

Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

This issue of Saranagati carries the third part of the life story of Prof. K. Swaminathan, the Ashram translator of 1254 stanzas of Sri Muruganar's *Guru Vachaka Kovai* and 1851 stanzas of his *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*. It also introduces *Sri Ramanasramam Heritage Sites*, a column dedicated to significant locations associated with the genesis of the Ashram. This month features the history of the Ashram Well.

Wordwise this month looks at *bhuma* or perfection. And *Events at Sri Ramanasramam* features the Samadhi Day of Munagala S. Venkataramiah.

For further news and 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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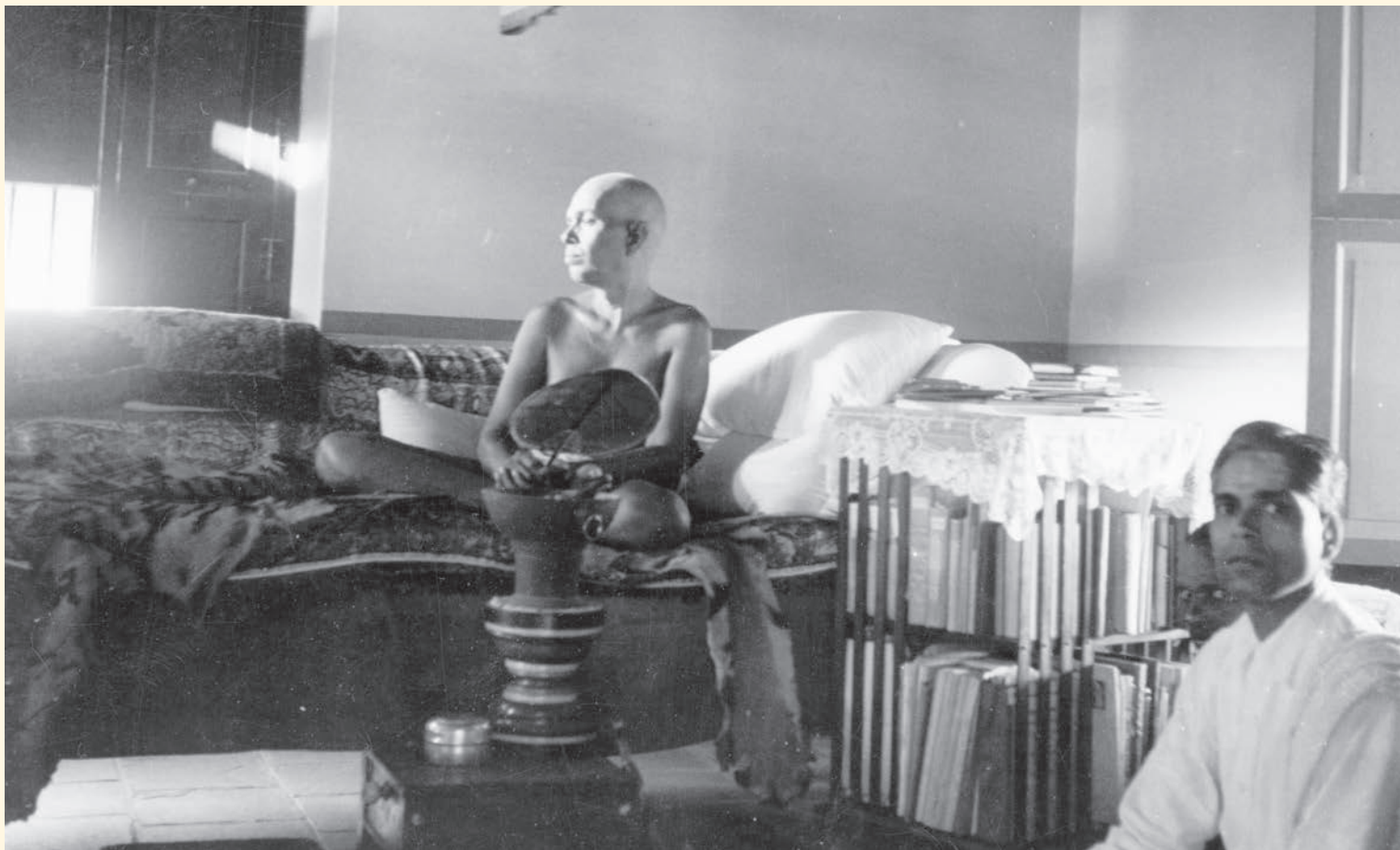
Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

Bhuma, the Supreme

D.: I feel sometimes that *bhuma* (Supreme Consciousness) is infinitude and that I am finite consciousness. Is that correct?

M.: *Bhuma* (Perfection) alone is. It is Infinite. There arises from it this finite consciousness taking on an *upadhi* (limiting adjunct). This is *abhasa* or reflection. Merge this individual consciousness into the Supreme One. That is what should be done. *Bhuma* is the Supreme — *yatra naanyat pasyati yatra naanyat srunoti sa bhuma* (where one does not see any other, hears nothing, it is Perfection). — *Talks §68*





Coming to Bhagavan: The Life of Prof. K. Swaminathan (part three)

In the early 1940s KS brought the entire family to see Bhagavan. Arriving at the Ashram by bullock cart, they entered the Ashram to find Bhagavan standing out under the illuppai tree. This was unusual as Bhagavan rarely stood out under the tree. The children marvelled at the sight, the golden form clad only in a koupina, shining in the morning light, standing there with his walking stick as if to welcome the youngsters. All got down and did prostrations before Bhagavan. Bhagavan was silent but gazed affectionately on each member of the family. The children mused to themselves, “Is he a human being or a god, wearing only his body for clothing? Surely this must be Rama himself!”

Simplicity and Humility

The professor soon took notice of Bhagavan’s appreciation for simplicity and humility. KS learned from Bhagavan that worldly accomplishments and earthly learning could in no way serve to aid one in gaining a foothold in the realm of true knowledge but were rather often barriers to it. Such reflections prepared the ground for the following experience at the Ashram. KS writes:

“Once during a visit to the Ashram in the 1940s I was sitting outside the Old Hall with many devotees, facing Sri Bhagavan who was reclining on [his] couch. A group of learned pundits were discussing certain passages from the Upanishads with great enthusiasm and profundity. All, including Bhagavan, appeared to be attentively listening to this interesting discussion when, all of a sudden, Bhagavan rose from his couch, walked thirty meters to the north, and stood before a villager who was





standing there looking lowly with palms joined. Immediately the discussion stopped and all eyes were turned to Bhagavan and the villager standing at a distance. They appeared to be conversing, but at such a distance no one could tell about what. Soon Bhagavan returned to his couch and the discussion resumed. I was curious about this villager and why Bhagavan had gone out of his way to meet him. So while the discussion continued, I slipped away and caught up with him before he left the Ashram. I asked the villager what he and Bhagavan had talked about. He said that Bhagavan had asked him why he was standing there so far away. 'I told Bhagavan, "I am only an ignorant, poor villager. How am I to approach you who are God incarnate?"' 'What did the Maharshi say then?' I asked. 'He asked me my name, what village I was from, what work I did and how many children I had, etc.' 'Did you ask Him anything?' 'I asked Him how I could be saved and how I could earn His blessings.' 'What did He tell you?' 'He asked me if there was a temple in my village. I told him there was. He wanted to know the name of the deity of that temple. I told Him the name. He then said that I should go on repeating the name of that deity and I would receive all the blessings needed.'"

"I came back to Bhagavan's presence and sat among the devotees listening to the learned discussion, in which I had now lost all interest, realizing that the simple humility and devotion of this peasant had evoked a far greater response from our Master than any amount of learning. I then decided that, though a scholar by profession, I should always remain a humble, ignorant peasant at heart, and pray, like that villager, for Bhagavan's grace and blessings."



Prof. K. Swaminathan and family in the early 1940s

Formal Introduction

KS was fond of humorously narrating the story of the day of his formal 'introduction' to Bhagavan. The year was 1941. KS and family had come to the Ashram and entered the hall. A lady named Kalyani Rajagopal, sitting next to Mrs. KS, suddenly began pointing toward Mrs. KS, exclaiming, "Oh Bhagavan, this is Visalam. We studied in school together from the 1st to the 4th standard. We are seeing each other only after all these years." Bhagavan looked at Visalakshi while the childhood friend asked Visalakshi who her husband was. When Mrs. KS pointed toward the professor, the lady added, "And Bhagavan, this is her husband."

Later that day when KS and family were in town, KS openly joked with the children: "See, I have been introduced by so many people as being highly qualified, as having gone to Oxford and gotten a degree there, as a professor at a prestigious college, and so on, but when I am introduced to Bhagavan Ramana, I am announced merely as the husband of your mother, a lady who studied up to the fourth standard!" And turning to his wife, he added affectionately, "You are so lucky. Poor me, I had no

Reality in Forty Verses

22. Giving light to the mind that sees everything, [the Lord] shines within it. Other than by curbing the mind, turning it inwards and embedding it in the Lord, how can there be any thinking of the Lord on the part of the mind? Consider this.

— Sri Bhagavan





classmate to introduce me like that to Bhagavan!" Then he added, "But it is right that I was introduced to Bhagavan only as your husband and not with a list of credentials it."

Ammaiappa

In his letters to Bhagavan, KS addressed his guru as 'Ammaiappa', a Tamil word, a form of address that means both mother and father. KS would sign the letters as 'Ramana Sei' (Ramana's child). KS writes: "And how did [Bhagavan] react to this? Was he indifferent how I addressed him? Did he leave me to imagine that he was taking no special notice of my unusual way of addressing him? If anybody came to him and sang before him any Tamil song in which the word 'Ammaiappa' occurred, he [would] turn round to see if I was there and his eyes [would] ask me, 'Are you attending? Here is another using your name.'"

Karma yoga and Jnana

In due time KS began to unravel the internal conflict that had been the cause of such a long delay in his coming to Bhagavan, what he had seen up until then as a contradiction between his commitment to Gandhi and helping to put right the unfair historical circumstances India found herself in, on the one hand, and the need of grounding such a quest in eternal Truth and personal transcendence on the other. Without the latter, robustness for the former could not endure. In short, jnana yoga and karma

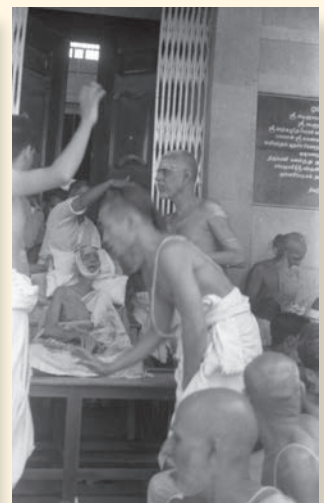
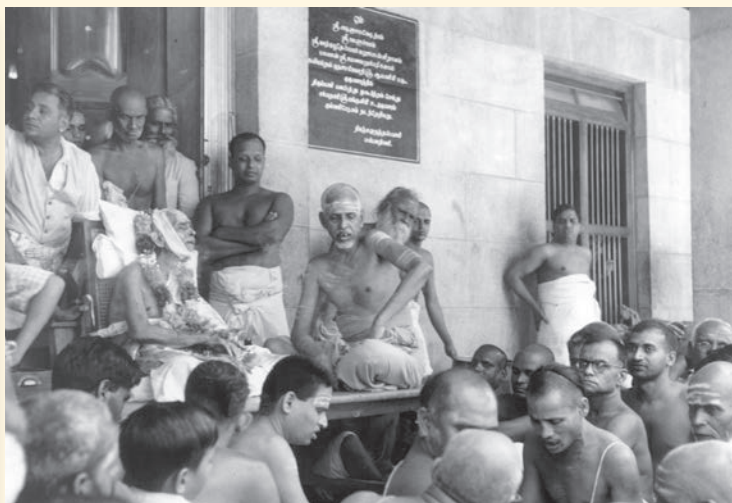
yoga were bound up with one another. KS wrote of Bhagavan years later: "His grace it was that gave me length of life, strength of body and ample room to render humble service to Rajaji, Vinoba and Gandhi, all reflections in our own time of the Eternal Goodness of which [Bhagavan] was the full embodiment."

Bhagavan's Illness and Mahanirvana

In February 1949, Bhagavan underwent surgery in the Ashram dispensary to remove a small growth on his arm. Friends asked the professor why he was always going to Tiruvannamalai during the summer months, where it was so hot. Why not go to the Nilgiri Hills instead? KS, acutely aware of the potential severity of Bhagavan's condition, replied: "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 left arm. Sri Bhagavan declined saying, "The body is itself a disease. Let it have its natural end. Why mutilate it?"

In spite of increasing weakness, Bhagavan maintained his regular darshan schedule even as his condition became critical. KS kept up his regular visits and saw Bhagavan the last time just seven days before his departure. Of the final moment, he wrote: "When Kavyakuntha was living with the Maharshi





in 1908, something like a meteor appeared at dawn, touched Maharshi's forehead, retreated and came again six times. On the night of 14th April, 1950, as Maharshi cast off his body, a bright meteor shooting over the ashram was seen and noted by all and sundry all over S. India."

But feeling the sting of the loss, KS wrote a month later: "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."

Desperate for relief, KS began organising weekly meetings of the Ramana Bhakta Sabha at

'Dharmalayam'. He writes: "In this state of mind it occurred to me it would be really something of a consolation, the best consolation that could be had under the circumstances, if I [could] come across other devotees of Bhagavan, others whom I have come to regard as fellow members with me in Bhagavan's great family, with whom I [could] exchange confidences and share experiences. This is the urge that made me move in the direction of taking steps to start a centre in Madras [...] where I [could] meet old devotees of Bhagavan, feel as if I was once again in the old atmosphere."

(to be continued)

* Freely adapted from the following sources: *Prof. K. Swaminathan (1896-1994): Tributes to Commemorate His Birth Centenary; KS Remembered: Prof. K. Swaminathan (1896-1994); Ramana Maharshi*, the National Book Trust, New Delhi; *Sri Ramana, The Self Supreme; Five Hymns to Arunachala*, Sri Ramanasramam; various articles in *The Mountain Path; The Resplendent Sun*, A.R. Natarajan, (RMCL); *Indian Express*, Dec 29th, 1990, p. 3; public talk of La. Su. Rengarajan, 2004; and recorded interviews with Prof. K. Swaminathan and family members.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Munagala Venkataramiah Samadhi Day



It was Munagala S. Venkataramiah (later Swami Ramanananda Saraswati) who recorded the conversations in the Old Hall that were later collated, edited and published as *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Born in Cholavandan of Madurai District in 1882, the young Munagala received accolades for his academic achievements, later affording him a career as a university lecturer in chemistry. Following the sudden death of his first daughter in 1918, Munagala came to Bhagavan up at Skandasramam. After losing his teaching post at the end of 1932, he came to live as an Ashram inmate. He took up work translating letters for the Ashram and later translating numerous books. Munagala's Samadhi Day was observed on the 12th February 2013 at his samadhi in Ramana Nagar.





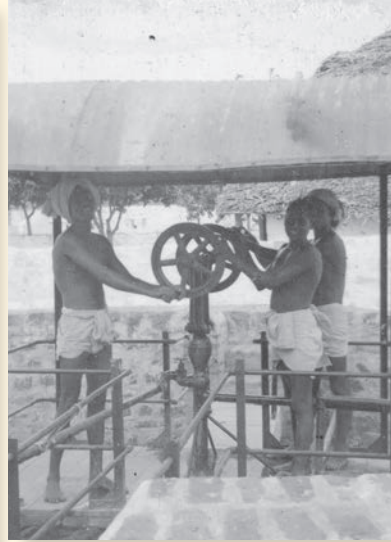
Sri Ramanasramam Heritage Sites: The Ashram Well



Construction of the parapet wall (ca. 1930)



Bhagavan walking to the old office



Workers drawing water



Samadhi with vimana opposite the well

When Bhagavan's mother attained Mahasamadhi in May 1922, she was interred at the southern foot of the hill. At the suggestion of devotees, Chinnaswamy and Ramanathan, son of Yoganathan, used to take naivedya to the samadhi each morning and return to Skandasramam at noon after doing puja at the samadhi. Water required for the daily abhishekam was collected from the tank at Palakothu. During the construction of the Samadhi, earth was scooped out by devotees from a place just north of the burial site to provide for the raising of a platform around the Samadhi. The excavation left a small cavity in the earth, which, when a heavy rain came a few days later, was filled up with rainwater. After the rain, the usual hot dry summer weather returned but the water in the crevice did not dry up but rather, remained at a constant level, clear and clean. When this was noticed by Chinnaswami, they tried to drain the water from the hole but found that the former water level was soon restored. They took a sample of the water up to Skandashram to show Bhagavan. That evening Bhagavan came down from the hill, inspected the site, and asked them to dig a pit three feet wide and three feet deep. Once done, water began flowing, and the site revealed itself to be a spring which, though twelve feet higher than the nearby Pali thirtham, bestowed sweet, crystalline water. The spring, christened 'Ramana Thirtha', was commemorated in a Sanskrit verse by Ganapati Muni: "Here is the new Tirtha, remover of all blemishes, at the Samadhi of Mother Saundaryamba, like the stream of pollen from the twin lotus hands of Ramana Maharshi." In the course of the years that followed, further excavation was done and the spring proved to be perennial, never drying up.

As Ashram water needs mounted, the well was further deepened and broadened by making use of conventional quarrying techniques. Parapet walls of stone and mortar were raised, and a hand-pump was fitted into the well to pump water into a masonry tank. Pipes from the kitchen were fitted to the tank for daily access.

In 1967 further digging was done until the well's depth reached 45 feet. In 1988 two bore wells were drilled at the Ashram to try and meet the ever-increasing demand for water, especially acute in the summer months. Submersible electric pumps were installed with a large overhead tank. Finally the municipality began providing water to the Ashram and pipes were laid from Pali Thirtham to provide for the flower gardens. In 2005 a water treatment plant was installed behind the Veda Patsala which serves to recycle all Ashram grey water for garden use. Today Ashram water needs are stable and the Ashram Well is once again being used exclusively for abhishekam in the Mother's Temple and at Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi Shrine.





From the *Periapuranam*: Appudhi Adikal Naayanaar



Appudhi Adikal's love for the Saivite saint Tirunavukkarsar (Appar) was so great that he named his children, cows, cooking vessels, wells and ponds—indeed everything in his house—after the great saint. Appudhi had never seen him but chanted his name and his verses every day. One day while Tirunavukkarsar was roaming about the land, he chanced upon the village of this devoted soul. Thirsty from his long journey in the midday sun, the saint approached the village well and was curious to find the name 'Tirunavukkarsar' inscribed all over the shed covering the well. The humble sage, not revealing his identity, inquired of the villagers who it was that was doing service in the name written on the shed walls. They told him that it was one Appudhi Adikal who performs homa each day for the sake of the world, and that it was he that had built the shed over the well. Inquiring of Appudhi's whereabouts, in short order the sage arrived at his doorstep.

When Appudhi heard there was a devotee of the Lord at his door, he was overwhelmed with joy. Without knowing that this was the great 'Appar' whom he had been worshipping all these years, he prostrated before the visitor while the latter prostrated in like manner. Tirunavukkarsar asked why, instead of the name of the donor, there was 'another name' written on the shed of village well? Appudhi replied indignantly, "Is the

name of the great saint who triumphed over the Jains just another name for you? Do you not know how, by the Lord's power, Appar was saved by a floating rock when once tossed into the ocean? You are clothed in holy garb yet your words lack reverence." Seeing Appudhi's sincerity, Tirunavukkarsar answered humbly: "I am the one of deluded mind who was restored to the true faith through a colic induced by the Lord's grace." Hearing this, Appudhi Adikal realized that the sadhu standing before him was none other than his own beloved Tirunavukkarsar. He folded his palms in adoration as tears streamed from his eyes, and he fell prostrate on the ground before the saint's lotus-feet. The saint returned the adoration and lifted up his devotee. Overwhelmed with joy, Adikal began to sing and dance and ran about announcing to his kinsmen just who was in their midst. All gathered round and prayed for the saint to enter the family home. Appudhi and his wife washed the saint's feet and sprinkled the gathering with the thirtam. They then set about to prepare food. They asked their eldest son whose name was Muththa Tirunavukkarsar ('eldest Tirunavukkarsar') to fetch some banana leaves on which the food could be served. As the boy





cut banana leaves in the back garden, he suddenly encountered a venomous snake which bit him on the hand. Knowing his fate, the boy rushed in to deliver the leaves but, lest he disturb the auspicious event, said nothing about his snakebite. But when the parents discovered their loving son lifeless with the wound on his hand, they knew what had transpired. Though heavy of heart, they continued in their preparation without making any mention of the tragedy to their guest. But before having his food, Tirunavukkarsar wanted to bless the couple and their children with the holy ash and asked where the eldest son was. Adikal, unwilling to tell of the inauspicious accident, only said, "He won't be of use now". "What has happened?" the saint inquired. Unable to conceal it any longer, Appudhi Adikal burst into tears and confessed that their son, bitten by a poisonous snake, lay dead behind the kitchen. Appalled by the news, Tirunavukkarsar rushed to the body of the boy and, sprinkling holy ash over him, pleaded in prayer to the Lord to bring the child back to life. As the lifeless body began to stir, the family and villagers were amazed. All returned to the house and Tirunavukkarsar suggested that the feast continue. The sage asked Adikal and the children, including the resuscitated youth, to have food along with him. After staying with them for several days, the great poet left for Tirupazanam to recite hymns on the Lord where he adored the devotion of Appudhi Adikal in one of the hymns of the *Thevarum*. (Appudhi Adikal Naayanaar's Aradhana Day this year was observed on the 11th February)

Wordwise: *Bhuma*

भूमा

BhUmA: 'the absolute'; 'perfection', 'fullness of Being'; 'infinity', 'abundance', 'plenty', 'plurality', 'multitude'; *BhU*: 'the earth', 'the universe', 'the ground'; *BhUman*: 'earth or world' or 'existing thing'; *BhUmAni*: 'various worlds', 'totality of existing things'; *BhUmA*: 'ground or source of Being'.

Bhuma is the Supreme, the ground of Being, the fullness of the Godhead, infinity, to which nothing can be added and from which all things spring. Bhuma refers to the Self which is the ground and substratum of everything. It is, Bhagavan says, "indefinable and indescribable". "It is as it is.... Bhuma alone IS." (*Talks* §68)



Announcements: Ramanasramam Website

Sri Ramanasramam has redesigned the website: <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org>. The new design is 'responsive', meaning the menu adapts to the screen size. The multilingual site includes English, Tamil, Hindi, Japanese, French and Russian languages. We need volunteers to translate into Spanish, German and other languages. Those who wish to help with translations may write to: ashram@gururamana.org. The new website allows free downloading of all issues of the Mountain Path older than 2010. These may be found at: <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/Mountain-Path/>.

Visitors can learn to chant the *Akshara Mana Malai* at: <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/portfolio-item/chant-arunachala/>. The old website can still be accessed at <http://archival.sriramanamaharshi.org> for any information that is missing in the new website. Because of limited resources, the ashram has only tested the new website in Firefox, IE, Safari and Google Chrome. Please send suggestions for improvement to: ashram@gururamana.org.

