

Saranagathi



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Dear Sri Bhagavan Devotees,

The 60th anniversary of Sri Bhagavan's Brahma Nirvana was observed at Sri Ramanasramam on May 11th, 2010 with usual grandeur. Please visit the Ashram website to view pictures and video of the [Aradhana Day](#) celebrations.

This issue of Saranagathi carries a continuation of the article about Sri Venkatarathnam who lived with Sri Bhagavan from 1944 to 1950 and served Bhagavan in His final years. This is followed by Sri H.W.L.Poonjaji's recollections in 'How I came to the Maharshi' which was first published in the July 1965 issue of The Mountain Path.

'Reports from Sri Ramanasramam' contains a detailed account of the inauguration festivities at the newly renovated Sundara Mandiram in Tiruchuli.

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This event too has been well documented on the Ashram website.

In Sri Bhagavan,

The Editorial Team.

The Essence of Instruction

*In the nature of their being creature and creator
Are in substance one.
They differ only
In adjuncts and awareness.*

— Upadesa Saram by Sri Bhagavan (Verse 24)

Venkatarathnam By Neal Rosner *(Continued....)*

(Published in 'The Maharshi' newsletter Sep/Oct & Nov/Dec 2007)

*Sri Venkatarathnam lived with Bhagavan from 1944 to 1950. During the last year he served as one of His personal attendants. Neal Rosner came to Sri Ramanasramam from the USA in 1968, attached himself to Venkatarathnam and diligently served him until his passing in 1976. Neal's immersion into the spiritual heritage of India under the guidance of Venkatarathnam is elaborately described in his book, *On the Road to Freedom: A Pilgrimage in India*. Neal now resides in Amritanandamayi's Kerala Ashram and is known as Swami Paramatmananda. In the following article, details regarding the life of Venkatarathnam have been extracted from a 25-page essay written about Venkatarathnam by Neal Rosner. He presented this manuscript to us thirty years ago at Sri Ramanasramam. We have also utilized some material from the above-mentioned book.*



Neal Rosner and Venkatarathnam

As his mother's end approached, Sri Venkatarathnam would everyday keep the Darbha Seyya (kusa grass mat) under her cot, as it was her only wish that she should die on the Darbha Seyya and not on the cot. On the last day he shifted her to the ground in spite of the cold and damp weather and the objections of Venkatarathnam's brothers. Then he kept her head in his lap and plunged himself into dhyana. At that time the same experience of an infinite expanse of Grace in the heart, which he had had in Sri Ramana's presence, occurred again, and it was while he was in this state that his mother expired in his hands.

Yatra (Pilgrimage)

After six months he and his eldest sister went on a yatra to North India and performed the karma for their mother in different holy places. He had gone to Sringeri to have darshan of H. H. Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Swamiji who had recently come out of prolonged mouna. He asked the Swamiji for his ashirvadams (blessings) for Atma Sakshatkara. The Swamiji asked him if he wanted to take sannyasa and he answered that he did not know what was best for himself and that whatever Jagadguru says he was prepared to do. The Swamiji then gave him a song in praise of the Jivanmukti written by Sri Sadasiva Brahmendra Saraswati and told him to repeat it and to go to Badrinath. Because he had not taken leave of Bhagavan at his samadhi site, he returned to Arunachalam and then went north.

Wanderings and Company of Saints

During the subsequent ten years after Bhagavan's Mahasamadhi, Venkatarathnam spent his time going on pilgrimage, meeting with devotees, mahatmas and saints, but always returning to Arunachalam and Bhagavan's ashram. In 1956 Sri Venkatarathnam went to Kerala on foot and took a vow not to ask anyone for food or water and to only accept whatever was given unasked. He also chose not disclose his identity as a disciple of the Maharshi to anyone during his travels in Kerala, and he did not carry money with him. He spent about six months like this,

depending entirely on God, in order to test how deep his surrender actually was.

Back in Sri Ramanasramam

In 1967 the Mahakumbabhishekam of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Samadhi was performed and Venkatarathnam was then requested to serve in the Ashram. He continued this service until September 1969.

I first met Venkatarathnam [writes Neal Rosner] in September 1968. Venkatarathnam was returning to his room after completing the seva at Sri Ramana's Samadhi. When I saw his face which was glowing with tejas and ananda a shock went through my being and I wondered who he might be. The next night I met him on the Hill where he was talking to some devotees about Divine Consciousness. Someone asked, "What is the flash of Divine Consciousness?" He replied that it is like a flash of lightning which illumines everything for a moment and then everything is dark again. Just then there was a brilliant flash of lightning, as if to demonstrate what he has just said.

Routine in the Ashram

At this time Sri Venkatarathnam was very busy with his daily routine which was roughly as follows: 3:30 a.m. got up, swept the room, went to the latrine, etc.; 4:30 a.m., finished bath, sandhya (puja), japa and cleaned his altar; 5:15, went to Bhagavan's Samadhi, cleaned and swept it, and then arranged for the 6:15 puja. From 7 to 8:15 he performed his own Panchyatana puja, 8:15 to 9:15 he did Samadhi puja and from 9:30 to 11:30 did japa and studied the Srimad Bagavatam. Then he partook of food. From 12 to 2 p.m. he rested or spent the time in visiting and meeting devotees. 2 to 4 p.m., he wrote letters, etc; 4 p.m. bath; 4:30 to 6:30, Samadhi Shrine work, Veda Parayana and puja; 6:30 to 7 p.m., sandhya and japa; 7:30 was mealtime; and 8 to 11 p.m., miscellaneous activities or satsang; 11 p.m. sleep.

It was at this time that I started assisting him in work, like picking flowers for puja, sweeping or any other service he might give me to do. While near Bhagavan's Samadhi he would not speak to anyone unless it was regarding the immediate work at hand. He often said, "The Samadhi is the same as Sri Bhagavan. As I felt near his body during his lifetime, I feel the same near his Samadhi now. It is Him only."

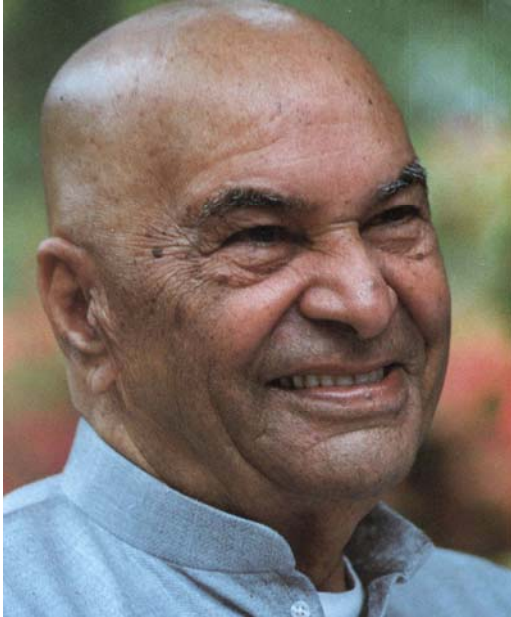
Frequently he would go on Giripradakshina during the nights after 8:30, usually returning only the next morning, and then again start the daily routine without even resting.

I asked him how could bear the strain day after day. He simply said that when there is love of God one doesn't feel any strain however great it may be. It is only when the love and interest go away that boredom and strain are felt. If any new bhaktas would come to visit from outside he always made it a point to go and meet them and spend time with them, more so if they had real devotion and sincerity. He spent many sleepless nights like this in satsang.

In 1967, on May 14th he met with H. H. Sri Chandrashekharendra Saraswati Swamiji, Jagadguru Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, for the third time and received from him mantra diksha of Siva Panchakshari mantra. He also received a Hayagriva Salagram from His Holiness. After this he used to daily repeat 2,000 – 3,000 Gayatri mantras and 5,000 – 10,000 Panchakshari mantras. By the middle of 1969 he had done 14 lakhs [1.4 million] of the Panchakshari mantra. In August 1969, he decided to somehow complete the minimum number of japa as recommended by His Holiness and proceed to Hyderabad to perform the yearly sraddha of his parents. To do this he had to sit for japa eight hours a day and after finally finishing it he had a physical breakdown. After some days bedridden, he left for Hyderabad in October 1969.

How I came to the Maharshi

By H.W.L.Poonja (*Published in The Mountain Path, July 1965*)



I have been a visionary from childhood. When I was only five years old I already had visions of Sri Krishna. At first I thought every one could see them. I once said to my mother: "Look! He's standing there!" but she explained to me that only I saw him.

When I grew up I joined the army. However my desire for God-experience grew so strong that after some years I resigned and decided to devote my life to sadhana. I wanted to become a sannyasin but could not because I had a wife and children to look after.

I started visiting Swamis and asked each one point blank: "Have you seen God and can you show me God?" I would allow no hedging. If they began to talk around it I said: "Please give me a straight yes or no." I found no one who could answer 'yes' and returned to my home in the Punjab feeling very depressed.

One day my wife was just serving my midday meal when a sadhu came and stood in the doorway. I invited him in and told her to serve him food too and then asked him whether he could direct me to a Swami who could show

me God. He told me that I could find what I was looking for from Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai.

It was the first time that I had heard of the Maharshi or of Tiruvannamalai, so I wrote down both names. But how was I to get there? It was right down in the South, and my funds were almost exhausted. However, the next day I saw an advertisement in the paper for an ex-army man to run a canteen in Madras. I applied and was at once given the post and my fare paid.

When I got to Madras I said that I must first pay a visit to Tiruvannamalai before taking up my duties. Arriving there, I dumped my bedding in the Ashram dormitory and went into the meditation hall; and who should I see there on the couch but the sadhu who had visited me at my home in the Punjab!

I decided that he was a fraud. He had been travelling about India boosting himself and had then taken a train back and arrived before me. So I got up and left the hall. I got my bedding and was just putting it back on the horse-cart that had brought me from the station when a devotee asked me why I was leaving so soon. I told him and he said: "It must be a mistake, because the Maharshi has never left this place since he first came nearly fifty years ago. Either it was someone else you saw or he appeared to you by supernatural power." So I was back to the hall.

As soon as I had an opportunity to see Bhagavan alone I asked him my usual question. I added: "It's a bargain. I am willing to pay any price, even my life, but your part of the bargain is to enable me to see God."

At first he sat silent, but I said "That's no good; I don't understand silence. Please give me a straight answer."

Then he said: "I can enable you rather to be God than to see God."

That puzzled me. I had very little understanding then.

A few days later I went for a walk in the rough country at the foot of the north slope of Arunachala and fell into a state of ecstasy during which I again had a vision of Sri Krishna. When I got back I told Bhagavan. He asked me: "can you see Krishna now?"

I said, "No; only when I have a vision."

So he said: "What is the use of a God who comes and goes? If he is a real God he should be with you always."

That shocked me. Again I almost lost faith in him, but some of the devotees explained to me. Before I left for Madras I asked Bhagavan for a mantra but he did not give me one. I asked him for permission to take sannyas, but he refused.

However, shortly after my return to Madras he appeared to me in a dream and gave me a mantra. Soon after this I had a vision of God in human form. This was followed by a great change in me. I lost interest in all the ritual and incantations and breathing exercises that I had been doing up to then. For instance, I used to get up at three o'clock in the morning to attend to my statue of Sri Krishna. All such things ceased to interest me. I was very worried about this. I thought it meant I had become an atheist.

At the first opportunity I went to Tiruvannamalai. I told Bhagavan about the change that had come over me and how I had lost interest in all the ritual that I had been practising regularly for so many years past.

Bhagavan looked steadily at me for some time and then said something to me in Tamil which I was told, on enquiry, meant "You, that is me, that is Bhagavan." These words sank into my heart and I experienced the most wonderful feeling of bliss I had ever known.

It was from this time that I began to understand Bhagavan and his teaching.

Maharshi's Gospel: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi

Mind Control

D: Is a set meditation necessary for strengthening the mind?

M: Not if you keep the idea always before you that it is not your work. At first, effort is needed to remind yourself of it, but later on it becomes natural and continuous. The work will go on of its own accord, and your peace will remain undisturbed. Meditation is your true nature. You call it meditation now, because there are other thoughts distracting you. When these thoughts are dispelled, you remain alone – that is, in the state of meditation free from thoughts; and that is your real nature, which you are now trying to gain by keeping away other thoughts. Such keeping away of other thoughts is now called meditation. But when the practice becomes firm, the real nature shows itself as true meditation.

Reports from Sri Ramanasramam



Inauguration of Renovated Sri Sundara Mandiram –Tiruchuli

Tiruchuli, hailed by the great Saint–Singer Sundaramurthy Nayanar as the place of our own Lord Siva who wears the crescent moon on his head, is the birth–place of Bhagavan Sri Ramana. The small house where the Sage was born, now known as “Sri Sundara Mandiram” is just adjacent to the temple of Lord Bhuminatha and His consort Sahayavalli, the presiding deities of Tiruchuli. It is a place of pilgrimage to world–wide devotees of Bhagavan. This 150 year old hallowed structure has been renovated so well that Ramana devotees can sit and meditate, chant and sing to their hearts content. It was inaugurated in a grand manner on Sunday 16th May 2010.

The Sri Ramana Maharshi Street on which the Mandiram stands wore a festive look with pandal on it and gaily decorated with plantain leaves and festoons. Eagerness and enthusiasm were writ large on the faces of the denizens of the holy town. Poojya Swami Kamalatmananda, President Sri Ramakrishna Mutt, Madurai graced the occasion by his presence. After Gopuja (Cow–worship); Havans started at the Yagasala at about 8 a.m. The Havan and the chanting of Vedic mantras by pundits inspired the large gathering of devotees. The havan culminated in Purnahuti. The sacred waters were duly taken round the Mandiram to the accompaniment of Nadaswaram music and sprinkled on the Kalasa. Lights were waved in the room where Bhagavan was born. Then about 300 devotees recited with fervent devotion Arunachala Aksharamana Malai and Bhagavan’s other songs.

In the meantime, special abhishekas and worship were done to Lord Bhuminatha Swamy and Goddess Sahayavalli. Devotees gathered in the Temple and worshipped with great fervor.

Sugar rice, pongal, tamarind rice and curd rice were distributed as prasadam to more than 2000 devotees and local people.

Publisher: V.S. Ramanan

Editorial Team: Ranjani Ramanan, L.Sivasubramanian, D.Thiyagarajan and Ravi Ramanan

Email: saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org