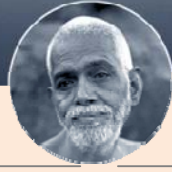


Saranagathi

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ISSUE

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Dear Devotees,

Happy New Year!

Sri Bhagavan's 131st Jayanti was celebrated at the Ashram on 23rd December 2010. Please visit <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/jayanti2.html> to view photographs and video footage of the joyous event.

In this issue of Saranagathi we continue with the life story of Mother Azhagammal as part of our series on inspiring women devotees of Sri Bhagavan. Arthur Osborne's lucid account of how he was drawn to the Maharshi is followed by Reports from Sri Ramanasramam.

Please send your emails to

saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

In Sri Bhagavan

The Editorial Team

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Reality in Forty Verses

Invocation

Unless Reality exists, can thought of it arise? Since, void of thought, Reality exists within as Heart, how to know the Reality we term the heart? To know That is merely to be That in the Heart.

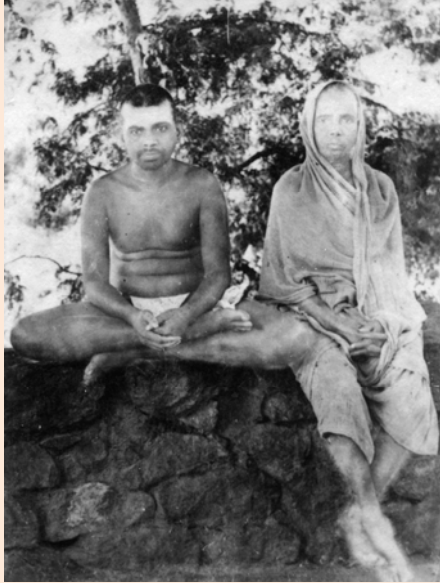
Ulladu Narpadu by Sri Bhagavan (Invocation Verse 1)





Mother Azhagammal

(...Continued from last issue)



It was a severe training that Azhagammal received. Often enough Sri Bhagavan would ignore her, not answering when she spoke, although he took notice of others. If she complained he would say, "All women are my mothers, not you only." One is reminded of Christ's saying when he was told that his mother and brothers were standing at the edge of the crowd, waiting to speak to him, "Whoever does the will of my Father Who is in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." At first Sri Bhagavan's mother would often weep with vexation but gradually understanding developed in her. The feeling of superiority in being the mother of the Swami fell away, the sense of ego was weakened and she devoted herself to the service of the devotees.

Even now, he would still scoff at her orthodox scruples. If her sari happened to touch a non-Brahmin he would exclaim in mock consternation: "Look! Purity is gone! Religion is gone!" The Ashram food was strictly vegetarian, but Azhagammal, like some very devout Brahmins, went still further and considered some vegetables also unsattvic (impure),

and Sri Bhagavan would say mockingly: "Mind that onion! It is a great obstacle to Moksha (Deliverance)!"

It should be said here that Sri Bhagavan did not disapprove of orthodoxy in general. In this case there was excessive attachment to the forms of orthodoxy and that was what he attacked. In general he laid stress on the importance of sattvic (pure) food. He did not often give any injunctions at all concerning outer activity; his usual method was to sow the spiritual seed in the heart and leave it to shape the outer life as it grew.

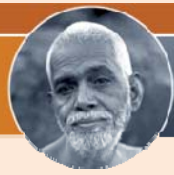
There were other ways also in which the mother was made to realize that he who had been born her son was a Divine Incarnation. Once as she sat before him he disappeared and she saw instead a lingam (column) of pure light. Thinking this to mean that he had discarded his human form, she burst into tears, but soon the lingam vanished and he reappeared as before. On another occasion she saw him garlanded and surrounded with serpents like the conventional representations of Siva. She cried to him: "Send them away! I am frightened of them!"

After this she begged him to appear to her henceforth only in his human form. The purpose of the visions had been served; she had realized that the form she knew and loved as her son was as illusory as any other he might assume.

In 1920 the health of the mother began to fail. She was able to work less in the service of the Ashram and was obliged to rest more. During her illness Sri Bhagavan attended on her constantly, often sitting up at night with her. In silence and meditation her understanding matured.

The end came in 1922 on the festival of Bahula Navami, which fell that year on May 19th. Sri Bhagavan and a few others waited on her the whole day without eating. Around sunset a meal was





prepared and Sri Bhagavan asked the others to go and eat, but he himself did not. In the evening a group of devotees sat chanting the Vedas beside her while others invoked the name of Ram. For more than two hours she lay there, her chest heaving and her breath coming in loud gasps, and all this while Sri Bhagavan sat beside her, his right hand on her heart and his left on her head. This time there was no question of prolonging life but only of quieting the mind so that death could be Mahasamadhi, absorption in the Self.

At eight o'clock in the evening she was finally released from the body. Sri Bhagavan immediately rose, quite cheerful. "Now we can eat," he said; "come along, there is no pollution."

There was deep meaning in this. A Hindu death entails ritualistic pollution calling for purification rites, but this had not been a death but reabsorption. There was no disembodied soul but perfect Union

with the Self and therefore no purification rites were needed. Some days later Sri Bhagavan confirmed this: when someone referred to the passing away of the mother he corrected him curtly, "She did not pass away, she was absorbed."

Describing the process afterwards, he said: "Innate tendencies and the subtle memory of past experiences leading to future possibilities became very active. Scene after scene rolled before her in the subtle consciousness, the outer senses having already gone. The soul was passing through a series of experiences, thus avoiding the need for rebirth and making possible Union with the Spirit. The soul was at last disrobed of the subtle sheaths before it reached the final Destination, the Supreme Peace of Liberation from which there is no return to ignorance.

(To be continued)

Maharshi's Gospel: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi

Guru and His Grace

D: Cannot Grace hasten ripeness in the seeker?

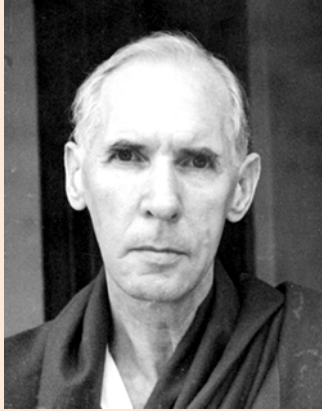
M: Leave it all to the Master. Surrender to Him without reserve. One of two things must be done: either surrender yourself, because you realize your inability and need a higher power to help you; or investigate into the cause of misery, go into the Source and so merge in the Self. Either way, you will be free from misery. God or Guru never forsakes the devotee who has surrendered himself.





How I Came to the Maharshi

By Arthur Osborne (*From The Mountain Path, Oct 1966*)



In September 1941, when my leave ended, the war was already drawing near to Siam (where I was employed as a university lecturer), so I left my wife and three children in India and went back alone. A friend had kindly opened to them his house at Tiruvannamalai. I went back without seeing Bhagavan. In December the Japanese invaded Siam and I was arrested and interned. Just before that I had received a letter saying that my eldest daughter, aged five, and my son, three years younger, had asked Bhagavan to keep me safe through the war and he had smiled and assented. There followed three and a half long years of internment until the Japanese surrender in 1945. There was ample time for sadhana. More and more Bhagavan became the support of my strivings, though I did not yet turn to him as the Guru.

As soon as the evacuation could be arranged I went to Tiruvannamalai, arriving there at the beginning of October; and yet it was as much to rejoin my family as to see Bhagavan that I went. Perhaps it would be more true to say that I simply felt I had to go there. I entered the Ashram hall on the morning of my arrival, before Bhagavan had returned from his daily walk on the hill. I was a little awed to find how small it was and how close to him I should be sitting; I had expected something grander

and less intimate. And then he entered and, to my surprise, there was no great impression. Certainly far less than his photographs had made. Just a white-haired, very gracious man, walking a little stiffly from rheumatism and with a slight stoop. As soon as he had eased himself on to the couch he smiled to me and then turned to those around and to my young son and said: "So Adam's prayer has been answered; his Daddy has come back safely." I felt his kindness but no more. I appreciated that it was for my sake that he had spoken English, since Adam knew Tamil.

During the weeks that followed he was constantly gracious to me and the strain of nerves and mind gradually relaxed, but there was still no dynamic contact. I was disappointed, as it seemed to show a lack of receptivity in me; and yet, at the same time, it confirmed the opinion I had accepted that he was not a Guru and did not give guidance on any path. And Bhagavan did nothing to change my view.

Until the evening of Kartikai when, each year a beacon is lit on the summit of Arunachala. Or it may have been Deepavali; I am not quite sure. There were huge crowds for the festival and we were sitting in the courtyard outside the hall. Bhagavan was reclining on his couch and I was sitting in the front row before it. He sat up, facing me, and his narrowed eyes pierced into me, penetrating, intimate, with an intensity I cannot describe. It was as though they said: "You have been told; why have you not realized?" And then quietness, a depth of peace, an indescribable lightness and happiness.

Thereafter love for Bhagavan began to grow in my heart and I felt his power and beauty. Next morning, for the first time, sitting before him in the hall, I tried to follow his teaching by using the vichara: 'Who am I?' I thought it was I who had





decided. I did not at first realize that it was the initiation by look that had vitalised me and changed my attitude of mind. Indeed, I had heard only vaguely of this initiation and paid little heed to what I had heard. Only later did I learn that other devotees also had had such an experience and that with them also it had marked the beginning of active sadhana under Bhagavan's guidance.

My love and devotion to Bhagavan deepened. I went about with a lilt of happiness in my heart, feeling the blessing and mystery of the Guru, repeating like a song of love that he was the Guru, the link between heaven and earth, between God and me, between the Formless Being and my heart. I became aware of the enormous grace of his presence. Even outwardly he was gracious to me, smiling when I entered the hall, signing to me to sit where he could watch me in meditation. And then one day a sudden vivid reminder awoke in me: "The link with Formless Being? But he is the Formless Being!" And I began to apprehend the meaning of his Jnana and to understand why devotees addressed him simply as 'Bhagavan', which is a word meaning 'God'. So he began to prove to me what he declared in his teaching: that the outer Guru serves to awaken the Guru in the heart. The vichara, the constant 'Who am I?', began to awaken an awareness of the Self as Bhagavan outwardly and also simultaneously of the Self within.

The specious theory that Bhagavan was not a Guru had simply evaporated in the radiance of his Grace. Moreover, I now perceived that, so far from his teaching not being practical guidance, it was exclusively that. I observed that he shunned theoretical explanations and kept turning the questioner to practical considerations of sadhana, of the path to be followed. It was that, and that only, that he was here to teach. I wrote and explained this to the people who had misinformed me and, before sending the letter, showed it to him for his approval. He approved and handed it back, bidding me send it.

Daily I sat in the hall before him. I asked no questions, for the theory had long been understood. I spoke to him only very occasionally about some personal matter. But the silent guidance was continuous, strong and subtle. It may seem strange to modern minds, but the Guru taught in silence. This did not mean that he was unwilling to explain when asked; indeed he would answer sincere questions fully; what it meant was that the real teaching was not the explanation but the silent influence, the alchemy worked in the heart. I strove constantly by way of the vichara, according to his instructions. Having a strong sense of duty or obligation, I still continued, side by side with it, to use other forms of sadhana which I had undertaken before coming to Bhagavan, even though I now found them burdensome and unhelpful. Finally I told Bhagavan of my predicament and asked whether I could abandon them. He assented, explaining that all other methods only lead up to the vichara.

From the moment of my arrival at Tiruvannamalai there had been no question of my leaving again. This was home – even at the very beginning, when I was so mistaken about Bhagavan, even when material prospects seemed bleak. Perhaps that was why Bhagavan in his graciousness bestowed the initiation on one who sought but had not the wit to ask. This period of constant physical proximity lasted up to the beginning of 1948. I had never been in a financial position to make me suppose I should be able to spend nearly three years at an ashram, but circumstances adapt themselves to the will of Bhagavan. Not only did his Grace keep me there, but it enabled me to go through the long period of unemployment and other trials and bereavement without undue anxiety. Although he never spoke of my difficulties or misfortunes, he flooded my heart with peace.

Early in 1948 constant physical proximity had





ceased to be necessary and professional work had become urgently necessary. Work was found in Madras. I took with me a life-size photograph of Bhagavan painted over in oils – a gift from Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami, a devotee and photographer. I showed it to Bhagavan before leaving and he took it in his hands and returned it, saying: "He is taking Swami with him." Since then it has looked at me with the love and compulsion of a Guru and spoken more profoundly than all the other portraits. Thereafter I went to Tiruvannamalai only for weekends and holidays, and each visit was revitalising. I was there at the time of one of the operations that Bhagavan suffered and had darshan immediately after it, and the graciousness of his reception melted the heart and awoke remorse to think how great was the reward for so little effort made. I was there that fateful April night of the body's death and felt a calm beneath the grief and a wonder at the fortitude Bhagavan had implanted in his devotees to bear

their loss. Gradually one after another began to discover in his heart the truth that Bhagavan had not gone away but, as he promised, is still here. Since that day his presence in the heart has been more vital, the outpouring of his Grace more abundant, his support more powerful. I have been to Tiruvannamalai since then also, and the Grace that emanates from his tomb is the Grace of the living Ramana.

During these years I had felt no urge to write about Bhagavan. After his body's death and his reassurance: "I am not going away; I am here; where could, I go?" there was a dream in which he called me up to him and, as I knelt before his couch, placed his hands on my head in blessing. At this time an impulse came to write about Bhagavan and especially to explain the accessibility of the path of Self-enquiry which he taught.

Reports from Sri Ramanasramam

Dhanurmasa (Margazhi) Puja

Like in other years, devotees gathered at Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi Shrine for the first Margazhi Puja on Thursday, 16th December 2010 and sang the first verses of Saint Manickavachakar's Tiruvembavai, Saint Andal's Tiruppavai and Swami Muruganar's Ramana Tiruvembavai. Thereafter, the priests, acharyas and students of the Ashram Vedapatasala recited the Vishnu Sahasranama followed by distribution of the Prasad.

This special puja, singing and recitation of the Lord's 1000 names will go on till the 1st day of Thai, the next Tamil month, which falls on 15 January, 2011.





Music Programme

Smt. Vijayalakshmi Sankaranarayanan (W/o. Padmabhushan Sangeetha Kalanidhi Sri T. V. Sankaranarayanan, Chennai) accompanied by Ms. Amruta Sankaranarayanan and Sri Mahadevan Sankaranarayanan gave a Music Programme on AKSHARAMANAMALAI (Arunachala Marital Garland of Letters) in Ragamalika at the NEW HALL from 10.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. on Tuesday 14th December 2010. It was a garland of music of 14 ragas that they offered to the Divine composer. The audience packing the New Hall listened with enraptured attention.



Aradhana of Swami Ramanananda, late President of the Ashram

Aradhana of Swami Ramanananda, late president of the Ashram was observed from 9.30 to 10.30 a.m. on Friday the 24th December 2010 the day after Bhagavan's Jayanti. It was on the day after Bhagavan's Jayanti in 2007 that Swamiji was Absorbed in Arunachala Ramana whose presence he believed was always around him like a magnetic field protecting him. It was this faith and devotion that made the late President unfailingly indomitable till the end. He was indeed a blessed soul to have been protected by his Master when he was in body and thereafter.

