

Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

NOVEMBER 2021
VOL. 15, NO.11



Dev Gogoi



Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

In recent weeks, Tiruvannamalai, and all of Tamil Nadu, has been blessed with daily thunderstorms. In fact the North-East monsoon had to wait in the queue, unable to enter the subcontinent for all the rain breaking decades-old weather records. Waterfalls and runoff abound, and all the tanks and tirthams around the Hill are filled to the brim as the frogs and toads chant in unison.

In this issue we look at the first part of a series on the life of Frank H. Humphreys who came to Bhagavan while serving as Asst. Superintendent of Police in Vellore and who immediately revealed himself as a deeply sensitive and spiritual young man who fell on Bhagavan's words with the urgency of one lost in a desert without water (page 3).

On page 11, see the short biography of Ashram Vedapatasala teacher, Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal who peacefully passed away at the beginning of October.

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 Ashram Events

4th November (Thurs) Deepavali
19th November (Fri) Kartigai Deepam Day
24th November (Weds) Punarvasu
18th December (Sat) Full Moon
21st December (Tues) Bhagavan's Jayanti
31st December (Fri) Lucy-ma Day

12th January (Weds) Sivaprakasam Pillai
14th January (Fri) Pongal/Ramaswami Pillai
17th Jan (Mon) Punarvasu/Full Moon/Chinnaswami
12th February (Sat) Munagala Venkataramaiah Day
14th February (Mon) Punarvasu
15-16th February (Tues-Weds) Full Moon





IN PROFILE

Frank H. Humphreys

Over the decades, we have heard a lot about Frank Humphreys who came to see Bhagavan at Virupaksha Cave in November 1911. B. V. Narasimha Swami devoted two chapters to the young Britisher in his *Self-Realisation*, and Arthur Osborne included a long segment on him in his *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*. The attention Humphreys has received from devotees over the years is well-deserved for even in the early memoir of his encounter with Bhagavan (published in *The International Psychic Gazette* in 1925), the reader discerns a deeply insightful spiritual mind. As we learn later, Humphreys went on to devote himself full time to the religious life and

at the age of 36, joined a Catholic religious order, where he served as a Dominican friar and priest for the remainder of his life.

In taking up his story, it is hard to know where to begin considering its many twists and turns, a résumé of life events and vocational pursuits so vastly diverse that it boggles the mind. In reviewing Humphreys' biography, the reader encounters an exotic range of quests, adventures, vocations, career stints, intellectual interests, and experiments in living, all of which ultimately divulge the workings of a soul dominated by the longing for God. No doubt some of the impetus for Humphreys' intense search were born of recurrent struggles with his mortality. He suffered fragile health from his boyhood and found himself on death's doorstep numerous times over the course of his life. Already at the age of seven, he was hospitalised with blood poisoning and again at eight, with diphtheria.

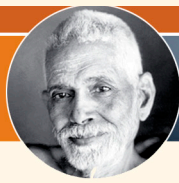
In a short book compiled by his Dominican brothers, his health challenges and injuries over the course of his 85 years were enumerated:

His illnesses included typhoid, pneumonia, bronchitis, pleurisy, malaria, jaundice, cardiac asthma, hernia, and tuberculosis. He twice broke his nose, twice broke his arm, had his appendix out, suffered a spinal injury and a spinal abscess, underwent three operations for glandular tuberculosis, sustained fractures of the bones in his face from a [near-fatal] plane crash, had a kidney removed, and gall bladder disease. He spent about seven years in hospital at different times. He broke his ribs at 79, both his legs at 80, and a hip and thigh [when struck by a car] at the age of 82.¹

Reading this inventory of debilities, one might get the impression that Humphreys would have had to have been denied a normal active life and instead would have spent most of his life as a bed-ridden paraplegic but nothing could be further from the truth. Among other things, Humphreys had joined the Royal Flying Corps as a fighter pilot during the First World War, studied journalism, wrote for *The Daily Mail* and served as Assistant Superintendent of Police in Vellore. His confreres amassed a list of his various occupations and undertakings prior to joining the Dominican order:

¹ *Not So Trivial A Tale*, p. 8. This short biography compiled by Humphreys' Dominican confreres in 1975 in South Africa came to light and was acquired from a Dominican archivist by the efforts of the American Ramana devotee, John Imes.





He [had once been] engaged to be married which only broke off at the last moment, he farmed in the Sundays River valley, worked as a storekeeper and farm manager, worked in the Post Office at East London as a sorter, was secretary to a Swiss doctor, tutor to the son of a rich American, ran a joinery business, and belonged to the Catholic Evidence Guild. He [did theological studies], was ordained as a priest, served as a chaplain to a convent, was Spiritual Director to African students, became the Preacher General, and wielded his pen throughout his life, [publishing numerous articles and books].²

Humphreys' dynamism began from an early age and his precocity showed itself in his learning to read and write and do simple mathematics by the age of four. On his fourth birthday, he began studying Latin. His father and mother had French ancestry, and his mother was fluent, so Humphreys picked up French easily. At the age of 10, he attended the Kings Choir School at Cambridge and at 15, he put in for the Chinese Interpretership, an entry into the Diplomatic Corps which entailed study in Lobberich, Germany where he picked up German. By the age of 20 he was in India and passed exams in Telugu. He learned Russian while hospitalised after crashing his fighter plane, and after the war, he joined the Intelligence Service.³

It is dizzying just to even hear of all these varied undertakings. But when we eavesdrop on Humphreys at the feet of Bhagavan, we discover that there was an intense and incessant inquiry at work within him.⁴ No doubt these many diverse occupations were the outward expression of a desperate inner struggle.

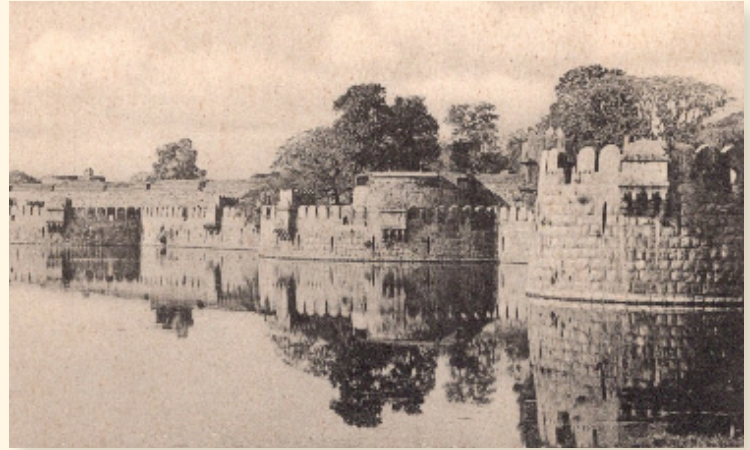
By his own admission he had been a difficult pupil, and at the age of 15, he had a piece of bone removed from the tip of his nose which had been broken in a fist fight. He thought that the disagreeable nature he exhibited in his youth was born of the fact that his mother 'practised Fortune Telling, Table Turning, Second Sight and later, Spiritualism'. In his autobiography, he writes:

Because of Fortune Telling [and Spiritualism, one has] a strong tendency to develop a subtle form of pride, lying and vainglory,

² Ibid., p. 8.

³ Ibid., p.15.

⁴ See the teachings section in *Glimpses of the Life and Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 16-25.



Vellore Fort, early 1900s

*injuring the development of the intellect and developing undue dependence upon imagination.*⁵

Even if the pride he mentions here was not evident in his personal life story, the written record contains some evidence that Humphreys may have possessed psychic gifts and a prolific dream life. One example of this is what he revealed to S. Narasimhayya, the Telugu Munshi⁶ in Vellore, namely, what he had seen during his fevers and sleep while in the hospital at Bombay. More on that later. As for his mother, though he had ultimately rejected her 'occultism', he loved her dearly and knew of her innate goodness:

*Well, poor dear, she had a hard time trying to make ends meet and in this continual and exhausting struggle she showed marvellous courage. She was always planning and working for those around her and within seven weeks of being 91, she was going on foot up and down the mile to town twice every day at full speed doing things mainly for other people. I am thankful to have had such a mother and her mistakes count for nothing beside her goodness. Yes, Almighty God looked after her.*⁷

The unevenness of Humphreys early life was offset by an abiding interest in religious faith and already at 15, he was given a copy of *The Imitation of Christ* to translate from the Latin.⁸

⁵ *Not So Trivial A Tale*, p. 12.

⁶ 'Munshi' (Persian) is a respected title for administrators, heads of departments, accountants, secretaries, teachers scholars and polyglots hired by the government in India (especially during British occupation).

⁷ *Not So Trivial A Tale*, p. 13.

⁸ Ibid., p. 14.





Kavya Kantha Ghanapati Muni as a young man, ca. 1905

Arrival in India

While he was studying to enter the Student Interpreters in China, there had been a change of age for those entering and his coaches thus advised him to try for the Indian Police instead. He passed the Police examination, but just barely. His poor performance was due to ill-health. After nearly dying from illness, he sailed for India on 31st December 1910. While en route, he developed pleurisy and upon arrival in Bombay, was admitted into the Bombay Hospital where he nearly died again. To make matters worse, he contracted malaria. He was eventually discharged and was advised to recuperate for two months in the hill country before taking up his post in Vellore. Due to back trouble, he was

unable to ride the horse assigned to him for his police work, so instead, he bought a motorcycle.⁹

It was during this time that there was a significant development in his life. He reached Vellore on the 18th of March 1911 and soon after his arrival, met S. Narasimhayya, the Telugu Munshi commissioned to teach him Telugu. The young pupil, however, appears to have been more interested in esoteric things and asked for a book on astrology. The second day, he asked the Munshi: 'Do you know any Mahatma here?' to which Narasimhayya answered in the negative. The biographer B.V. Narasimha Swami recounts the following conversation:

The very next morning the pupil met the Munshi and said: 'Munshi, you said yesterday that you did not know any Mahatma. [But] I saw your Guru this morning in my sleep. He sat by my side. The first man of Vellore whom I met in Bombay was yourself.' The Munshi protested saying that he had never visited Bombay; but the pupil explained that during his stay at the Bombay Hospital, he had directed his mind to Vellore, and in his astral body had seen the figure of the Munshi. The Munshi then placed about 8 or 10 photographs of Holy Men before his pupil, out of which the latter picked up the photograph of Kavya Kantha Ghanapati Muni and said: 'This is the likeness of your Guru. Is he not your Guru? Tell me.' The munshi admitted the fact.¹⁰

The professional arrangement between Humphreys and the Munshi quickly gained a personal character and studying Telugu took a back seat. The Munshi writes:

One day, when I was teaching him Telugu in Vellore, he asked me for paper and pencil and drew a picture of a mountain cave with a sage standing at its entrance and a stream gently flowing down the hill in front of the cave. He said he saw this in his sleep and asked me what it would be. Immediately the thought of our Maharshi, then dwelling in the Virupaksha Cave, came to my mind and I told him about Sri Ramana Paramatma. From the day he saw Ghanapati Sastrigal in his dream, he had been asking and urging me to take him to the Sastriar.¹¹

Humphreys met the Munshi's guru, Ghanapati Muni, not long after this and from the beginning, gained great respect for the scholar. Humphreys made numerous observations about the Muni—his prodigious learning,

⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰ *Self-realisation*, B.V. Narasimha Swami, p. 69.

¹¹ *Glimpses*, pp. 8-9.





his ability to spellbind large audiences through his discourses, and most extraordinary of all, his ability to fluently speak languages he had picked up in only a couple of weeks. When Humphreys asked how he could learn a language so quickly, the Muni said, 'By meditation'.

Still more impressive for Humphreys was witnessing the Muni's formidable meditation skills, not least of all his ability to sit in meditation at a single spot with eyes open for seven days without food or water or laying down to sleep. Such spiritual feats were unheard of in

his native England, and he had no way of explaining these capacities.¹²

By November 1911, Humphreys had adequately demonstrated his sincerity, and Ghanapati Muni and the Munshi, at long last, took Humphreys to Tiruvannamalai to have the darshan of the 'Mahatma' Humphreys had glimpsed in his dream.¹³

(to be continued)

¹² *Glimpses*, p. 12.

¹³ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p. 112.

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Navaratri Celebrations, 7-15th October

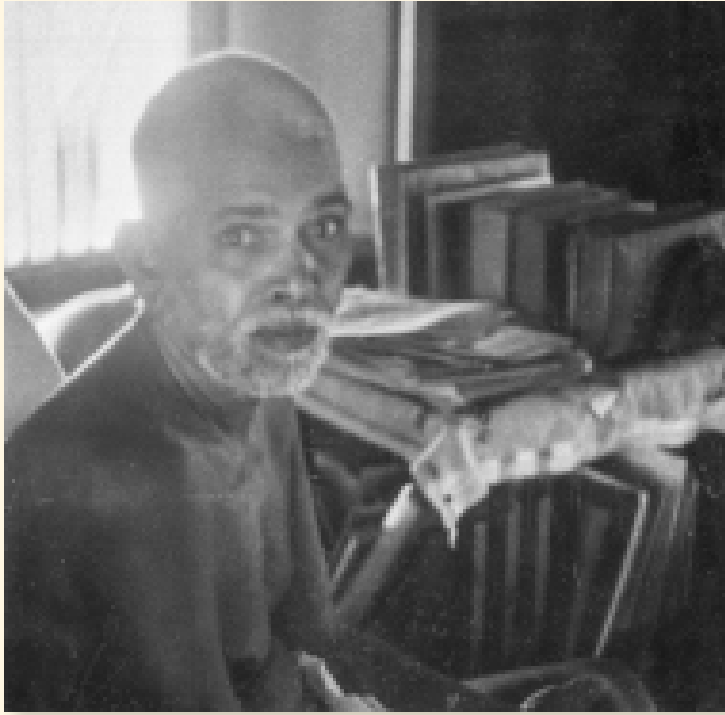


On Thursday, 7th October, Navaratri began in the Ashram. Owing to the Covid restrictions, Yogambika was not taken in procession the day before nor installed at the foot of the Mantapam in Mother's Shrine. Like Navaratri last year, all the pujas were simple without Navaratri themed *alankaras*. However, the devotional singing at pujas by Ramanan Balachandran and Adithi Aiyer, and daily recitation of *Lalithasahasranamam* and *Devi Mahatmyam* were extraordinary this year.

This year's festival was eight nights, owing to the way the *tithis* fell, and on the last night devotees sang the 21-verse Mahishasura Mardini stotram, venerating the "slayer of the buffalo-demon". Devotees will remember that Mahishasura was born to Rambha, king of the asuras and Princess Shyamala (his water-buffalo mother) and later invaded heaven and defeated Indra. Since he was invincible to all male forms, the devas created Durga, who possessed the combined strength of all the devas. Durga and her army fiercely fought the demon and his forces for nine days until she finally killed Mahishasura on *dasami shukla paksha*, the tenth day of the waxing moon.

Worship in the Ashram on this last night consisted in a brief performance by Ramanan Balachandran who sang with his veena followed by a brief discourse by Sabari (Shadakshara Ghanapatigal), the late Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal's younger brother. —





RAMANA REFLECTIONS

Refining Our Vichara

If the practise of vichara is sometimes confusing, it is because we often imagine that by asking the question ‘who am I?’, we will someday discover a little self in there somewhere. But ‘who am I?’ is designed to reveal to us that no such little self exists.

If we have taken on faith Bhagavan’s words that there is no ego, this is all well and good, but still we conduct our lives as though it were there. Bhagavan gives us vichara as a means of wearing away the ‘I am the body’ delusion, bit by bit. To be sure, the ego nexus is illumined by the light of the Self, as Bhagavan has pointed out on numerous occasions. However, very often we get tricked into believing that the Self is discoverable by the mind and can be seen as an object. What Bhagavan means is something completely different. In wearing away the ego notion in a war of attrition, we come to experience first-hand that the ego is an illusion. In the vacant space that remains, there is only the Ground of Being, and we find we no longer need a *sense of agency* to give us a *sense of being*. As the process

unfolds, we discover that what we have always thought of as ego is in fact just a layering of unhealed psychic material—orphaned emotions, disappointments, memories, fears, anxieties, traumas, samskaras, vasanas, and sensory fragments—all looking for something to belong to. This orphaned psychic material constellates around the manasic functions of the mind and seem to take on lives of their own. Disparate isolated bits of psychic material imbued with a sense of lack, fear and reactivity, begin to communicate with one another. Their fragmentation is the operative mechanism that leads to their bonding with one another. They form a nexus, and the nexus feels solid. The nexus’s organising principle is reactivity and preference, i.e. preferring some things and resisting others. We mistake this aggregation as an entity and give it a name—‘deluded mind’, ‘small self’ or ‘manas’—and imagine it as having an independent substantial existence.

Here is where Bhagavan asks us to insert our investigation. To be clear, the who in ‘who am I?’ is negatively positioned, is not meant to identify an entity but rather to reveal that no such entity is there. Like monkeys grasping at reflections, however, our entire lives have been spent groping after this delusion and calling it ‘I’. Bhagavan’s vichara is designed to clear up this delusion.

The irony is that this orphaned psychic material can serve as the portal that leads us to freedom if we would just accept it on its own terms and work compassionately with it. But we have lost direct contact with it. It lives within us as the shadow of our conscious mind, ever-present but perfectly hidden from view. If we had direct contact with it, its destructive influence on our inner life would be moderated, even healed. As it is, however, it is denied and banished to the unconscious, and thus its harmful effects continue unabated.

When we look out into the world through the filter of these distortions, we imagine the pain and discomfort they cause us are coming from outside of us—as coming from our spouse, from our children, from our colleagues at work, from our neighbours, from the government, from some religious or ethnic other, from the weather—in what is a scapegoating of reality. In traditional language, such scapegoating would be called





superimposition. But whether we call it superimposition, externalisation, or psychological projection, such reactivity amounts to colouring the world by and through the filter of our banished afflictions. Differentiation is the means for teasing out this mistaken filtering.

Grief of the Lost Son

An image from real life would be the mother who is notified by the government that her soldier-son has been lost in battle. For years she grieves the loss until one day, the boy, having been a prisoner of war and very much alive all the while, is released by the enemy. Her joy knows no bounds. But was her anguish all those years mistaken? The grief was real, but it was based on erroneous information. Likewise, suffering born of defilements has its root in the mistaken notion of a separate self. While the notion is erroneous, the grief is real, and thus deserves our compassion. If the mother had had direct contact with the enemy, she might have learned of her son's true status earlier. But communication had been cut off between the warring factions. If we have communication with the enemy of defilements and afflictions through inquiry, we have a better chance of knowing our own true status.

A Banquet of Consequences

Orphaned psychic content, whether called afflictions, defilements, *vasanas* or *samskaras*, is the gateway to the knowledge of the Self. If 'sooner or later we must sit down to a banquet of consequences', as Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote, the efforts to refine our *vichara* practice means deliberately taking a seat at the banquet

table. Instead of blaming our pain and afflictions on others or just ignoring them, instead of allowing our defilements to catch us off guard in times of stress, we go after them in advance—proactively, intentionally, and courageously—inquiring into their nature and trusting in the healing power of *vichara* to scour away all that is unwholesome within us. It is the uncomfortable material of the psyche that steers our inquiry inward, even if sometimes this is the last place we want to look. We find that the very thing that would seem to impede our path turns out to be the doorway to our deliverance.

The reader may recall the legend about a jealous Brahma trying to keep humans from discovering their divinity. Brahma called a council of the gods to help decide on the right place to conceal their divinity. 'Let's bury it deep in the earth,' said one of the gods. But Brahma said, 'No, that will not do because humans will eventually dig into the earth and discover it.' Then another said, 'Let's hide it in the deepest part of the ocean.' But Brahma said, 'No, they will eventually dive down into the ocean and will discover it.' Another said, 'Let's take it to the top of the highest mountain and hide it there.' But once again Brahma replied, 'No, that will not do either, because they will eventually climb every mountain and will find it.' The assembly fell silent.

Brahma sat quietly and thought for a long time and then said, 'Well, there is one place they will never look'. 'Where's that?', the gods queried eagerly. 'They will never look inside their own hearts', said Brahma. 'If we hide it there, they shall never find it!'

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Viswanatha Swami Day, 22nd October



On 22nd October, devotees gathered at Viswanathaswami's shrine to observe the anniversary of his passing away 43 years ago in 1978 according to the English calendar. Chanting of the *Aksharamanamalai* preceded the *arati* and distribution of *prasad*. —





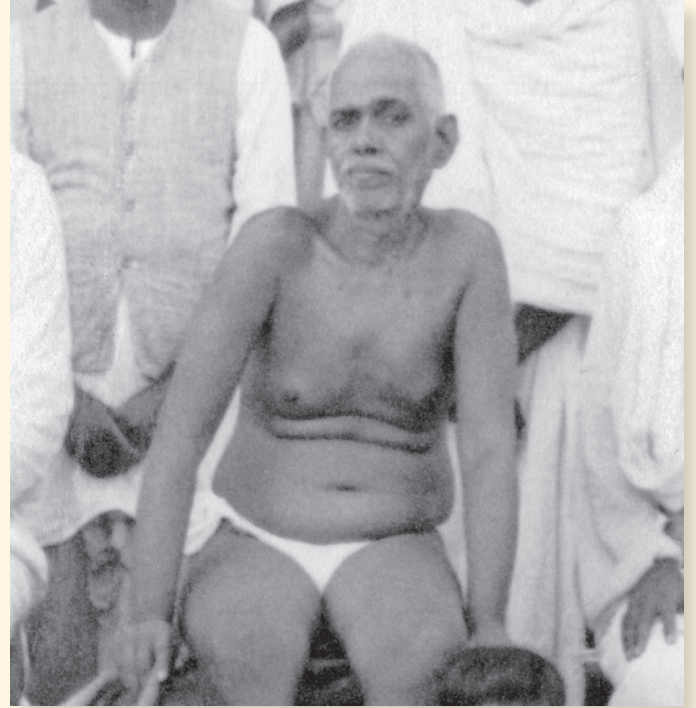
Differentiation

Bhagavan urges us to make the 180° turn to investigate our own heart, which is the source of our affliction, but too, the site of its redemption. We turn inward to glimpse the place we most fear—beneath the shadowy regions of the unconscious, beneath painful memories, innumerable disappointments, and endless vexations—so that we may find freedom and live. In taking up this work, we learn to cultivate the capacity for differentiation, not least of all, distinguishing an aggregation of orphaned psychic loose-ends from an illusory separate self. Differentiation is not the *fruit of enquiry* but rather *the very process* itself.

But what is differentiation? It is not unlike what we do when we make use of the observing power of the visible eye, namely, the faculty of sight, to distinguish the green of a tree from the blue of the sky. But differentiation in vichara is much more subtle and centres on making use of the observing power of the *inner* eye, namely, the faculty of intuition, to distinguish Self from non-self. If the keenness of the faculty of ordinary sight has a relatively fixed value, our inner sight grows sharper with use.

Bhagavan calls us to cultivate *aparoksha jnana* (knowledge of direct intuitive experience).¹ By it, we come to see that true vichara hinges on non-evaluative observation brought about by the faculty of discriminative wisdom. Differentiation means observing the subtle nature of mental phenomena, not in order to catalogue their infinite varieties but to know their nature directly through illuminating the objective field. Differentiation means cultivating the capacity to deconstruct the labels we use to define ourselves through a direct encounter with the inner landscape. This is where our divinity lies, Bhagavan tells us. It is also the place where we mend our afflictions, defilements, proclivities to reactivity, and the internal resistance we feel toward the things that life dishes out.

Differentiation helps us refine our vichara, making it potent. Refining our vichara is the means for bringing space and making the egoic nexus less tightly bound. We inquire into the constituents of the ego nexus, directly challenging the notion of a consolidated individual separate self. As we look more closely, we see through the ego's apparent density. If at first it appears solid and



whole, upon closer inspection, it is seen to be made up of thousands of disparate parts, unhealed fragments of the psyche, each independent of the other. Ego density takes on other forms. It appears to function as a single unit, as an agent (*manas*), because it seems to be busy and at work all the time, performing the ongoing tasks of daily living. But when enquired into, we see that the mechanisms of the mind performing daily functions are not part of a single entity but rather are independent faculties of consciousness (*indriyas*).

Ego density is in part attributable to the *illusion of continuity*. We watch the passing show of events in our lives day to day and imagine that a single entity is operating throughout whereas, like the individual frames in a movie projector, each is independent of the next. When we slow down the movie, we see that each frame is not continuous with the next.

The mind moves so quickly that we naturally assume there is agency at work all the way through. But if we slow the mind down through a refined vichara practice, we begin to see the individual frames and the mind's disparate elements, i.e. thought, feelings, and myriad other mental formations. We assume that because there is a thought, there must be a thinker. But Bhagavan asks us to inquire into the one thinking the thought. He knows that the thinker is nowhere to be found.

¹ *Letters*, 28 September 1947.





He knows that inquiring into the thinker reveals each thought as just one more frame in the cinema-illusion of continuity. At first this discovery can be jarring. But it is ultimately freeing because soon we come to see that these are not *my* thoughts; they are just thoughts that arise in the mind as a matter of course.

The illusion of continuity is born of not having a chance to view thoughts from the outside but being totally caught up in them. With never even a millimetre's distance from them, we are helplessly adrift in the thought stream, thinking of it as 'myself'. But when we step back and view thought (and the thought stream) as an independent reality, we gain distance from it, and the illusion of continuity is momentarily broken.

The same applies to other mental phenomena including feelings which are even more seductive in respect of the cinema-illusion of continuity. When we leave off identifying with feelings, thoughts, worries, fears and sensations as *myself*—as *the Self*—we begin to see all mental and emotional conditions as just arbitrary impersonal occurrences arising in the mind.

But now, what about the Self?

Bhagavan tells us the Self is that which is leftover once we see through the density-illusion of the thinker. Bhagavan never subscribed to the term 'witness' to describe the Self because the Self is beyond subject and object:

*For whom is inside or outside? They can be only so long as there are the subject and object. For whom are these two again? They both resolve into the subject only. See who is in the subject. The investigation leads you to pure consciousness beyond the subject.*²

² Talks §42. See also Talks §62 and §145, respectively: *If, on the other hand, the man feels himself to be the screen on which the subject and object are projected there can be no confusion, and he can remain watching their appearance and disappearance without any perturbation to the Self... There is no seer nor objects seen. The seer and the seen are the Self. There*

'Subject' and 'witness' are names we unwittingly assign to the ego, Bhagavan tells us. The Self, by contrast, is the neutral Silent Ground, the (Empty) Screen of Pure Awareness on which the objects of the world—including the ego—appear and play their roles.

If we penetrate the barrier of ego density just once, we have a good chance of piercing it again. We use vichara to gradually whittle away at the illusion of ego density which seeks to renew itself every step of the way. Though an incremental process, over time we find ourselves not being so reactive with others—with family members, friends, acquaintances and strangers. We find ourselves more resilient, better able to adjust in difficult circumstances.

If an ancient saying goes, 'patience is enlightenment', then the inverse corollary holds true: *reactivity is delusion*. But can we bring non-judgmental awareness to our reactive moments or do we make the reactive moment into a self? If the latter, we inquire into this newly made self. With diligent enquiry we soon discover that there is no self in it at all, but it is yet just another frame in the cinema-illusion of self.

If we can avoid the temptation to build a self around our moments of reactivity, irritation, anger, etc., then we begin to cultivate resilience in the face of life's hardships and can free up space in the density of the ego illusion. Gradually we begin to see through the ego's many ploys and machinations.

We do this not just by our own efforts, of course, but we ask for Bhagavan's grace. Indeed, we need to seek the guru's grace and to earnestly pray for it. When we do, the purifying power of a refined vichara begins to work for us as our greatest ally and friend. —

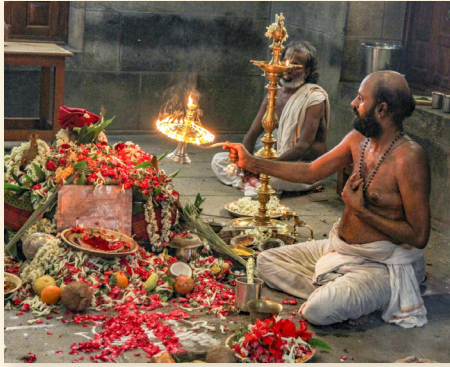
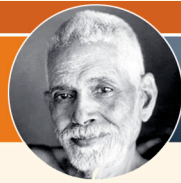
are not many selves either. All are only one Self.

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Ashram Wildlife



Ritual combat between male snakes is often misinterpreted as mating because the snakes are entwined. The fact is, experts tell us, snakes have no limbs to grab and hold their opponent, so they twist and entwine around each other, with each snake trying to rise higher than the other and press the opponent's head to the ground. The loser is the one who gets its head pushed to the ground; the winner gets the territory and the mating rights. —





Brahmasri Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal (1973 - 2021)



Born 15th July 1973 in Kavanur village of Cuddalore district, Brahmasri Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal came to Sri Ramanasramam in October 2002 when the Ashram Vedapatasala was in need of a new teacher. A thorough search had been made and then Ashram President V.S.

Ramanan, acting on a recommendation from Nochur Sri Venkataraman, phoned Sri Gowri Shankar about the possibility of bringing his son, Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal. Senthilnathan was at that time directing the Vedic school at Palghat and had recently married. When he got news of the proposal, he urged his father, who was then living in Bengal, to return to his native Tiruvannamalai after having worked for forty years in Kolkota. Toward the end of 2002, all was agreed upon, and the family settled at Tiruvannamalai where Senthil took up the task of reorganizing the Ashram Vedapatasala.

Senthil had come to the Vedas two decades earlier through the Kanchi Math Paramacharya, H. H. Chandrashekarendra Saraswati Swamigal, the 68th Acharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. It was in the early 1980s when the nine-year-old Senthil was to undergo *upanayanam* (sacred thread ceremony) and he and his father went to Mahaswami for his darshan and blessing. The Paramacharya told Gowri Shankar that Senthil was not meant for secular education and asked if he 'would be willing to spare the boy.'

Gowri Shankar was at a loss to know what service his nine-year-old son could render such a great saint as the Paramacharya. As he marvelled at the thought, the Maha Periyavaal stated plainly that 'the Vedas should be chanted for the benefit of the world' and that he wanted Senthil to enter Vedic life. Without the least hesitation Gowri Shankar gave his assent.

Senthilnathan was sent to the Kanchi Math Vedapatasala in Bangalore where he took up formal training and for the next eight years studied up through Kramam. Mahaswami then sent him to Tirupati for advanced training in Jata and Ghanam. Upon graduation, Senthilnathan was appointed as Vedapatasala teacher at Palghat where he remained for eight years before coming to Sri Ramanasramam.

Senthilnathan was an *agnibotri* and performed homas each day at his home. He showed himself to be a gifted teacher, exhibiting patience with his students and earning their deep love and respect. However, he was more than a teacher and saw to it that they got to see the important *kshetras* of South India and he took them annually for several years to Pandharpur. On one occasion, he took senior students and teachers to Kailash where his wife Akhila cooked for the group on the banks of Manasrovar.

With Senthilnathan's contacts with Vedapatasalas and Pundits, his excellent organisational skills and the respect he commanded in Vedic circles, the Ashram Vedapatasala grew in stature and was even designated along with Sringeri, Kanchipuram and Mysore as one of S. India's examination sites. From 2015, Vedapariksha began to be conducted annually at the Ashram and students from all over S. India appeared for their qualifying exams.

Senthilnathan was the *hota* and master of ceremonies during special rites and rituals at the Ashram including the annual Sri Vidya Homa, Samvatsara Abhishekam and the





Ati Rudram and Maha Rudram Homas. His adeptness at organising and overseeing liturgically complex rites and rituals was by all accounts outstanding.

Senthilnathan hosted the annual Ghanaparayanam during the Kartigai Deepam festival at the Tiruvannamalai branch of the Kanchipuram Sankara Math. The parayanam started fifteen years ago with approximately eight pandits and Vedacharyas and soon grew to sixty or more, all who participated in the ten full days of recitation. In addition to Krishna Yajur Veda and Rig Veda Ghanaparayanam, the programme included Nama Samkeertanam, an exposition of Sri Bhagavan's *Upadesa Saaram*, Sri Ramayanam Upanyasam, and Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarar Kalyanam. Senthilnathan saw to it that prasad was provided for all the pandits, and spectators were invited for lunch following the morning programme.

Senthilnathan aided local patasalas in finding teachers for them and assisted in placement for his students. He gave advanced classes at his home in the early morning. Upon passing by the family home, one would often hear Vedic recitation and devotional singing.

With the onset of the pandemic lockdown in March 2020, Senthil's health became fragile, and he underwent treatment in January 2021. On 29th September 2021, Senthil went to Pondicherry hospital for a routine check-up. The following day, however,

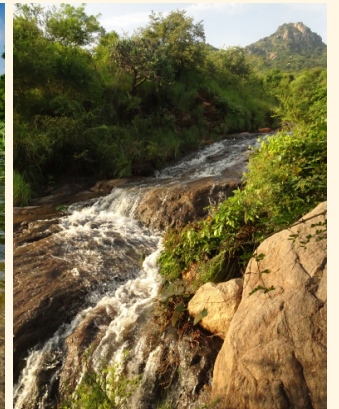
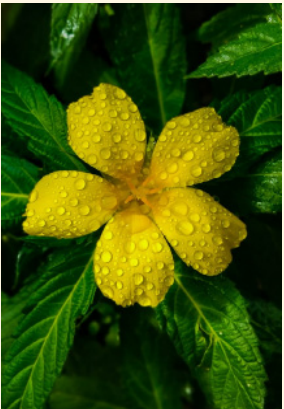
he suffered two heart attacks and fell unconscious. The family rushed to his bedside. On Friday morning 1st of October, he was fully conscious again and talked with his wife, brothers, and sons. But then suddenly around 11.30 am, at the tender age of 48, Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal succumbed to a heart attack and merged at the Feet of Arunachala.

In the Ashram, the ever-smiling Senthilnathan will be remembered for his kind, gentle nature and his willingness to help in whatever way needed. The former Ashram President, the late V. S. Ramanan had always said that in the Ashram Vedapatasala's 85-year-long history, Senthilnathan was the best teacher the school ever had.

Brahmasri Senthilnatha Ghanapatigal is survived by his wife Akhila, his two sons, Virupaksha and Purandharan Vitthal, his daughter, Bhavatarini, his mother Gita, his two brothers, Tat Tvam Asi and Sabari and his two sisters, Nivedita and Aparna. In the days following his demise, his numerous former students came from all over S. India to pay respects to their beloved teacher. Senthilnathan will be missed by all. —

[Senthilnathan's brother, Sabari (Shadakshara Ghanapatigal) has dutifully assumed the role of Ashram Vedapatasala teacher in the absence of his elder brother. In keeping with a tradition initiated by Senthilnathan, Sabari, along with his brother, Tat Tvam Asi are organizing the annual Ghanaparayana at the local Sankara Math taking place during the upcoming Kartigai Deepam Festival, 10-20th November 2021.]

Events in Tiruvannamalai: Pre-Monsoon Rains



With the ubiquitous sounds of waterfalls and river-streams from every quarter, the feeling in Tiruvannamalai is one of renewal and abundance. After nearly two years of lockdowns and restrictions, not to mention the multiple losses, it feels like nature is washing away the troubles that came with the pandemic and that all will be well and made new again. —

