

## Saranagati



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IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

This issue of *Saranagathi* carries the life story of Mungala Venkataramiah who recorded the conversations in the Old Hall which were later collated, edited and published as *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. *Events at Sri Ramanasramam* includes Cow Lakshmi's Samadhi Day and Maha Puja and the music and dance events preceding it. *Introducing the Kendras* this month features Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Bangalore.

For further news on Mahapuja and other Ashram news, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/> or write to us at [saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org](mailto:saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org)

In Sri Bhagavan,  
The Editorial Team

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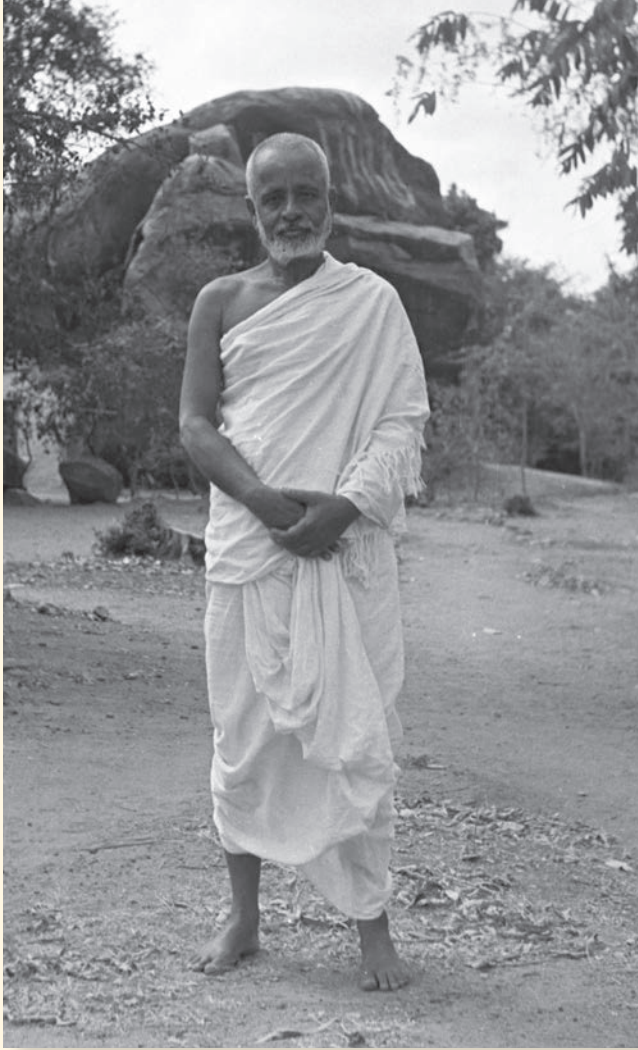


## Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

### Beyond the Ego is Consciousness

The mind is only a projection of the Self, appearing in the waking state. In deep sleep, you do not say whose son you are and so on. As soon as you wake up, you say you are so and so, and recognise the world. The world is only *loka*, (*lokyate iti loka* — what is perceived is the world). That which is seen is *loka* or the world. Which is the eye that sees it? That is the ego which rises and sinks periodically. But you exist always. Therefore That which lies beyond the ego is consciousness—the Self. —*Talks §76*





## Munagala Venkataramiah and the Making of Talks (part one)

*In a very critical and distressing period of his life, a humble devotee sought the presence of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi for his own peace of mind, and lived in the Ashram with the kind permission of the Sarvadhikari, Sri Niranjanananda Swami. The seeker took it upon himself to note down, as occasions arose, the sweet, refreshing and enlightening words of the Master. This self-imposed task was undertaken for the purification of his own mind and better understanding of the subtle and profound words of Sri Bhagavan. — Preface to Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*

The foregoing anonymously written lines preface the early editions of *Talks* which, for many, stands as one of the greatest collections ever compiled about Bhagavan. *Talks* not only excels in its capacity to faithfully

document over a sustained period the actual encounters between Bhagavan and devotees in the Hall but its prose is smooth and readable, rendering accessible what might otherwise have been difficult-to-understand phrases and instructions. The editor's commentary sets the stage and contextualizes the atmosphere of the moment for each of the recorded dialogues. As the recorder and translator had an intuitive grasp of Bhagavan's teaching—not to mention proficiency in the relevant languages (Tamil, Sanskrit, English and Telugu) and the natural gift for translation—he was able to perceive and transmit the subtler features of Bhagavan's responses to visitors' queries, and thus provide the comprehensive presentation of Bhagavan's teaching that we find in this remarkable book.

If it weren't for Major Chadwick, posterity may not have known who the driving force behind this great book ever was, for in the early editions of *Talks* the name "Munagala S. Venkataramiah" is nowhere to be found. It seems that the responsible party had chosen to remain out of view and thus refers to himself only as "The Recorder".

In the following pages we will take a brief look at the life of "The Recorder", Munagala S. Venkataramiah, (later Swami Ramanananda Saraswati), and at the circumstances that led to the production of one of the twentieth century's great spiritual texts.

Munagala S. Venkataramiah was born near to Bhagavan, both in time and space, in Cholavandan of Madurai District in 1882. He was the only one of Munagala Subramanian's five sons not to study in the patasala of Cholavandan, but instead took up studies in the English school. One day in 1896 he came home from school and told his mother about a young Brahmin







Bhagavan with devotees (ca. 1935). Munagala Venkataramaiah is seated below at Bhagavan's left.

boy from the neighbouring school who had run away and was no more to be seen. Little did he know that the boy in question would one day become his guru.<sup>1</sup>

At the tender age of thirteen, Venkataramiah and his uncle's daughter were married. Venkataramiah devoted himself to his studies and later joined Madras Christian College before going to Bombay for further studies at a laboratory there. By the age of 18, the couple had their first child at which time Venkataramiah returned to Madras for examinations. Standing first in the Madras Presidency and having received the Ami Gold Medal, job opportunities abounded and he was privileged to join Noble College as a lecturer in chemistry.

He lectured at various colleges in the decade that followed until one day in 1918 tragedy struck with the sudden death of his daughter. Venkataramiah was so grief-stricken that he had trouble maintaining his

<sup>1</sup> For biographical details, see M.V. Krishnan's article in MP April, 1979, pp. 97-99.

professional duties. It was during these years that he took up a formal study of the Upanishads, the Gita and the Brahma Sutras and maintained contact with Sri Sai Baba Narayan Guru, a Bengali sadhu and a disciple of the famous Kali Kamliwala of Hardwar, who set him on the spiritual way. It was also at this time, 1918, that he first came to Skandasramam and met Sri Bhagavan.

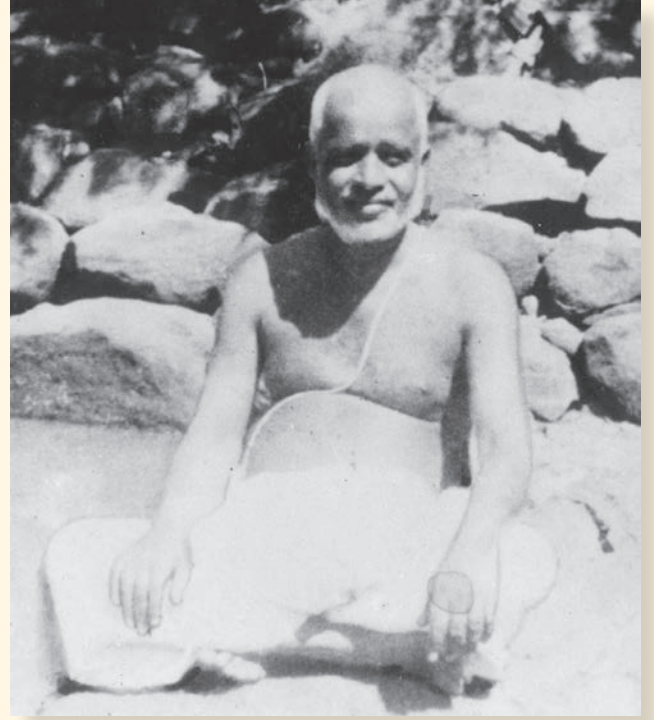
As he worked through the trauma of family loss, he was transferred to Ooty to work as a chemist with the Madras Government in the Department of Small Industries which, while providing new environs from which to make a new start in life, carried with it the disadvantage of being geographically isolated from the Bengali sadhu who had been such a help to him. But two years later he was made the Superintendent of the Government Industrial Institute in Washermanpet (Chennai), which brought him back into close proximity with Sri Sai Baba Narayan Guru. This notwithstanding, the connection was short-lived: just two years later, 1922, his guru left the body.





In the years that followed Venkataramiah used his spare time to study works on Advaita Vedanta. As he had studied English and Latin in his youth and was not well-versed in Sanskrit, he now took it upon himself to take up a formal study of the ancient language to facilitate a better understanding of these great works. In 1927, a little more matured not only by virtue of his involvement with formal advaitic teaching but by ten additional years of life's vicissitudes, he made his second visit to Sri Bhagavan. From the time of this meeting, he began coming with his family each summer to spend a month at the Ashram with Bhagavan. Five years passed this way until 1932, when trouble struck once again: without notice, Venkataramiah lost his position of employment. With a daughter yet to be married off and young sons yet to be educated, Venkataramiah found himself penniless, without work, and without any hope of getting work: it seemed that fate had dealt him its worst blow.

It was in this fragile period that he finally took refuge in Bhagavan and came to the Ashram as an inmate, placing all his cares at the Master's feet. And it was in this 'distressing period of his life' that he took up the project of recording the conversations



in the darshan hall each day, bringing with him not only his training in disparate languages and his wide reading in advaita but the keen and eager listening that comes with a searching heart.

(to be continued)

## Wordwise: Lokah      लोकः

*Lok*: to look, behold, perceive, know, recognize; *lokah*: space, place, tract, region, the world, planetary systems, all people, all living beings, all the universe(s), all that is seen; cognate with the Latin *locus*, *localis* ('place') and English 'locale'. The Tamil *paar* means both 'to see' and 'the world'.

**B**hagavan says *lokyate iti lokah*, "that which is seen is *lokah* or the world" (*Talks* §76, ¶13; see above, p. 1). Etymologies of this word point to a significant semantic link between that which is *objectively external* and that which is *subjectively perceived within*, revealing something about the nature of world and mind in keeping with what we hear Bhagavan say about it in *Self-Enquiry*: "All that appear outside are in reality inside" (*SE*§8). If "all that appear outside are in reality inside" then we might ask, *are all forms mental, having no enduring substance?* If within and without have no boundary separating them, then where and what is this thing we call 'inside'? Bhagavan continues: "The mind is the creator of the subject and the object. There is no seer nor objects seen. The seer and the seen are the Self." (*Talks* §25, 145) "The distinction between inner and outer is with reference to the body only. In reality there is no inner and no outer." (*SE*§8)







## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Maha Puja, 13th June, 2012



Maha Puja is the day of liberation for Sri Bhagavan's Mother, who merged with Arunachala on Krishna Paksha Navami of Vaikasi in 1922. This year's observance of Mother's Aradhana took place on the 13th June before a large gathering of devotees. Festivities began two days earlier in the Grantalaya Auditorium with programmes by RMCL, Bangalore. Maha Puja Day itself began with Mahanyasa rites, followed by special abhishekam and culminating in pujas at the shrines of Sri Bhagavan and Mother, after which more than 600 devotees gathered for the mid-day meal. On the 19th June, devotees gathered at Skandasramam to recite Tiruvachakam as had been done at Bhagavan's behest on 19th May, 1922.

## Establishing Mother Alagammal's Samadhi: 19-20th May, 1922



After Bhagavan's mother attained liberation on the 19th May, 1922, devotees felt that her body should be buried rather than cremated since she was a jnani. Bhagavan concurred. But as to why his mother could not be buried on the Hill itself, Bhagavan later explained: "There is an ancient tradition that this Hill is *lingaswarupa*; that is to say, this Hill itself is God. That is the cause and glory of this place."

Temple authorities had always made similar declarations to any party wanting to construct shrines on the Hill. According to the sastras no other form of worship should take place on Arunachala as Arunachala is the Lord Himself. Even if mother had been interred quietly at Skandasramam, no shrine or memorial at the gravesite would have been appropriate. It was thus decided that the body should be interred at the foot of the Hill on the southern side, a traditional site for the burial of sadhus. The burial party left Skandasramam just before dawn on 20th May and chose a site close to the road. But Sri Ramakrishna Iyer suggested that it be nearer the hill, away from the road, and thus more conveniently situated if ever a temple over it were to be constructed. When he pointed out another location further in, at the present location, all were in agreement.

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Pali Thirtam Repair



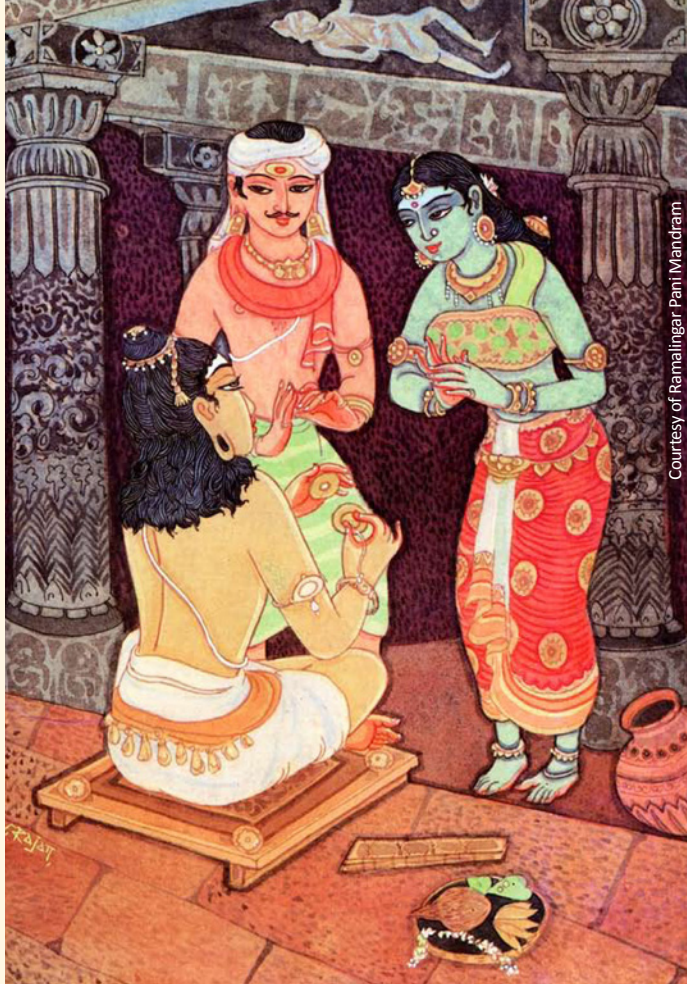
Dried out by the summer sun and last year's failed monsoon, Pali Thirtam is getting a cleanup. For long decades the Ashram has borne the responsibility of maintaining the holy tank, part of which involves regular cleaning. The Ashram is taking the opportunity to dredge and even deepen the tank, removing bedrock stones and earth for increased holding capacity. Mud dredged from the bottom of the tank will not go to waste. Being nutrient-rich, it serves as good soil for the Ashram gardens while bedrock stones can be made use of for leveling and bunding. An overhaul every three years helps keep Pali Thirtam's water pure, not only for those who rely on it directly but also for wells in Ramana Nagar, which are fed by it through underground percolation.







## From the Periapuranam: Jnana Sambandar



Sivapada Hridayar of Sirkazhi prayed to the Lord for the boon of a son who would re-establish the greatness of Siva devotion in the Tamil land. The Lord heard his prayer and soon his wife bore a radiant male child. When the boy was three years old, Sivapada took him along to the temple tank for morning oblations. While the father did his oblations, the Lord appeared before the boy with Mother Parvathi, encouraging Her to suckle the child. Mother Parvathi gave the boy her milk in a golden chalice, which the Lord blessed with wisdom, and from that moment, the child began to sing hymns in praise of the Lord and was given the appellation, 'Jnana Sambandar'. The boy began his pilgrimage and in time the Lord blessed him with a palanquin. As he visited each temple town, he was ever enthralled by the sight of the Lord and sang his praise unceasingly. As he travelled, whenever he found devotees in distress, he was moved out of compassion to endeavour to help them by calling on the Lord's intervention through his decads.

Once, on the night before her wedding, a young maiden cried before the lifeless body of her husband-to-be bitten by a venomous snake. She called out to the Lord in a loud voice: "Oh Lord that shattered the terrible dark form of Yama who came to take away the life of the boy Markandeya, show me Your mercy!" Overhearing her lament, Sambandar came to her aid and sang to the Lord of the matted tresses to rescue her. At the conclusion of the tenth verse, miraculously, the bridegroom stood up alive and well. The grateful maiden fell at the feet of the child-saint, who, instead of making arrangements for a funeral, began instead making arrangements for a marriage.

In his further pilgrimage, Jnana Sambandar met the great Appar and the two journeyed together, visiting the holy kshetras of the South.

But one day wise men came to persuade Sambandar to come to Madurai and rescue Saivism from the influence of other religions as even the king there no longer worshipped the Lord. Appar, out of sheer love for the boy, pleaded with him not to go as it was a dangerous mission. But realising his divine nature and the greatness of his task, Appar refrained from discouraging him.

News of Sambandar's arrival in Madurai reached his opponents who, with the king's permission, set fire to Sambandar's camp. But as soon as the saint sang his padikam, the fire turned itself on the king in the form of a dreadful disease. With burning sensations throughout his body, the king's suffering continued in spite of the best efforts of royal physicians and the court priests. Those concerned knew the true cause of the ailment and so enjoined the king to invite Sambandar to court in order that the king might be cured. Received in court with all honours, Sambandar approached the king with vibhuti blessed by ceaseless recitations of the Lord's name. (cont. next page)

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mahapuja Ballet and Bharatnatyam



Maha Puja festivities began on the 11th June with bhajans by Smt. Radha & RMCL in the afternoon and a bharatanatyam presentation by Sri Ujwal Jagadeesh in the evening. The following night was host to *Ramana, My Best Beloved*, a dance ballet by RMCL.



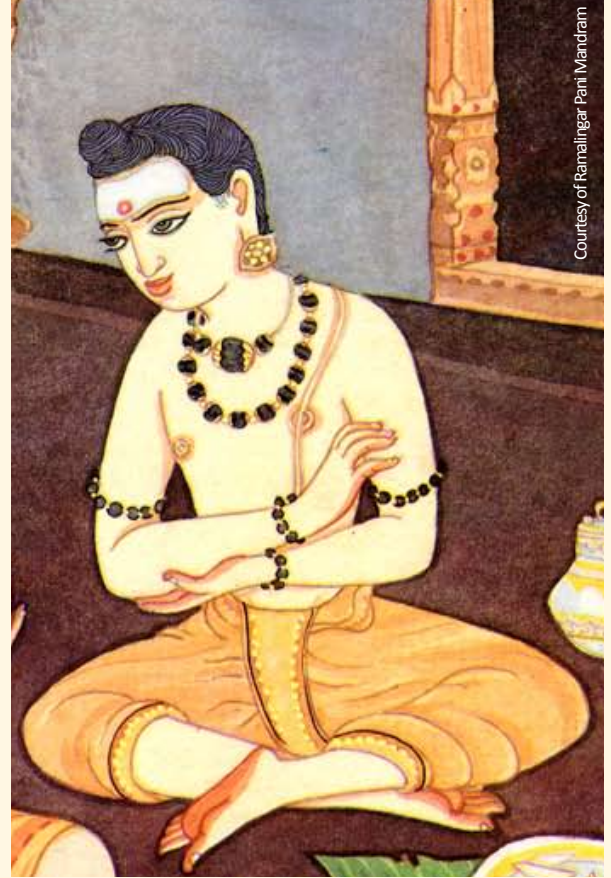




## From the Periapuranam: Jnana Sambandar (cont.)

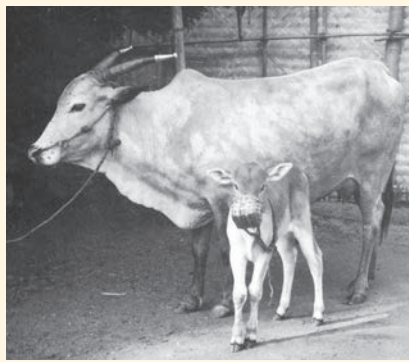
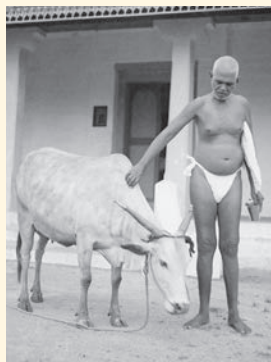
Singing his padikam, Sambandar spread the ash on the king's body and immediately the king was restored. The king was grateful and thanked Sambandar but in so doing, earned for Sambandar the further jealousy of the court priests, who maintained that the miracle was only effected through black magic. Thus they would not concede defeat but came forth with a new challenge to test the true virtues of the two respective faiths. They proposed that both parties write the essence of their religions on palm leaves and cast them into the fire. The leaves that survived would be those of the true religion. But when it was found that only Sambandar's palm leaves survived the flames, his opponents would still not concede defeat but raised yet a third challenge. This time, each party would cast their scriptures into the river and the leaves which swam against the current, contained the truth. The palm leaves of Sambandar's opponents washed away in the current, not to be seen again, but Sambandar sang his padikam and all beheld his leaf alone going against the current without sinking. Sambandar then concluded his padikam by invoking the Lord's grace on the king to cure him of his childhood deformity—he had been a hunchback since birth—and it was so accomplished. The king was thus convinced, and the people followed the king in becoming Saivites. In this way, Sivapada Hridayar's prayer was answered: through his son, Jnana Sambandar, Saivism was restored in the land.

*(Of the Periapuranam's 4200 verses, more than 1200 are dedicated to Jnanasambandar who merged into the light of the Lord on his wedding day at the age of 16. His aradhana day this year was celebrated on 5th June.)*



Courtesy of Ramalinga Pari Mandram

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Cow Lakshmi Samadhi Day, 30th June



Cow Lakshmi came to Bhagavan as a young calf in 1926. Initially tended to by a caretaker in town, she used to walk from town each day and spend the day with Bhagavan. Upon her arrival in the Ashram, she would enter the hall and, when seeing Bhagavan, prance about with demonstrable joy. When she became pregnant with her first calf, Bhagavan asked that a shed be constructed for her in the Ashram. During the course of the next 22 years as an Ashram resident, Lakshmi gave birth to nine calves, three of which, remarkably, were born on Bhagavan's Jayanthi Day and others born on Bhagavan's monthly Punarvasu Day. Her first and only love was for Bhagavan and Bhagavan's love for Lakshmi was special. Lakshmi left the body the 18th June, 1948.

This year on Saturday, 30th June, her Samadhi Day was observed with a special puja at her shrine.





## Do Animals Have Souls?

Cow Lakshmi's Aradhana (day of deliverance from bodily life to a higher form of existence) was celebrated yesterday (June 30, 2012) at her tomb in Sri Ramanasramam. Worship is offered to the shrine of cow Lakshmi every Friday and annually on the day of her remembrance just like the worship offered at the shrine of a great saint.

Sri Ramana Maharshi treats animals as he does human beings; when speaking of an animal he uniformly uses the pronoun 'he' or 'she' as the case may be. (Tamils regularly use the pronoun 'it' when referring to an animal). Once when asked whether animals are not inferior to men he replied: 'The Upanishads say that men are just animals so long as they are subject to the ego, that is, until they become aware of the pure Self. It may even be that men are worse than animals.' The Sage has also been heard to say that very advanced souls may have taken up animal bodies in order to live in the atmosphere of their hermitage. There was at one time four dogs living there, and these showed many marks of devotion; for example, when food was offered to them they would not touch it until the Sage himself had been served and had commenced his meal; as soon as he had done so they fell to eating, showing how particular they were on this point. — "Maha Yoga", P. 196.

Cow Lakshmi is an example of a very advanced soul who made her way into the ashram overcoming Bhagavan's concerns about unavailability of facilities to care for her there. Further she exhibited extraordinary affection and love for Bhagavan. She refused to occupy a new stall created for her until Bhagavan sanctified it by His presence. The greatness of cow Lakshmi stands revealed when we remember that vast majority of humans don't care to invoke the presence of the Lord before occupying a new house.

One morning in January 1947, at about 9 A.M., Lakshmi, the cow, entered the hall hurriedly with her legs, body and tail full of mud, with blood oozing out of her nose and with a half-severed rope round her neck. She went straight to the sofa where Bhagavan sat. The attendants began saying with some disgust that she had come in with mud on her body. Bhagavan, however, said with affection, "Let her come. Let her come. What does it matter how she comes?" Addressing the cow, he said. "Come, my dear. Please come near." So saying he passed his hand over the body lightly, patted her on the neck and looking at the face and said. "What is this? Some blood is oozing!" One of the attendants said, "Recently they had put a rope through her nose.

Oho! Is that the reason? That is why she has come here to complain to me about it. Is it not very painful for her? Unable to bear the pain, she has come here running to complain to me without even washing her body. What to do? Give her some iddly or something," said Bhagavan, evincing great solicitude for her welfare. The attendants gave her some plantains and thus managed to send her out. I went to the kitchen, brought some iddlies and gave them to her. She was satisfied and went away to her usual place.

After all of us returned to the hall and sat down, Bhagavan remarked, looking at the attendants, "Do not all of you come to me to relate your troubles? She too has done the same thing. Why then you are vexed with her for coming here with mud on her? When we have troubles, do we consider whether our clothes are all right or our hair is properly brushed?"

Suri Nagamama writes "In the case of Lakshmi, the cow, Bhagavan often told us that all the past incidents in life welled up in the same manner as in the case of Mother but they subsided ultimately, which did not happen in the case of Palaniswami. When I pointed out that Bhagavan was not with Lakshmi till she breathed her last as in the case of Mother, he said, "Oh that! What desires did Lakshmi have after all? Only if there are desires in plenty, they will remain till the end." So what Bhagavan wanted us to understand was that Lakshmi, the cow, being an animal had no *vasanas* like us human beings. It was only in the case of these three living beings that Bhagavan extended his grace during the last moments of their lives.







## Introducing the Kendras: Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Bangalore



Established as a non-profit organization in 1979, the Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning (RMCL), as its name would suggest, is committed to education through art, philosophy and music to create a greater awareness of the timeless heritage of India with a special emphasis on the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana. The Centre's activities are broad and varied and include publications on or about Bhagavan Ramana, e.g., some 150 books in English, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu; a monthly magazine, *The Ramana Way*; 200 audio and video CD's and DVD's of classical music, traditional hymns and bhajans by eminent artists as well as live performances of dance, ballet and drama. The Centre also sponsors annual seminars, workshops, training programs, cultural festivals and music concerts around the country. Children enjoy weekly value education classes as well as summer camps and winter camps. RMCL's facilities include the 400-seat Ramana Heritage Auditorium in Sanjaynagar, Bangalore, and the Shrine and Meditation Centre near Mekhri Circle, open daily for all 7am-1pm and 3-9pm. Daily pujas are at 9.30am and 7.30 pm and on pournami days, there are bhajans and recitation of *Aksharamanamalai* during the circumambulation of the Shrine. At Ramana Heritage Auditorium daily parayana takes place at 11.30 am and puja at 6.30 pm with weekly meditation on Friday evenings. *The Sri Ramana Indian Heritage Research Understanding Dissemination Excellence Academy* teaches children about Indian heritage. The *Ramana Bala Kendra* gives instruction in slokas, music, dance and drama. *Maha Yoga* is a class on Self-enquiry. For contact or other information, visit RMCL's website at [www.ramanacentre.com](http://www.ramanacentre.com).

