to the DNA sequence; believed to be more pronounced in male offspring.



Ashram Gardens: Night Queen

C*estrum nocturnum* is an evergreen shrub with slender branches (4 m tall). It is an ornamental plant and its flowers are heavily perfumed. The blossom's night-time scent can be so strong that those with respiratory sensitivities report irritation of the nose and throat. The Ashram's Night Queen is planted just behind Swami Ramanandaji Maharaja's Samadhi and was recently in bloom. —





of sadness followed by an image from childhood: the day of his mother's funeral when hundreds of fresh roses surrounded her mortal remains. The connection became clear. The sadness in the hall and the mental state at the time of the funeral forty years earlier were linked by the trigger of the rose scent and an early life samskara caused by the untimely death of his mother. The grief from that event had evidently never been fully resolved—perhaps owing to youth—and needed to be experienced more fully. Enquiry into the one who felt sad in the hall that day roused the fortitude to sit with the scent of rose oil and the grief it elicited, thereby helping mend a hidden samskara.

Unearthing Samskaric Stratification

Enquiry is thus a means for accessing orphaned material of the heart—karmic imprinting, vasanas, samskaras and any psychological dispositions passed down through the generations or from past births. The path of enquiry helps to decipher the enigma of layered samskaras which can be gnarly and impenetrable. Encoded within each layer is the secret to its healing. The cause of each layer is discovered in the next layer further down. Once the root layer of a given cluster of samskaras is uncovered and enquiry is brought to bear on it, no further work is needed there. Here we discover the potential of enquiry to wear away the egoic complex, which is itself an aggregation, i.e., a clustering of samskaric nexuses. If we mistake the ego for the Self, it is because the light of the Self illuminates these samskaric clusters. We recognise the light as coming from the Self but mistakenly take the clusters to be the Self and cling to them, calling them 'I'. By moving enquiringly from one set of layered samskaras to the next, we begin to disabuse ourselves of this false notion.

Healing a single stratified cluster of woundedness gives impetus for tending deeper, knottier aggregations. What had once seemed opaque and impenetrable turns out to be just layers that can be uncovered in a simple excavation through enquiry. Here enquiry's reach is vast and can be described as *illuminating the inner landscape*. For example, the granddaughter of a woman who had been abused in childhood may uncover her grandmother's trauma internally through enquiry without knowing what it is, only experiencing a pain whose origins and causes are unknown. This would



apply most obviously in cases where the original trauma had never been part of the overt family history. The focus here would not necessarily be to seek the historical facts in one's ancestry, but simply to acknowledge these raw psychic residues and give them the caring attention needed for their healing.

The urgency for this work begins with the premise that the inner darkness associated with samskaric accumulation grows through neglect. Distancing ourselves from these hidden layers drives them further into the unconscious, very often enhancing their harmfulness. What makes human life unbearable is being split off from our inner discomforts, denying and disowning the deepest most sensitive parts of ourselves, rather than holding them in compassion and registering the heartache they elicit.

When we embrace the path of enquiry, we cross the threshold from the conscious mind to the lesser-known parts of consciousness to plumb the depths of the heart where grace greets us at the place of our vulnerability. Rather than being overwhelmed by such encounters, we are rewarded with strength, renewal, and courage. Our willingness to work with whatever the path leads us to helps us to overcome its obstacles and thus, the rallying cry for one on the upward-leading path is simply this: *what's IN the way, IS the way.*³

³ Mary O' Malley, consider *Talks* §107 where Bhagavan said, 'Suffering is the way for Realisation of God', to which the questioner replied, 'But should He not ordain it differently?' Bhagavan only added, 'It is the way.'





Clinging to the Notion of a Separate Self

The sense realm perpetuates the illusion of an eternal separate self. For the brash senses, the subtlety, stillness and silence of the Self is not sufficiently salient. The sense realm demands something tangible and stimulating. It clings to memories, imaginings of ideal future conditions, stories of the me, and any ideation related to somebody who will continue through time. Instead of accepting the passing nature of things, we look for something lasting, while all along it is right under our noses. Our membership in the totality of the universe which includes the inanimate earth and vast empty space is not separate from us and yet, the 'me' fears dissolving into it just as the Upanishadic *drop in the ocean* fears merging into the ocean. But what is this merging? It is just recognising the illusion of separateness and nothing more, after all, the drop has only ever been the ocean.

We inquire into thought as a refuge and look for what is underneath compulsive thinking. We see that it seeks to divert our attention from any unpleasant sensation. In short, compulsive thinking is our avenue of escape from suffering. However, it is fool's gold because not only does it not help us escape suffering but in fact, perpetuates it, and is even the very source of our suffering. Why should we cling to it? Because it gives us the illusion of control. The Self that Bhagavan speaks of is something altogether different. The Self is empty of every compulsion to think or, for that matter, to want anything at all.

To be sure, indulging thought gives temporary relief, but enquiry into the source of thought brings understanding and exposes the illusion of thought as a refuge. The English words 'idea' and 'idol' both have their etymology in the Greek *eidolon*, which means 'form' or 'that which is seen'. Forms in the mind are mere representations and thus can never serve as lasting refuges. Rather than trying to kill thought, if we step back and see thought as thought, we see how we have invested in it to give us momentary satisfaction. When we get below thought, even for a few moments, we see the potency of enquiry and its capacity to free us from delusion. This experience may inspire further efforts and our infatuation with thought begins to diminish.

We enquire into the one who thinks, speaks, and acts. But more than that, we enquire into the hidden

motivations undergirding what we think, say and do. This requires courage because it soon becomes evident that many, if not most, of our motivations are narcissistic at root. Seeing this fact helps us clarify the upward ascent and become more modest in our assessment of where we are on the mountain.

Samsara tricks us over and over again and we want to be careful about resting in our discoveries. When clung to, what were liberating insights become fossilized relics. The poetic expression *gilding the lily* refers not merely to adding unnecessarily to what is already excellent: it is unwittingly maiming what is beautiful in a futile effort to clutch and retain it. If we make a home out of our insights, they become like any other worldly possession and their spiritual benefit is lost.

The meditation tradition offers the image of the warrior who goes into battle with a sharp sword. In the course of combat, the sword is gradually blunted, but the keen-edged sword of enquiry which cuts away the illusions of sense experience grows sharper with use. The dynamic path that leads us out from samsara to true happiness is cut with this blade of investigation.

If courage is the price life exacts for granting peace⁴, we courageously set out on the path, sword in hand. This is courage born not of an exaggerated sense of self but of the assurances Bhagavan gave us that there are no *ajnanis* and that each of us already contains the fullness we seek. While the path is a journey of purification, the original endowment remains unsullied. We need only wipe away the impurities that obscure it to become at last what we already are.

The Path That Knows the Way

If Arunachala is the embodiment of wisdom, the path up the mountain knows the way. It does not always lead us with clear indications and may at times disappear from view. Each time we go astray, we recall the encouragement offered by our predecessors: *to come to the knowledge you have not, you must go by a way you know not.*⁵

We are guaranteed to lose our way, even stumble and fall. When we find ourselves lost, panic may set in. And when we struggle to find our way back, every hope that we have found the path once again may turn out to be in

4 Amelia Earhart.

5 *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, John of the Cross.





vain. As we stop in the middle of a dark wood, we fear ever coming upon it again. As dawn breaks, we take stock of our surroundings. We glimpse a lizard on a nearby rock in the morning sun. He appears to know where he is. He seems to trust that every rock is his home and that wherever he is at any given moment is where he belongs.⁶ Not knowing what else to do, we follow his lead and discover that we too are where we belong. We recognize that the piece of ground where we stand is the altar of God. We see that the path was never meant to lead us from *here to there*, as we had supposed, but to lead us from *there to here*⁷, i.e., from a place outside of ourselves—from a cherished self-image or the projection of an imagined destination—to embrace that which is within us as our deepest nature. Bhagavan said it like this: ‘The pure bright world of God is not a place to go *to*. It is in your Heart.’⁸

The acclaimed Swedish poet, Lars Gustafsson described the path in simple language:

You walk eastwards, the compass persistently shows east, the path faithfully follows the compass, like a straight line, everything is in order, then the path swings northwards. In the north lies nothing. What does the path want now? Soon you come to a huge bog, and the path knew that. It leads [you] around with the assurance of one who has been this way before. It knows where the bog lies, it knows where the rock face gets far too steep, it knows what happens when it goes north instead of south of the [cleft]. It has done all of this so many times.⁹

Conclusion

Enquiry amounts to more than just asking questions. It is the therapeutic deployment of attention and serves as the key to our alignment with Bhagavan.

⁶ Drawing on a theme from David Wagoner’s poem, ‘Lost’.

⁷ A familiar saying.

⁸ *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, §194.

⁹ ‘Ballad on the Paths in Västmanland’, *Lars Gustafsson: Selected Poems*.

It has been said that God gave us mouths that close and ears that don’t. We enquire with the ear of the heart, with a listening, searching heart.

In the age of precious little time, there’s value in just learning to sit in silence and hear the sounds of the world, or as one poet calls it, *the sweet sad music of humanity*¹⁰. Being present to the sounds of passing cars, singing birds, or one’s own breath helps train the restraint needed for true growth, not a growth that comes from knowing the answers but the growth that comes from living the questions.¹¹

If the art of climbing is learning to balance the terror of being born with the wonder of becoming human,¹² enquiry gets us in touch with hidden psychic wounds and allows us to heal them. Now less burdened by orphaned samskaras, we become more resilient, better able to adjust to adverse conditions, and find we have within us the reserves to be available to a world in need.

As our hearts grow day by day, we find ourselves higher up the mountain. Before us, we glimpse broad vistas; behind us, a world that no longer appears real. When we look up ahead, the path that had begun in laments and cries now begins to hold promise, and Bhagavan’s words resonate all the more, *O Arunachala, Be Thou the Sun for my heart-lotus to bloom*.¹³ At last, we find ourselves better able to trace Bhagavan’s footprints, step by step, on this gentle upward slope that leads us further and further on. —

(series concluded)

¹⁰ Charles Lamb.

¹¹ Paraphrasing Rilke.

¹² Paraphrasing Carlos Castaneda.

¹³ *Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam*, v. 1.

Announcement: Sri Ramana Maharshi Heritage



Sri Ramana Maharshi Heritage (SRMH) is a newly created 501 (c) (3), registered non-profit in the United States. The organization’s purpose is to preserve Sri Ramana Maharshi’s heritage and to serve devotees who are drawn to the life and teachings of Bhagavan. The new entity’s objectives are aligned with those of Sri Ramanasramam in India. Devotees in the United States who wish to donate towards and participate in Sri Ramanasramam’s charitable initiatives in India can learn more by visiting the SRMH website: <https://www.srmh.org/> or by sending an email to: sriramanamaharshiheritage@gmail.com.





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mattu Pongal



Pongal is a three-day festival that begins the day before Makara Sankranti with Bhogi, the last day of Margazhi month when old things in the household are discarded. On Mattu Pongal (15th January), cows and bulls were honoured for their boundless labour throughout the year. The festival typically ends with a procession of temple deities but this year, owing to the Omicron outbreak, the deities made a non-stop circumambulation around the hill on Mattu Pongal Day. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sivaprakasam Pillai Day



On 12th Jan, Sivaprakasam Pillai Day was observed with the singing of his poems on Bhagavan by devotees just after the Dhanurmasa puja. Also being the birthday of Swami Vivekananda, KVS sang a lovely Bengali song composed by Swamiji at the evening puja at Bhagavan's Shrine. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Lucy Ma Day



On 31st December, devotees gathered at the samadhi of Lucy Cornelsen, author of *Hunting the I*, to observe the anniversary of her departure in 1989. Her daughter, Heike Hildebrand, age 88, was in attendance and sang a song in German. Devotees acknowledged the young tree next to Lucy Ma's samadhi, an *Indian Laburnum*. At the time of Lucy Ma's passing, she had been keeping the sapling in a flowerpot. After her body was interred, the sapling was transplanted to the present location. To ensure enough sun light, the large jungle tree (*Kaattuva*) to the west was trimmed and surrounding bushes were cleared. —





Obituary: Sri Narasimham



In 1962, Sri Parasara M. Narasimham's association with Bhagavan started when he entered into a wedlock with Ramana Puthri, daughter of Sri Griddaluru Subba Rao. The Griddaluru family have been staunch devotees of Bhagavan since the early 1920s. During his visits to Sri Ramanasramam, the then President Sri T.N. Venkataraman and Smt. Nagalakshmi Ammal used to fondly address him as "MaaPillai" which translates to Son-in-Law, to which Narasimham demurred, requesting them to address him as Pillai (son), since he belonged to the same Gotra as Bhagavan.

Whenever Sri Narasimham and family visited the Asramam, they were invited to have a meal at the President's residence. Sri Narasimham often warmly recalled the visit to Sri V.S. Ramanan's residence at Delhi and the meal (rajma chawal) that had been served to him by Smt. Suseela Ramanan and the affection he received from TNV's family. He felt elated whenever Sri Mani Anna & Smt. Ramani Manni turned towards him when "Parasara" Gotram was mentioned during the evening pooja sankalpam on their visits to Sri Ramanasramam.

In the year 1979, Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad was founded by Dr.

K.S. and Parasara M. Narasimham was the founding secretary. The following year, Parasara M. Narasimham established Sri Ramana Bhakta Mandali with the motto of "To serve mankind is serving Sri Bhagavan", to which end he started a poor feeding on last Sunday of every month and distributed Bhagavan's prasadam for the speedy recovery of the patients at a local Nursing Home facility.

At the request of Sri A. R. Natarajan, he discovered the exact location of the birthplace of Ganapathi Muni, Kaluvarayi in Vizag district of Andhra Pradesh and established a beautiful Ashram there. He has served the simple, poor people of that village in several ways.

As part of the 102nd Jayanthi Celebrations of Bhagavan, Narasimham organised Sri Chandi Yagam from 25-31 December, 1981 and over the years, held various celebrations in Hyderabad, hosting many old devotees of Bhagavan, e.g. Smt. Vajreswari, daughter of Kavyakanta, Smt. Mahalakshmi Amma, Sri Krishna Bikshu, Dr. Melkote, Swami Satyananda Maharshi, Sri Bridavolu Ranganatham, B. Lakshmi (Sister of Griddaluru Brothers), among others. He made a point of always following the discipline of first informing the President of Sri Ramanasramam of any activity or celebration performed in Hyderabad or Kaluvarai. He felt that any puja performed at Sri Ramanasramam should be taken up in Sri Ramana Ganapati Asramam, Kaluvarai. He was a stickler and insisted that whatever was done, was done well.. Every puja related to Bhagavan was a celebration for which he planned meticulously giving out work instructions to his chosen team.

Besides being an ardent devotee of Sri Bhagavan, he was a man who loved life and had lived an active life. All remember him as one who was joyous with a positive outlook even in difficult circumstances.

Sri Parasara M. Narasimham, founder President of Sri Ramana Bhakta Mandali, Ramana Maharshi Heritage and Vasista Ganapathi Muni Memorial Trust, Hyderabad, and Sri Arunachala Ramana Ganapathi Asramam, Kaluvarai reached the Lotus Feet of Sri Bhagavan on December 29, 2021 in Hyderabad. The news of his departure left his family, fellow devotees and a multitude of his acquaintances reeling in shock and sorrow as everyone had awaited his return from the hospital to complete the Jayanthi Celebrations of Sri Bhagavan. —





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Ashram Covid Boosters



In Tamil Nadu, where the incidence of COVID-19 and the Omicron variant have been increasing day by day, the government is providing booster doses for those with the first two vaccines. Boosters were administered at Ramanasramam's dispensary starting Monday 10th January to the Ashram residents and staff. About 100 persons over 60 years of age, including frontline staff and those with co-morbidities, were administered doses on the first day. The first dose of the vaccine for 13-18-year-olds was also given to Ashram Vedapatasala students. The vaccine was administered by health workers of the Tiruvannamalai Government Hospital in the presence of the doctors of the Ashram dispensary. The booster programme at the Ashram Dispensary continues. To determine availability and eligibility, please contact Mr. Madhavan at 91-9600325724. —

Obituary: Smt. Shantha Gurumurthy



Born June of 1938 in Tiruvarur, Smt. Shantha Gurumurthy was brought up in a pious family in the habit of regularly visiting local temples. She married in 1959 and when the family moved to Bangalore in 1974, she received an invitation to join music class conducted by Smt. Sulochana Natarajan where she learned Ramana music.

After marrying off her only daughter (in the Samadhi Hall at Ramanasramam), she took up residence in a *kudil* near the Ashram, with her (sannyasi) husband, and studied *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* under the tutelage of Kunju Swami and Smt. Kanakammal. Many were the songs she learnt and sang with Smt. Ramani, later with Smt. Susheela and special classes conducted by Smt. Mahalakshmi Suryanandan. In the mid-1990s she transcribed the Tamil Parayana into roman script for those not familiar with the Tamil alphabet. The first parayana transliteration was thus published in the mid-1990s and was made available for purchase in the Ashram bookstall. After shifting to Chennai, she taught the Tamil Parayanam to various groups.

On 29th December, 2021, she received a call from Bhagavan, and her heart fluttered. On the night of 30th until midnight before she glided into sleep, she related stories of Bhagavan and Arunachala to those who were by her side. During Brahma muhurtham of 31st December, she merged at the Feet of Arunachala Ramana. —

Announcement: Ashram YouTube Channel

To access Ashram videos, go to: <<https://www.youtube.com/c/SriRamanasramam/videos>>

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