

Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

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ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

This 68th Aradhana month of May brought great celebrations with the observance of Sri Bhagavan's Mahanirvana on 13th May which fell on 13th tithi Krishna Paksha as it did on 14th April 1950.

In this issue we glimpse the days, months and years leading up to Bhagavan's final departure (see p. 3). Also this issue is the conclusion to the photo-feature by Chris James Dade of the Ashram Veda patasala (see cover insert).

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,
The Editorial Team

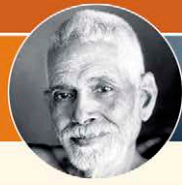
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

7th June (Thurs) Mahapuja
15th June (Sat) Punarvasu
24th June (Sun) Cow Lakshmi Day
27th June (Weds) Full Moon Day
13th July (Fri) Punarvasu
27th July (Fri) Guru Poornima/Full Moon
9th August (Thurs) Punarvasu

25th August (Sat) Full Moon Day
1st September (Sat) Bhagavan's Advent Day
6th September (Thurs) Punarvasu
13th September (Thurs) Ganesh Chaturthi
24th September (Mon) Full Moon Day
3rd October (Weds) Punarvasu
9th October (Tues) Navaratri





The Days Leading Up to Bhagavan's Mahanirvana

When Bhagavan came down the Hill in December 1922, the sadhu-devotees who were accustomed to being in his intimate presence, day in and day out, quietly lamented the growing throngs of visitors that would now have access to him at the new Ashram adjacent to the Chengam Road.

In 1926 discontent arose in the inmates in relation to Bhagavan's pradakshinas. Those left behind to do the work at the Ashram were not happy about not being able to join. For this reason, Bhagavan gave up his hill-roundings and never went again. In fact, from that time on, he never left the Ashram at all. By the

mid-1930s, the first Europeans had come and written books on Bhagavan, bringing him international repute which brought even more visitors from wider circles and divergent backgrounds. As the Ashram grew, the demands made on Bhagavan's time increased. But he was not unduly strained by the changes. It was the devotees who didn't want to share him with the whole world. Little by little, Bhagavan sought to train them to get along on their own without needing to be in his proximity full time.

The Lament of the Kitchen

For decades Bhagavan had commenced his day in the early morning by going to the kitchen, starting the fire and cutting vegetables. For the hard-working kitchen assistants, his presence was more than ample compensation for the long hours required to keep Ashram inmates and guests fed. The kitchen workers got to spend quality time at the Master's side. But soon this practice would fall away as well. It was as though Bhagavan knew that if he endlessly indulged his devotees with his constant company, they would be unable to stand on their own.

One day in 1941, Bhagavan stopped going to the Ashram kitchen. It was not an arbitrary decision; Bhagavan had been disappointed on numerous occasions by the lack of frugality in the kitchen and one day, when kitchen workers failed to carry out his directions regarding wasting buttermilk, Bhagavan retired from his kitchen duties and never set foot in the kitchen again despite countless profuse and heartfelt apologies.

When G. V. Subbaramayya got the news, he wrote a poem in Telugu called *Pakasala Vilapam* or 'Lament of the Kitchen'. The poet describes going to the kitchen in the early morning for work as usual but one day finding the place deserted. While searching in the darkness, the Goddess of the Kitchen, who describes herself as a devotee of Bhagavan Ramana, suddenly appears before him and recalls the glory of the days when the Lord honoured her with his presence. But now, only tears streamed from her eyes as she mourned, bereft of the former grace. The poet writes, "The relish had gone from the chutneys, sambar, pickles and other preparations and the interest in vegetable-cutting and other cooking





operations had disappeared. In short, her very life had left her though she looked outwardly the same as before. She lingered still in the hope that someday Ramana's heart might melt and he would renew his grace to her."¹

While Bhagavan seems to have enjoyed the poem, GVS was not successful in ending his retirement. Bhagavan dismissed the idea saying, "Things happen as they must and cannot be changed. It is all for the good. These people must not always hang upon me. They must learn to do things by themselves."²

Bhagavan's lessons in latter years were tough indeed. The higher devotion he demanded was not born of clinging but of being able to stand alone and trust that everything had already been given. What he sought to communicate was that his teaching was not centred on the practice of continually adoring him but that by living in his presence, devotees might begin to absorb his ways and become, in some small measure, more and more like him, abiding in the Self. Thus Bhagavan's method was like weaning a child from the mother's breast, like the mother-bird who pushes her young out of the nest, forcing them to learn to fly.

But the biggest teaching of all was yet to come. As the decade neared its end, Bhagavan's body showed signs of age and in 1948, he contracted sarcoma, a medical condition that resisted every form of expert intervention.

The experience was not tragic in his view. The body has a natural beginning and end, he argued, and now the Sage's body was in a state of decline. What for him was completely ordinary and not something to fret about, gripped devotees as though the earth were splitting open and swallowing them all alive. How could they live without Bhagavan's physical presence? They kept holding out for a miracle. But the miracle that would come had nothing to do with his mortal frame carrying on indefinitely. The true miracle would come in a completely different guise, namely, in seeing clearly that Bhagavan is not his body. The same applied to the devotees who would eventually follow him with their own physical decline, recognising their own true form as not reducible to the body. But

1 *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, G.V. Subbaramayya, 4th ed., pp. 96-97.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.



even as Bhagavan's physical continuance was maintained by a slim thread, till the last breath he only sought to serve them with all his heart.

For their parts, pleas for his recovery met with casual responses: "The jnani rejoices to be relieved of the body by death as a servant rejoices to lay down his burden at the place of delivery. When we have finished a meal do we keep the leaf-plate on which we have eaten it?"³

Bhagavan assured them that all would come right in the end. He calmed their fears with a verse from *Yoga-Vasishtha*: "The jnani who has found himself as formless, pure Awareness, is unaffected though his body be cleft with a sword. Sugar-candy does not lose its sweetness though broken or crushed."

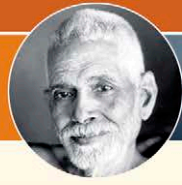
On another occasion, he cheered a grieving devotee, saying: "They take this body for Bhagavan and attribute suffering to him. What a pity! They are despondent that Bhagavan is going to leave them and go away but where can he go, and how?"

District Medical Officer in Attendance

In the midst of what to all appearances looked to be a steady, gradual and unequivocal physical decline, Bhagavan received care from the most qualified physicians in the land. The District Medical Officer

3 *The Maha-Nirvana of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Arthur Osborne, 1951, pp. 52-53.





himself took up Bhagavan's case and tended the ailing sage with deep reverence. Dr. Lt. Col. P. V. Karamchandani later writes:

When I reached the Ashram, I was told that for the past 24 hours Bhagavan had not taken any food, not even a drop of water; that the disciples' implorations had failed; and that in consequence, the entire community was feeling most anxious. I was entreated to persuade Bhagavan to eat something. On examining Bhagavan, I found that it was imperative that he should take some fluid. But what if he refused my request too? Ordering him in my capacity as a doctor seemed to be out of the question. I felt like asking him as a boon to accept my prayer. I prayed inwardly and held a glass of buttermilk before him. He gazed at me for a second, took the buttermilk with his shaking hands, and drank it. My joy knew no bounds. There was relief and jubilation all around.

Dr. Karamchandani was at the Ashram in a purely professional capacity but could not help but be won over by the Maharshi's divinity and soon found himself in the most remarkable circumstance of his career. The one who had come to minister healing was the one who was healed. The doctor recalls:

At that time, I had been feeling restless about promotion to the rank of Major-General (Surgeon General), which was legitimately due to me as the senior-most I.M.S. Officer in the Province of Madras. Howsoever I tried to banish the idea of that coveted promotion from my mind, it loomed large before me and marred my equanimity. Then I said to myself, "Why am I fretting unnecessarily? The next time I visit Bhagavan, I shall request him to grant me this promotion!" When I visited the Ashram again, I went before Bhagavan with my mind resolutely set on requesting him for that boon. But a marvel happened. As soon as I saw Bhagavan, my mind melted, the resolution evaporated, and I felt filled with a strange contentment. A request did formulate itself within me, but it was an entirely different request. I inwardly prayed, "Bhagavan, free me from my craving for this promotion. I don't want anything mundane. Instead, grant me my soul's evolution." My prayer seemed to be instantly granted. Effulgent joy flooded the very depths of my being and I reverently bowed before Bhagavan and he gazed at me benevolently.⁴

The Last Days

In the final days of Bhagavan's earthly existence, Puja Kittu Sastrigal tended Bhagavan daily in the small linen storage room that would come to be called the Nirvana Room, bringing *naivedyam* and *theertham* from the puja. As Bhagavan's condition was delicate,

⁴ "How I Came to the Maharshi", by Dr. Lt. Col. P. V. Karamchandani, *The Mountain Path*, January 1966.

few were allowed access into the small quarters. During the critical last days, Bhagavan's physical weakness was such that he was unable to sit up to take the *theertham* and so asked Kittu Sastrigal to pour it into his mouth as he lay prone. Once, as *prasadam* was brought, Bhagavan said, "As you make the offering to my Mother's shrine, so do it to me. She is unable to eat it. Now I am also unable to eat it."⁵

Final Hours

Characteristically, Bhagavan gave of himself in spite of the distress caused by the disease and even had a smile for devotees on his last day. When just two hours before his final breaths two peacocks trumpeted from a nearby tree, Bhagavan asked whether they had been given their usual nuts.⁶

On April 14th, the doctors and attendants knew that it was the last day. About noon, when his liquid food was brought, he asked the time, punctual as ever, then added, "But henceforth time doesn't matter."⁷

Osborne describes the last hours this way:

*The devotees also, passing in long line that morning, silent with grief, before the doorway where he lay, saw an almost lifeless body, the face pinched, the stomach sunken, the ribs protruding. And after the evening *darshan* they felt that it was the end. Instead of dispersing to their homes as they usually did, they hung about in small groups or stood silently waiting or sat in grief along the temple ramp facing the little room where Bhagavan lay. There was an air of foreboding. Many eyes were fixed on the window of the room and the two fans gently waving inside — the sign that there was still a living body to fan. A group of *sadhus* and devotees sat together on the temple ramp just opposite the little room and began singing *Arunachala Siva*, the supreme song of Divine Love that Bhagavan has given us. More joined in. The singing swelled louder to drown murmurs and cries of grief. Inside the room, Bhagavan bade them sit him up. The pain must have been intense, but he found it appropriate to [depart this earth] sitting, as our Guru. At the sound of *Arunachala Siva*, he opened his luminous untroubled eyes, with a brief smile of indescribable tenderness, and a tear of bliss trickled down from the outer corner of his eyes. And then, at 8.47 pm, breathing stopped. There was no struggle or spasm, no other sign of death: only that the next breath did not come⁸ —*

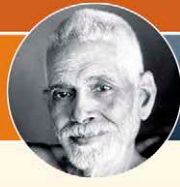
⁵ *The Mountain Path*, October 1980, p. 232.

⁶ *The Maha-Nirvana of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Arthur Osborne, 1951, p. 51.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.



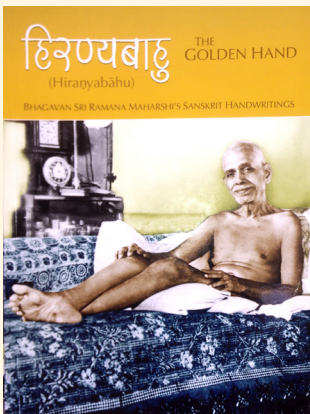


Sri Bhagavan's 68th Aradhana

Sri Bhagavan's 68th Aradhana began in the early morning hours of 13th May. Right in the heart of Agni nakshatra, Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall was decorated with natural vetiver (*khus*) fibres which gave a cool fragrance on a warm summer day. Devotees arrived at 5.30 am for Tamil Parayana as purohitas gathered in the Mother's Shrine for Mahanyasa

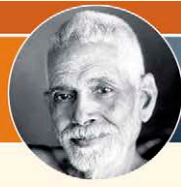
recitation. Abhishekam followed at 8.30 am and final arati at 10.30 am when the Hall brimmed with fervour. In the evening, the New Granathalaya auditorium hosted Ramana music by Ambika Kameshwar. On the following day, 14th May, Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning offered the annual *Ramana Pada Pancha Ratnam*, with verses of Siva Prakasham Pillai selected by Sulocana Nataraja set to the five ghana ragas of Thyagaraja. For video coverage go to: <<https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>>. —

Announcements: New Publications



As part from composing literary works in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam, Bhagavan helped devotees—at their request or otherwise—in copying out classical texts as well as his own compositions. One of Bhagavan's monumental hand-writing legacies was copying out the more than 2,000 verses of *Arunachala Mahatmyam* from various sources, such as *Skanda Maha Puranam* and *Siva Maha Puranam*. By Bhagavan's grace, several of these handwritten works have been preserved in the Ashram Archives, thus permitting their reproduction in the present volume. As Bhagavan was known as the 'The One with the Golden Touch', the present publication of Bhagavan's manuscripts in Sanskrit is aptly entitled *Hiranya Bahu*. Each work is preceded by a synopsis in English. [For a visual presentation of the book, go to <<https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>>. For recordings of the chanting of the texts in the book, see the Ashram's webpage resource centre, 'Audio books' at www.sriramanamaharshi.org] —





Favourite Stories of Sri Bhagavan: King Janaka and Sage Suka

[Once a questioner asked Bhagavan, “Can the atyasramis (those beyond all states) own property?” Bhagavan replied, “There is no restriction for them. They may do what they please. Suka is said to have married and begotten children.” — Talks §291]

Suka was the only son of Vyasa, author of the Brahma Sutras and the Puranas and master of the Vedas. From his childhood, Suka had understood through pure intellect and by freedom from distractions that the world is full of delusion. His mind was disturbed when he tried to probe into the source of delusion. He went to his father on Mt. Meru and voiced his doubts. Vyasa, the very incarnation of Lord Vishnu, addressed Suka’s misgivings but his son was not satisfied. Understanding his son’s mental state, Vyasa told him, “Dear son! If you still harbour doubts, go to the king of Videha, King

Janaka. May you benefit from all that is virtuous!”

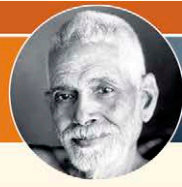
Suka reached the kingdom of Janaka with considerable effort and waited near the king’s private chambers. The servants announced his arrival to the king. Janaka wanted to test the determination of Suka and thus, the servants did not give him admittance for seven long days. But Suka maintained his equanimity. Seven days later, the king’s retinue allowed him to have an audience with the king with all the royal courtesies. Beautiful men and women attempted to entertain him with song and dance. Suka was neither elated by this royal treatment nor was he flustered by the king’s earlier indifference.

Janaka was very pleased with Suka’s immaculate attitude. He offered him the sixteen kinds of hospitality, praised his ancestry and humbly addressed him thus, “It is my great good fortune that you, who are endowed with the knowledge of Brahman, came all the way here, seeking audience with me. Please command me as to what service I can render you”. Suka reiterated all that he had told his father and raised the question that was tormenting him, “What is the origin of delusion? How does one overcome it?” Janaka’s response was the same as had been his father’s. So, Suka explained that he had heard this response before, and it had not resolved his doubts.

Janaka then elaborated further, “You are fully detached from all things, are without doubt the very embodiment of Brahman. What your father stated, what I have understood and what you are contemplating, are all the same—the knowledge of the Self. Total detachment is essential for this. You are seeking the source of delusion. and it has brought you all this way. This very desire is the manifestation of delusion. Attempting to know anything other than the Self is delusion. Such a desire also occurs by the very force of the Self—attempting to know and knowing it. However, in the attempt to quench one’s desire to know, the Self gets lost in the background and one is caught in a vicious whirlpool. Therefore, conquer this desire to know more about delusion and endeavour to attain the state of equanimity once again, for that is your true state.”

On hearing this explanation, Suka became completely silent, was emancipated from all desire and filled with perfect contentment. He now understood the greatness of his father through the renowned Janaka. —





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mahanandi Theertham Renovation



Nandi, Lord Siva's bull-devotee, is always before the Lord. Son of the Sage Shilada, Nandi was born after Shilada took up extreme penance to have the boon of an immortal child devoted to the Lord. Nandi is said to have received divine knowledge from Goddess Parvati by which he taught the eight disciples. (Nandi [Skt.] means 'happiness' or 'joy'; [Tam.] 'to grow' or 'flourish').

Adjacent to the Mahanandi Shrine just south of Yama linga on the hillround road is Mahanandi Theertha, constructed in the Pandya period. When the highway department recently undertook renovation of the Chengam Road drains just west of the Ashram, they reconstructed the defunct drainage pathways that fed Mahanandi Theertham. This means that the ancient sacred tank should now get ample water supply when the monsoon arrives. But after decades of neglect, the tank is in need of repairs. This seemed like the ideal time, and Sri Ramanasramam came forward and offered its assistance. The bhumi puja for the renovation project took place on Sunday morning 20th May with Ashram devotees in attendance. —

Padma Swaminathan, age 100, at the Ashram

At the end of April 2018, the Ashram hosted the centenarian Padma Swaminathan, who first came to Bhagavan in 1925 as a girl of seven with her father, F. G. Natesa Iyer. Her youth was out of the ordinary. Her father was a theatre artist and scouted talent for the stage and screen. It was he that had discovered M.S. Subbulakshmi as a girl of eleven and later played lead opposite her in her first film, *Seva Sadanam* (1938). As Padma and M.S. Subbulakshmi became fast friends, Padma studied classical voice and embarked on her own

career as a concert performer. She eventually married and settled into family life. (See her life story in the October 2015 issue of *Saranagati*).

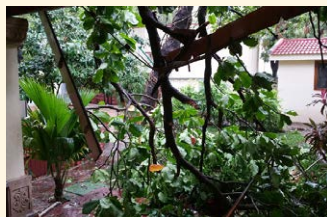


At the Ashram, April 25, 2018

Padma attributes her longevity to "Bhagavan's blessing and *Nature Cure*", the system of diet and health she learned directly from Lakshmana Sharma. She and her husband followed its dietary restrictions all their lives and Padma continues to do so today.

May Bhagavan bless her with many more years of healthy living and continued visits to Sri Ramanasramam. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Ashram Archive Repairs



The Ashram Archives is recovering in the aftermath of a freak storm that brought down numerous large trees in the Ashram on 8th May. The slight rain that accompanied the high winds was a welcome reprieve from the May summer heat. But one almond tree fell on the Archives entranceway damaging roof and woodwork. Trees are now being trimmed to prevent a recurrence. —

