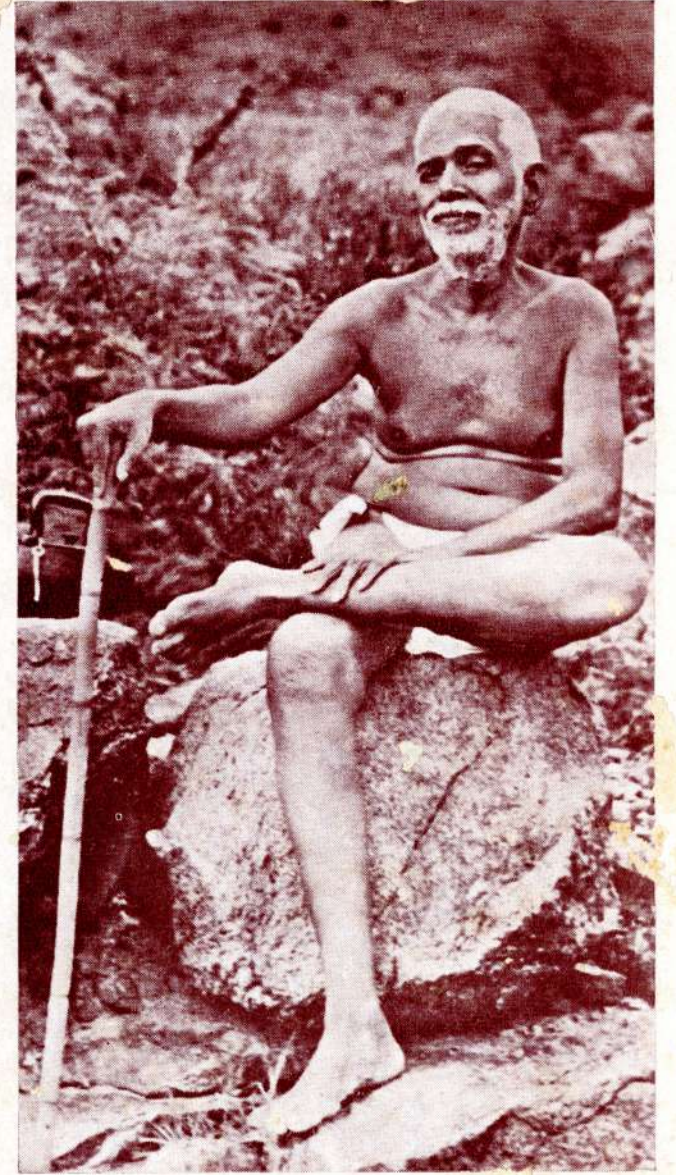
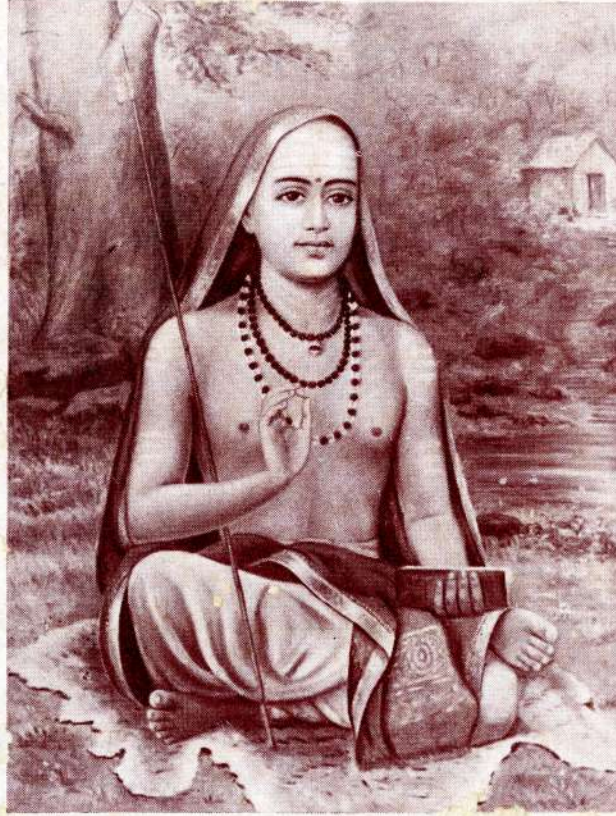


VENKATOO 60

SOUVENIR





दक्षिणामूर्तिसारम्भां शंकराचार्यमध्यमाम् ।

रमणाचार्यपर्यन्तां वन्देगुरुपरम्पराम् ॥

“ Obeisance to the line of Preceptors
With Dakshinamurti in the beginning,
Sankara in the middle and
Ramana in the end ! ”

“Who Am I?”

1. I am not the physical body, nor the senses, nor the mind, nor the state of ignorance in sleep. When all the aforementioned are rejected, THAT which alone remains am I. It is pure Awareness, the Self which is *Sat-Chit-Ananda*.

2. The pure Self is not realised unless the mind subsides. The mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts, and the first and foremost of all thought is the primal ‘I’-thought. Therefore, it is only through the enquiry “*Who am I?*” does the mind subside. To keep the mind constantly turned within and to abide thus in the Self is alone Self-enquiry.

3. By steady and continuous investigation into the nature of the mind, the mind is transformed into THAT to which ‘I’ refers, and that is verily the Self.

4. That which arises in the physical body as ‘I’ is the mind. If one enquires whence this I-ness first arises, it will be found that it is the Heart or *Hridayam*.

5. Restraint of the out-going mind and its absorption in the Heart is known as *antarmukhadrishti* or introversion. When the mind becomes absorbed in the Heart, the ‘I’ or ego vanishes ; and pure Consciousness or Self which subsists during all the states of the mind alone remains resplendent. This state, where there is not the slightest trace of the ‘I’-thought is one’s true *Swarupa*. And that is called Quiescence or *Mouna* ; that is also true Wisdom.

6. The Self alone exists ; and the Self alone is real. Verily the Self alone is the world, the ‘I’ and God. All that exists is but the manifestation of the Supreme Being.

7. Firm and disciplined inherence in the Self does verily constitute self-surrender to the Supreme Lord. Let any amount of burden be laid on Him. He doth bear it all.

8. That which is Bliss is verily the Self. Bliss and the Self are one and identical. And THAT alone is real. Not even in one of the countless objects of world is there anything that can be called happiness. This phenomenal world is nothing but thought. When the mind is free from thought it enjoys the Bliss of the Self. The mind of the Enlightened One never exists apart from the Self Absolute or *Brahman*.

9. God and *Guru* are one. He that has earned the Grace of the *Guru* shall undoubtedly be saved and never forsaken. But the disciple, for his part, should follow the path shown by the Master.

10. Likes and dislikes, love and hatred, are equally to be eschewed. It is not proper to let the mind rest often on the objects or affairs of mundane life. If the ego subsides all else will also subside. The deeper the humility with which we conduct ourselves, the better it is for us. Everything that is offered to others is really an offering to oneself. Not to desire anything extraneous to oneself is *Vairagya* or Dispassion. Not to give up one’s hold on the Self is *Jnana* or Enlightenment. Thus *Vairagya* and *Jnana* are really one and the same. Pledged to *Vairagya*, every aspirant must dive deep into himself and realise the precious *Atman*, the Self Absolute.



**Dawn is rising on the Hill,
Sweet Ramana, come !
Lord Arunachala, come !**

**In the bush the koel sings,
Dear Master Ramana, come !
Lord of Knowledge, come !**

**The conch blows, the stars are dim,
Sweet Ramana, come !
Lord God of Gods, come !**

**The cocks crow, the birds chirp,
It is already time, come !
The night has fled, come !**

**The trumpets blow, the drums beat,
Gold-bright Ramana, come !
Knowledge Awake, come !**

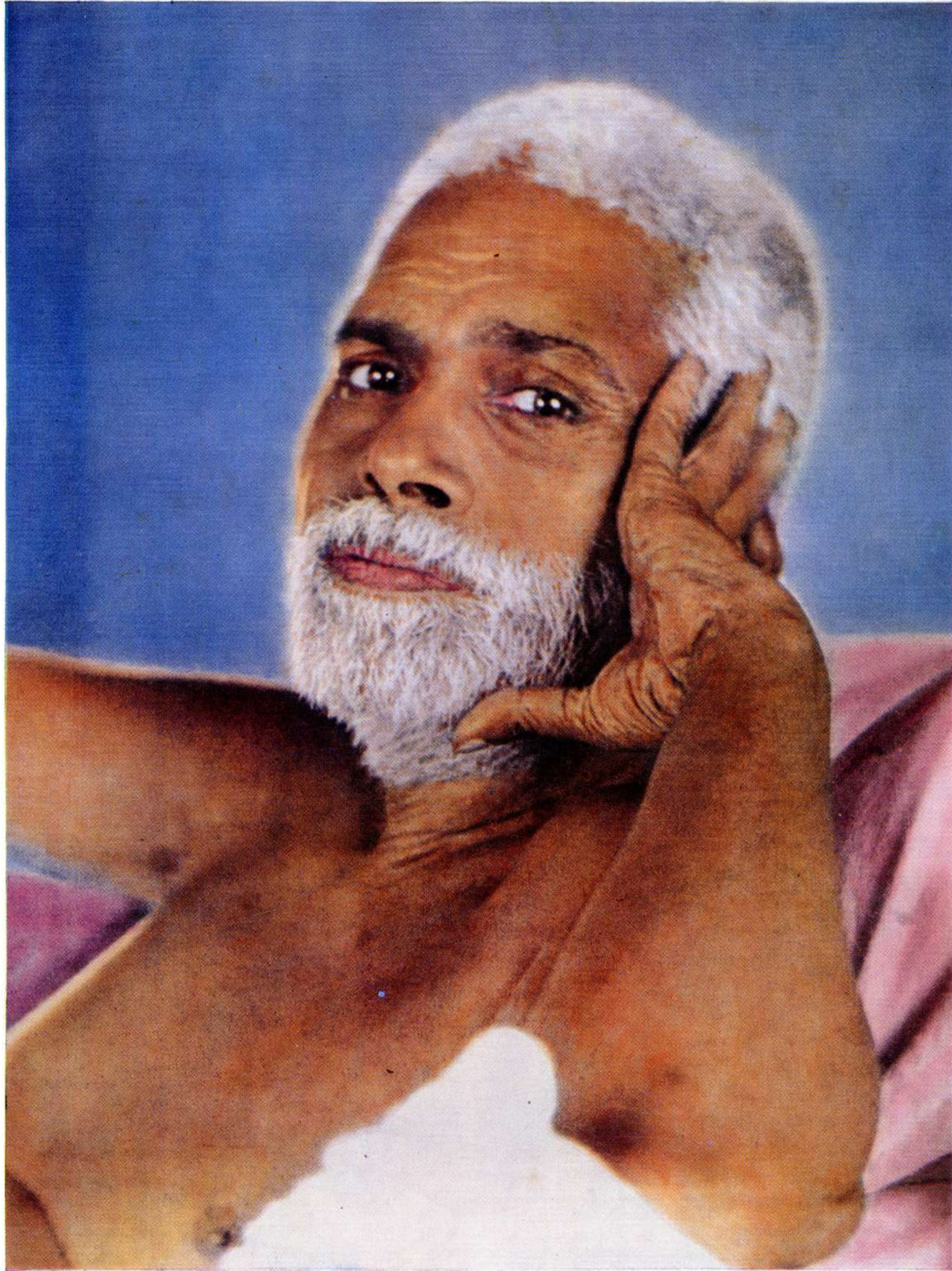
**The crows caw, it is morn,
Snake-decked Lord, come !
Blue-throated Lord, come !**

**Ignorance is fled, the lotuses open,
Wise Lord Ramana, come !
Crown of the Vedas, come !**

**Unstained by qualities, Lord of Liberation,
Gracious Ramana, come !
Lord Peace, come !**

**Sage and Lord,
One with Being-Knowledge-Bliss,
Lord dancing in joy, come !**

**Love on the summit of Knowledge,
Past pleasure, past pain, come !
Blissful Silence, come !**



Those who take refuge at the Lotus Feet of the Supreme Lord of Mercy presiding over Arunachala — their minds freed of attachment to riches, lands and relatives, and to caste and the like, and ever made purer by seeking Thy Benign Grace — these rid themselves (of the misery) of darkness, and in the steady light of Thy ever-protecting Grace, which shines like the golden rays of the rising sun, they abide happy, sunk in the Ocean of Bliss.

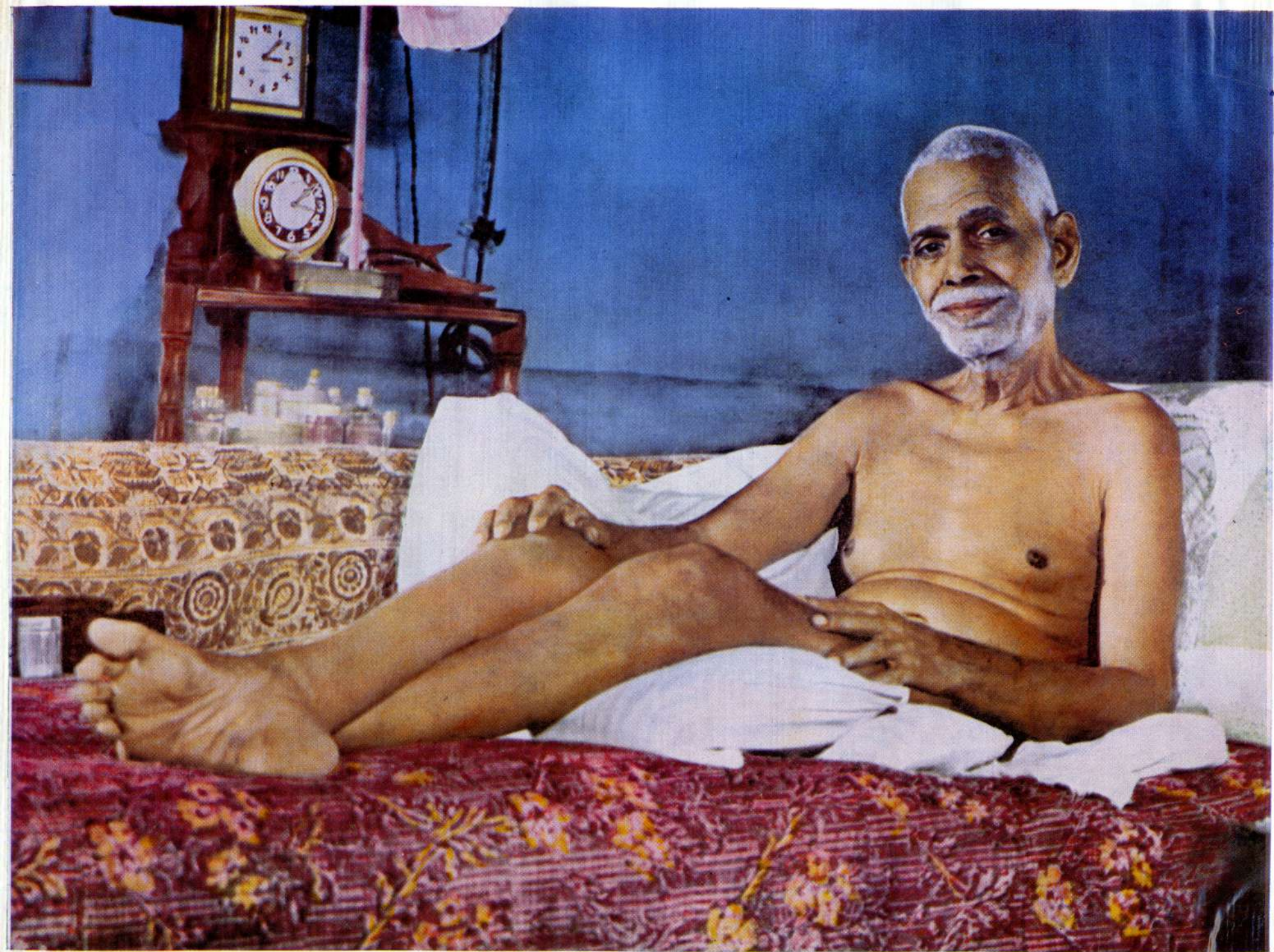
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Lord ! Who art Consciousness Itself, reigning over the sublime Arunachala, forgive all the grievous wrongs of this poor self, and by Thy Gracious Glance, benignant as a rain cloud, save me from being lost once more in the dreary waste, or else I cannot ford the grim (stream of universal) manifestation. Thou art the Universal Mother ; what can match a mother's care for her child ?



Bearing and tending me in the world in the shape of my father and mother, Thou didst abide in my mind, and before I fell into the deep sea called *Jaganmaya* (universal illusion) and was drowned, Thou didst draw me to Thee, Lord, Consciousness Itself, such is the wonder of Thy Grace !

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Drawing me with the cords of Thy Grace, although I had not even dimly thought of Thee, Thou didst decide to kill me outright. How then has one so weak as I offended Thee that Thou dost leave the task unfinished ? Why dost Thou torture me thus, keeping me suspended between life and death ? Fulfil Thy wish, and long survive me all alone, Oh Lord !



Lord of my life ! I am ever at Thy Feet, like a frog (which clings) to the stem of the lotus ; make me instead a honey-bee which (from the blossom of the Heart) sucks the sweet honey of Pure Consciousness ; then shall I have Deliverance. If I am lost while clinging to Thy Lotus Feet, it will be for Thee a standing column of ignominy, Oh Blazing Pillar of Light ! Oh (wide) Expanse of Grace, more subtle than the ether !

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O Transcendent ! I am the first of those who have not the Supreme Wisdom to clasp Thy Feet in freedom from attachment. Ordain Thou that my burden be transferred to Thee and my free-will effaced, for what indeed can be a burden to the Sustainer (of the universe) ? Lord Supreme ! I have had enough (of the fruits) of carrying (the burden of) this world upon my head, parted from Thee. Supreme Self ! think no more to keep me at a distance from Thy Feet !



**If there were not being could there be any idea of being ?
Since that which is free from mental concepts and is
within oneself, who is there to contemplate it ? It is called
the Heart. Know that to remain within oneself as being is
to contemplate It.**

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**Those who have great fear of death seek refuge at the
feet of the Supreme Lord who is without birth and death,
in order to overcome their fear. They then die to themselves
along with their adjuncts (sense of ' I ' and ' mine '). Will
those who are (have realised themselves to be) deathless
entertain again the thought of death ?**



That in which this entire universe is established, to which it pertains, out of which it arises, for which it exists, by which it comes into being, and which it really is — that is the Self-existent Reality, the Truth. Let us worship That in the heart.

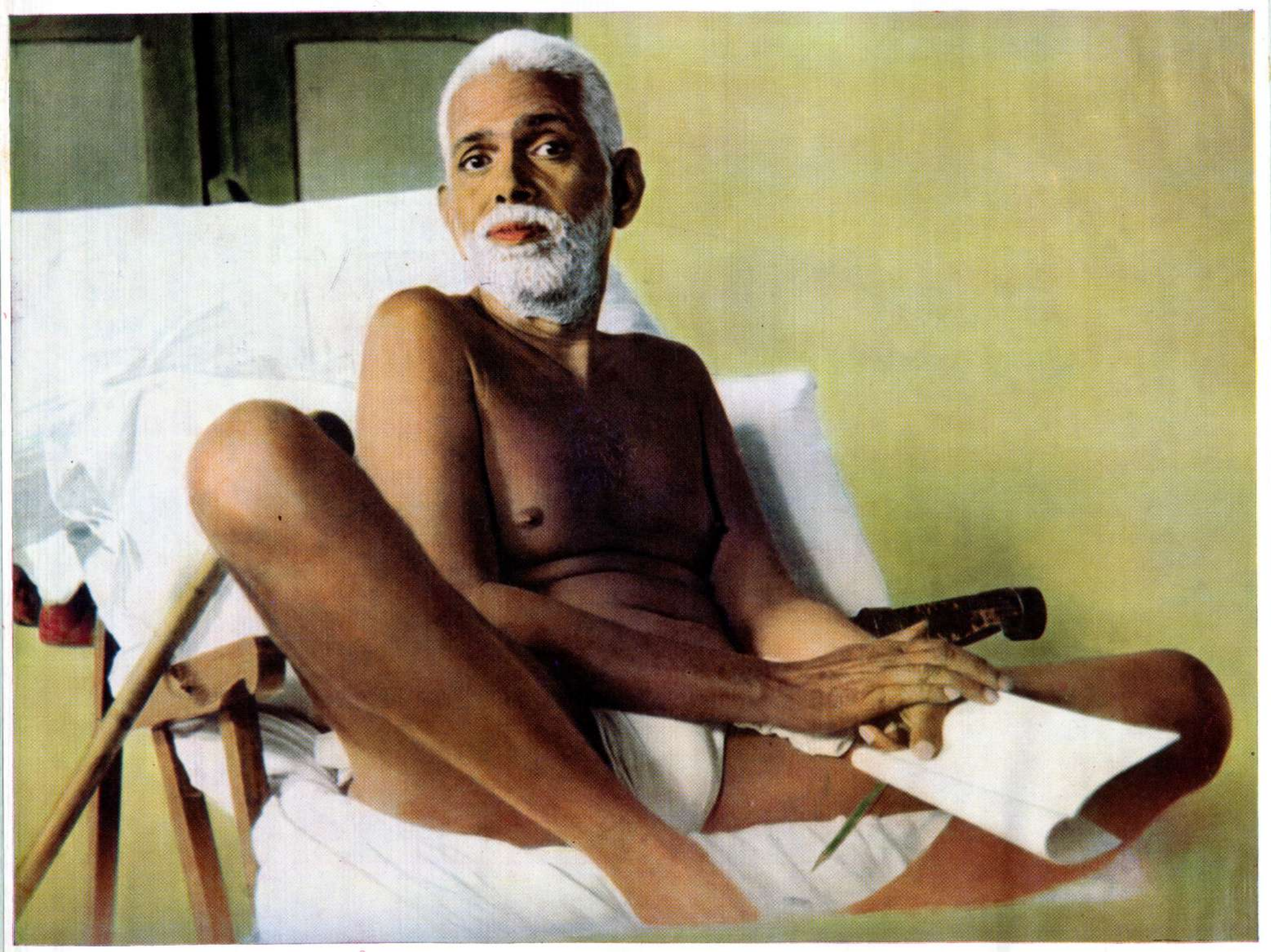
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Gifts, penance, sacrifice, upright conduct, self-control, devotion, heaven (the expanse of consciousness), substance (existence), peace, truth, grace, silence, the Supreme State, deathless death, knowledge, renunciation, Liberation, bliss — know that all these are only severance of the ‘ I-am-the-body-consciousness ’.



To enquire who it is who has karma, *vibhakti* (lack of devotion), *viyoga* (separation) and *ajnana* (ignorance), is the true path of karma, bhakti, yoga and jnana. Remaining as the Self which has none of these things, and without an ego to make the enquiry, is indeed the true state.

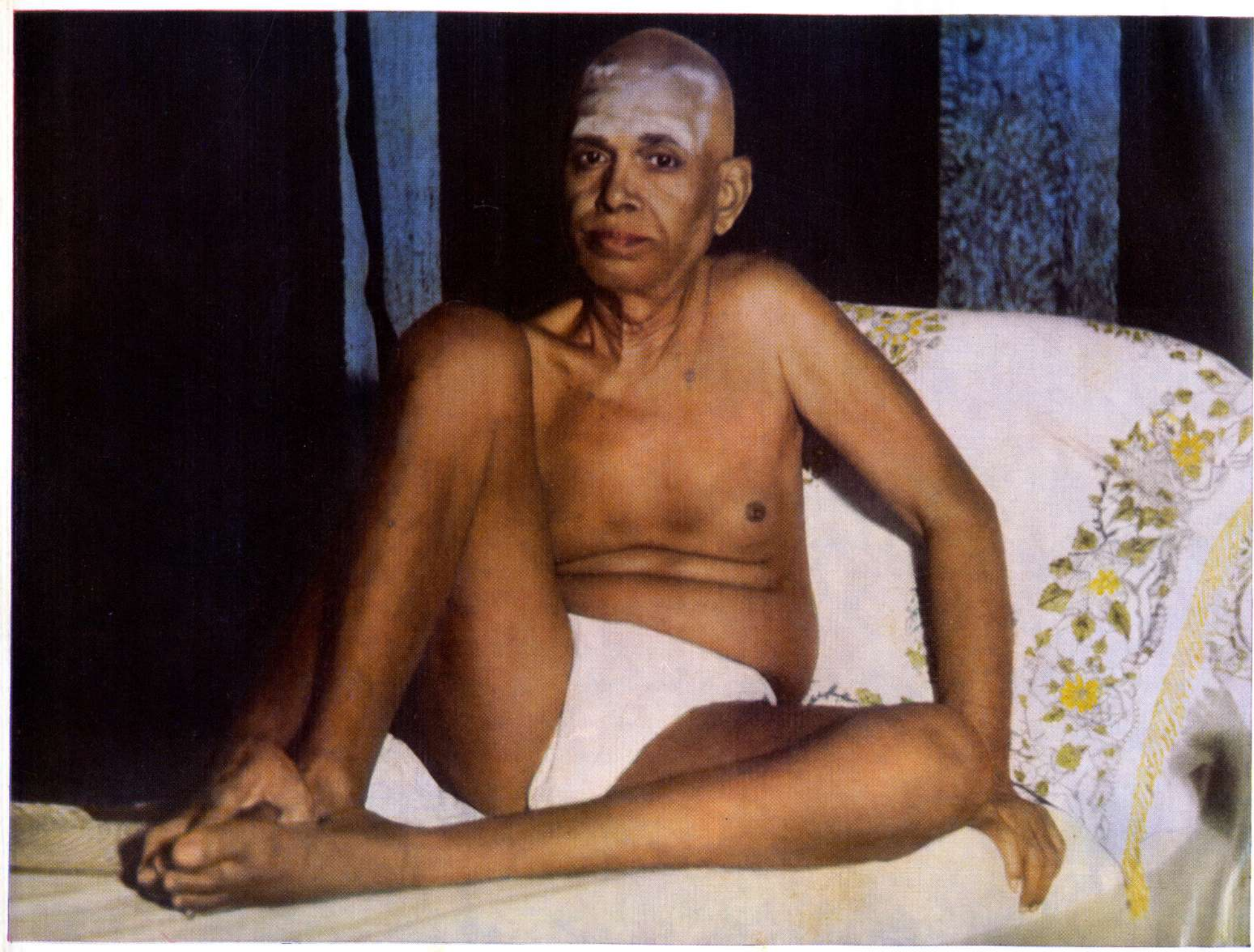
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The Lord bears the burden of the world. The pseudo-self which thinks it bears it is like the grinning sculptured figure (at the foot of a temple tower) which seems to support it. Whose fault is it if one who travels in a cart carries his luggage on his head to his own discomfort instead of putting it in the cart which carries it anyway ?



The Lord who dwells and shines in the lotus of the heart is worshipped as Guhesa (Lord of the Cave-Heart). When, by continued effort, the conviction ' I-am-the-Guhesa ' becomes as firm as the sense of ' I ' in your body and you become that Lord, nescience of the form ' I-am-the-perishable-body ' will disappear like darkness at sunrise.

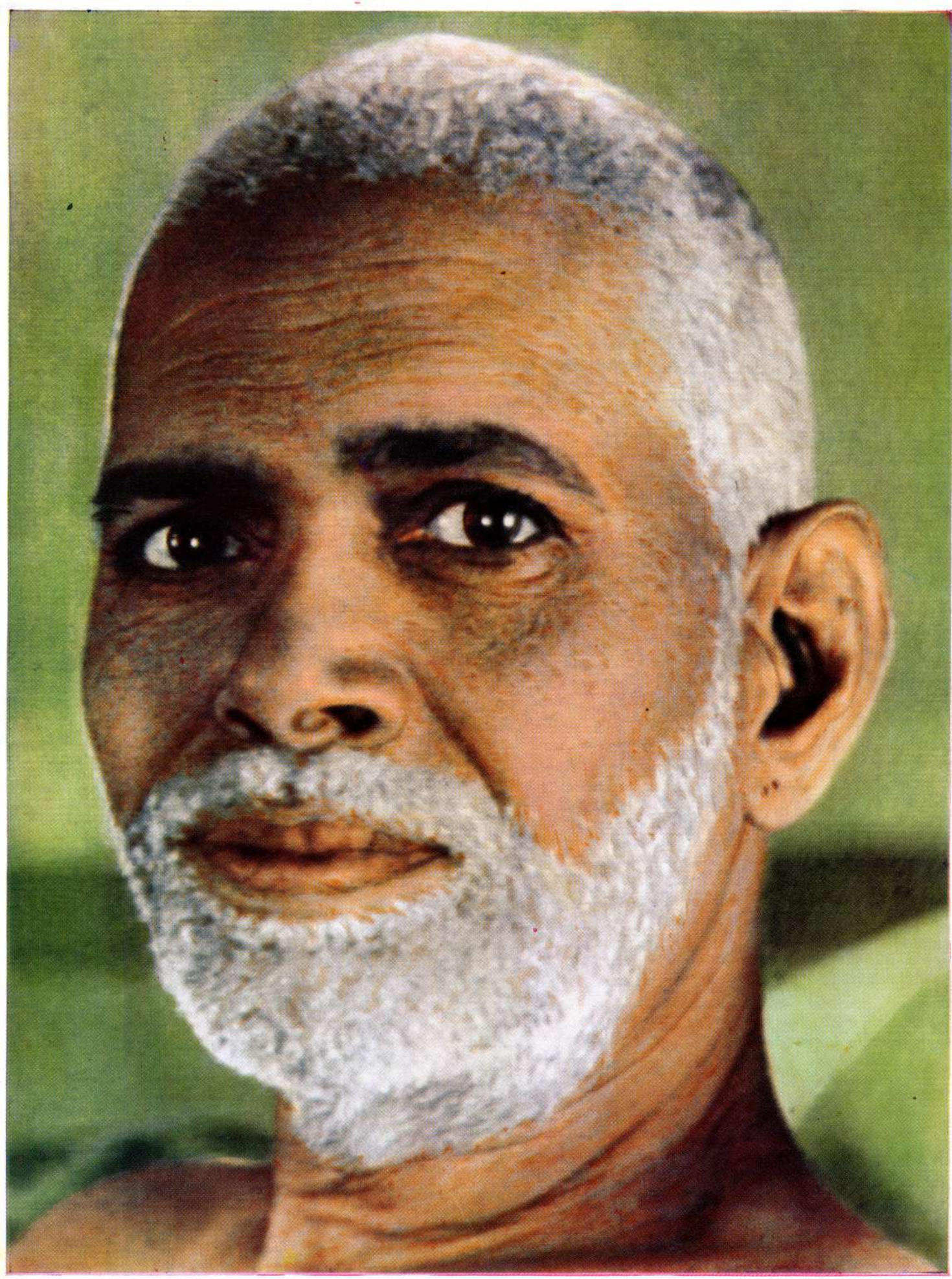
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The waters rise up from the sea as clouds, then fall as rain and run back to the sea in streams ; nothing can keep them from returning to their source. Likewise the soul rising up from Thee cannot be kept from joining Thee again, although it turns in many eddies on its way. A bird which rises from the earth and soars into the sky can find no place of rest in mid-air, but must return again to earth. So indeed must all retrace their path, and when the soul finds the way back to its source, it will sink and be merged in Thee, Thou Ocean of Bliss !



ARUNACHALA RAMANA

In the recesses of the lotus-shaped hearts of all, beginning with Vishnu, there shines as pure intellect (Absolute Consciousness) the *Paramatman* who is the same as Arunachala or Ramana. When the mind melts with love of Him, and reaches the inmost recess of the Heart wherein He dwells as the Beloved, the subtle eye of pure intellect opens and He reveals Himself as Pure Consciousness.

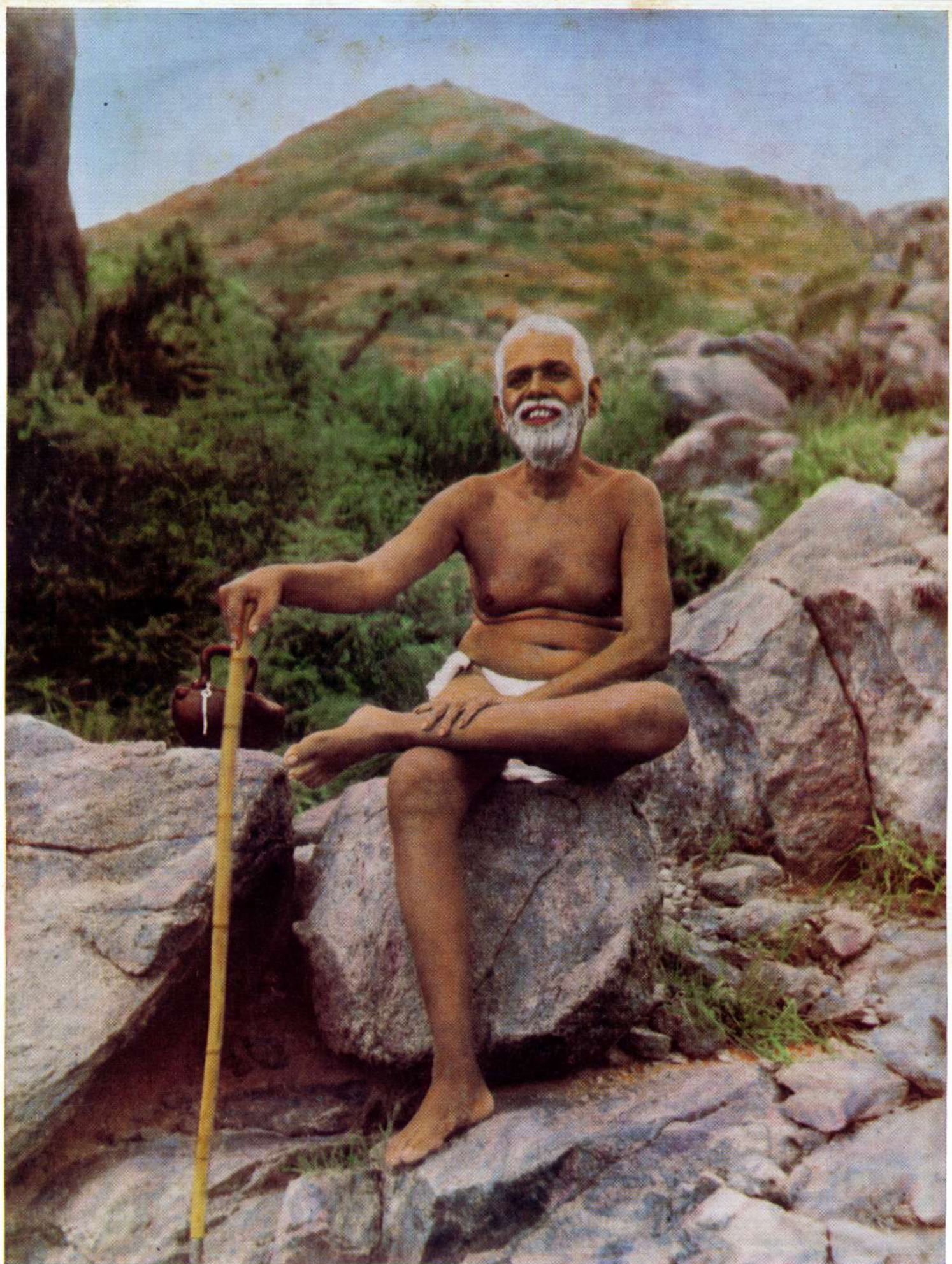
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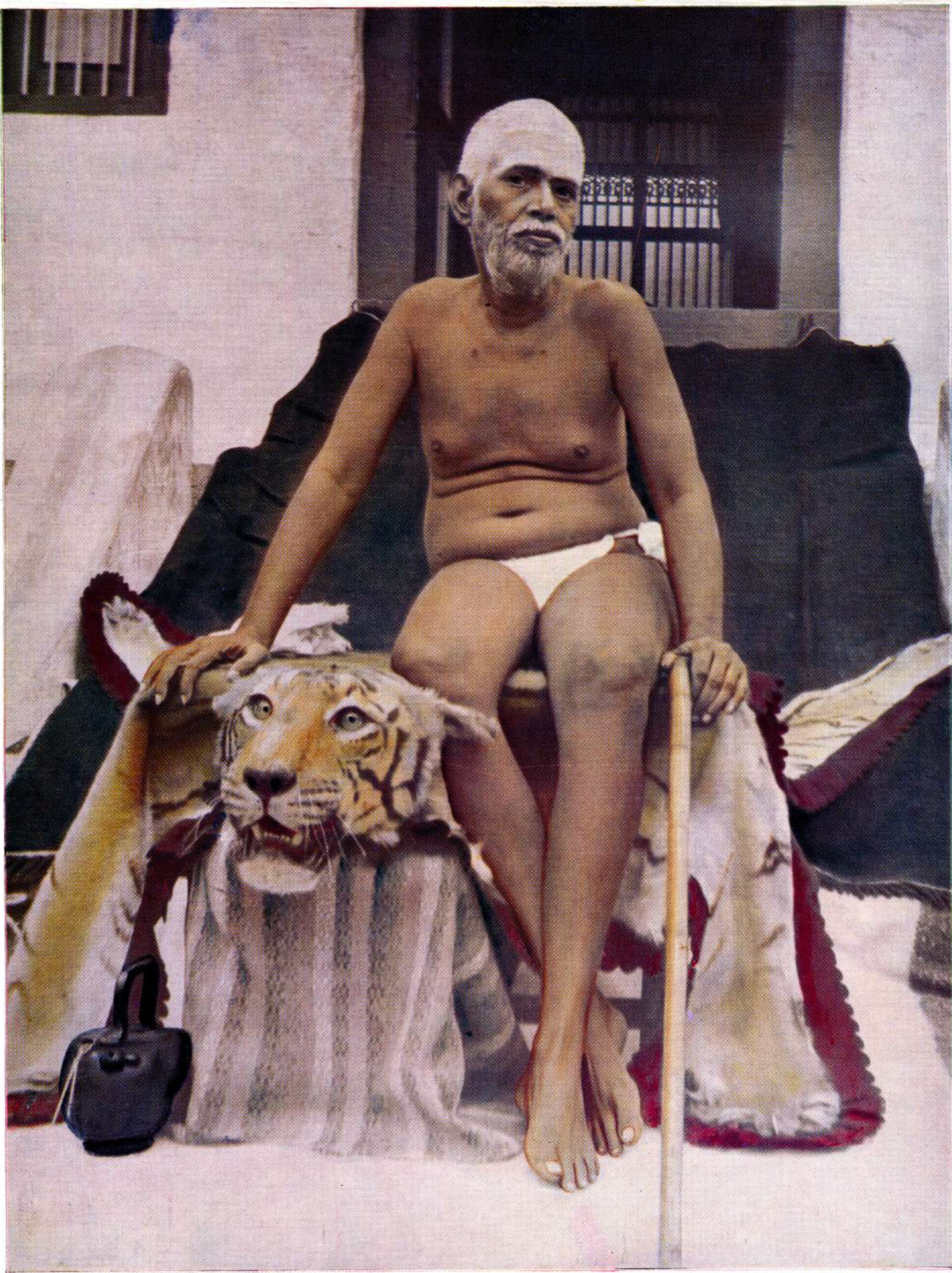
In the inmost core, the Heart
Shines as Brahman alone,
As 'I-I', the Self aware.
Enter deep into the Heart
By search for Self, or diving deep,
Or with breath under check.
Thus abide ever in Atman.



(Joy has flooded the heart of Mother Earth, because)

Of the Lord of Mercy living on the slopes of Arunachala, the glory of whose unique life shines out and clears away the dark miseries of human life which He vindicates by His realisation both of the Truth expounded by Vishnu (in his Incarnation as Sri Krishna in *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*) and of the recondite Symbol of Silence shown by Siva (as Sri Dakshinamurti) :

**Who is the repository of all the highest virtues, Whose beatific effulgence is hidden by the sheath of the gross body, like the blazing sun hidden behind the clouds ; Who is perfect in His mastery over the unruly sense, Who readily recognises only the merits of others, Who always abides in the unsophisticated Bliss of Peace, Who dwells as an austere ascetic on the slopes of the Hill, Whose mere Presence crushes the heavy load of misery of true devotees to dust and scatters it and Who is therefore the haven of security for them, Who is not elated by honour nor depressed by insult offered by others ; Who is foremost among Sages, Whose intellect is the keenest and the brightest, Who is immersed in the flood of Bliss Eternal, has now come down as a Man on Earth, to reign over the world as its unique Master !
Salutations to Thee, O Ramana ! !**



Now, when righteousness is at an end, when the three worlds are struggling in the net-work of misery, when scholars having lost sight of Truth are learnedly discussing polemics to no end, and when the very existence of God, the Father, is disputed Who else could be our Refuge ? Oh Lord, now born as man !

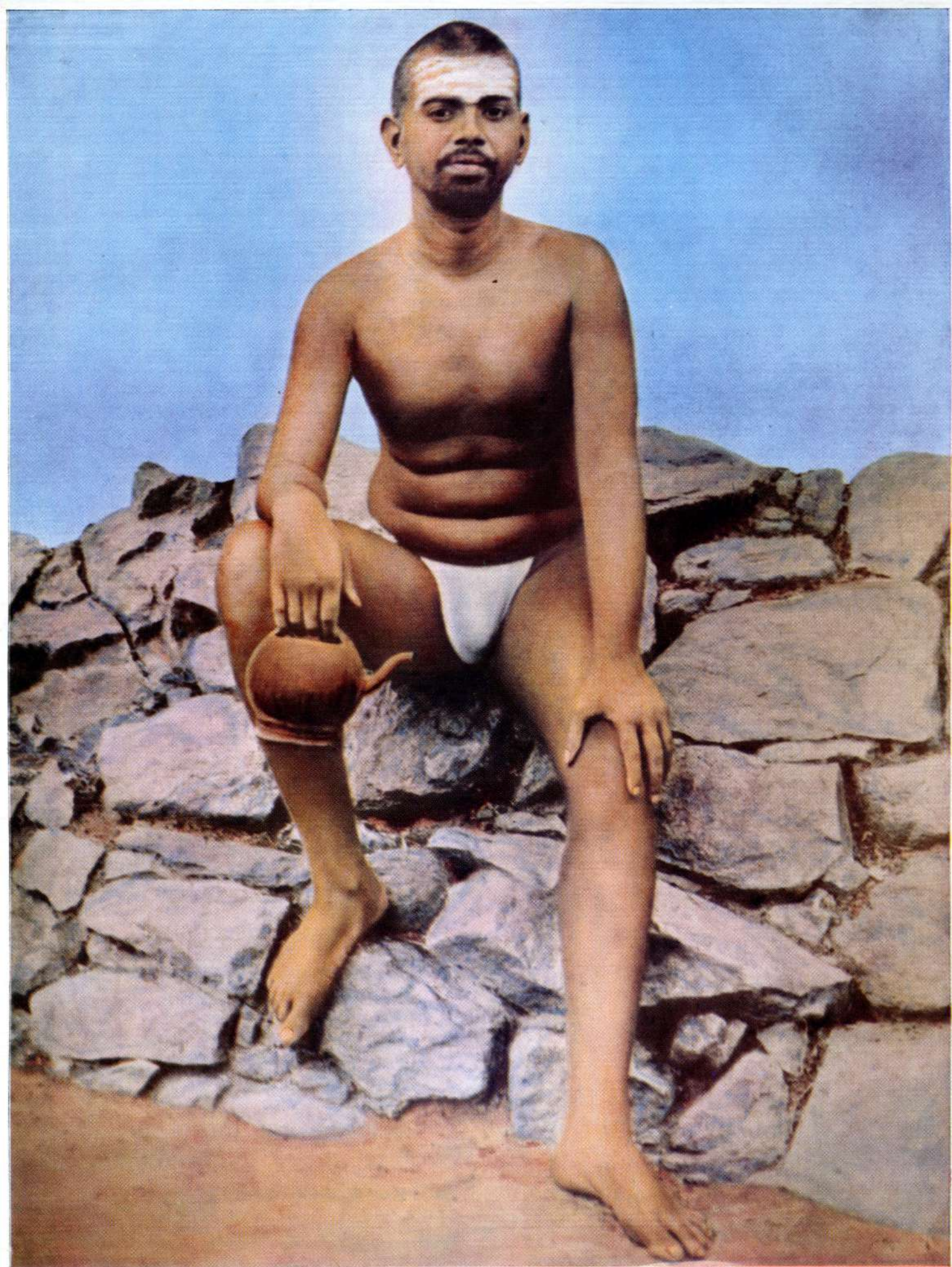
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Salutations to Sri Ramana, the universal Master, the Dispeller of misery from the world, the One who chases away the darkness of His devotees and displays Himself as the Eternal Consciousness inhering in the heart, blazing both within and without, bereft of the least trace of ignorance — the One who shines as the transcendental Truth underlying the world and beyond !



**O Ramana ! May Thy gracious glance be turned once
on me so that I may be blessed !**

**O Ramana ! Thou art the natural Guru of men. Infinite
is Thy Heart which knows no difference !**

**O Spotless Being ! Thy form blazes with pure light.
Infinite is Thy effulgent look.**

**O Lord ! Thy mind has dissolved into Thy Heart and
Thou shinest in Eternal Bliss.**

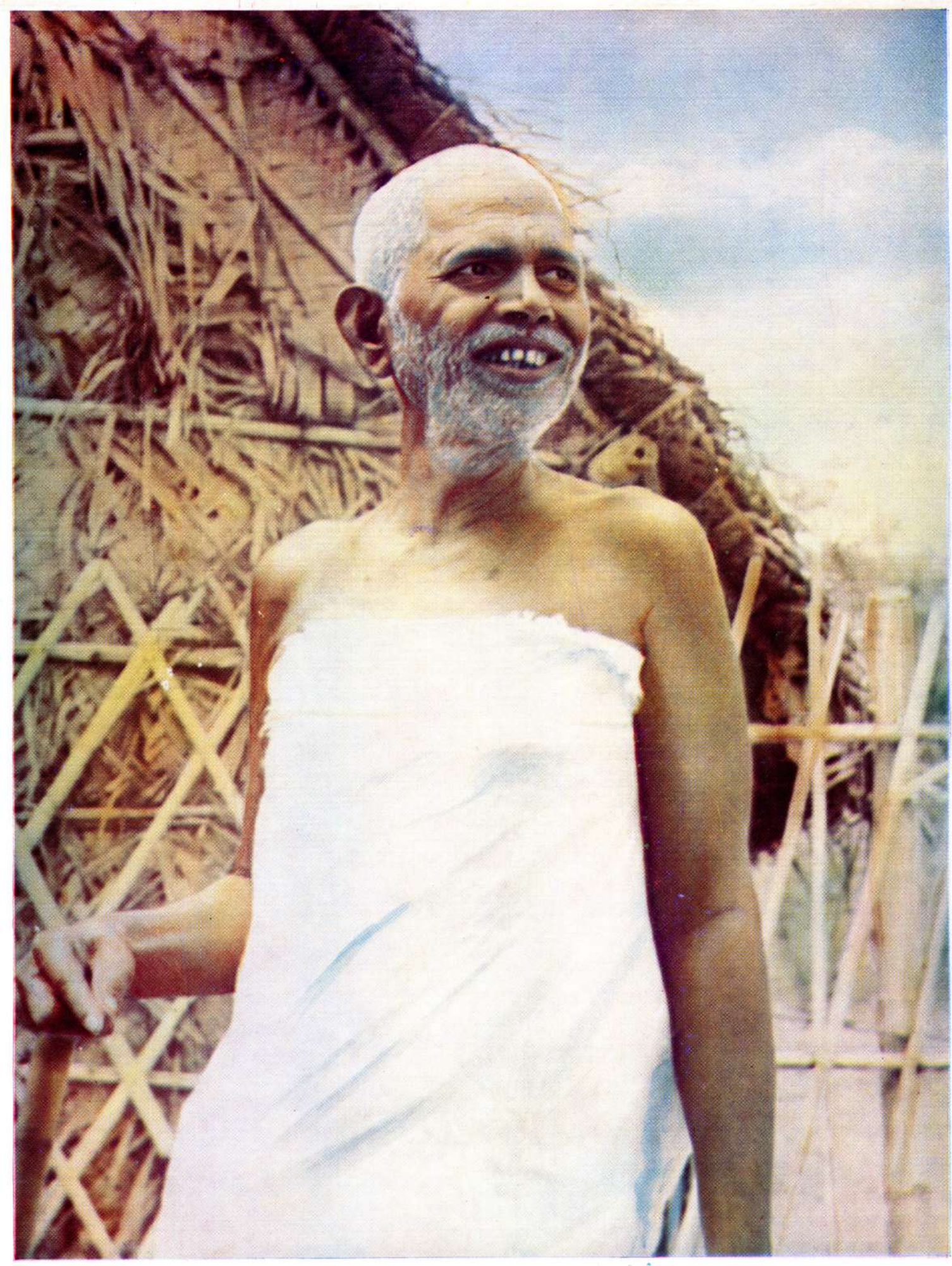
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**I worship the great Master, Ramana, Who pierces through
the dense darkness prevailing in the human heart not only
by word of mouth but also by virtue of Grace imparted by
His beneficent glance.**



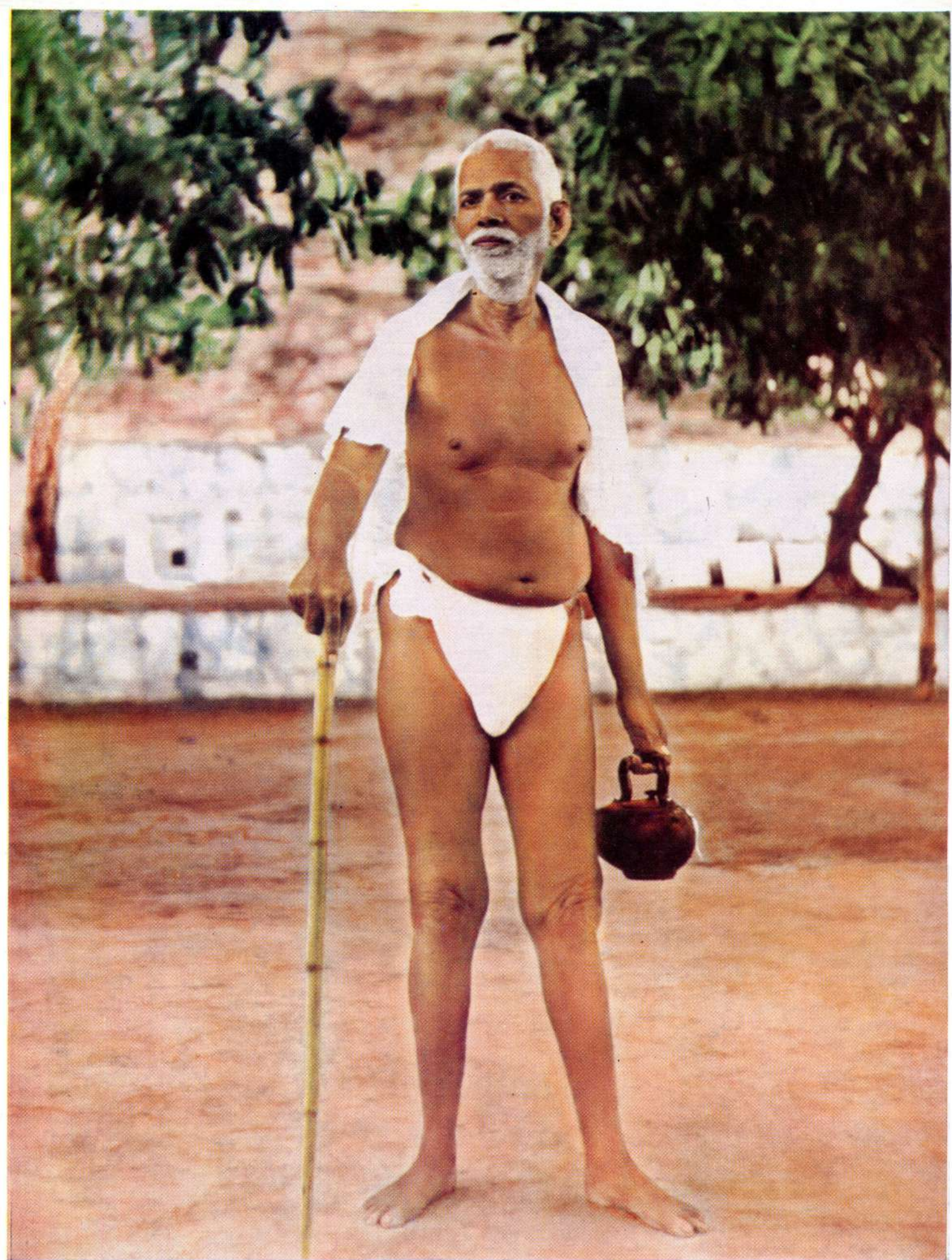
**Blessed be, Blessed be
The feet of Lord Ramana,
Blessed be, Blessed be
And for ever Blessed be !!**

**Blessed be the Feet of the Master, the embodiment of
Grace. Blessed be the Knower of the Veda whose Feet
remove ignorance and confer Knowledge.**

**Blessed be the Feet of Him who teaches “ Seek ‘ Who
am I ? ’ and leave the rest ”. Blessed be the Feet of Him,
the Peaceful One, who says that sorrow will go if one
becomes Oneself.**

**Blessed be the Feet of the One who gives the knowledge
that ‘ I-am-not-the-body-which-is-so-dear ’. Blessed be the
Feet of Him who says ‘ Throw the burden on the Lord.’**

**Blessed be the Feet of the One who says that all is the
work of the Lord. Blessed be the Feet of the One who says
that the ego and nothing else is the whole trouble.**



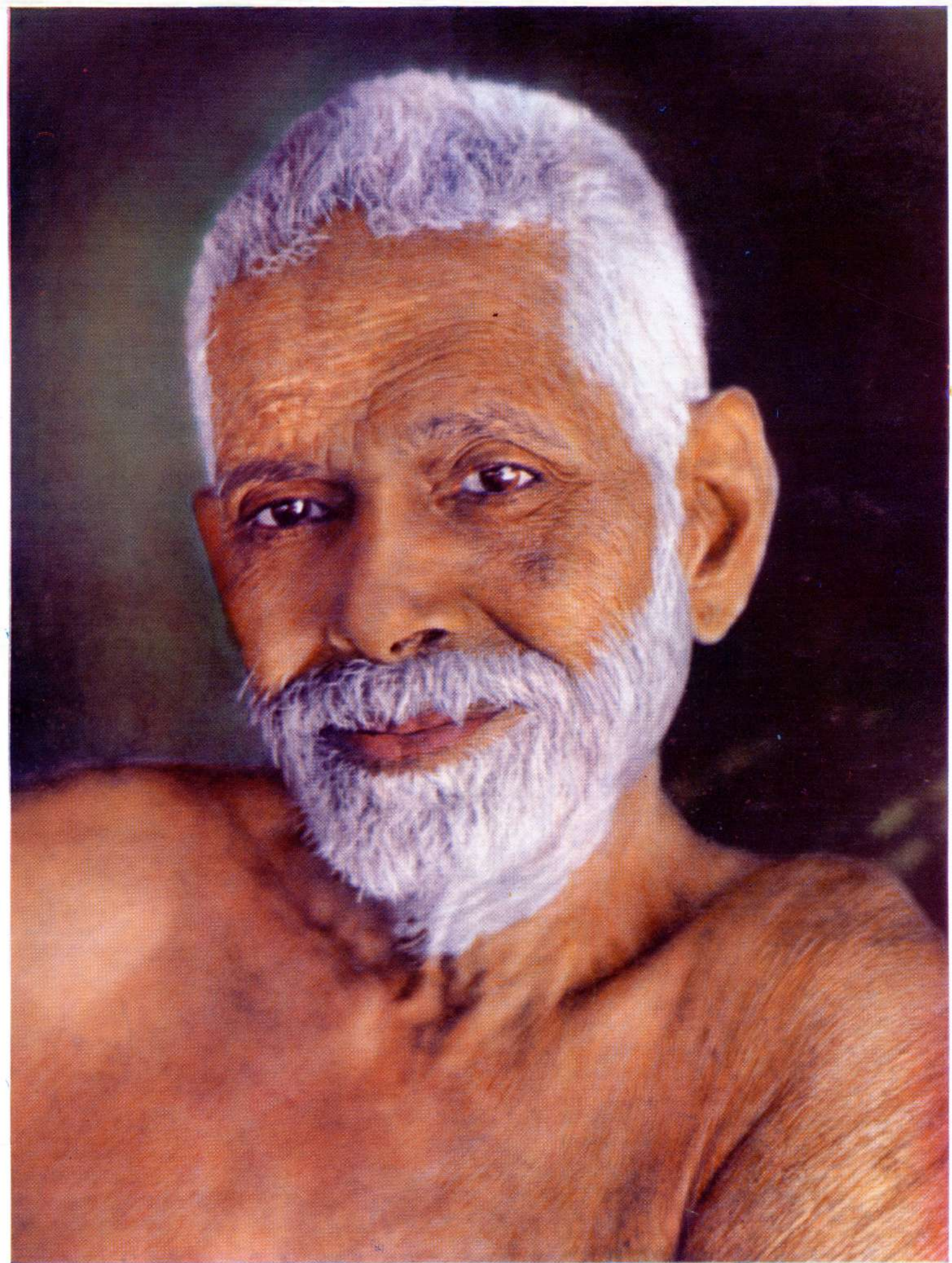
Blessed be the Feet of the One who instructs ‘ Do not think anything, and BE STILL ’. Blessed be the Feet of the One who says ‘ Keep your mind fixed in the Self ’.

Blessed be the Feet of the One who says : ‘ Fix the mind in the Self. That is respecting the Guru’s word ’.

Blessed be the Feet of the One who says : ‘ Many are the ways to control the mind. The best among them is Self-enquiry ’.

Blessed be the Feet of the One who like the Sun makes the hearts of the devotees blossom. Blessed be the Feet of the One who lives in Arunachala.

**Blessed be, Blessed be
The Feet of Lord Ramana,
Blessed be, Blessed be
And for ever Blessed be !**

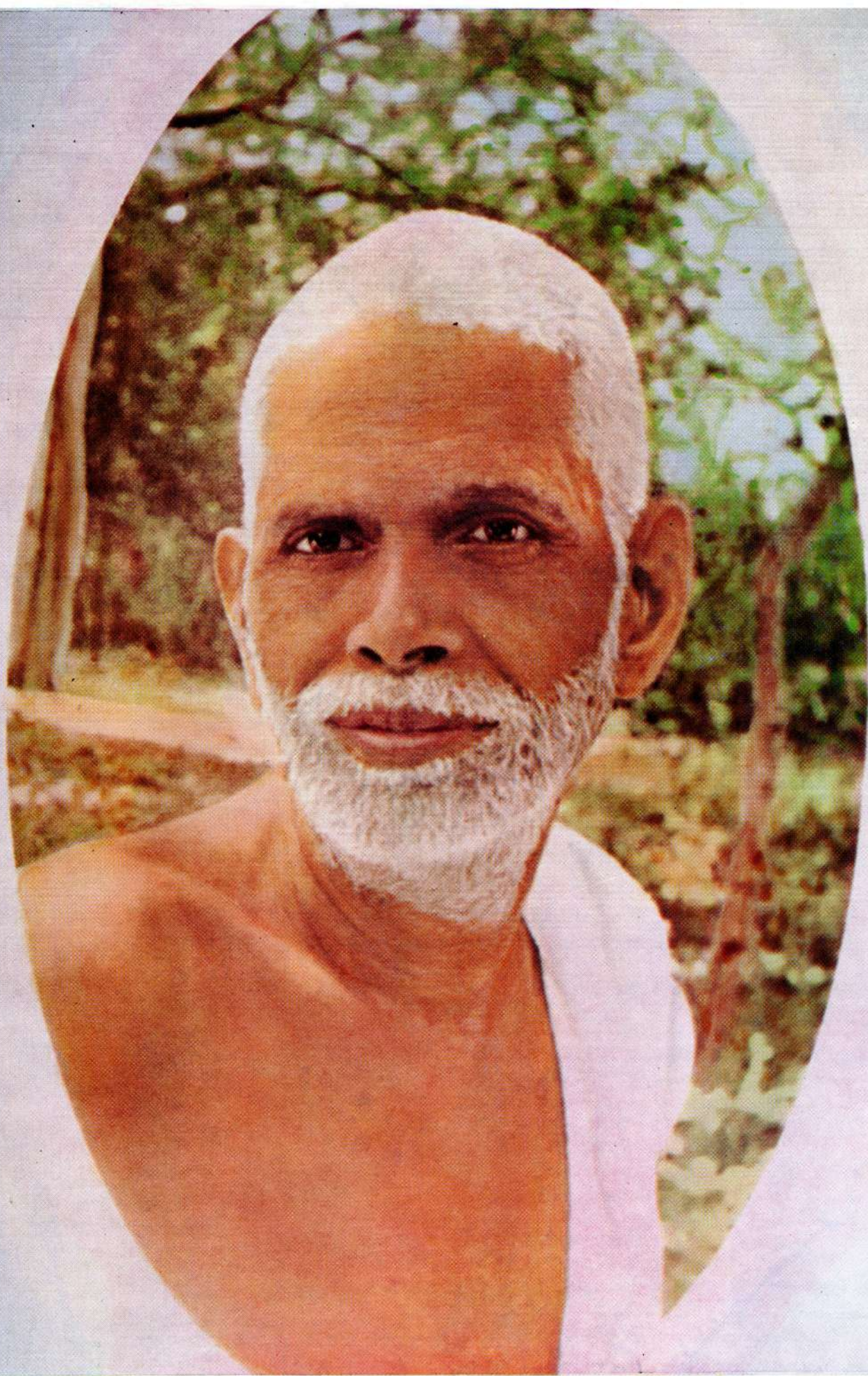


**Hail, hail, Ramana *Sad-Guru*,
Royal Ramana *Sad-Guru* !**

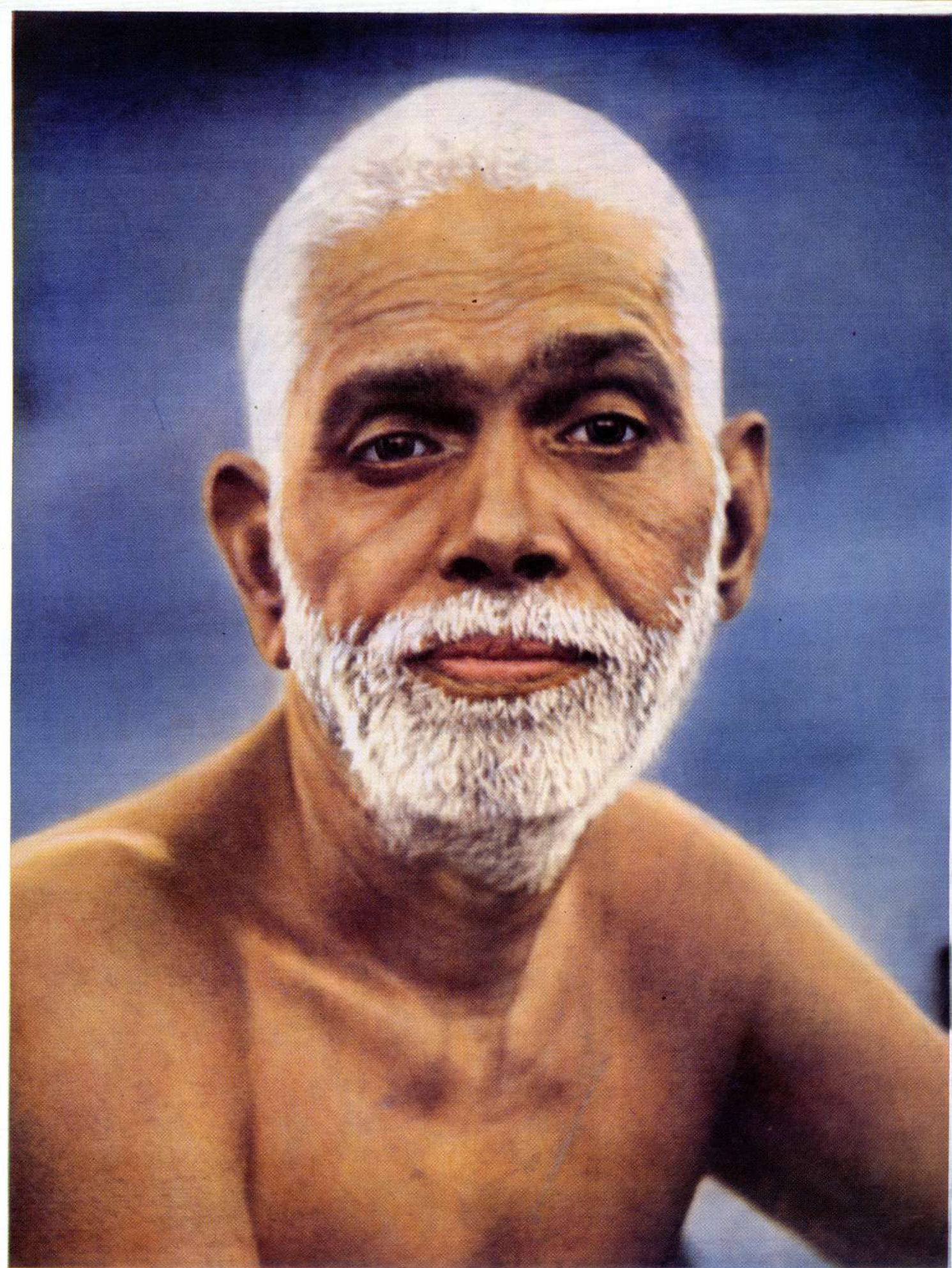
**He whom the gods of heaven adore
Was born a babe in Tiruchuzhi
When Beauty (Alagu) did with Beauty (Sundaram)
blend**

**The formless One took human form.
Within a cave in Aruna Hill
Where Wisdom dwells He came to dwell.
He mastered *maya* and destroyed
The senses false alluring bonds
Devoid of *karma's* tricky coils.
Absorbed in Arunachala
My Guru the beloved One
He is the wish-fulfilling tree
In human form embodied Grace.
Gold-hued, He Lord Siva Himself
Of matted locks. He is the One
Whose Guru was none other
Than his own Absolute Self.
The elements five He pervades
Beyond the five-fold body. To such
As come for comfort to His Feet
He gives the Knowledge that ends grief.**

**Hail, hail, Ramana *Sad-Guru*,
Royal Ramana *Sad-Guru* !**



**Was He born ? Did he ever die ? While on earth
Radiated consciousness, and still does. Birth and death
Mark an interval : while ego by stealth
Veils pure I-AM-NESS ; sense inputs connive
Imagings of things concrete and things
To which ' I ' get attached as my own wealth.
The gross ' I ' grows expanding mundane girth ;
The cycle goes on, pressing ego-drive.
Shoulders bent with care, head rent with fear
Mind confused, and light of the Self diffused,
While loyalties snap, and Royalties shun,
The Effulgent Grace home you to Him, clear
Shines the Self as Guru, enshrined
More effulgent than the sun
In the heart, ALL-THAT-IS.**



**Birds in the sky and fish in water
Dart and leave no track behind.
And none can trace the path by which
The sages journeyed to the Self.**

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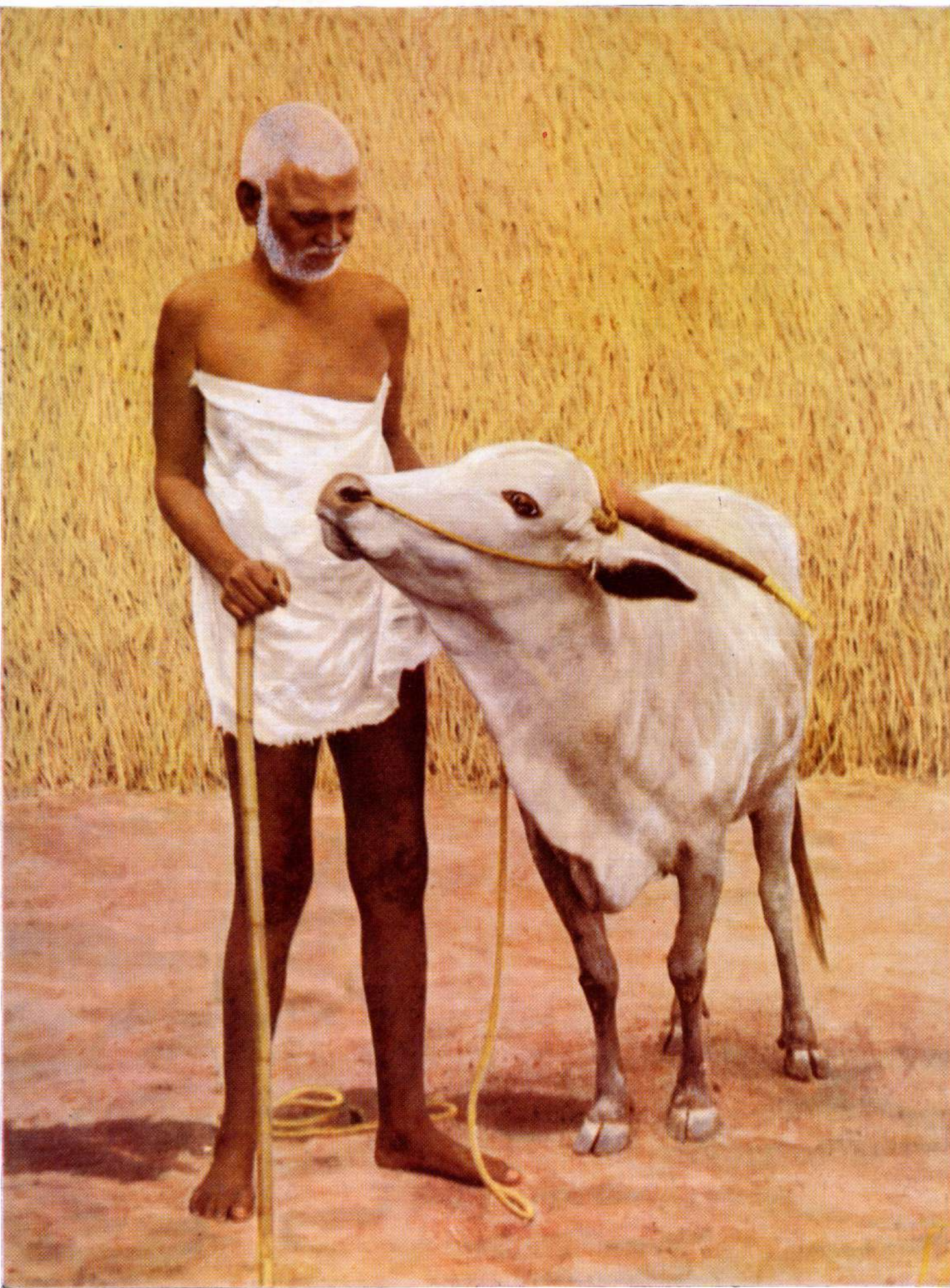
**Dear devotees, avid for grace,
Our Master is an ocean,
Take and hold your fill.
Approach him freely,
Minds and hands wide open
Drink to your heart's content.**

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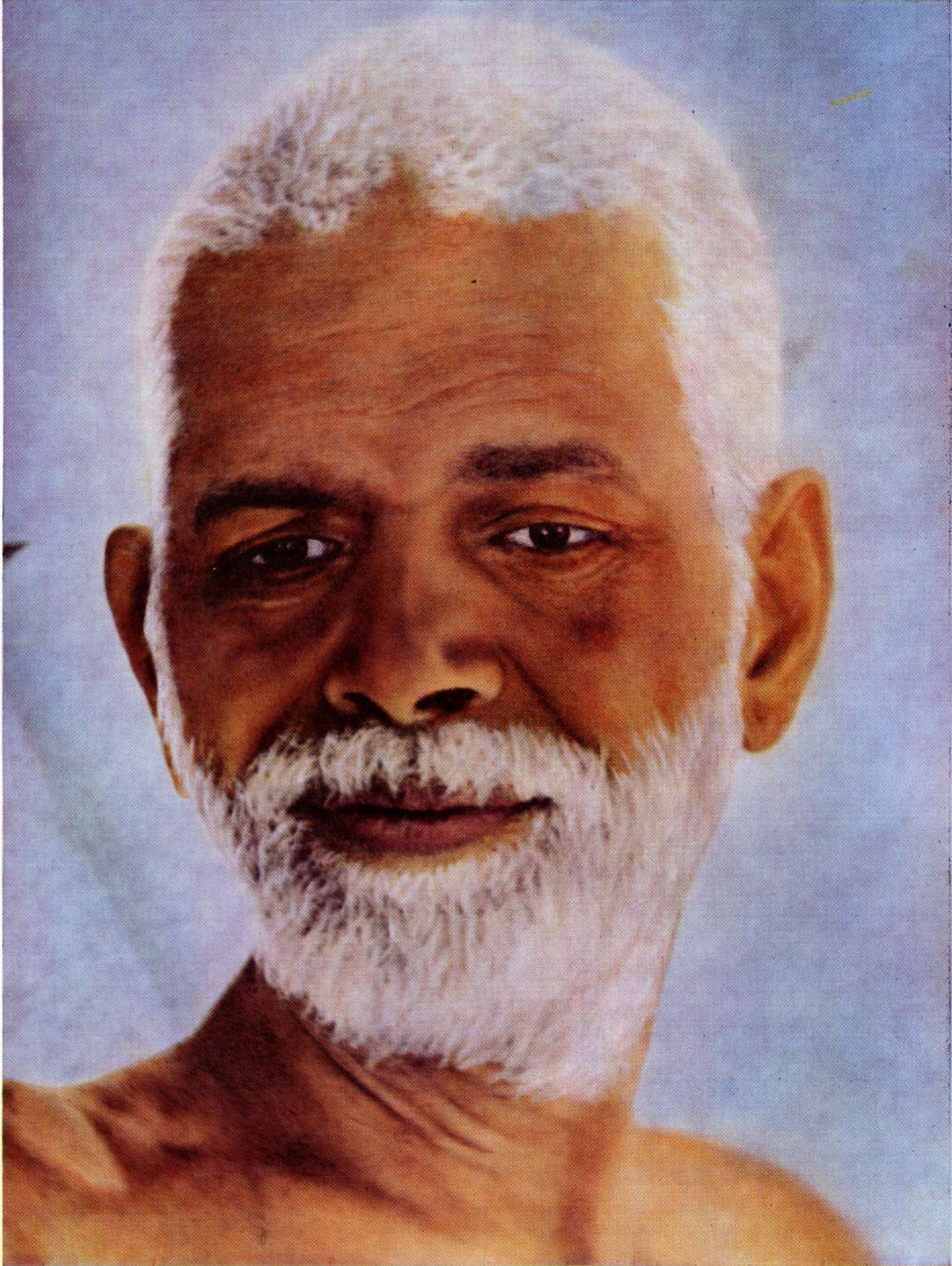
**All ego gone,
Living as That alone
Is penance good for growth
Sings Ramana, the Self.**



Mother He is and father too,
Apt for every kind of kinship,
Yes, apt and more than apt.
He is the womb from which are born
All moving things and things unmoving.

Dear child He is and cherished wealth,
Rich learning, wisdom ripe ;
Blessed by the mouths that daily chant
Vedic hymns to mighty Rudra,
He dwells in the mind's eye
And the bright unbroken sky,
The light of lights that shines within
the deep heart's core ;

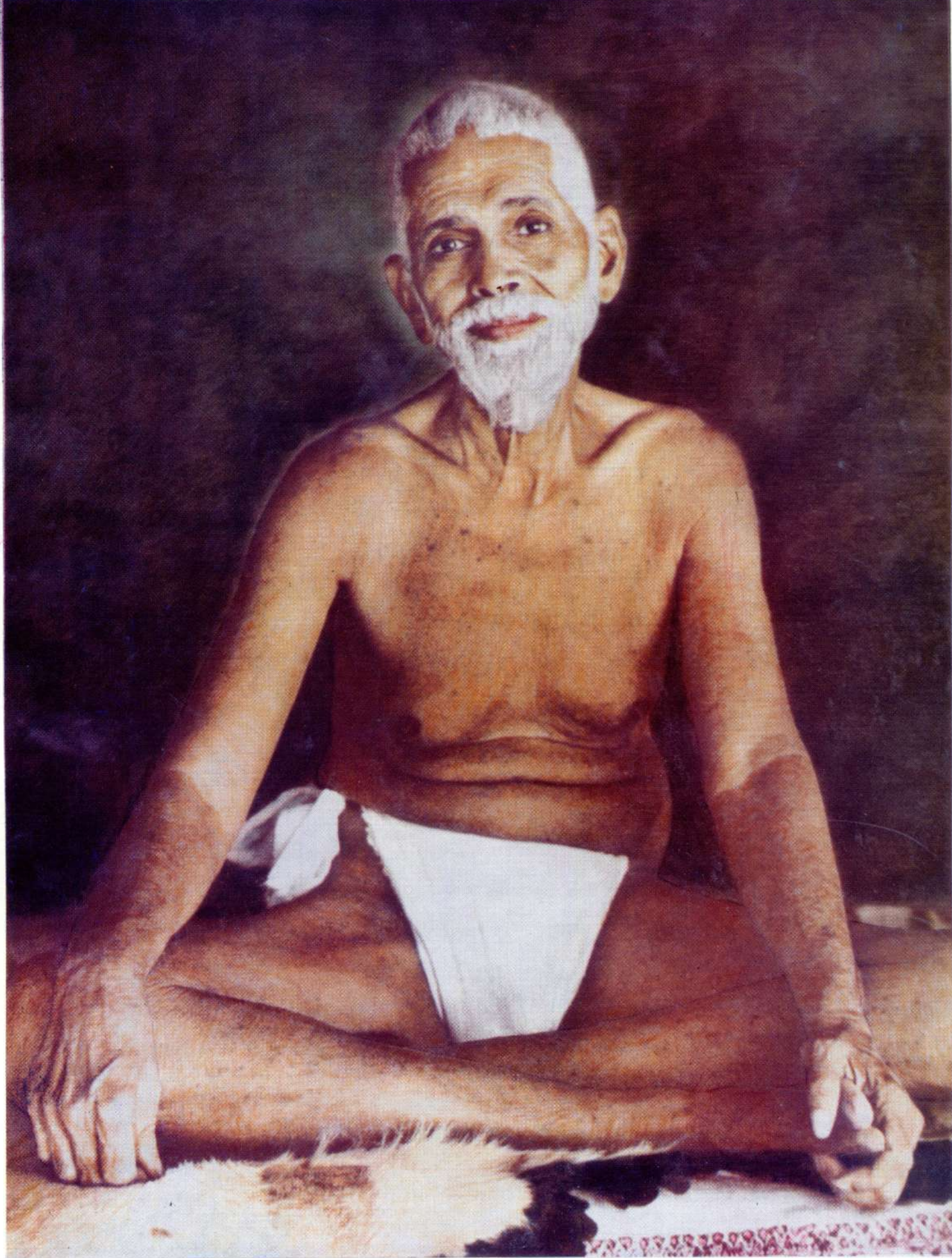
Venkata,
All in One and One in all,
True seer in whom all Truth is seen,
Merciful, liberal giver of grace
Miraculously strong to save.
Yes, He is mother and Father too !



From the slope of holy Arunachala
Look towards the golden red setting sun
Siva penetrating into the Earth
To quicken Her with His Spirit
He is Siva.

When the sun has gone down
The inner eye sees Him effulgent
In the womb of the Earth.

And thus when walking with measured step
Around the tomb
In it the very loved Master Sri Ramana
Lies buried in the sacred lotus *asana*
The inner eye sees Him
A golden red sun sunk in the Earth
To quicken Her with His spirit
And the heart feels Him
A warm spring of Grace
In silence flowing.....flowing.....
The while his devotees
Around His tomb walk in *pradakshina*
Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya !



VENKATARAMA

souvenir

Sashtiabdapurti

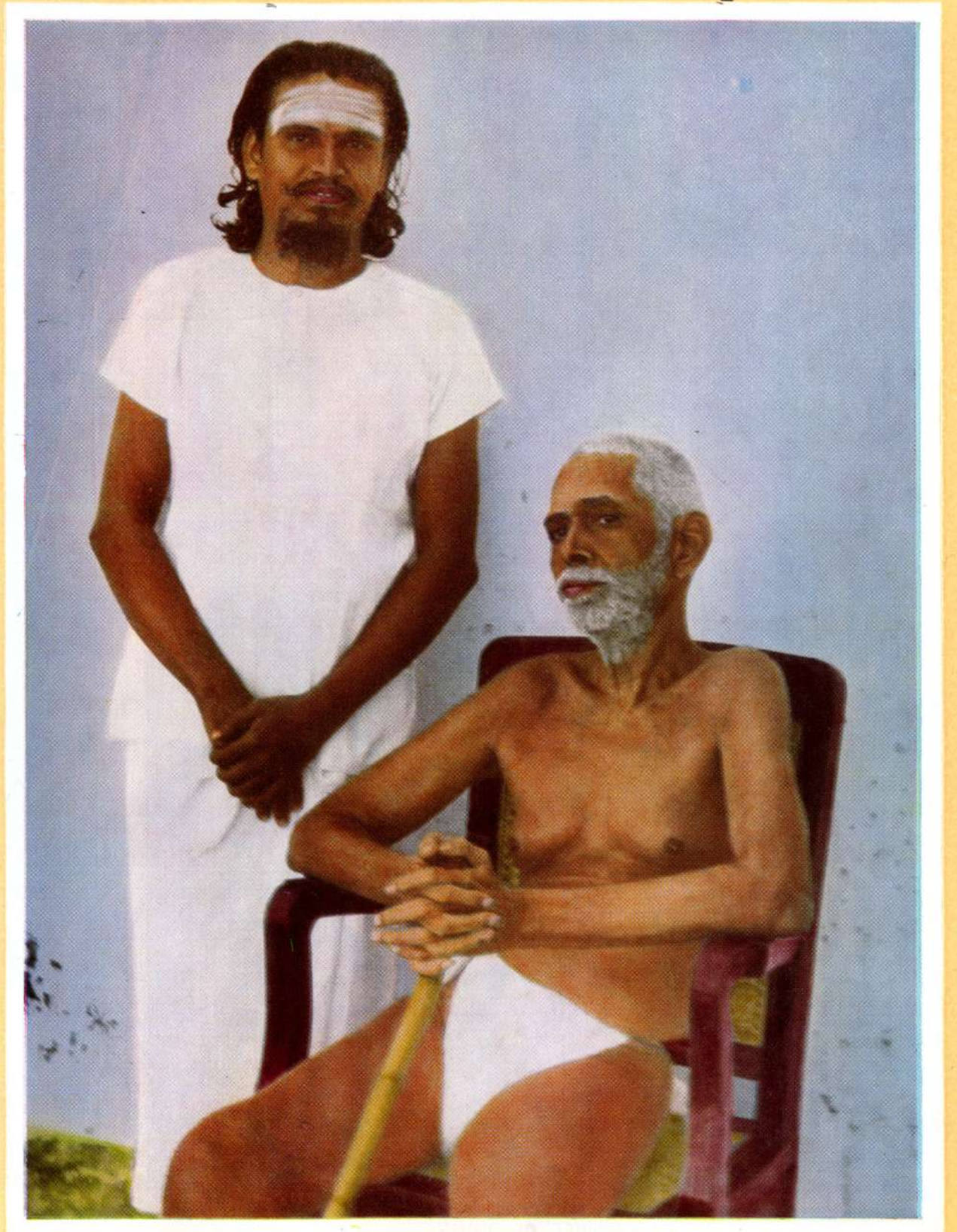
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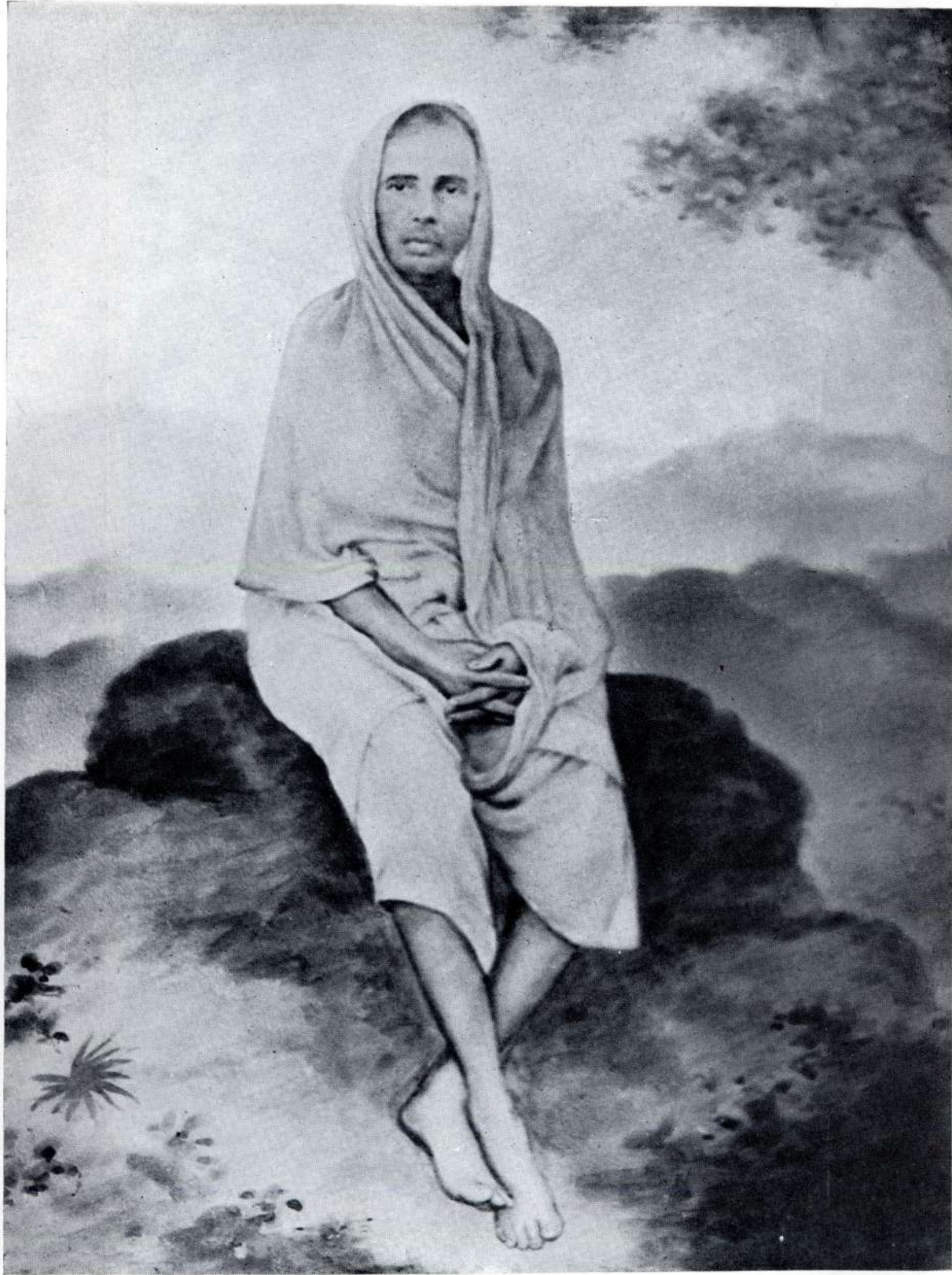
Sri T. N. VENKATARAMAN

PRESIDENT, SRI RAMANASRAMAM

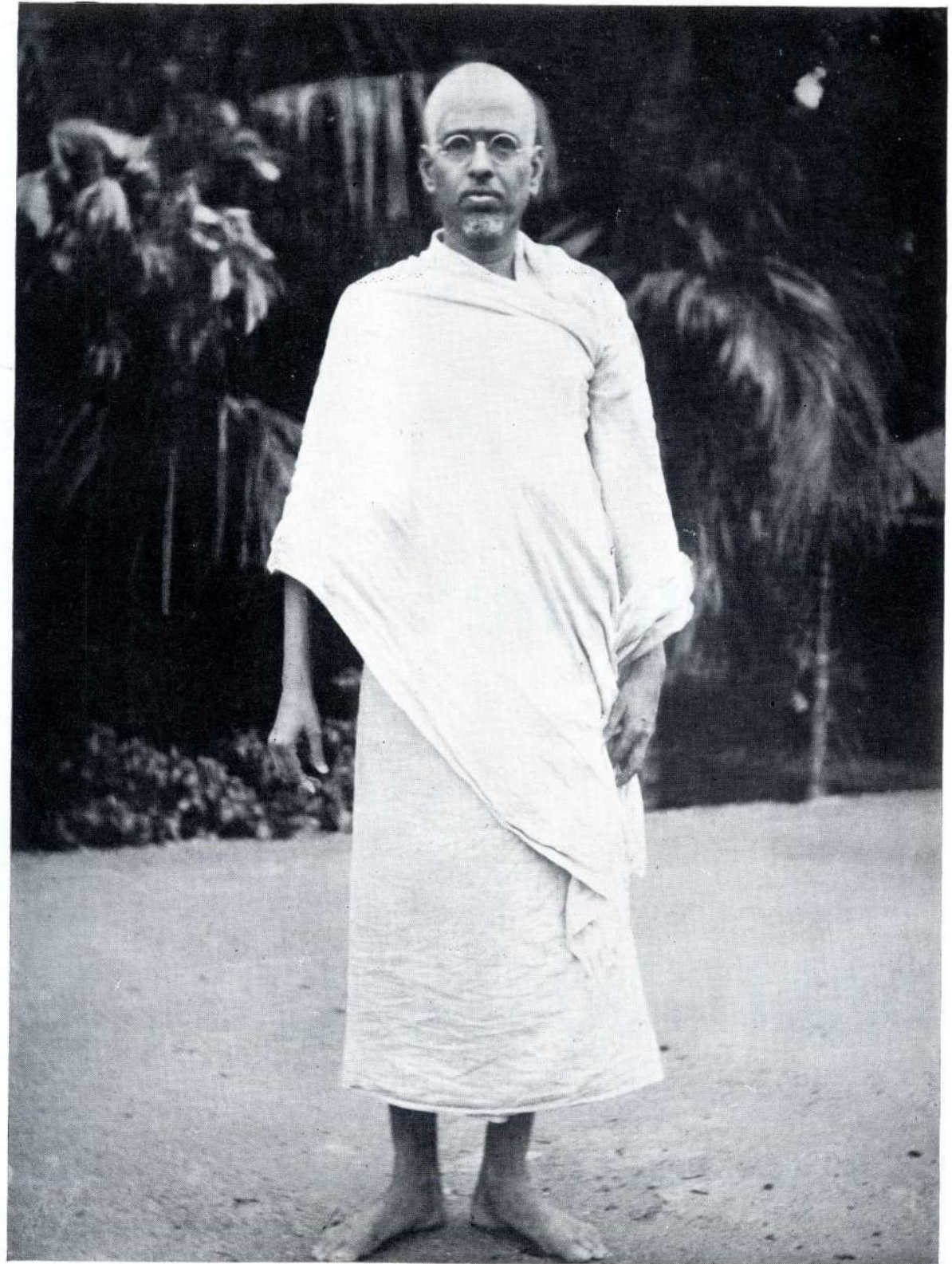
TIRUVANNAMALAI

23-5-1974





Sri Bhagavan's mother : ALAGAMMAL



Sri Bhagavan's brother : Sri NIRANJANANANDA SWAMI



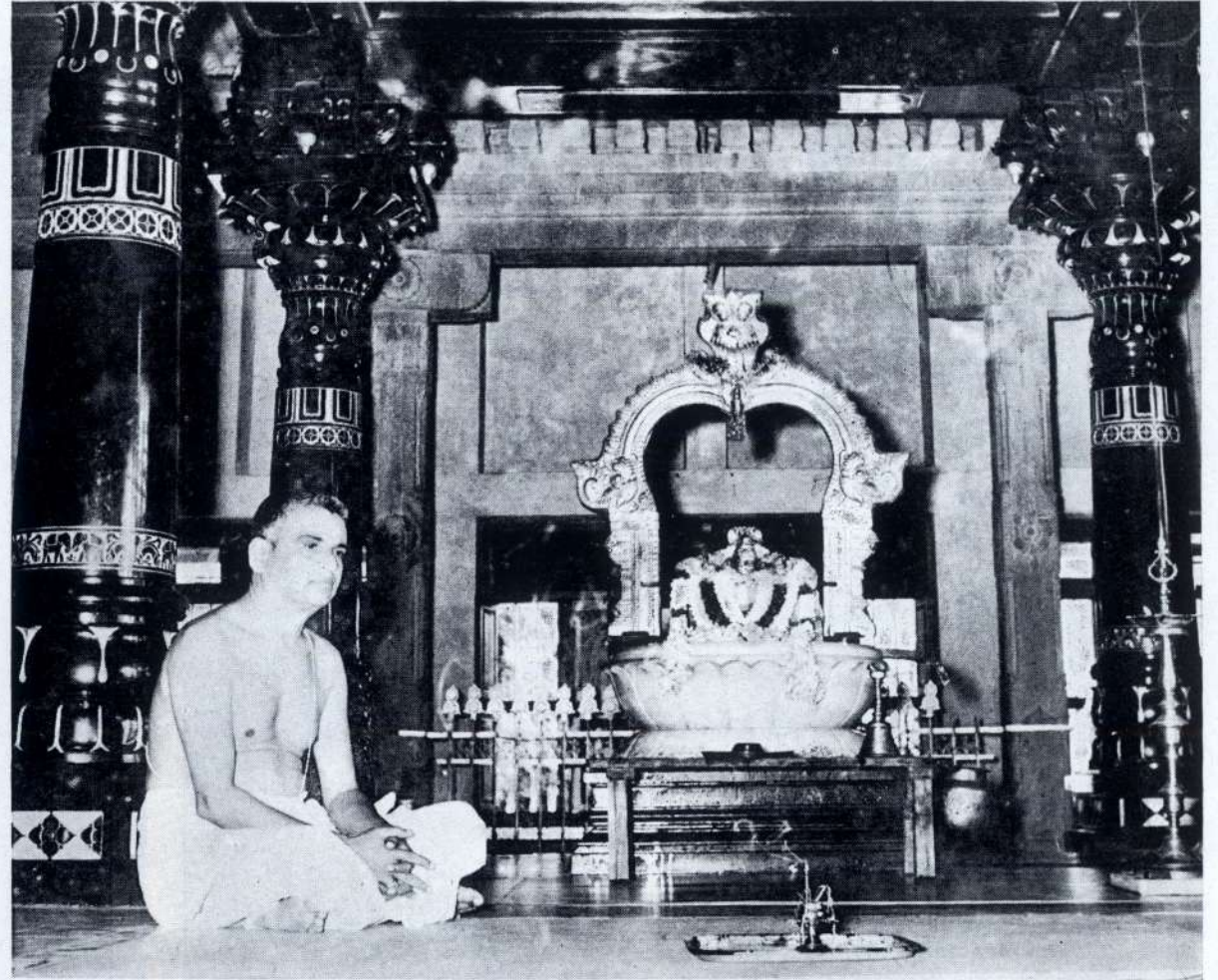
Smt. ALAMELU AMMAL and Sri S. PITCHU IYER



Sri T. N. VENKATARAMAN and Smt. NAGALAKSHMI



Venkatoos on horse-back during his Badrinath pilgrimage



Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi Shrine : Venkatoos is absorbed in prayers to Him

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

By the Grace of Sri Bhagavan, our Ashram President, Sri T. N. Venkataraman, completes his 60th year on May 23, 1974. The large and growing spiritual family of Sri Bhagavan rejoice in joining the members of His natural family in honouring one who has rendered sustained and dedicated service to Sri Bhagavan by serving the devotees and visitors to the Ashram.

It is purely by His Grace it has been possible for me to bring out this Souvenir — VENKATOO-60. I feel happy to the core of my being for there is the great satisfaction of having duly honoured the 'fortunate boy' who is 'our Master's choice'!

The articles in the Souvenir throw some fresh light on facts which are little known and should remind readers that Sri Bhagavan was a man living among men for a while, though He is and will be forever a Maharshi too!

With folded hands I express my grateful thanks to all the devotees who readily came forward and helped me in various capacities. The joint effort of my dear friends and well-wishers has been fruitful and praiseworthy. Instead of individually thanking all of them in this column, which I am sure they do not want, I offer my prayers to our Master, Sri Ramana Bhagavan, to bless them for ever and ever!

The generous financial assistance extended by devotees will be remembered by me all my life. My grateful thanks are specially offered to a great philanthropist who gave substantial help but does not want his name to be mentioned here!

Prof. K. Swaminathan and Sri Ramamani helped me immensely and willingly in collecting articles, editing them and giving a good shape to the Souvenir. My humble pranams to them!

Special mention must be made of Sri Sai Das who enlarged and tinted the photographs and was the main inspiration behind this whole project. I offer my grateful thanks to him.

The Jupiter Press Private Limited, Madras — particularly their Director, Sri T. V. Venkataraman — deserve praise and congratulation for their unstinted co-operation and help throughout and for completing the work in time and in excellent form.

I bow down to Sri Bhagavan and pray that He may accept this offering from one who is merely dust at His Lotus Feet!

Sri Ramanarpitamastu

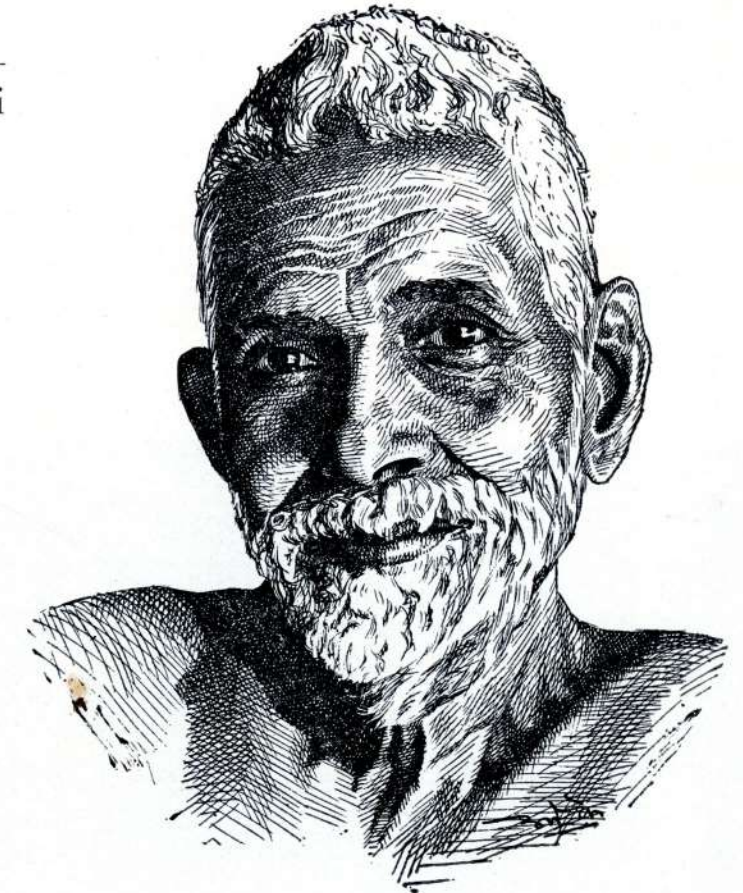
Sri Ramanasramam,
May 23, 1974.



V. GANESAN

Bhagavan Ramana and His Ashram

By Ramamani



SRI RAMANASRAMAM today is not a mere relic of the past but a dynamic centre radiating the vibrant presence of Sri Bhagavan. The Brahma Nirvana in 1950 is an event in time and apparently a dividing line between Sri Bhagavan's days and after, but otherwise this has made no difference to the spiritual ministry of Sri Bhagavan. Buildings and material comforts have been added since Sri Bhagavan's days but all this has been done without weakening, in any sense or degree, the power of His presence, as many old devotees are only too ready to testify.

What do we look for in any Ashram? To be truthful most of us do look forward to some basic comforts or amenities. From this angle, the Ashram has done well. Some thirty years ago, there was only a group of thatched buildings and

the barest necessities. Few realize how much has changed, since the change has been so slow and smooth. And though some may wonder whether we need all these "amenities" in the Ashram, the majority of *sadhakas* find them helpful and do welcome them.

The electricity and the water supply are mere conveniences, an adjustment to changing times and this has come about naturally almost unnoticed. On the other hand, some visitors accustomed to more luxurious fare find fault with the meagre food and comforts here provided. Ours is, as it has ever been a common home with a common kitchen for ordinary people, for plain wholesome living, with no ostentation of want and certainly none of wealth. Though the management is no doubt devoted, thoughtful and diligent, surely it is the Higher Will that has been the prime mover behind the silent

necessary growth. The machinery goes on smoothly because the hub of it is sound and safe in the hands of persons vitally because naturally, devoted and interested in the Person who embodied the utterly Impersonal.

* * * *

'Venkataraman' (the original name of Sri Bhagavan) was dead, in Sri Bhagavan's own words, even at Madurai, when He was merged in the Self at the age of 16. For Him the spiritual journey was complete then and there!

Arunachala now calls Him and He obeys the call. The temple doors are wide open, with no one between Him and His Father. He moves on to the Hill. Followers gather and grow in strength. His mother comes too and stays with Him. The Ashram does its own cooking now,



Sri Ramanasramam (in the beginning)

thanks to the mother. On her, by right of nature, He concentrates His Grace in her last moments and confers final freedom. The body is interred at the foot of the Hill on the southern slopes. He visits and revisits the spot and then, one day, stays and settles there for good. The present Ashram — SRI RAMANASRAMAM — comes into being to continue thereafter as His abode, where, in His presence, prince and pauper, peasant and pandit,

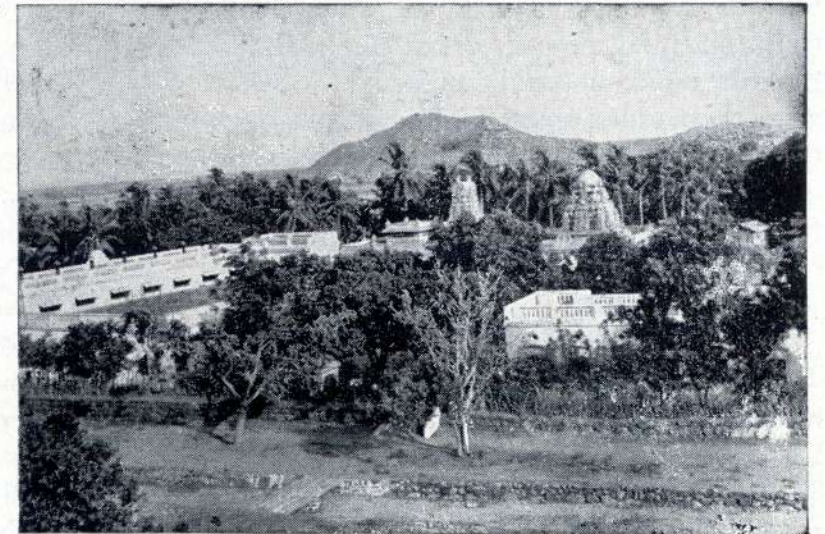
all are treated alike and all feel equally at home.

* * * *

What is meant by the *Jnani* carrying on with the body even after *jnana* We have this explained to us by Sri Bhagavan Himself : “ There are various controversies or schools of thought as to whether a *jnani* can continue to live in his physical body after realisation. Some hold that



one who dies cannot be a *jnani* because his body must vanish into air or some such thing. They put forward all sorts of funny notions. If a man must at once leave his body when he realises the Self, I wonder how any knowledge of the Self or the state of realisation can come down to other men. And that would mean that all those who have given us the fruits of their Self-realisation in books cannot be considered *jnani*s because they went on living after realisation. And if it is held that a man cannot be considered a *jnani* so long as he performs actions in the world (and action is impossible without the mind), then not only the great sages who carried on various kinds of work after attaining



Sri Ramanasramam (an aerial view)

jnana must be considered *ajnanis*, but the gods also and Ishwara Himself, since He continues looking after the world. The fact is that any amount of action can be performed, and performed quite well, by the *jnani* without his identifying himself with it in any way or ever imagining that he is the doer. Some power acts through his body and uses his body to get the work done.”¹



Only in the light of this explanation can we understand the maintenance of the Ashram as a Spiritual Centre or its material growth. Hundreds of instances in His lifetime could be cited as evidence of Sri Bhagavan's supreme compassion and concern for His devotees. His greatness was in no way affected or questioned because he came forth with guidance and help, sometimes even in very ordinary matters. And so it cannot be imagined that Sri Bhagavan, so full of compassion and concern, could have been indifferent to the needs of the future. It is to Sri Bhagavan that we owe the present set-up and outer structure of the Ashram. When Sri Bhagavan executed the Will (in 1938) He did so for a lofty and impersonal purpose. Sri Bhagavan was not a mere *sannyasin*. He was an *atyasrami*, as he Himself confirmed, and so He was bound by no rules and was free to act in any manner regarding the upkeep of the

Ashram, even considering it to be merely a property. Sri Bhagavan's replies in the course of an enquiry on Commission in a law-suit over the management of the Ashram² are revealing by themselves. They also show that the Will executed was an act of Providential care necessary to avoid controversy and confusion in the years to come.

Major Chadwick remarks as follows :
 “ Many cases have been brought against the Ashram by discontented



“ Om ! Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya ”

people and much propaganda has been made, but there has always been the Will to see that it continued as a going concern, so that people might still come and enjoy its peace and find the Master still present. . . . Once he remarked that whatever a *jnani* said, however absurd it might seem, must eventually come to pass. He signed the Will which said that the Ashram must be maintained as a Spiritual Centre and

¹ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, pp. 238-39.

² Extracts reproduced elsewhere as *Sparks from the Anvil*.



that is being done Surely in time it will grow from strength to strength, to be known at length to the whole world.³

And so Sri Bhagavan's Grace will envelop the whole world. But, historically and geographically, the Presence in its fullness, the centre of radiance, will always be His chosen HOME, the Ashram, standing and growing here beside the Mother's shrine and the Rock of Transcendent Awareness !

³ *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 86-87.



A life-size portrait of Bhagavan now rests on the couch in the 'Old Hall', where He sat for more than twenty years with His devotees. Even today, devotees who sit in meditation there find His Presence as powerful as before.

Sri Niranjanananda Swami

By Viswanatha Swami



Sri Niranjanananda Swami, familiarly known as Chinna Swami, the younger brother of Sri Bhagavan, was for over thirty years the sole manager (*Sarvadhikari*) of the Ashram and has thus earned for himself a unique place among His devotees. If all devotees had, following Mary rather than Martha, chosen the way of meditation and neglected practical affairs and the call of work and service, there would have been a yawning chasm in Sri Bhagavan's story, not the abundance and the fullness which we now take for granted. If the chasm is not there and if the Ashram came into being and functioned and continues to function fittingly as a hospitable home for devotees and an active centre for spreading His teachings, the credit for it all belongs to Sri Niranjanananda Swami. He carried on with unwearied zeal the noble task of attending to Sri Bhagavan's devotees and publishing His works and also other books on His life and teachings. These tasks

called for a stalwart and single-minded Karma yogi. And Chinna Swami with the majestic stature and steadfast firmness of a De Gaulle or a "Roman Emperor", as some Western devotees loved to name him, met the need almost unaided and thus proved to be the best Karma yogi among Sri Bhagavan's devotees.

He was greatly devoted to his mother and his notable service to her expanded naturally into service to the Ashram. After the Mahasamadhi of the mother in 1922 the Ashram grew up steadily. Bhagavan's Hall, the dining hall and the *gosala* were all constructed one by one under his supervision. The Kumbhabhishekam of the Mother's shrine in 1949 was the crowning event of all his efforts! Such tasks needed money, material and skilled manpower in a big way. The success in securing these resources and utilising them wisely was due almost entirely to the zeal, the sense of responsibility and untiring diligence of Swamiji. With these qualities, he set a good

example himself and provided inspiration to willing and enthusiastic devotees who helped him in building up and running a big institution. Above all, his absolute dedication to Sri Bhagavan and his unwavering faith were his mainstay and support. He told devotees who were in close contact with him that he did not imagine that he was the doer of all this. It was entirely Sri Bhagavan's work in which he was only an instrument. His strength sprang from his humility!

Other achievements of his are the acquisition of the house at Tiruchuzhi in which Sri Bhagavan was born, and the house at Madurai where He lived as a schoolboy and realized the Self. Regular *puja* to Sri Bhagavan is being performed at these holy spots since their acquisition by the Ashram. They have now become places of pilgrimage for devotees of Sri Bhagavan.

While he thus laboured hard in Bhagavan's service, it was all done as worship. He held



The Sarvadhikari at his desk

Bhagavan in highest reverence and his personal relationship with Him was never assumed or brought in. He earned the reputation of being a stern task-master. In his situation no one could have been otherwise. He deemed it a great privilege, for others as for himself, to serve Bhagavan and fellow-devotees. Because of this firm belief he often called upon devotees to assist him in administrative tasks. For him serving Bhagavan and His devotees was a means for attaining the highest spiritual good. To the last he kept up this attitude of absolute surrender and that was the secret of his success !

Since taking up *sannyasa* in the presence of Bhagavan, he conducted himself as a *sannyasin* should. He went for *bhiksha* (begging for food) to the town, as advised by Bhagavan. Often he did the cooking for the ashramites when the kitchen attendants did not turn up. There was no hesitation on his part to do any work in the Ashram. Later, with his son and close relatives around, it was no easy job to maintain the ideal and attitude of a *sannyasin*, but he succeeded even here. The son and other relatives could not claim any greater privilege than the other devotees. On many occasions he had come out with specific instructions regarding what should and should not be done by them in the Ashram. He impressed upon them that the duty they owed to the Ashram was all the greater because of their relationship with Bhagavan and that they should not on that account claim any special privileges !

Sri Swamiji had a clear understanding of the tenets of Bhagavan's teaching and was particularly fond of Bhagavan's *Arunachala Ashtakam* ('Eight Verses on Arunachala'), full of devotional fervour and profound philosophic thought. His last days were spent in perfect peace, undisturbed by anything mundane. His last moments were so serene that they seemed to justify his faith that Bhagavan would take complete charge of those who serve Him with utter self-surrender in whatever way they could.

Feeling that his end was near, on the 28th January, 1953, he called Sri T. N. Venkataraman, his family and Ashram devotees, and with thick speech, said : "I am departing with a clear conscience and clean hands. I have not used even a pie of the Ashram funds for my own benefit. Everything here belongs to Bhagavan, and should be guarded with care and vigilance. Devote yourselves heart and soul to the service of the Lord, and in return He will shower His grace on you. Be sincere and truthful to the core of your being. Uphold our revered ancient tradition in the working of this Ashram, as I have upheld them all my life."¹

Thus he lived a dedicated life, combining in himself the virtues of a true devotee, a model administrator and an ideal *sannyasin* !

¹ *Self Realisation*, p. 264.

The birth of Sri T. N. Venkataraman, on May 26, 1914, carried more than ordinary significance to the family of Sri Bhagavan, since this event saved it from extinction. Sri Bhagavan's elder brother (Sri Nagaswami Iyer) was dead by then and the sister (Alamelu), though married, had no children. The younger brother, Sri Nagasundaram Iyer (whose *sannyasa* name was Sri Niranjanananda Swami) had lost two children. The sole hope of continuing the line lay in the birth of a child to him again. The mother, Alagammal, was greatly distressed and came to her Swami-son at Arunachala, accompanied by Mangalam, Nagasundaram Iyer's wife and sought Sri Bhagavan's blessing for a son. That Mangalam was thus blessed is evident from the following entry in the diary of Sri K. Natesan (then Supervisor, Corporation of Madras) under the date 30-11-1947 :

“Child Mangalam (Venkatoo's third daughter, a year old) prostrated herself before Sri Bhagavan after

loudly addressing Him as *Thatha* (grandfather). Sri Bhagavan remarked : ‘Her grandmother was named Mangalam too’. I asked Sri Bhagavan whether she had ever come to see Him. Sri Bhagavan replied : ‘O yes ! She came to the Virupaksha Cave along with Mother. They stayed for the night there, which was unusual, this was the first and only occasion when women were permitted to do so. She returned home and became pregnant and Venkatoo was born. When he was two, Mangalam died. Seeing his child Mangalam one remembers all this !’”

The family of Nelliappa Iyer, Sri Bhagavan's uncle (in whose house at Manamadurai Sri T. N. Venkataraman was born) supported the young child. The father, Nagasundaram Iyer, went to Arunachala where he took *sannyasa* under the name of Sri Niranjanananda Swami. The motherless child used to

address Nelliappa Iyer's wife as *Amma*. After three years Sri Bhagavan's sister, Alamelu Ammal, known to Ashram devotees as *Athai* (aunt) and her husband, Sri Pitchu Iyer, took over the care of the child and brought him up with great affection. He, like Sri Bhagavan, was given the name of *Venkataraman* — after Lord Venkateswara of Tirupati, the family deity. The shortened name *Venkatoo*, by which devotees still know him, had come into vogue in childhood.

He was brought to Tiruvannamalai twice or thrice a year to see Sri Bhagavan, then living in Skandashram. Women were not allowed to stay in the Ashram but Sri Bhagavan assured *Athai* that she could safely leave the child in His care. On such occasions He would Himself put him to sleep, wash him and clean his teeth in the morning !

Sri T. N. Venkataraman went to school at Tiruppattur (Ramanathapuram) and Manamadurai. In 1929, he married *Nagalakshmi*, daughter of Sri Bhagavan's



1928 Group Photo : Venkatoo is standing on the right side of Sri Bhagavan. Sri Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni is seated on the right side of Him. Sri Kavyakantha was particular that Venkatoo should join and asked him to stand close to Sri Bhagavan.

uncle, Sri Ramachandra Iyer. He was employed for a year in the Kunrakkudi Subramania Temple Devasthanam and then changed over to the Chettinad Bank where he continued till the end of January, 1938. For his marriage the Ashram sent its blessings, together with new clothes and other gifts, through Sri Gopala Rao, the then Secretary of the Ashram. Sri Gopala Rao had much trouble in reaching Vetriyur, the venue of the wedding, since the village was inaccessible by rail or road !

The course of Venkatoo's life was changed in January, 1938, when he received a letter from the Ashram summoning him to Tiruvannamalai with

his family and *Athai* and her husband. Before embarking on this change Sri T. N. Venkataraman, now the father of two children, requested Sri Chellam Iyer to go and find out whether the summons had the sanction of Sri Bhagavan. When approached by him, along with Sri Yogi Ramiah, Sri Bhagavan confirmed it. When some one said that Venkatoo had a family, He added : "What of that ? Let him bring them too !" Thus it was with Sri Bhagavan's consent and blessings that Sri T. N. Venkataraman came to the Ashram for good.

And so, from February 1, 1938, Sri T. N. Venkataraman worked in the

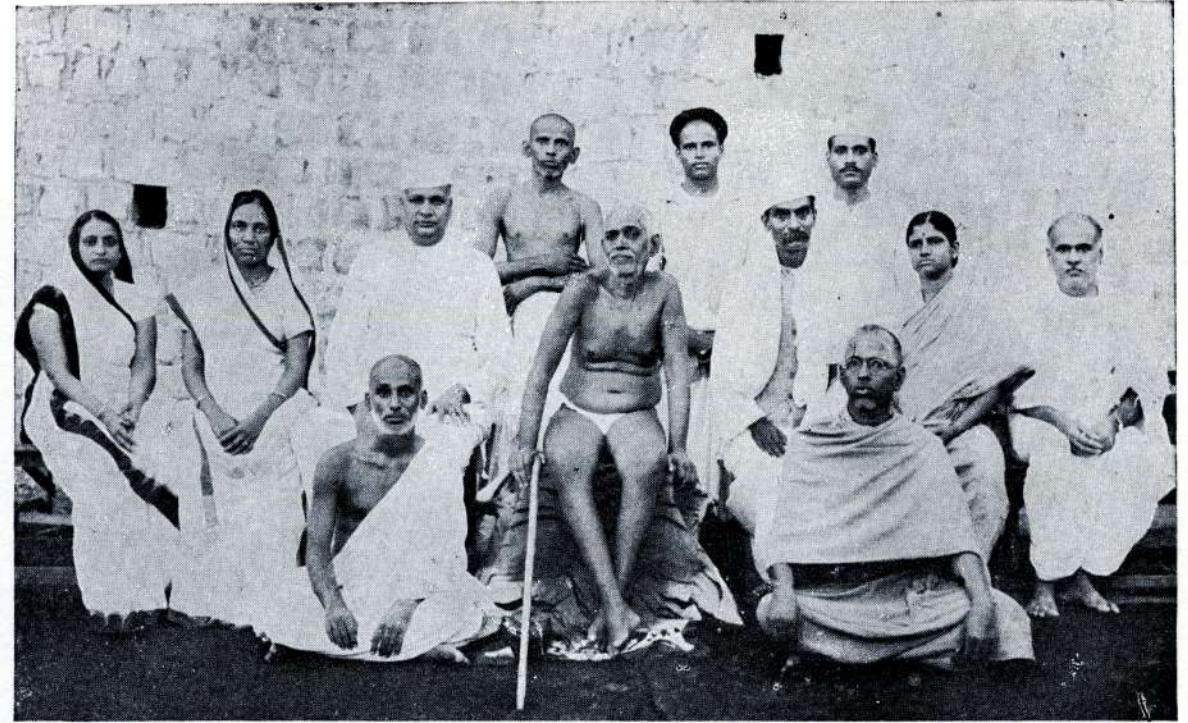


Ashram office, assisting Sri Niranjanananda Swami, the *Sarvadhikari* (Sole Manager), whom he succeeded as President on January 30, 1953. On several occasions when the *Sarvadhikari* had to go away on Ashram business he was put in charge. Sri Bhagavan would some times refer people to him, saying : "Ask Venkatoo. He is the *kutti* (little) *Sarvadhikari* !" More than once he said : "He is the future *Sarvadhikari* ; take his view also."

Sri Niranjanananda Swami was apt to be brusque in manner towards Venkatoo. Since he was a *sannyasin* he was careful that none of the old relationship of father and son should continue as between him and Venkatoo. He was very curt and would not allow Venkatoo even to join group photographs. Once it was Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni (group photo taken on 28-12-1928) and more than once it was Sri Bhagavan (group photo taken on 30-11-1947) who intervened and insisted on the inclusion of Venkatoo. Sri M. S. Kamath, a well-known devotee and the editor of *Sunday Times*, used to present on Jayanthi Day new Khadi clothes to devotees and the *Sarvadhikari* would not permit any such gift being given to Venkatoo. A devotee (Sri Framji Dorabji's brother) had once presented a cycle to Venkatoo,

but the *Sarvadhikari* claimed it for the Ashram ! The *Sarvadhikari* did not permit him to move out of Tiruvannamalai and it was Sri Bhagavan who had to intervene and persuade Chinna Swami (*Sarvadhikari*) that Venkatoo was a householder and was free to move about as he pleased.

Sri Bhagavan had always shown love and kindness to Venkatoo. When Sri Seshadri Swami's body was interred Sri Bhagavan asked Venkatoo to join Him and others in placing *vibhuthi* (sacred ash) on the *samadhi*-pit. When large-scale arrests were reported during the *Quit India* movement in 1942, Sri Bhagavan remarked that, if Venkatoo were not in the Ashram, he as a staunch Congressman would have gone to jail, like his comrades ! On August 15, 1947 — the day of Indian Independence — Sri T. N. Venkataraman brought the Revenue Divisional Officer and the Deputy Superintendent of Police of Tiruvannamalai to the Ashram and requested Sri Bhagavan to hoist the Indian National Flag in the Ashram. In fact, the previous night Sri Bhagavan Himself, along with other inmates, got the flag ready and helped arrange decorations. In memory of Sri Bhagavan's participation in this, the National Flag is hoisted at the Ashram every year on Independence Day.



1938 Group Photo : Sri Rajendra Prasad (who later became the first President of Indian Union), along with Sri Jammalal Bajaj paid homage to Sri Bhagavan. Venkatoo is seen standing behind Sri Bhagavan, to His left. Sri Niranjanananda Swami is seated on the left side of Sri Bhagavan. Sri Yogi Ramiah is sitting on His right. Sri M. S. Kamath is seen seated on the extreme right.

When Gandhiji visited Madras in 1946, Venkatoo wanted to go and meet the Mahatma. Despite opposition from Chinna Swami, Venkatoo approached Sri Bhagavan, who gave not only consent but such encouragement that Venkatoo spent five days with the Mahatma in Madras and even secured his signature on the photograph of Sri Bhagavan. On his return he showed the photograph with Mahatma's signature

to Sri Bhagavan who smilingly held it in His hands and also listened with interest to Venkatoo's detailed and enthusiastic report on his delightful participation in the Mahatma's day-to-day activities.

Once when *Nān Yār ?* (the original Tamil of Sri Bhagavan's *Who Am I ?*) had run out of print and new copies could not be printed for want of money, Sri Rama Satagopan, editor of *Tyagi*, wanted just enough money to buy the requisite



Venkatoo (extreme right, next to Sri Bhagavan), who representing the Ashram, inaugurated the Kumbhabhishekam ceremonies of Sri Mathrubutheswara Shrine on 17-3-1949, is seen taking permission from Sri Bhagavan for the commencement of the function.

paper and promised to do the printing gratis. Venkatoo was the acting *Sarvadhikari* then and he immediately paid Rs. 100/- to Sri Satagopan. Mouna Swami (Srinivasa Rao) strongly objected. Sri Bhagavan who was coming along and heard all these, remarked : "What ? He is the *Sarvadhikari*, is he not ? What is wrong with it ?"

* * *

The administration of the Ashram had never been without problems. There were a few who had acted as Secretaries of the Ashram till 1933. But these persons lived in the town and also had their office there, so that money and provisions had to be carried all the way to the Ashram daily. This was a cumbersome process. So at the request of many close devotees, Sri Bhagavan gave the general power of attorney to Sri Niranjanananda Swami who became the Agent and *Sarvadhikari*. This was challenged by one, Perumal Swami, who had once been an attendant of Sri Bhagavan and now wanted to be the *Sarvadhikari*. In the legal proceedings that followed, Bhagavan had to depose before the Court, which, of course, sent a Commissioner to take the evidence. On the basis of Sri Bhagavan's deposition,¹ the Court declared that the Ashram was Private Property.

¹ An extract of the Deposition is published as *Sparks from the Anvil*.

To avoid similar troubles in future, devotees drew up a *Will*, under which the Ashram was to be maintained as a spiritual centre and its management was to vest in the *Sarvadhikari* and, after him, Venkatoo and his descendants. Sri Bhagavan listened carefully as it was read out, made comments on it and approved of it. Where a blank space had been left, He told them to write in the names of Sri Niranjanananda Swami and Sri T. N. Venkatarama Iyer. He did not sign it, having no name to sign with, but He drew a line at the foot of it and allowed Sri G. Sambasiva Rao to declare that He had done so in token of approval. The document was registered on March 6, 1938, and attested by Dewan Bahadur K. Sundaram Chettiar, (Retd. High Court Judge, Madras), Sri M. M. Bhargava (Manager, Reserve Bank of India, Madras), Sri Yogi Ramiah, Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami, Sri T. S. Rajagopala Iyer and Sri R. Narayana Iyer (Sub Registrar, Omalur).

For the installation of Sri Chakra Meru and the *Kumbhabhishekam* of Mother's Shrine — Sri Mathrubutheswara temple — on behalf of Sri Bhagavan and the Ashram (Sri Niranjanananda Swami being a *sannyasin* could not do rituals), Sri Venkataraman officiated in all rituals. The *vaidiks* together with Venkatoo approached Sri Bhagavan and secured



On 15-4-1950, Venkatoo leading the ceremonies of interment after Sri Bhagavan cast off His body (on 14-4-1950). He is here seen performing archana.

formal permission to commence the *Kumbhabhishekam* ceremonies. Again, when Sri Bhagavan attained *Brahma Nirvana* on April 14, 1950, the ceremonial acts of bathing, *puja* and burial on the following day, were all performed by Venkatoo with scrupulous care and reverence.

Sri T. N. Venkataraman played therefore an active role in both the ritual observances and practical administration of the Ashram. After the *samadhi* of Sri Niranjanananda Swami, he had to go to Court and obtain

a certificate of succession to administer the Ashram (of course, with the aid of a Managing Committee). A case had been going on even from 1950, but finally in March 1954 the Court declared that Sri T. N. Venkataraman was entitled to manage the properties under the *Will* of the Maharshi. Again a case went up petitioning the Court to bring the Ashram under the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act, which would have meant that the Ashram was exclusively



1947 Group Photo : The last group photo of Sri Bhagavan with devotees. Sri Bhagavan asked Venkatoo and his children to join and they are seen seated close to Him on the floor. Behind Him, Major Chadwick is standing.

for Hindus. The Court declared the Ashram as a Public Religious Trust and recognised the position of Sri T. N. Venkataraman as the Hereditary Trustee, who was to manage the Ashram with the aid of four other trustees, two to be nominated by the Government of Tamil Nadu and two by him. This Scheme has been working from 1964. According to this Scheme the government sees to the proper management of the institution, since the Budget and Audit Reports are to be submitted to them ;

while the Hereditary Trustee attends to the day-to-day affairs and caters to the needs of the devotees.

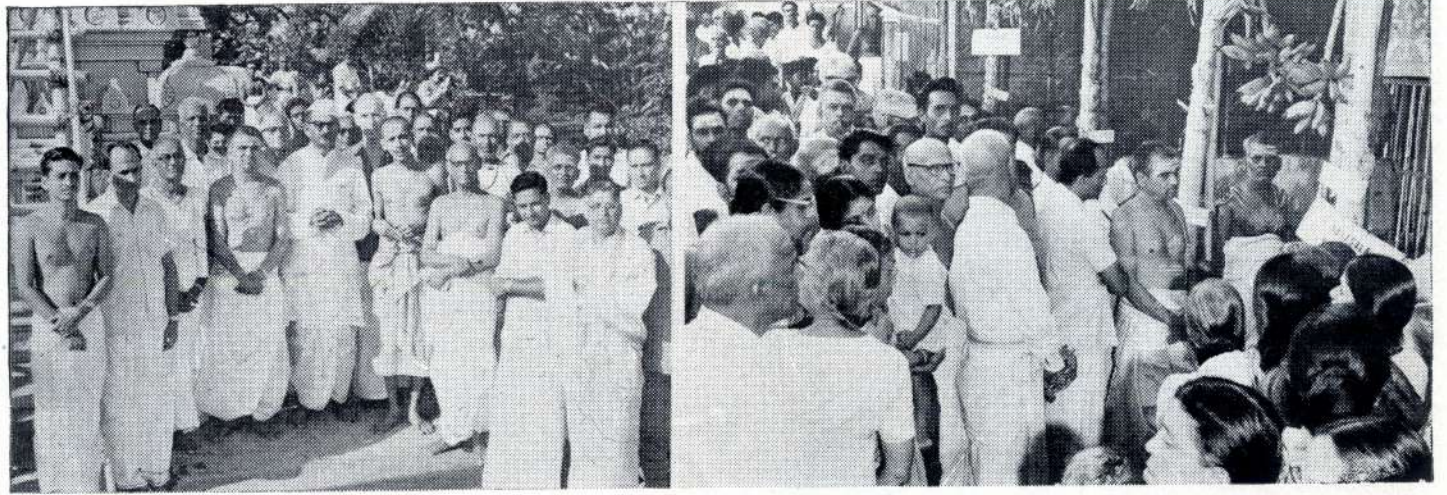
In spite of such preoccupations and administrative worries Sri T. N. Venkataraman has always managed to keep cheerful. His dealings with devotees and Ashram inmates are characterised by warm affection and thoughtful concern. Hence he is sensitive to their requirements and difficulties and offers them the utmost help. The devotees,

in their turn, hold him in loving esteem and regard him like a brother.

When he took over the management the Ashram was heavily in debt. Sri T. N. Venkataraman has retrieved it from this position and built up some capital and property, by the abundant grace of Sri Bhagavan and with the unstinted co-operation and earnest efforts of fellow-devotees. Even a casual visitor to the Ashram can notice the substantial improvements effected, the number of new residential buildings, the facilities now available and the smoothness and efficiency of the whole administration. In fact, an experienced financier saw the accounts recently and remarked that it was a tremendous achievement to have built up the present reserve position ! This is a tribute to the integrity, industry and managerial skill of Sri T. N. Venkataraman.

At home he is very simple. His children call him 'ANNA' (elder brother) ! The family could not have a comfortable life till after the eldest son had got a job ; but, in spite of the hardship, he has given all his children higher education. Likewise he has discharged in full his duty towards elders in the family. In the case of *Manni* (wife of Sri Nagaswami Iyer, Sri Bhagavan's elder brother, who passed away even before his wife reached

her teens), Sri Bhagavan's wish, conveyed through *Athai*, was that she should stay. *Manni* consented and stayed. *Athai* and her husband, Sri S. Pitchu Iyer, also stayed with Venkatoo. He always cherished feelings of the greatest affection and respect for these elders and looked after their daily needs and comfort. He took the leading part in the 60th birthday celebration of Sri Pitchu Iyer, which went off in a grand manner in the presence of Sri Bhagavan. In their last



1

2

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The Kumbhabhishekam to Sri Bhagavan's Shrine of Grace was performed on 18-6-1967, thanks to the tireless efforts of Venkatoo !

H. H. Sri Swami Chidananda of Sivanandashram graced the occasion and the then Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, Sri S. L. Silam, too participated in these ceremonies.

1. Venkatoo with the purnakumbha at the commencement of the sacred function.
2. Venkatoo with Sri Silam and Sri Swami Chidananda. In front of yagasala.
3. Sri Silam speaks : Mr. Arthur Osborne and Venkatoo listen with interest.

moments all these elders gratefully acknowledged that they had indeed been very well looked after by him. All his children are married except Sri Ganesan, the second son, who is the Managing Editor of *The Mountain Path* and also assists his father in running the Ashram.





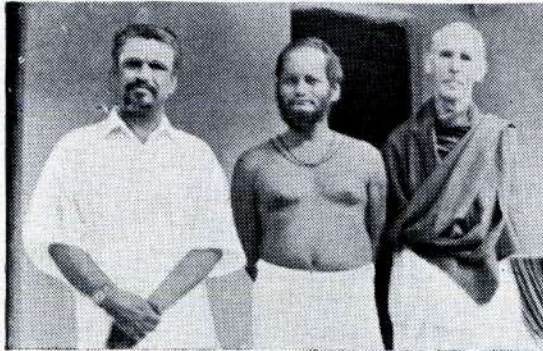
With Sri O. P. Ramaswami Reddiar, the then Chief Minister of Madras.

With the blessings and presiding guidance of Sri Bhagavan, the gracious good wishes of elder devotees and willing co-operation from fellow-workers, Venkatoo is cheerfully carrying on the management to the satisfaction of all concerned.

His recognition of his limitations has, throughout his life, helped him to be submissive without being timid and flexible without being infirm. This remarkable quality enabled him to move on the best of terms with devotees and scholars, such as Major Chadwick, Sri Ramanananda Saraswati, Sri Devaraja Mudaliar, Mr. Arthur Osborne, Sri Muruganar,



With Sri G. S. Pathak, Vice President of India.

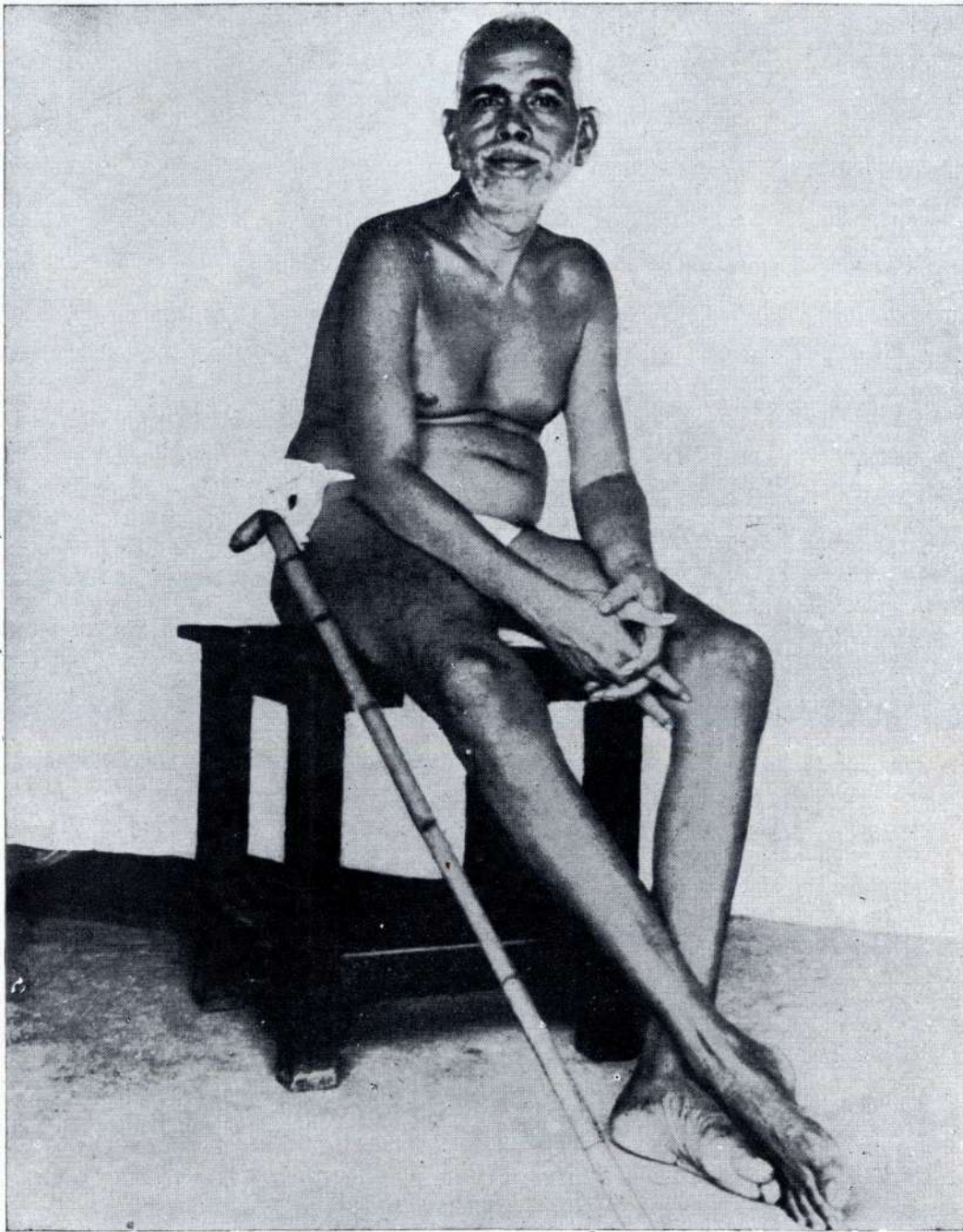


With Sri Swami Muktananda of Vajreshwari.

Sri Viswanatha Swami, Sri Kunju Swami, Sri T. P. Ramachandra Aiyer and Sri Ramaswami Pillai. His achievements in completing Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi, its *Kumbhabhishekam* in 1967 and the opening of the vast Auditorium/Meditation Hall in front of it in 1970, and the renovation of Sri Mathrubutheswara temple (in 1967), will be cherished by posterity with gratitude. His untiring zeal in bringing out books on and by Sri Bhagavan is well-known. Anxious to keep the Ashram as it was in the days of Sri Bhagavan, he has, despite odds, maintained the kitchen and the kind and quality of food that used to be



H. H. Sri Santananda Swami of Pudukkottai is seen declaring open the RAMANA AUDITORIUM in 1970. Venkatoo looks very happy at having accomplished this great task.



served to the devotees. When once there was a suggestion that in view of rising costs the kitchen might be closed and a canteen opened outside the Ashram, he got furious and said : " I will never allow it to happen. For, I remember vividly how Sri Bhagavan was reading a newspaper article on Him and read aloud appreciatively the passage : ' There are two fires in Ramanashram : one is Sri Bhagavan

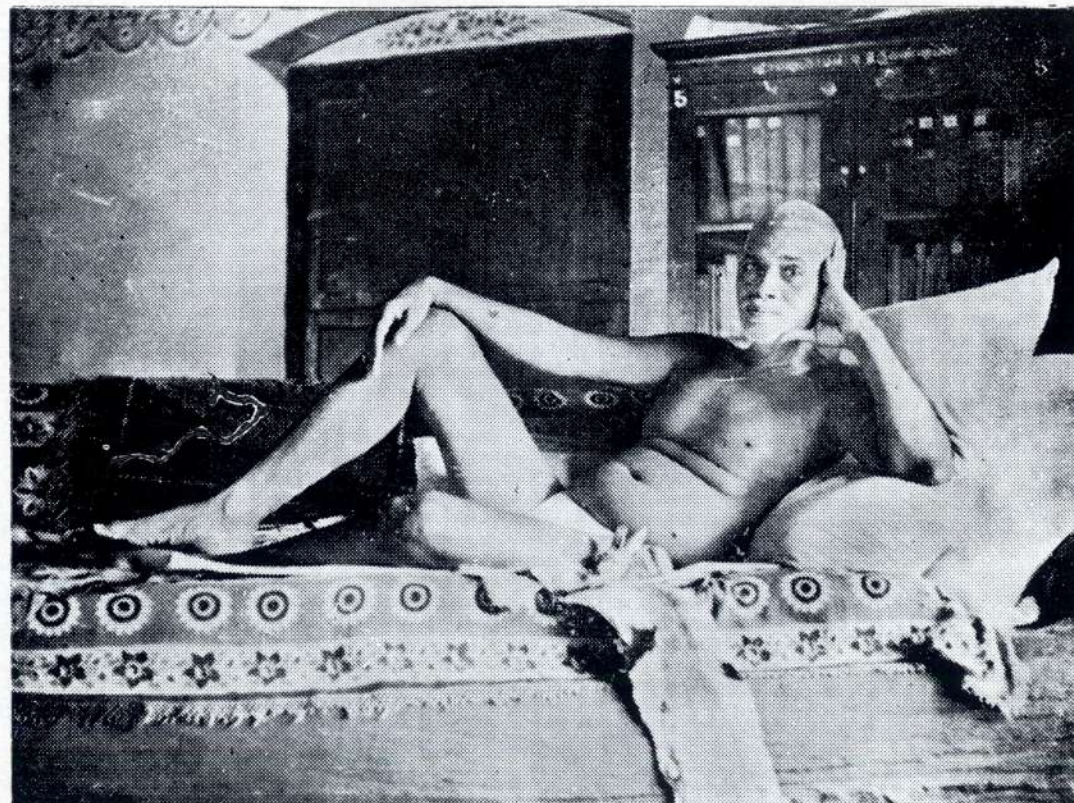
Himself and the other is the kitchen fire. They both will never cease to kindle the heart of any devotee visiting the Ashram ! ' And so, I know how much Sri Bhagavan wanted the kitchen to be kept up and the devotees served good food."

Devotees thus have now good shelter, good food, good halls for



meditation, good books to read and a good journal to spread the teaching of Sri Bhagavan. Is this not proof enough that Venkatoo has indeed been chosen by our Master for His service ?

May Sri T. N. Venkataraman live long, happy and cheerful as ever, and continue to do Ramana-seva and Ramana-bhakta-seva !



A rabbit sitting on the couch near Sri Bhagavan

In 1936, a certain man claiming to be Sri Maharshi's quandom disciple filed a suit in the court praying for a declaration that he was the legitimate Manager (*Sarvadhikari*) of the Ashram. Sri Bhagavan was examined on Commission. There was a crowd but the proceedings went on smoothly, Sri Bhagavan's answers being quite spontaneous. Here are a few questions and answers :

Question : To which *asramam* (stage of life) does Sri Bhagavan belong ?

Answer : *Atyasrama* (transcending all stages).

Q. : What is it ?

A. : It is beyond the four commonly known *asramas*.

Q. : Is it *sastraic* ?

A. : Yes. It is mentioned in the *sastras*.

Q. : Are there others of the same type besides yourself ?

A. : There may be.

Q. : Have there been any ?

A. : Suka, Rishabha, Jada Bharata and so on.

Q. : You left home at an early age because you had no attachment for home and property. But here, there is property in the Asramam. How is it ?

A. : I do not seek it. Property is thrust on me. I neither love nor hate it.

Q. : In that case the attachment to property is now renewed. Is it so ?

A. : I do not hate it, — that is all I said.

Q. : In practical life it amounts to what I say.

A. : Just as we live and move in practical matters.

* * *

Q. : When you threw away your cash, etc., within an hour after your arrival in this place, you did so because you did not desire possessions. You never touch money. There were no possessions for several years after your arrival here. How is it that donations are now accepted by the Asramam ?

A. : This practice grew up at a later stage because a few associates began to use my name to collect funds. I did not approve of their action nor check them. So it is going on. I do not desire that

¹ From *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 237-240

contributions should be accepted. But people do not heed that advice. I do not desire to give ineffective advice. I do not therefore check them. Since money comes in property grows spontaneously.

Q. : Why do you not sign your name ?

A. : The author of *Self-Realisation* has furnished his answer for this question. Moreover, by what name am I to be known ? I myself do not know. People have given me several names from time to time since my arrival here. If I should sign by one name, all would not understand it. So I used to say to the people seeking autographs that, even if they should show my signature, people in general would not believe it to be true.

Q. : You do not touch money nor other offerings, I trust.

A. : People sometimes place fruits in my hands. I touch them.

Q. : If you receive one kind of offering, why should you not receive money also ?

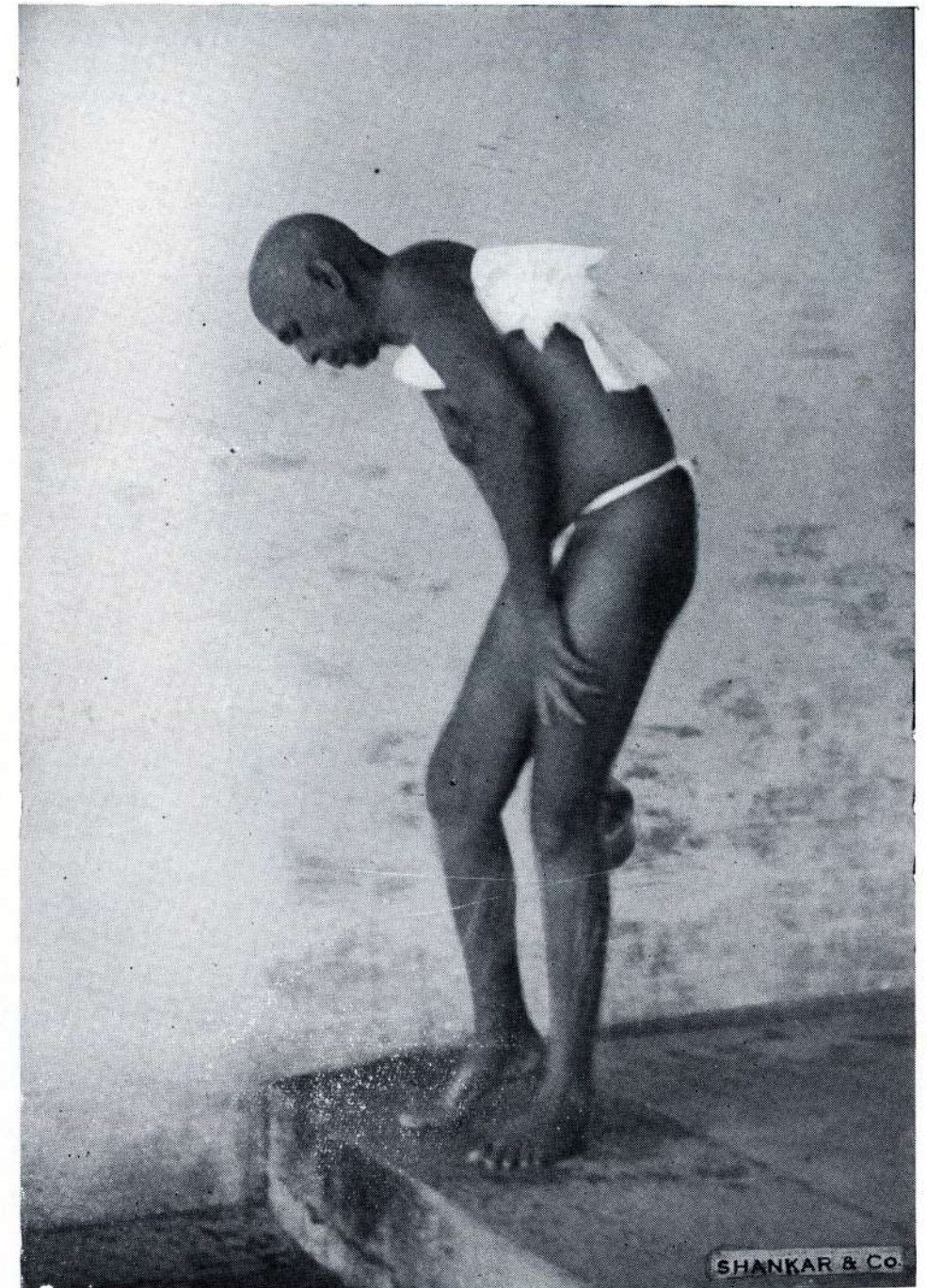
A. : I cannot eat money. What shall I do with it ? Why should I take that with which I do not know what to do ?

Q. : Why do visitors stop at the Asramam ?

A. : They must know why.

Q. : You have no objection to any one coming and staying here, I suppose.

A. : No.



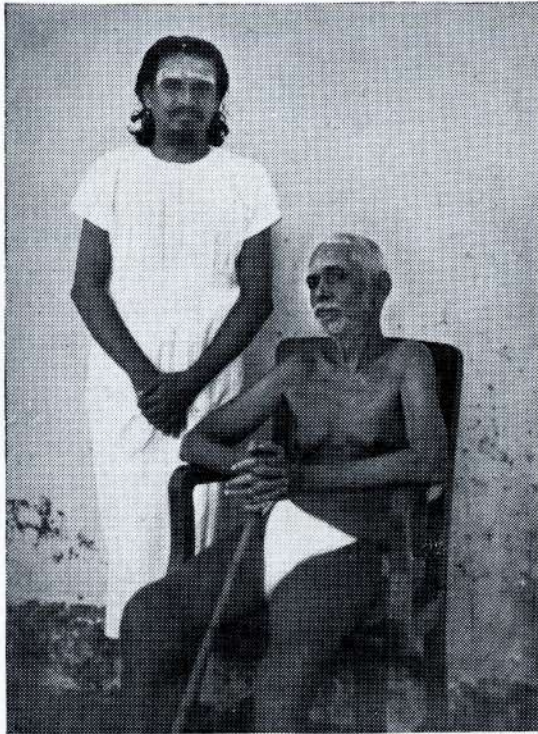
Q. : You have similarly no objection to any length of their stay.

A. : No. If I do not find it agreeable I will go away. That is all.

A lawyer-devotee asked Sri Bhagavan if the previous day's examination by the Commission caused much strain. Maharshi replied : " I did not use my mind and so there was no strain. Let them examine me for a thousand days. I don't mind ! "

Our Master's Choice

By Lucia Osborne



Sri Bhagavan approved of the Will designating members of the family to manage the Ashram affairs because as He said, they would be interested and have it at heart to see to it that it is run as best as possible whereas strangers might not be so interested. We see the wisdom of it today when temple affairs are entrusted to worldly people and sometimes to atheists.

I have known the President of the Ashram, more familiarly known as 'Venkatoo', for over thirty years. I could perhaps understand and appreciate him better as a family man for I know the difficulties of having a family and trying to remain unaffected by it. Venkatoo is an exceptionally good and affectionate father and his deep love and consideration for his children and family is fully reciprocated by them. They adore him!

Whatever criticism may be levelled against him there is no doubt that he is a devotee of Sri Bhagavan and turns

to Him in surrender for protection whenever trouble looms large. This has steered him and the Ashram through many a pitfall. There is a certain amount of simplicity and humility about him, though in certain aspects he can be as hard as nails. He admits in all simplicity some of his shortcomings of which he is aware. He has no pretensions intellectually: 'I am a simple man', he says.

In *The Mountain Path* of October, 1966 (p. 385-6) the late founder-editor of it wrote: "A particular tribute must be paid to Venkatoo by *The Mountain Path*. When it was still a project in the latter part of 1963 almost every one took it for granted that it would incur a deficit and would need to be subsidised. In spite of this Venkatoo told us that we could go ahead and he would finance it out of the Ashram funds. Now the President has been repaid for his faith in it, because the fixed deposit built out of the Life Subscriptions to it is one of those

on which the Ashram's new prosperity is built."

After all an institution is *ipso facto* turned more towards outer affairs and let's not forget that this is the Kali Yuga when most values show a downward trend; but in spite of that Arunachala will remain and stand out as the spiritual centre of the world. The Grace and guidance that emanates from the invisible all-pervading Presence of Sri Bhagavan draws people in increasing numbers, and the Ashram management's function is first and foremost to maintain it as a spiritual centre as envisaged by the Master. Its influence is spreading far and wide.

The late founder-editor also once has written: "I wouldn't say Venkatoo's management is the best; but there cannot be a better one for me since he is my Master's choice!"

This applies to all devotees.

Bhagavan knows best.

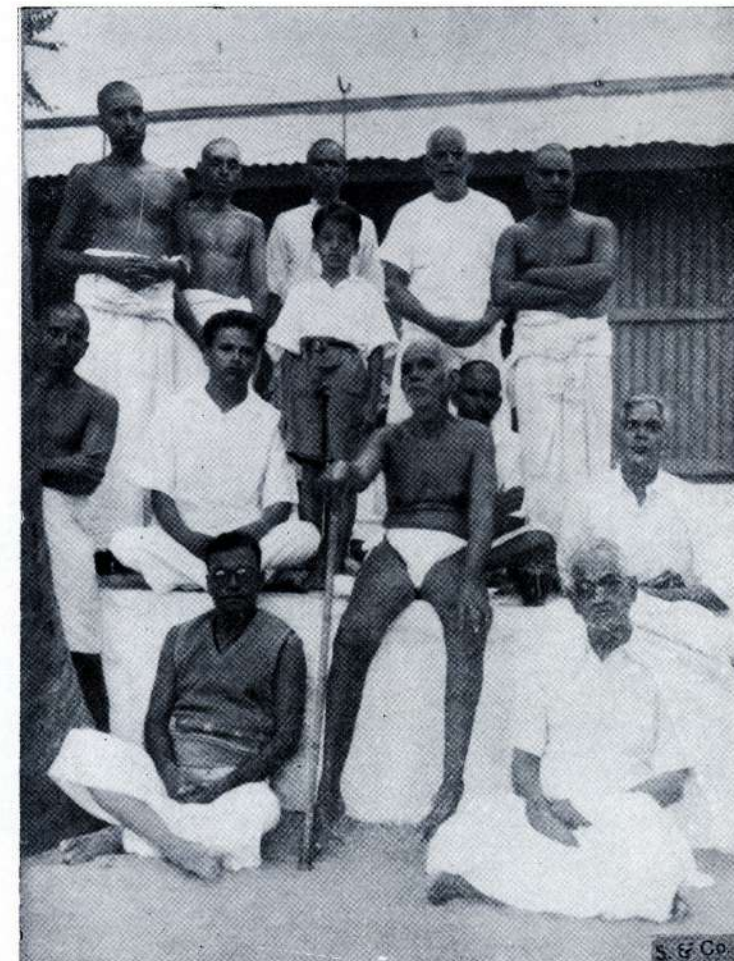
The Fortunate Boy

By "Sein"

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is well-known to all as a great Sage. But few know or recall His human goodness. And fewer still experienced His fatherly and motherly love! But one boy had the golden privilege of sleeping with Sri Bhagavan and being tended by Him as by a mother.

This was in 1920. Bhagavan had come to Skandashram from Virupaksha Cave and a small batch of devotees had gathered round Him. Devotees from all parts of India were coming for His darshan. While men could stay in the Ashram on the hill side with Bhagavan night and day, women were not allowed to remain there after sun set. This rule is adhered to in Sri Ramanasramam even day. Women devotees do not spend the night at the Ashram proper.

Sri Maharshi had a younger brother and sister, his elder brother having passed away prematurely. This younger brother, Sri Nagasundaram Iyer took *sannyasa* when his wife died, leaving a two-year old boy uncared for. Maharshi's sister, *Athai*, took charge of the orphan child and brought him up with loving care. She had no issue of her own and this boy was the sole scion of the whole family. *Athai* and her husband, who were living in the far south, took this lad twice or thrice a year to Tiruvannamalai to see Bhagavan and his father, now known as Sri Niranjanananda Swami. They were provided a house at the foot of the Hill at Tiruvannamalai. Every morning *Athai* would go up the Hill and return to town in the evening, leaving the boy behind



Sri Bhagavan visited Skandashram in 1945 and spent a day there with devotees. In this group photo taken there, Venkatoo is seated next to Sri Bhagavan, to His right and Ganesan is standing behind. Sri T. P. Ramachandra Aiyer sits near His right foot and Sri S. Doraiswami Aiyer, to the left.

at Skandashram itself to be taken care of by the Sage.

In the night the boy would be fed by Bhagavan, who would make him lie down beside Him, cover him with a blanket and lull him to sleep, like any mother her child. Early in the morning He would take the boy to the spring, clean his teeth with powder, and wash his face. *Athai* would come hurrying up the Hill in the morning. Bhagavan, with the child seated on a culvert beside Him: "Look! There comes your *Athai*. Look, how she runs up to see you!" As soon as she reached the spot, Bhagavan would tell her:



“ Take your boy, make sure he is safe and sound ! ”

This motherly affection went side by side with fatherly strictness. Once Bhagavan gave the boy a practical lesson not easily forgotten. At Skandashram lived a monkey, named *Nondi* (a maimed one), which was the pet of all. Maharshi had ordered that whatever food was served to Him and the devotees should also be served to the monkey, and in case he was absent at meal time, then his share should be kept aside and await his return. Then, the food would be kept on a window sill inside the cave and the shutter closed but not bolted. This was the custom.

On one of his periodical visits to the Ashram, the boy had enjoyed his due share and perhaps a little more of the sweet dishes served to the devotees. The monkey being absent, its portion was kept on the sill and the shutter closed. The boy, his greed unsatisfied, went up to the window and began to eat out of the monkey's share. Just then *Nondi* came, opened the window and found the boy eating his share. He promptly gave the boy a blow on his cheek. Shocked and terrified, the boy cried out and devotees tried to console him. Sri Bhagavan came to the spot, understood the situation and told the boy : “ You have been served right. Why did you touch *Nondi*'s share ? You had had enough already. You ought to have been contented with that.”

“ Do not touch what belongs to others. Be content with what you have.” This lesson the boy learnt for life from the words of the Maharshi that day.

The boy thus blessed is
Sri T. N. Venkataraman !



“ Do not touch what belongs to others.
Be content with what you have ! ”

Namakarana

Many devotees have known and poets have sung of the grace of Sri Bhagavan as Mother or Father, but few are aware of His charming playfulness as a grandfather interested in *namakarana* (christening), to the satisfaction of all concerned, when new additions were made to devotees' families. This natural prerogative, which He enjoyed exercising, was brought into full play in the successive names He bestowed on Venkatoo's children. This series presents a beautiful story revealing the humour and humanity of Sri Bhagavan, who also officiated at the *annaprasana* ceremonies of these children and fed them with their first mouthful of boiled rice.



Even before Venkatoo came to Tiruvannamalai and settled at the Ashram in 1938, he used to bring his new born babes to Sri Bhagavan to receive His blessings and be named by Him. When the first son was brought to Him in 1934 and placed in His hands in the Old Hall and *Athai* requested Him to choose a name for the child, He lifted His head and noticed one Sundara Arya, a shy inmate, unobtrusively entering the Hall, and said : "Look ! there he is. Does he not say, name the child after me ?" So, the child got the name, SUNDARA RAMANAN, combining Sri Bhagavan's name with that of His father.

The next son, brought to Him in 1936 for naming, gave Him, as He jokingly said :

"No trouble at all, for he had come into the world with a name !" The implication was that, having been born on *Vinayaka Chaturti* (the birthday of Lord Ganesa), the baby had to be named GANESAN.



Venkatoo with his children and grandchildren. Seated (l. to r.) : Sundara Ramanan, Sri Venkataraman, Smt. Nagalakshmi, Smt. Sundara Ramanan. Standing (l. to r.) : Ganesan, Saraswati, Alagu, Lakshmi, Mangalam and Subramaniam.

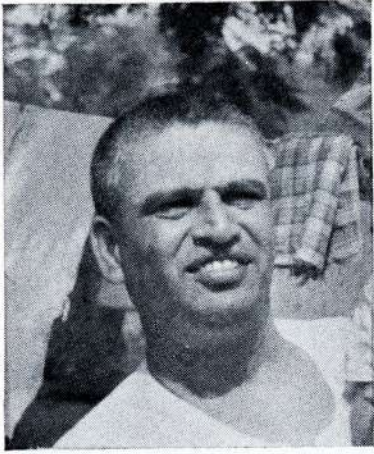
The third son was born in 1939, by which time the family had settled in Tiruvannamalai. When the infant was taken to Him for naming, Bhagavan smilingly said : "This fellow too gives no trouble. He is the younger brother



of Ganesa and hence is also born with a name !” Thus he came to be called SUBRAMANIAM.

The next infant, a girl, was put into Bhagavan’s hands in 1941, and elicited the remarks : ‘ Though the first girl born in our family should be named Alagu or Alamelu, I would name her after my grandmother who almost sacrificed herself for the family ’. So, in grateful memory, the child was named LAKSHMI. The next baby girl (1944) was named by Sri Bhagavan, ALAGU, after His mother.

When the next baby girl (1946) was taken to Sri Bhagavan, He told the devotees in the Hall : “ I had given my grandmother’s name and my mother’s name to two girls. Won’t Venkatoo be angry with me if I fail to give this one his mother’s name ? ” So this child was called MANGALAM. The last baby girl (1949) was taken to Sri Bhagavan by Sadhu Kumaraswami and others who wanted to name her Alamelu, after Sri Bhagavan’s sister, and were almost certain that He would make this obvious choice. But when the baby was in His hands and there was a general murmur ‘ Alamelu ’, Bhagavan gave a beaming smile and said : “ No, no ; I have given the name of my grandmother, my mother and also Venkatoo’s mother. What will poor Nagu feel if I forget her mother ? Let her be called SARASWATI ”. Saraswati was the name of Venkatoo’s mother-in-law !



A Tribute

By Kunju Swami

I

I have known Sri T. N. Venkataraman from his boyhood. Before he came to live at the Ashram (in 1938) he was for some time in the employment of Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar, the well-known businessman and philanthropist. Trained with loving care by Sri Pitchu Iyer, his uncle, he gained great proficiency in keeping accounts. He also learned the art of dealing with persons belonging to all ranks and conditions of life. He was deeply interested in the Congress and the Freedom movement. A follower of Gandhiji, he would wear nothing but handspun and handwoven clothes. He keeps up this habit to this day.

Having observed his keen interest in the nationalist movement and social progress, I could not help feeling somewhat sad that the young man was not drawn to Sri Bhagavan. This looked strange, since thousands were drawn to Him even after a brief visit or casual contact!

It is reported that Sri Narayana Guru¹ while visiting Sri Bhagavan in 1922 remarked that, for all the rare and tremendous spiritual stature of Sri Bhagavan, the facilities provided by the Ashram were poor. He felt that if more amenities were available thousands could come and benefit by His radiant Grace. In fact Sri Narayana Guru asked one of his followers, well experienced in administrative affairs, whether he could not go to Sri Ramanasramam and see that something

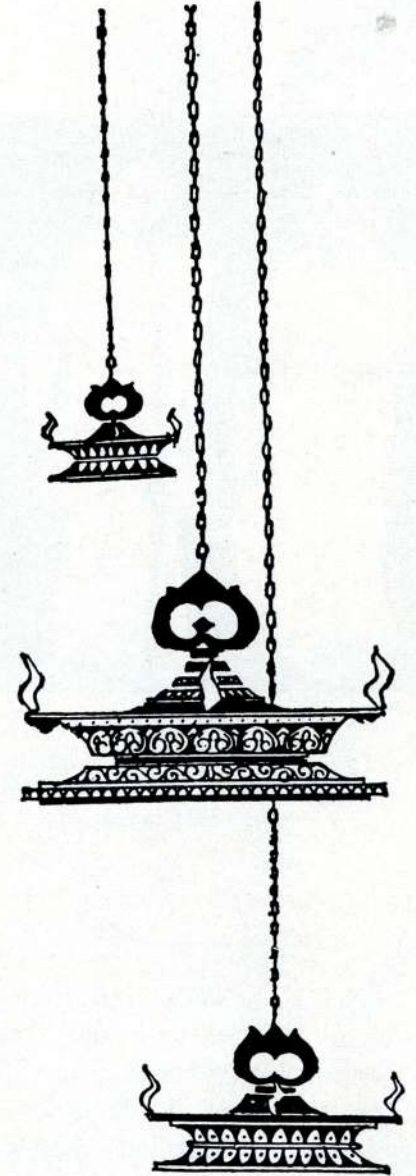
was done to improve the facilities. This idea, however, was not implemented at the time.

But observing the way Sri T. N. Venkataraman administers the Ashram today, I do feel that the wish of Sri Narayana Guru has been fulfilled. Sri T. N. Venkataraman's zeal for service for social and national welfare has been canalised and made purposeful and effective in his sustained and thoughtful service to the ever-growing community of Sri Bhagavan's devotees!

Under his able management, Sri Ramanasramam has become a spiritual centre attracting aspirants from all parts of the world. His simplicity, his charming manners and cheerful warmth in welcoming visitors and looking after devotees have endeared him to all.

Some of his personal traits are worth recalling. His desire to keep the Ashram clean and tidy, for instance. It is a common sight to see him to bend down and remove the least bit of dirt himself and ensure absolute cleanliness. I recollect how in the old days Yazhpanam Swami showed the same zeal in keeping the Ashram premises clean. If Sri Bhagavan noticed some dirt or rubbish anywhere, He would enquire whether Yazhpanam Swami was not around!

¹ See *The Mountain Path*, Vol. VI, No. 2, pp. 101-2.





RAMANA PICTORIAL SOUVENIR was released in 1969 Sri S. L. Silam, the then Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, presided. Tributes were paid to Venkatoo by (l. to r.) Dr. T. N. Krishnaswamy, Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan and Mr. Arthur Osborne.

It is my humble prayer to Sri Bhagavan that Sri T. N. Venkataraman may be blessed with long life and health and strength so that he may continue to serve the devotees for years and years to come !



Venkatoo presenting a portrait of Sri Bhagavan to the members of ARUNACHALA ASHRAMA (U. S. A. and Canada).

Sri T. N. Venkataraman has always been a friend in need to every devotee. He would personally attend and offer all assistance at the funeral of old devotees. When the Mudaliar Patti (a lady-devotee who, like Echammal, continued to serve food to Sri Bhagavan till her end) was to be buried and we had no money whatever, he discovered our plight and started a collection, with nothing but a towel on his person, and within an hour brought some ninety rupees folded in a corner of the towel !



A Tribute

By K. S.

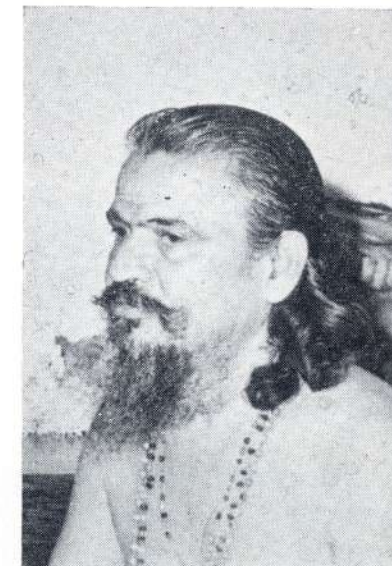
II

The *shashtiabdapurti* of Sri T. N. Venkataraman is an appropriate occasion for recalling with grateful appreciation his sustained service of over 35 years to Sri Ramanasramam, the earthly abode of Sri Bhagavan and the spiritual home of an ever-increasing family of seekers, all of whom are His children "in spirit and in truth".

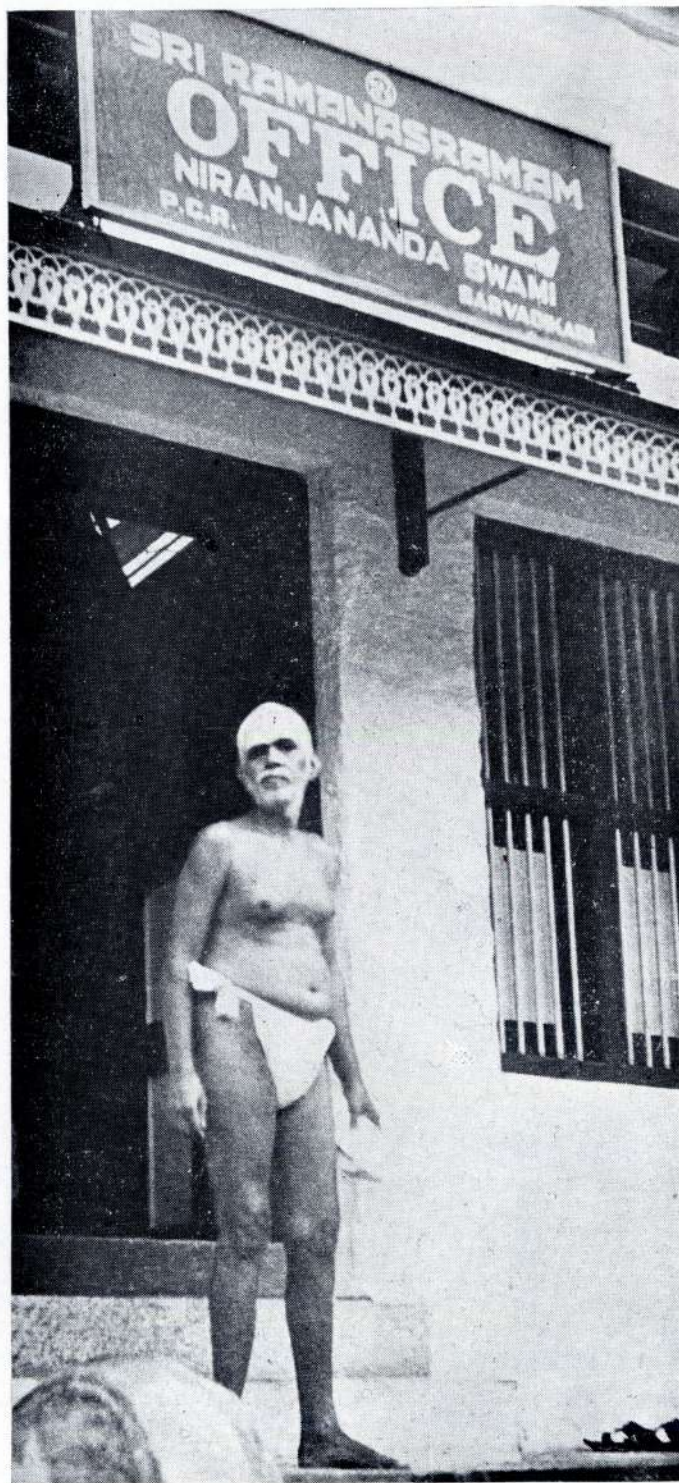
From the rigorous training he received as apprentice and assistant for 15 years under the staunch and stalwart "Chinna Swami", the Ashram's first, last and only *Sarvadhikari*, Venkataraman acquired two fine qualities — humility and courage — which have stood him in good stead during the two decades of his independent service as Manager and Hereditary Trustee of the Ashram.

If he has proved a considerate and patient host for countless visitors and inmates and also an efficient administrator utilizing available resources to the maximum advantage, it is because of his natural love and loyalty, the love and loyalty of fellow-devotees and the lesson of steadfastness in service which he had learnt from his father and which is the essence of leadership.

Bhagavan wanted the Ashram to be maintained "as a centre for the diffusion of spiritual knowledge and a place of sanctity". He did want the Ashram to provide scope for "the advancement of spirituality". He did want the *pujas* in the shrines to be properly conducted and the *sarira yatra* (the minimum



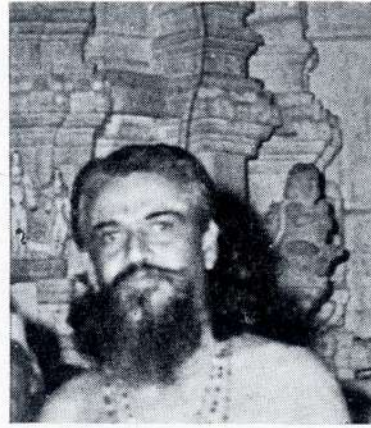
needs) of the *sadhakas* to be provided. But he had no intention of nominating a successor to the Throne of Transcendental Awareness which He held and will for ever hold, not as a man among men, but as the Person in all persons.



Venkataraman presenting the Sacred Relics of Sri Bhagavan to Ramana Kendra, Delhi. Prof. K. Swaminathan is receiving them.

A Tireless Worker

By Dr. T. N. Krishnaswamy



Because of Sri Venkataraman's humility he accepted wholeheartedly this limited but very heavy responsibility and scrupulously refrained from expounding doctrine or interposing himself between the Master, on the one hand, and His followers and devotees, on the other.

Because of his courage and firm faith, he fought with zeal and persistence and foiled with the help of the law the clumsy attempts of power-hungry passers-by to 'capture' the Ashram and use it for their own personal, partisan or political ends.

Thus two achievements stand to his credit and must be credited to his humility and courage. With humble reverence he has helped to preserve intact the 'sanctity' of the place, so that sensitive seekers still recognise here the Master's continued presence and share His spiritual sovereignty, the power of spirit over mind and matter, which all mankind is eligible to enjoy. By his courage and standfast strength, Sri Venkataraman has also preserved the necessary, if ancillary, sovereignty, in the temporal sphere, of the Ashram as the exclusive property and common home of Bhagavan's own 'family', natural and supernatural of *sevaks* and *sadhaks*.

In Sri Venkataraman's spirit of dedicated service and in the rapport he has maintained with the large body of devotees, one finds the silent operation of Sri Bhagavan's abundant Grace.

Venkatoo, who will be sixty on the 23rd May, 1974, has a distinguished record of service. For over thirty-five years he has been at the helm of Ashram affairs shouldering heavy responsibility without demur. He has no serious problems today but before he could settle down as the rightful President of the Ashram he had to go through the rigours of litigation.

There are many achievements of his worth mentioning. The large-scale expansion of accommodation facilities at the Ashram is one. But the most significant

achievement is the completion of Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi Shrine and its Kumbhabhishekam in 1967; and the construction of the Meditation Hall in front of it in 1970.

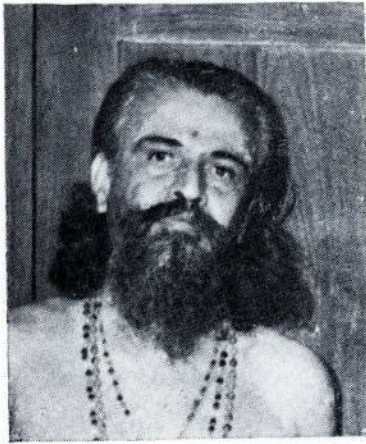
The Ashram is running as smoothly as ever and it has grown under his care.

It is but proper that a function is arranged to celebrate the sixtieth birthday of such a tireless worker who has always done his best for the Ashram.

My heartiest blessings to Venkatoo for a long life of joy and cheer!



Venkatoo always takes great interest in the serving of food at the Ashram. If there are no attendants around he himself does it with great pleasure. Next to Sri Bhagavan's picture is Dr. T. N. Krishnaswamy, together with his family.



A Tribute

By K. K. Nambiar

III

In attempting to pen a few lines about dear Venkatoo, on the occasion of his *Sashtiabdapurti* celebration, my memory goes back four decades when I happened to see him for the first time. His father, Sri Niranjanananda Swami, was then the *Sarvadhikari* of the Ashram. I became very friendly with him and he used to indent on my humble services for various odds and ends that used to crop up in the routine of Ashram management. On many such occasions I also used to meet Venkatoo and thus happened to know him rather intimately. He was not very different from the young men of those days and on occasions differed from his father in certain details of Ashram management. On the demise of Sri Niranjanananda Swami in 1953 the responsibility for running the Ashram devolved on Sri T. N. Venkataraman. The finances of the Ashram were not in a sound condition then.

It was not at all smooth-sailing for the Ashram management after the *Mahanirvana* of the Maharshi in April 1950. While some sincere devotees tried to put the Ashram affairs on an even keel, there were others who were bent on giving no end of trouble. Civil suits were filed challenging the validity of Sri Bhagavan's Will which vested the management of the Ashram as a hereditary right in his brother

Sri Niranjanananda Swami and, after him, in his son T. N. Venkataraman. It is interesting to recall that Sri Niranjanananda Swami's appointment itself as *Sarvadhikari* by a General Power of Attorney executed by Sri Bhagavan in May 1933 was contested in the District Munsif's Court by one of his old attendants. After a fairly protracted hearing in 1936, the case fell through, and to safeguard the future of the Ashram, the Will referred to above was executed in March 1938. Even so, issues were raised in the



Sri K. K. Shah, Governor of Tamil Nadu, receives Ashram publications from Venkatoo.

High Court whether Bhagavan could execute a Will and, if so, whether the manner in which He executed it was valid. But the High Court accepted the genuineness and validity of the Will, setting at rest all doubts about the hereditary right of management of the Ashram.

Since Sri Venkataraman, affectionately known to us all as Venkatoo, took over as President of the Board of Trustees of the Ashram, he had also to weather many storms like his father,



With the Queen Mother Frederika of Greece who stands in front of Holy Arunachala. (l. to r.) Princess Irene, Venkatoo, Sri T. P. Ramachandra Aiyer, the Queen Mother, Sri Viswanatha Swami and Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan.

but it must be said to his credit that he has successfully steered through all those difficulties and accomplished many things for which all the devotees of the Ashram should be ever grateful to him. The beautiful Mantap over the *samadhi* of Sri Bhagavan, and the magnificent meditation hall in front of it are achievements that he could be proud of. Look at the array of guest houses that have been built as appurtenant to the Ashram. Without these it would have been impossible to provide accommodation for the numerous visitors

from distant places in India and abroad, who now flock to the Ashram in ever increasing numbers. The difficult job of looking after the foreign visitors unaccustomed to our food and living habits, I must say, Venkatoo has been managing very well as testified to by many visitors, including the members of the Royal family of Greece.

The spiritual rituals of the Ashram, the daily worship in the shrines of Mathrubhutheswara and at Bhagavan's *samadhi*, are being conducted with

solemnity and regularity as also the *Veda Parayana* as in the old days when Bhagavan was with us. The annual *Jayanthi*, *Aradhana*, *Mahapooja* and other celebrations are also conducted with due solemnity, with *bhajans* and discourses in the evenings to the satisfaction of the many devotees who visit the Ashram on such occasions. The finances of the Ashram have improved very much during his management. *The Mountain Path*, published by him with the able and devoted assistance of his son, V. Ganesan, is attracting world-wide recognition as a first class medium of spiritual instruction.

In short, Venkatoo spares no pains to implement the sacred injunctions in Sri Bhagavan's Will to "make Sri Ramanasramam a centre for the diffusion of spiritual knowledge and a place of sanctity by affording scope for the fulfilment of objects germane to the advancement of spirituality."

On this occasion of Venkatoo's *Sashtiabdapurti*, let me wish him and his devoted wife many more years of healthy and prosperous life so that they may continue to do the devoted service they have all along been doing for the Ashram. In making this wish, my wife, who has been a friend of the family for well-nigh forty years, joins me with sincere prayers to Sri Bhagavan and Sri Mathrubhutheswara !



A Tribute

By N. Balarama Reddy

IV

'Venkatoos' — as he is affectionately known — is part and parcel of Sri Ramanasramam, and not merely the President of its Trust Board. For the last 36 years he has grown with the institution, imbibing the intricacies of its administration and the niceties of its working. Long personal contact with Sri Bhagavan and close association with his revered father, Sri Niranjanananda Swami, in the management of the Ashram, have undoubtedly been an asset to him in discharging his responsibility as head of this international institution. His early training under Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar, the noted financier of South India, has also helped him in building up the Ashram finances on a sound basis. His organising ability he has acquired, at least in part, as a Congress worker of pre-independence days. With this preparation, he has been able to tackle successfully some very difficult situations which arose in the life of the Ashram during the early years of his tenure.

Under his stewardship the resident devotees enjoy all amenities of life conducive to unfettered spiritual growth. He hardly interferes with their individual freedom. He moves about the Ashram more as a worker among workers than as the boss. Flexible by nature he knows how and when to yield but can be firm and unyielding when the situation calls for

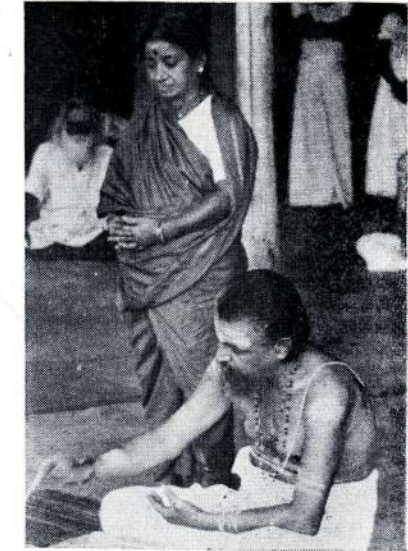
such an attitude in the interests of the organization. Genial by temperament he is a very sociable person with a smile for everyone.

As a householder he has played his role with amazing success. He is deeply attached to his family, which is fairly large. All his seven children are well-educated, and exceedingly well-behaved. They are also well-settled in life. The transformation of the family from its humble beginnings to its present prosperous condition is entirely due to him.

He keeps open house. Hospitality is obviously a family trait. Some friend or relative is always there as a guest in the house. His wife is a generous lady, pious and well-mannered and ably assists him both at home and the Ashram.

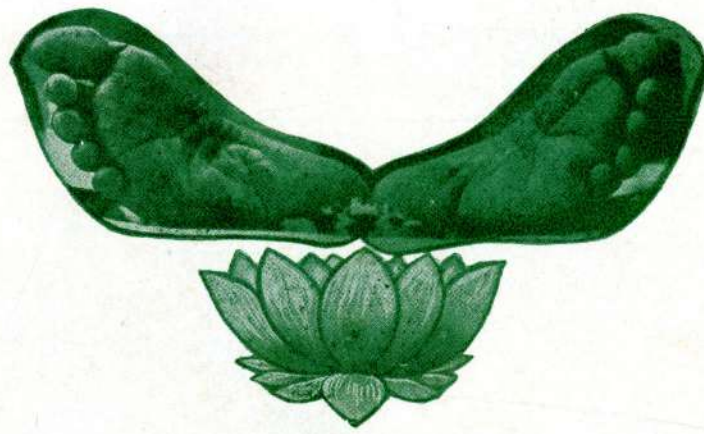
He has a soft corner for his relatives. They could always count on his help in times of need. Some of his poor relations are treated by him as his own family members and even supported by him. This is a commendable trait and one is reminded of Valmiki's phrase 'स्वजनस्य चरक्षिता' — protector of his own people.

The experience he gained as a successful householder must have been



of great help to him in the able handling of Ashram affairs.

May he continue to serve this great and noble institution which, as an outer symbol of Sri Ramana's Grace, has been attracting seekers from all over in their spiritual endeavour!



Prostrations to the Lotus Feet of Sri Bhagavan

SRI T. N. VENKATARAMAN (President, Board of Trustees, Sri Ramanasramam) takes this opportunity to thank all the devotees of Sri Bhagavan who have generously contributed towards the purse raised by the 'T. N. V. SASHTIABDAPURTI COMMITTEE', to be presented to him on 23-5-1974, on his completing the 60th birthday.

He conveys his special thanks to the members of the 'T. N. V. SASHTIABDAPURTI COMMITTEE': Sri D. S. Sastri, Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami, Sri K. K. Nambiar, Sri N. Balarama Reddiar, Sri R. L. Purushothama Reddiar (Convener).

One of his closest friends, Sri S. P. Mukherjee, who was the Convener of the above Committee and who was so very enthusiastic to celebrate this occasion with great eclat and jubilation, passed away recently to his great sorrow. He bows down to his departed friend and prays for his peace and bliss at the Lotus Feet of Sri Bhagavan .

To Bhagavan he owes his everything and to Him he surrenders his everything !

*May Sri Bhagavan bless us all,
is his prayer on this joyous occasion !!*

