

Saranagathi



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In this Issue

Dear Sri Bhagavan Devotees,

As in years past this year too on 14th April 2010, Sri Bhagavan's Maha Nirvana Day, a large group of devotees gathered in front of the Nirvana room and chanted Aksharamanamalai starting at 8.15pm. This year marks the 60th anniversary of Sri Bhagavan's Maha Nirvana.

A few days before the *Mahasamadhi* of Sri Bhagavan, G.V. Subbaramayya went to see Sri Bhagavan and implored Him for grace; 'Bhagavan, *Abhayam Yeevala*' (Bhagavan, you must give me protection) and quick came the reply '*Yichanu*' (I have given it)!

Before He left the body Sri Bhagavan said, "Where can I go? I am here." Since that time countless devotees have felt the strength of His presence in all facets of their lives and many more continue to be drawn into His aura of grace.

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This issue of Saranagathi carries the continuation of the article about Sri Venkatarathnam who lived with Sri Bhagavan from 1944 to 1950 and served Him in His final years. This is followed by Smt Firoza Taleyarkhan's recollections in 'How I came to the Maharshi' and finally, Reports from Sri Ramanasramam.

Yours in Sri Bhagavan,

Editorial Team.

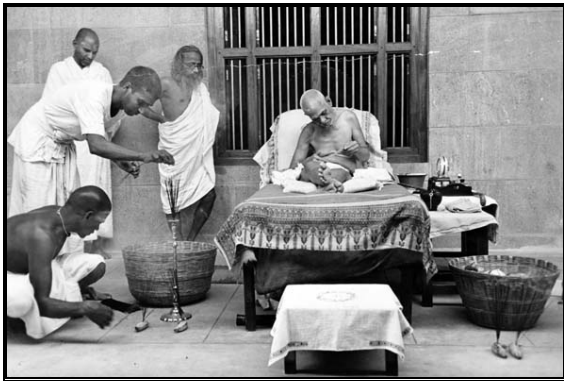
The Essence of Instruction

*For knowing That which Is
There is no other knower.
Hence Being is Awareness
And we are all Awareness.*

— Upadesa Saram by Sri Bhagavan (Verse 23)

Venkatarathnam By Neal Rosner (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. The article is continued...*



Lighting the Incense stick is Venkatarathnam

Bhagavan's Attendant

In 1949, Shiv Mohan Lal asked Bhagavan if Sri Venkatarathnam could join as one of Sri Bhagavan's personal attendants. Bhagavan told that he had no objection but that the office people must give the permission, which they did. Bhagavan was very strict in correcting him and if anything was done improperly it would be a matter of two days of continuous chiding in front of all the devotees.

One evening Sri Venkatarathnam came into the hall and quietly went behind the Maharshi and started fanning him. In the morning Bhagavan had told that nobody should fan him. Now he exploded and scolded him saying, "Oho, very good, very special, this fellow thinks he is doing a great service. He has so much bhakti, much more than the rest of the bhaktas here. Why doesn't he go and fan all of them and get the

punya (merit) of fanning the devotees of the Guru? He thinks that by his tapas he can make me bend to his will." Bhagavan spoke like this on and off to every incoming devotee for nearly two days. Finally, when alone with the Maharshi, Sri Venkatarathnam broke down in tears and asked Bhagavan to forgive him for having made Bhagavan exert himself so much to correct his fault. Sri Bhagavan graciously said, "Never mind, everyone makes a mistake," and that was the end of the matter.

Bhagavan then had about six or seven attendants who would serve him taking shifts. When it came time to choose shifts, they asked Venkatarathnam which shift he wanted. He told them that he would take that shift which remains after everyone else had chosen for himself. So he got the 10 P.M. to 4 A.M. shift, since everyone liked to sleep at that time.

This turned out to be a blessing in disguise, because after 9.30 P.M. all the bhaktas would go away to sleep and Venkatarathnam and Sri Maharshi would be left all alone for the night. It was at this time that Sri Venkatarathnam got his heart's desire to be intimately close to Bhagavan without others around fulfilled. Many nights were spent in spiritual talk or simply gazing on the Divine Face of the Maharshi.

Failing Health

By this time, Sri Bhagavan's health was already serious with sarcoma cancer in the left arm. At the

sight of the blood while dressing the wound, Sri Venkatarathnam would feel faint. Whenever he would come near Bhagavan, Maharshi would rebuke him thus, "Don't come near me. You people come here thinking 'Oh, Bhagavan is sick. He is dying'. I don't want you to come near me when your mind is full of such thoughts. Stay away." Then Sri Venkatarathnam asked Bhagavan that without thinking that Bhagavan is sick or that such and such a thing must be done to relieve the suffering, how can he serve Bhagavan? Bhagavan told him that he should simply play his part as in a drama and do whatever is necessary without having any feeling and to have the mental attitude of a witness, attending to the work as the situation demands. After this, he again was permitted to attend on the Maharshi. Following Bhagavan's instructions, he began to feel everything as Atma Vilasa (the Divine Play) and that Bhagavan was simply playing a role as a sick person, although in reality he was the Paramatma Himself.

Mahanirvana

After Sri Maharshi's Nirvana on 14 April 1950, Sri Venkatarathnam felt relieved rather than pained at his passing away. When I asked him why this was so, he said that until that time, he constantly had to be extremely alert to attend to Bhagavan externally but now he felt that he could devote his mind to Him and internally dive into Him. Nevertheless, he would feel sad when he thought of the love and concern that Maharshi had shown towards him and would sometimes weep. After the 10th day following Bhagavan's Mahanirvana he left for Gudivada and then to Sri Sailem with a friend.

In Sri Sailem he used to go to the forest for dhyana and thought he should stay there practicing what Sri Maharshi had taught him, i.e., Atma Vichara. One night he had a dream in which Maharshi appeared dressed in a gold cloth and chided him saying, "Why are you acting like this?" He understood that this meant he should not withdraw and that Sri Bhagavan

was watching over him and protecting him, so he returned to Ramanasramam.

Serving Mother

In 1952 he went to serve his mother who was ailing with paralysis and wanted him nearby. She had already spent a year or two at Arunachalam with him in the presence of the Maharshi. When she first came to the Ashram, Sri Venkatarathnam went and prostrated to her and returned to the bookstall where he was working at that time. On seeing this, Niranjanananda Swamy chided him for not showing his mother round the Ashram and finding her a place to stay. He said, "Oho, I see, you are a gunatita (beyond all differences) and need not serve your mother, is it?" Then Sri Venkatarathnam went and got her settled in a room, since the Sarvadhikari had ordered him to do so.

Whenever his mother would sit in Bhagavan's presence, she would become completely unconscious of the world. Even after everyone had gone out for food she would be sitting like that in trance. She told her son this and he suggested that she sit outside near a window facing Bhagavan. He later related that she really had the Grace of Bhagavan during her residence there. When others told her that it was a sorry thing that one of her sons had become a sadhu, she retorted and said that because she was a woman she could not live as a sadhu but her desire to do so had found its fulfillment in her son, Sri Venkatarathnam.

When he came to serve her in his home, she insisted on taking food only from his hands, even though he was not maintaining *madi* (orthodox procedures). He had personally served and touched the body of the Maharshi and that consecrated everything he touched afterward, she thought. She always kept a photo of the 21-year-old Maharshi by her head. Every day after bathing his mother, he would read to her Bhagavatam, as this was her favorite book.

How I came to the Maharshi

By Firoza Taleyarkhan (*Published in The Mountain Path, April 1965*)

Many people ask me why I am living here in Tiruvannamalai, so I would like to write about my experiences and how my Lord Ramana brought me here and kept me here. I have been very fortunate from childhood up in coming in contact with high souls and saints, amongst them the renowned woman saint Babajan whose life was a mystery, no one knowing where she came from or how old she was. It happened one day that I took her for a drive in Poona when we were there and as we passed the Fort she pointed to it and said, "King Shivaji and I used to play here." I was stunned because that would make her several centuries old. She was a great saint. Thousands of people benefited from her blessings. Poor people became rich and others became sadhus or saints. Even now prayers made at her shrine are answered. She showered her Grace on me and played a great part in my life, but here I have no space to write about all that.

Then there was Harilal Baba who stood in the Ganges at Benares looking at the sun from sunrise to sunset. He never stirred even when there were storms and floods and the water passed over him. He became blind from staring at the sun, but his inner light was powerful. I had the wonderful experience of his Grace and blessings.

I became attached to dear Gandhiji and Ba, his wonderful wife, who was a little saint. Gandhiji invited me to stay with him. I could have chosen that kind of life. His love and kindness were overwhelming. But I felt that politics were not my line; I was in search of something real which I did not know.

I was in Budh Gaya for ten years making sadhana. Of course, there was great benefit and I had wonderful experiences; still my heart was aching to meet someone who could really show me God. One day of Grace I met someone who told me about Ramana Maharshi. I had never heard of him before. The moment I opened the

book about him I was struck by the beauty of his face. I immediately wrote to Ramanashram but did not receive an encouraging reply, so I dropped the idea of going there.

Swami Yogendra and I planned to open an ashram for ladies together called 'The Home of Devotion'. (The Swami now has an Ashram at Khar.) We started trying to organise it but then I thought that before embarking on our new venture I would go to Tiruvannamalai to ask the Maharshi for His blessings. I stayed there for four days and showed him the prospectus of our scheme and asked for his blessings on it. I left thinking that I had them, as it was not his way to say definitely 'yes' or 'no' when people told him their schemes. But to my great surprise we shortly received a refusal from the government to rent us the land and buildings on Kadevly Hill which they had promised us. You can imagine my disappointment. I really lost my temper with Sri Bhagavan. I was wondering why they called him 'Bhagavan', for what sort of blessings were these? It was only much later that I understood that I had had his Grace all along. I went back to Tiruvannamalai longing to say: "How can I believe in you after what has happened to my cherished scheme?" Meanwhile a lady came to the Ashram and told Bhagavan that she was working hard to collect money to help people in distress and asked him whether that was not a good thing to do. Bhagavan took a book and showed her a passage to read. As I was sitting beside her, I could read it too and it made me smile. Bhagavan looked at me and said: "It's for you too."

It said: "A frail woman who has the peace of God can do more to help a country or mankind than all the intellectuals put together."

That very moment something within me told me that he was right. He knew that I was not yet ripe for the

responsible work of helping others. I needed to cure myself before trying to cure others. For the first time I got up and prostrated before him and from that moment my life, mind and heart changed and I felt his unbounded Grace flowing over me. I will tell one or two things that happened later.

I was sitting on the Hill talking to Visvanathan, an old devotee one afternoon and asked him what had happened to the house where Bhagavan was born. He said that he had no idea. I was shocked to hear this and told him that in Western countries the birth places of great men were preserved just as they were left, and even more so that of Bhagavan should belong to us and be kept as a place of pilgrimage. I ran straight away to the office of the Sarvadhikari, Niranjanananda Swami and asked him about it. He said that there was a school in the house. I asked him to write that very evening and say that I wanted to buy it. Now it is Ashram property and regular puja is performed there.

After this the Sarvadhikari asked me to go to Madras and see the Minister Sri Bhaktavatsalam about the possibility of getting a railway connection to Tiruchuzi, Bhagavan's birthplace. I went but I was

shocked when I heard how much it would cost. I decided to leave it to Bhagavan and thought no more about it, but imagine my joy some years later when Sri Bhaktavatsalam became Chief Minister of Madras and the line was actually constructed. Tiruchuzi has now become a much more important town. Bhagavan's Grace is sufficient to accomplish anything, big or small, if one's entire life and soul are laid at his feet. He has brought about many seemingly impossible things for me.

I also had the grace of Bhagavan when Mr. Tarapore, a Parsi friend, took up my plan for renovating the Patala Linga, an underground cavern where Bhagavan had sat performing austerities as a youth when he first came to Tiruvannamalai. He did this beautifully at his own expense and Sri Rajagopalachari, the then Governor-General of India, came over to perform the opening ceremony. This also has now become a place of pilgrimage.

Before I close I must mention also the loving devotion of the Sarvadhikari and the strong faith and selfless service with which he worked. It is due to him that we have these whole magnificent Ashram buildings where formerly was nothing but bare ground.

Reports from Sri Ramanasramam

Sri Bhagavan's Maha Nirvana Day

Bhagavan's Maha Nirvana occurred at 8.47 p.m. on 14th April 1950. On the April 14 of every year a large number of devotees would gather in front of the Nirvana Room at the ashram at 8.15 p.m. and chant Aksharamanamalai till it concluded around 9.00 p.m. April 14 of this year happened to be the 60th anniversary of Bhagavan's Maha Nirvana. It was in the same Tamil year Vikruti that the great Master, who came as Light, and was amidst us as Light, left as Light, to remain forever within us as Light. More than 100 devotees gathered in front of the Nirvana Room at 8.15 p.m. on Wednesday the 14th April 2010 and chanted Bhagavan's Aksharamanamalai.





Sri Ramanasramam Dispensary

A new Free Dispensary has been built within the Ashram complex near the Chengam road and it was inaugurated on Friday, 16th April 2010 between 5.30 a.m. and 6.00 a.m. It was attended by the Ashram President Sri V.S.Ramanan, Smt. Susila Ramanan, the Ashram Administrator Sri V.Subramanian, Smt. Ramani, Bhagavan's devotee Dr. Chidambaram who is the doctor-in-charge, and many other devotees. Puja was offered to Sri Bhagavan's photo and Prasadam distributed. The new Dispensary which will be open from 8 a.m. to 9.30 a.m. on all days except Sundays started functioning on 21st April 2010, Punarvasu Day.

Inauguration of New Guest House

A new Ashram Guest House named 'Achalam' consisting of 21 rooms, situated in Ramana Nagar, not far from the Ashram, was also inaugurated on 16th April 2010.



Major Chadwick Day

On Saturday the 17th April 2010, around 10 a.m. devotees in the Ashram gathered beside the Samadhi of Sadhu Arunachala, better known as Major A.W.Chadwick for it was on 17th April in 1962 that this wonderful devotee of Bhagavan left his body. Chadwick's Samadhi was decorated with flowers. Devotees chanted Aksharamanamalai. After arati, prasadam was distributed.

Publisher: V.S. Ramanan

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

Email: saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org