

LETTERS
FROM
SRI RAMANASRAMAM
Extract Version

SURI NAGAMMA

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AHAM SPHURANA

22nd November, 1945

Yesterday a Bengali Swami in ochre robes by name Hrishikesanand came here. This morning from 8-30 to 11-00 Bhagavan continuously discussed spiritual matters with him. That voice flowed full of nectar and uninterruptedly like the waters of the Ganges. How can my pen keep pace with that great flow? That *amrit* (nectar) can only be drunk deep with the hand of devotion: how can it be gathered and conveyed on paper? When Sri Bhagavan was relating his experiences in Madurai of the vision of death, these eyes were incapable of taking in the radiance of his personality, these ears of grasping the full wisdom of his words. It is natural for the enthusiasm of one who relates an incident to reflect the level of intelligence of him who listens.

I should have given you a more detailed account of the questions asked by the Swami and the replies given by Bhagavan; only at present the place reserved for ladies in the hall is rather far from Bhagavan, and, as I happened to be sitting at the back, I could not hear properly all that was being discussed. I did however hear one thing clearly. Bhagavan said, "In the vision of death, though all the senses were benumbed, the *aham sphurana* (Self-awareness) was clearly evident, and so I realised that it was that *awareness* that we call 'I', and not the body. This Self-awareness never decays. It is unrelated to anything. It is Self-luminous. Even if this body is burnt, it will not be affected. Hence, I realised on that very day so clearly that *that* was 'I'."

Many more such things were said but I could not follow or remember them; and so I am not able to write any more about them. There have been several discussions as this before, I am only sorry I have let slip such innumerable gems. Please excuse my laziness and indifference in not writing you even though you have been asking me all these days to write.

IN SERVICE OF THE SAGE

26th November 1945

When I went to the Asramam for the early morning *Vedaparayana* everyone was terribly busy. The kitchen presented a picturesque appearance, some cooking, some cleaning, some

giving orders, everyone busy with one thing or another. *Pulihodara, dadhyodhanam, pongal, vadai, chips, poories* and *kootu* and ever so many eatables were filled into baskets and sent up the hill. The *Sarvadhikari* does not appear to have had a wink of sleep the whole night. He is the person who has taken all the trouble.

Lord Krishna is reported to have stopped the celebration of the annual Indra Yajnam performed by the shepherds and instead arranged for the worship of the Govardhana Giri itself. When you saw the series of baskets going up the hill it appeared as if Sri Ramana had arranged this worship of Arunachala in place of the *vana samaradhana* of the Amala Tree (garden festival) performed annually during the month of Karthika.

After *Veda-parayana*, Bhagavan had his bath and breakfast and started for Skandasramam accompanied by Rangaswami who is like Nandi to Lord Siva. Leading the way, Bhagavan went up the hill to Skandasramam as if he was going to his own home.

Without giving the least inconvenience to Bhagavan the devotees proceeded in several groups and reached Skandasramam. Aunt Alamelu (sister of Bhagavan) and myself followed. Some other women got to the destination a little late. Being surrounded by the devotees Bhagavan was seated comfortably under the pleasant shade of the trees just in front of the Skandasramam building. This showed what a *Rishiasramam* is generally like. This Asramam was just like Badarikasramam of old as described in *Harivamsam* though the latter could not now be witnessed direct. This Skandasramam like Badarikasramam provided a visual feast with its water coming out of the rocky fountains resembling the *Sandhyarghya jalam* (the oblations at dawn and dusk) of Samyameswara and warblings and melodious notes of the birds sounding like the musical hymns of Sama Veda as sung by *rishikumaras* (the sons of seers). Apart from the many *sadhakas* and *sanyasins* present, lawyers and doctors, engineers and artists, newspaper correspondents and poets, songsters and a good many others arrived from Madras, Pondicherry and Villupuram. The young and old, the men and women and all without distinction of high and low, squatted on the ground around Bhagavan looking at him with a fixed gaze. While the Arunagiri abounding in mineral wealth served as the precious jewelled-throne, the clouds adorning the sky served the purpose of Sveta Chhatram (the white Umbrella) and the tree grove with innumerable branches acted as *vinjambarams* (fans used in deity worship). Sri Bhagavan shone in his glory as an emperor crowned, while *Prakritikanta* (Nature personified) waved lights to him with its agreeable rays of the sun.

Brother! How can I draw that picture for you? The Maharshi is calm and his serene gaze, coming from the source, pervades all corners. His gentle smile shone like the cool rays of the moon. His words simply rained *amrit*. We sat there like statues without consciousness of the body. The photographers then attended to their job. After 9-30 a.m. the usual daily programme of the Asramam below, relating to mails, newspapers, etc. was gone through as in a Maharaja's durbar. The clouds then increased and the wind blew heavily. The devotees gave Bhagavan a shawl with which he covered his whole body except the face. Then Bhagavan, in his sitting posture, looked like his mother Alamma incarnate. Aunt and myself were of the same opinion. This scene was also photographed.

Sri Bhagavan preached for some time in silence in the "*gurosthu mowna vyakhyanam*" (the Guru explaining by mere silence) way. There may certainly be some pure-hearted souls that could all become "*chhinna samsayah*" (cleared of all doubts). But in my case, my mind ran to the preparations like *pulihodara* and *dadhyodhanam* etc., as it was dinner time. The question was whether everything was offered to the hill or anything was left behind. The doubt was solved after 11-30 in the forenoon. My brethren wished to arrange the delicacies for Bhagavan separately in a comfortable place. But would he agree to that? He got a table arranged by his sofa and feasted there in the midst of all.

After the meal, his sofa was set up on the verandah which has an iron-grating enclosure. The devotees were at first at a distance but in a few minutes came near to Bhagavan. Aunt Alamelu and I with some other women were seated in an adjacent room looking at Bhagavan through a window just opposite to his lotus feet. He then began to talk, telling us short stories about his past life on the mountain, relating the arrival of the mother, the construction of Skandasramam, the water supply, the supply of provisions, the rule of the monkey kingdom, the peacock dances, his association with serpents and leopards. During this discourse he greeted a new entrant, the poet Naganarya, by enquiring "When did you come?" Turning towards me he observed, "Here he comes". I replied, "Yes". Then something was recalled to his mind and he said, fixing his resplendent gaze, "There mother had her *nirvana* (left her mortal frame). We made her sit there outside. Still no mark of death was visible in her face. Like one seated in deep *samadhi*, divine light was seen in a holy dance. There, just there, where you are now sitting."

His enchanting words entered my ears like the sweet note of the *Venu* (the divine flute). I stood at this place worth seeking and heard the words worth hearing. What a glorious day is today!

Kapila liberated Devayani by initiating her into the Reality. Dhruva put Sunita on the path of salvation. Sri Ramana in his turn not only vouchsafed the eternal empire of freedom and bliss to his revered mother but also did the highest honour by installing the Mathrubhuteswara Lingam on her *Samadhi* to make her glory permanently extolled in the world.

On hearing the word “Mother” from the mouth of Sri Bhagavan, I was overcome with ecstasy and tears filled my eyes. It sounded as though the words about the mother were uttered to the daughter. Mahatmas always honour women. They view woman as the mother and love in perfect form. There is no creation without nature. Before the arrival of the mother there was no cooking in the Asramam. The mother came and gave a hearty meal to the residents. The *agnihotra* (fire) first instituted by the mother does the cooking even today and fills the bellies of thousands of devotees.

I turned round to see the photo of that revered mother but, being disappointed on finding none, said silently within, “O Mother, that brought glory to womanhood in general! We are blessed!” In the meanwhile various kinds of delicacies were served. Half an hour after we ate them, *poori* and *koottu* were given. After helping ourselves we began to go back. After seeing us all off one after another, Bhagavan came down from the throne of Arunagiri accompanied by his attendants and, walking slowly, reached the Asramam at its foot just as the sun sank behind the mountain on the west. Then the routine programme of *Veda-parayana* etc was gone through as usual.

SERVICE OF ATMA SWARUPA IS ATMA SEVA

28th November 1945

During the last two or three months, Bhagavan’s personal attendants have been massaging his legs with some medicated oil to relieve the rheumatic pain. Some of the devotees, zealous in attention to Bhagavan’s body, also began massaging by turn every half an hour, and this resulted in upsetting the usual Asramam routine.

Would Bhagavan tolerate all this? He was always considerate even to his personal attendants and would never say emphatically “No” to anything; so he said in a casual way, “All of you please wait for a while, I will also massage these legs a little. Should I too not have some of the *punyam* (grace)?” So saying, he removed their hands and began massaging his own legs. Not only was I very much amused at this but what little desire might have still been lurking in me to touch Sri Bhagavan’s lotus feet and thus perform *pranam* (salutation) was completely obliterated. Bhagavan’s words have a peculiar charm of their own! Look! He too wants a little of the *punyam*! What a delicate hint to those who have the intelligence to take it!

It was about that time that a retired judge of ripe old age said, “Swamiji, I should also be given my share of service to the feet of the Guru.” To this Bhagavan replied. “Oh, really? *Atma-vai guruhu!* (Service to Self is service to Guru.) You are now 70 years of age. You to do service to me? Enough of that! At least from now onwards, serve yourself. It is more than enough, if you remain quiet.”

When one comes to think about it, what greater *upadesa* (initiation) is there than this? Bhagavan says it is enough if one can remain quiet. It is natural for him to do so, but are we capable of it? However much we try we do not attain that state. What else can we do than depend upon Sri Bhagavan’s Grace?

SAMATVAM (EQUALITY WITH ALL)

29th November 1945

I believe it was about a year back. You know Ramachandra Rao, an Ayurvedic physician? For preparing a medicine which would give strength to Bhagavan’s body, he made out a long list of the necessary herbs and ingredients and showed it to Sri Bhagavan, Like a good boy, who would readily obey instructions, Bhagavan went through the whole list, praised the efficacy of the various drugs and finally said, “To whom is this medicine, my dear man?” He said quietly, “For Sri Bhagavan himself”. On hearing that, Bhagavan said, “No doubt, you have given me a long list, but where am I to get the money for it? It may cost Rs. 10/-, and whom am I to approach for it?”

Someone quietly said, looking around at the Asramam property, “Whose is all this, Swamiji?”

“Yes, but what have I? If I want a quarter anna, I must go and ask the *Sarvadhikari*. How should I go and ask him? He gives me a little food, if I go there as soon as the bell rings. I also eat along with the others and then come back, and I might be refused food if I was late. Even in being served food, I come last,” said Bhagavan. The poor physician trembled with fear and, with folded hands, said, “Swamiji, I just showed you the list and I myself will get the required drugs.” Upon this Bhagavan said, “Oh yes? You will get them? But if that medicine is good for me, it must necessarily be good for all the others here. Can you give it to them also as well as to me?” When some people said, “Why do we want it, Swamiji?” Bhagavan replied, “If people who do physical work don’t need a body-building tonic, how do I who merely sits here and eats? No, no, that can’t be!”

Once before, Dr. Srinivasa Rao told Bhagavan about an Allopathic medicine which gives strength and said that it would be good for Bhagavan if he took it. Bhagavan said, “Yes, that is all right, you are rich and can take anything; but what about me? I am a mendicant. How can I have such a costly medicine?” Then the doctor said, “Bhagavan always declines everything that is offered, but if he agrees to take something, won’t it be forthcoming? Or if not medicines, why not take some nutritious food such as milk, fruit and almonds?”

Bhagavan replied: “All right; but I am a *daridranarayana*. How can I afford it? Besides, am I a single individual? Mine is a large family. How can all of them have fruits, milk, almonds etc.?”

Bhagavan dislikes anything special for himself. He has often told us that if anybody brings eatables and distributes them amongst all he will not mind even if he is left out, but he will feel hurt if the eatables are given to him only and not distributed to others along with him. If he is walking along a path, and some people are coming in the opposite direction, he does not like them to step aside for him but instead he will himself step aside and allow them to pass and, until they do, he will not go a step further. We should consider ourselves fortunate if we can imbibe even a thousandth part of this spirit of equality and renunciation.

If dull-witted people like me who do not know his ideas give him preferential treatment in matters of food etc. he excuses a great deal since forbearance is his nature, but when it goes too far he gets disgusted and says, “What am I to do? They have the upper hand, they are the people who serve, I am the one who eats. I must listen to what they say, and eat when they want me to. You see, this is *swamitvam* (life of a Swami). Do you understand?” What more admonition can one want than this?

“GO THE WAY YOU CAME”

2nd December 1945

On another occasion an Andhra youth came and said, “Swami having a great desire for *moksha* (deliverance) and anxious to know the way thereto, I have read all sorts of books on Vedanta. They all describe it, each in a different way. I have also visited a number of learned people and when I asked them, each recommended a different path. I got puzzled and have come to you; please tell me which path to take”.

With a smile on his face, Bhagavan said, “All right, then, go the way you came”. we all felt amused at this. The poor young man did not know what to say. He waited until Bhagavan left the hall and then with a depressed look turned to the others there appealingly, and said: “Gentlemen, I have come a long way with great hope and with no regard for the expenses or discomfort, out of my ardent desire to know the way to *moksha*; is it fair to tell me to go the way I came. Is this such a huge joke?”

Thereupon one of them said, “No Sir. It is no joke. It is the most appropriate reply to your question. Bhagavan’s teaching is that the enquiry, ‘Who am I?’ is the easiest path to *moksha*. You asked him which way ‘I’ should go, and his saying, ‘Go the way you came,’ meant that if you investigate and pursue the path from which that ‘I’ came, you will attain *moksha*.”

The voice of a *Mahatma* indicates the truth even when speaking in a light vein. Thereupon the book, “Who am I?” was placed in the hands of the young man who felt astonished at the interpretation, and taking Bhagavan’s words as *upadesa*, prostrated himself to Bhagawan and went away.

Bhagavan usually gives us his teachings either in a humorous or a casual way or by way of consolation. During my early days at the Asramam, whenever I felt like going home, I would approach Bhagavan at some time when there were hardly any people present and say, "I want to go home, Bhagavan, but I am afraid of falling back into family muddles." He would reply, "Where is the question of our falling into anything when all comes and falls into us?"

On another occasion, I said, "Swami, I am not yet freed from these bonds." Bhagavan replied, "Let what comes come, let what goes go. Why do you worry?" Yes, if only we could realise what that 'I' is, we should not have all these worries.

ECHAMMA'S DEMISE

29th December 1945

On the night of Thursday the 27th at 2-45 Echamma, who was like a mother to Bhagavan, left her body and attained union with the Almighty at Bhagavan's lotus feet. I feel rather gratified than sorrowful at this news. When I moved from her house to a residence near to the Asramam, she would often say, "I loved you as my child. I thought you would see me out of this world, but you have gone away to a distance. Now you will come to me only after I am dead, to see the body off to the cremation ground, won't you?" When she said this, tears used to well up in her eyes. But it happened just as she had said. I only heard the news of her death, not of her sickness, There is a saying, "The child is firm as a rock, the mother fragile as shellac." I am only sorry it came too true in this case.

You remember on the 25th you and your wife presented her with some clothes and she was then busy cooking for guests in the house. That same evening, she was unable to get up and so asked for water and she was given some. After drinking it, she lay quietly and so, all the guests left. I am giving you the details as related by her niece who attended on her. After that drink of water she could not talk or eat, but remained bed-ridden. Next day this news was conveyed to Bhagavan. On the 27th her condition became serious. Telegrams were sent to her relatives. Even though she was almost unconscious she would open her eyes slightly, when anyone called her. At about four in the afternoon one lady wanted to test how far she was really conscious. So she said, "Food does not appear to have been sent to Bhagavan today."

Immediately she heard the word “food” she opened her eyes full and, with an exclamation, cast a questioning look. So as not to disturb her peace of mind, her niece said, “We have sent it,” and she nodded her head in approval. That is real *vrita deeksha* (strict observance of a vow). What can one say of the great mother who would not forget her *kainkary*a (service) to Bhagavan, even though she was in the throes of death!

That is all. At 8 o’clock that evening incoherent sounds were coming out of her mouth, her eyes were glazed and she was clearly in the pangs of death. Her nephew came to Bhagavan and brought the news. The Asramam doctor went there, examined her and declared that there was no hope; and then they performed her *jeevaprayaschitham* (shriving). Anyway, after the news was conveyed to Bhagavan, she had not much suffering, the breathing became easier and feebler and she passed away at 2-45 a.m. I came to know of her illness on Thursday evening and thought I could look her up the next morning but when I came to the Asramam before starting, I heard this sad news. Bhagavan said to me, “Oh, is she dead? I have been waiting to see when she would get away from all these worldly worries. So she has gone away from all these worries. All right, go there and come back.”

I went there along with some devotees. I was overpowered with grief when I saw that body with the face still undimmed. She was undoubtedly a powerful personality and, when I was here alone in my early days, she was my sole support. Though much against her will, I changed my residence, she used to bring me foods along with that of Bhagavan whenever I was unwell. In accordance with her previous instructions, I bathed her body in Ganges water, smeared it with *Vibhuti* (holy ashes) and put on *rudraksha* beads and then saw her off on her final journey. All her relatives decided that she should be cremated, not buried.

When I prostrated before Bhagavan at 2-30 in the afternoon, he asked, “How did she die? What did they do?” I replied, “They decided on cremation. Her relatives said that she wished her ashes to be buried in her village and a *samadhi* erected over them with a *tulsi* plant for worship.” Bhagavan said, “Yes, yes, that is right. The same was done with Ganapati Sastri and others.” After I sat down, Bhagavan said in a consoling manner, “I told her quite a number of times not to worry about this food but to stop it. But no! She was adamant and refused to take food until she had served Swami. Even today food was sent to me on her account.” I said, “No more now.” “That Mudaliar old lady is still there” said Bhagavan. When he said this I was overcome with grief and said, “Whenever Echamma gave me

something to eat, she used to get angry if I did not eat it there and then.” By this time my eyes were full of tears, and saying, “Yes, yes,” Bhagavan changed the subject. The earthly life of a devotee who for thirty eight years kept this vow as her talisman and worshipped God has now come to an end.

Another interesting thing: on the evening of the 27th, after *Vedaparayana* and my usual *pradakshina* (round the hall), when I went in to bow before Bhagavan, I saw him seated motionless in *padmasana*, deeply immersed in *dhyana* and with his hands hanging loose at his side. His eyes were glowing with radiance as if they were two celestial lights and I felt that the spiritual lustre of the universe had come down in a concentrated form in the shape of Bhagavan. I wanted to see it closer and longer but I could not stand the powerful glare and so I merely bowed and came home thinking all the while that there must be some deep significance for that deep meditative state of Bhagavan.

In the night after meals and the subsequent short discourse with Bhagavan at his bedside, Krishna Bhikshu came to my place with a friend. When I enquired of Asramam news, he said that Bhagavan had been deeply self-absorbed with a radiant and distant look the whole evening, and that there must be something great and unusual about it. We wondered what it could be. Subsequently when we heard the details of Echamma’s demise, we found that from 5 p.m. onwards yesterday she was in the throes of death and that at 9 p.m. when the news was communicated to Bhagavan, all her agony ceased and she had a peaceful end of her life. Then we all thought that it was to release this great devotee from her mortal state that Bhagavan had assumed that superb radiant form the previous evening.

A SQUIRREL

3rd January 1946

Do you know how much liberty our brother squirrel has with Bhagavan? Two or three years back, there used to be one very active and mischievous fellow amongst the squirrels. One day it so happened that when he came for food, Bhagavan was reading and otherwise occupied and so delayed a bit in giving him food. That mischievous fellow would not eat anything unless Bhagavan himself held it to his mouth. Perhaps because of his anger at the delay he abruptly bit Bhagavan’s finger, but Bhagavan still did not offer him food. Bhagavan was

amused and said, “You are a naughty creature! You have bit my finger! I will no longer feed you. Go away!” so saying he stopped feeding the squirrel for some days.

Would that fellow stay quiet? No, he began begging of Bhagavan for forgiveness by crawling hither and thither. Bhagavan put the nuts on the window sill and on the sofa and told him to help himself. But no, he wouldn’t even touch them. Bhagavan pretended to be indifferent and not to notice. But he would crawl up to Bhagavan’s legs, jump on his body, climb on his shoulders and do ever so many things to attract attention. Then Bhagavan told us all. “Look, this fellow is begging me to forgive him his mischief in biting my finger and to give up my refusal to feed him with my own hands.”

He pushed the squirrel away for some days saying, “Naughty creature! Why did you bite my finger? I won’t feed you now. That is your punishment. Look, the nuts are there. Eat them all.” The squirrel would not give up his obstinacy either. Some days passed and Bhagavan had finally to admit defeat because of his mercy towards devotees. It then occurred to me that it was through pertinacity that devotees attained salvation.

That squirrel did riot stop at that. He gathered together a number of his gang and began building a nest in the roof of the hall exactly above the sofa. They began squeezing into the beam bits of string, coconut fibre and the like. Whenever there was wind, those things used to fall down; so people got angry and began to drive them away. Bhagavan however used to feel very grieved at the thought that there was not sufficient room for the squirrels to build a nest and that the people in the hall were driving them away. We have only to see Bhagavan’s face on such occasions to understand the depth of his love and affection for such beings.

When I told Bhagavan that I had written to you about the squirrels in my usual letter, he remarked with evident pleasure: “There is a big story about these squirrels. Some time back they used to have a nest near the beam above me. They had children and then grand children and thus the members of their family grew very large. They used to play about on this sofa in whatever way they liked. When I went out for my usual walk, some little squirrels used to hide under the pillow and when on my return, I reclined on the pillow, they used to get crushed. We could not bear the sight of this, and so Madhawa drove the squirrels out of the nest and sealed it by nailing some wooden boards over it. There are lots of incidents about them if one cared to write them.”

MOKSHA

8th January 1946

A few days ago, a lady, a recent arrival, came into the hall at about 3 p.m. and sat down. All the time she was there, she was trying to get up and ask something of Sri Bhagavan. As Bhagavan appeared not to have noticed her, and was reading a book, she waited for a while. As soon as Bhagavan put the book aside, she got up, approached the sofa and said without any fear or hesitation, “Swami, I have only one desire. May I tell you what it is?” “Yes,” said Bhagavan: “What do you want?” “I want *moksha*,” she said. “Oh, is that so?” remarked Bhagavan. “Yes, Swamiji, I do not want anything else. Is it enough if you give me *moksha*”, said she. Suppressing a smile that had almost escaped his lips, Bhagavan said, “Yes, yes, that is all right; that is good.” “It will not do if you say that you will give it sometime later. You must give it to me here and now,” she said. “It is all right,” said Bhagavan. “Will you give it now? I must be going,” said she. Bhagavan nodded.

As soon as she left the hall, Bhagavan burst out laughing and said, turning towards us, “She says that it is enough if only *moksha* is given to her. She does not want anything else.” Subbalakshamma, who was seated by my side, took up the thread of the conversation and quietly said, “We have come and are staying here for the same purpose. We do not want anything more. It is enough if you give us *moksha*.” “If you renounce, and give up everything, what remains is only *moksha*. What is there for others to give you? It is there always. That *is*,” said Bhagavan. “We do not know all that. Bhagavan himself must give us *moksha*”; so saying she left the hall. Looking at the attendants who were by his side, Bhagavan remarked, “I should give them *moksha*, they say. It is enough if *moksha* alone is given to them. Is not that itself a desire? If you give up all the desires that you have, what remains is only *moksha*. And you require *sadhana* to get rid of all those desires.”

A PAIR OF PIGEONS

17th January 1946

One morning about September or October 1945, a devotee from Bangalore, by name Venkataswami Naidu, brought a pair of pigeons and gave them to the Asramam as an offering. Seeing that, Bhagavan said, “We have to protect them from cats etc. is it not? Who

will look after them? A cage is required, food must be given. Who will do all that here? It is better for him to take them away.”

The devotee said he would make all the required arrangements and requested that they should be kept in the Asramam. He placed the pair of pigeons in Swamiji's lap. With overflowing affection and love, Bhagavan drew them near him, saying, “Come dears! Come! You won't go back? You wish to stay on here? All right, stay on; a cage will be coming.” As he thus petted them with affection, they became absolutely quiet, closed their eyes as if they were in *samadhi*, and stayed on there without moving this way or that. Bhagavan thereupon keeping them on his lap stopped petting them, and with his gracious eyes fixed on them, sat in silence, deeply immersed in *samadhi*.

It took nearly an hour for the devotees in the Asramam to find and bring a cage for them. The wonder of it is, all through that one hour, the pigeons sat in Bhagavan's lap without moving one way or the other as if they were a pair of Yogis in *samadhi*. What could we say about their good fortune? Is it not the result of their *punya* in previous births that this great sage should seat them on his lap, cajole them, by patting them from the head down to the feet with his hands bless them and thereby bestow on them divine bliss? Not only that; when the cage was brought in, Bhagavan patted them cajolingly and put them in the cage, saying, “Please go in. Be safe in the cage,” Then Bhagavan said, “In *Bhagavatham*, pigeons also are stated to be in the hierarchy of Gurus, in the chapter relating to *Yadu Samvadam*. I remember having read that story long ago.”

While the pigeons were in his lap, one devotee came and asked: “What is this?” Bhagavan said, without attachment but assuming responsibility. “Who knows? They come, and decline to go back. They say they will stay here only. Another family has come up on me, as if what I already have is not enough.”

Dear brother, it is very interesting to witness these strange happenings. It is said that in olden days Emperor Bharatha renounced the world, and performed great *tapas* (meditation) but towards the end of his life, he could think only of his pet deer and so was born a deer in his next life. In Vedanta *sastras* in *Bharatham* and *Bhagavatham* there are many stories like this. Bhagavan had told us long ago. “Any living being that comes to me is only to work out the balance of its *Karma*. So don't prevent anyone from coming to me.” When I looked at those

pigeons, it occurred to me that they might be great saints who had fallen from their austerity in meditation; otherwise how could they get into the lap of Bhagavan, a privilege which is impossible for ordinary people? In Canto V of *Bhagavatham* there is a verse which says that people born in Bharatavarsha are blessed, since Hari has come there a number of times as an *avatar* and blesses them by His precepts, help and guidance. The above incident is an illustration of this, is it not? What do you say?

ABSOLUTE SURRENDER

10th April 1947

This morning, an Andhra youth handed over a letter to Bhagavan in which it was written: “Swamiji! They say that one can obtain everything if one takes refuge in God wholly and solely, and without thought of any other. Does it mean sitting still at one place, and contemplating God entirely at all times, discarding all thoughts, including even about food which is essential for the sustenance of the body? Does it mean that when one gets ill, one should not think of medicine and treatment, but entrust one’s health or sickness exclusively to Providence? From the definition of *sthitha prajna* given in Gita,

The man who sheds all longing and moves without concern, free from the sense of ‘I and ‘mine’, he attains peace. (II:71)

“It means the discarding of all desires. Therefore should we devote ourselves exclusively to the contemplation of God, and accept food, water etc. only if they are available by God’s grace, without asking for them? Or does it mean that we should make a little effort? Bhagavan! Please explain the secret of this *saranagathi*.”

Bhagavan saw that letter leisurely and told the people near him: “ Look! ‘*Ananya saranagathi*’ means to be without any attachment of thoughts, no doubt, but does it mean to discard thoughts even of food and water etc. which are essential for the sustenance of the physical body? He asks, ‘should I eat only if I get anything by God’s direction, and without my asking for it? Or should I make a little effort?’ All right! Let us take it that what we have to eat comes of its own accord. But even then, who is to eat? Suppose somebody puts it in our

mouth, should we not swallow it, at least? Is that not an effort? He asked 'if I become sick, should I take medicine or should I keep quiet leaving my health and sickness in the hands of God?' '*Kshudvyadeh aaharam*', it is said. There are two meanings to this. One is, since *kshuth* i.e. hunger, is also like sickness, so for the sickness called hunger, the medicine called food must be given; the other is: like medicine for *vyadhi* (sickness), food for *kshuth* (hunger) must be given. In the book '*Sadhana Panchaka*' written by Sankara, it is stated, '*kshudvyadhischa chikitsyatam pratidinam bhikshoushadham bhudyatam*'. It means, for treatment of the disease called hunger, eat food received as alms. But then, one must at least go out for *bhiksha*. If all people close their eyes and sit still saying if the food comes, we eat, how is the world to get on? Hence one must take things as they come in accordance with one's traditions and must be free from the feeling that one is doing them oneself. The feeling that I am doing it is bondage. It is therefore necessary to consider and find out the method whereby such a feeling can be overcome, instead of doubting as to whether medicine should be administered if one is sick or whether food should be taken if one is hungry, such doubts will continue to come up and will never end. Even such doubts as, 'May I groan if there is pain? May I inhale air after exhaling?' also occur. Call it Iswara or call it karma; some *Karta* will carry on everything in this world according to the development of the mind of each individual. If the responsibility is thrown at him (the *Karta*), things will go on of their own accord. We walk on this ground.

While doing so, do we consider at every step whether we should raise one leg after the other or stop at some stage? Isn't the walking done automatically? The same is the case with inhaling and exhaling. No special effort is made to inhale or exhale. The same is the case with this life also. Can we give up anything if we want to or do anything as we please? Quite a number of things are done automatically without our being conscious of it. Complete surrender to God means- giving up all thoughts and concentrating the mind on Him. If we can concentrate on Him, other thoughts disappear. If *mano-vak-kaya karmas* i.e. the actions of the mind, speech and body are merged with God, all the burdens of our life will be on Him. Lord Krishna told Arjuna in the Gita:

To those men who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, to those ever harmonious, I bring full Security and attend to their needs. (IX:22)

Arjuna had to do the fighting. So Krishna said, 'Place all the burden on Me, do your duty; you are merely an instrument. I will see to everything. Nothing will bother you.' But then, before one surrenders to God, one should know who it is that surrenders. Unless all thoughts are given up there can't be surrender. When there are no thoughts at all, what remains is only the Self. So surrender will only be to one's Self. If surrender is in terms of *bhakti*, the burden should be thrown on God, and if it is in terms of karma, karma should be performed until one knows one's own Self. The result is the same in either case. Surrender means to enquire and know about one's own Self and then remain in the Self. What is there apart from the Self?"

That young man said, "What is the path by which it can be known?" Bhagavan replied: "In the Gita several paths are indicated. You are asked to do *dhyana*. If you are not able to do it, then *bhakti* or yoga or *nishkama karma*. Many more have been indicated. And one of the paths must be followed. One's own self is always there. Things happen automatically in accordance with the *samskaras* (the fruits of the actions of previous births).

The feeling that the doer is 'I' is itself bondage. If the feeling is got rid of by *vichara*, these questions do not arise. *Saranagathi* is not the mere act of sitting with closed eyes. If all sit like that, how are they to get on in this world?" While Bhagavan was speaking the bell of the dining hall rang. "There goes the bell; should we not go?" So saying with a smile, Bhagavan got up.

NON-ATTACHMENT, ILLUMINATION, DESIRELESSNESS

(Vairagya, bodha, uparati)

28th October, 1947

I have recently been reading the 'Vasudevamananam'. Yesterday I read in the chapter of 'vairagyabodhoparati' that, if Realization be attained, then liberation, (*moksha*) can be gained even without *vairagya* (non-attachment) and *uparati* (desirelessness). I asked Bhagavan how that could be, as according to the Ancients, the sign of a Realized Soul (jnani) is non-attachment.

Bhagavan replied, "It is true that non-attachment is the sign of a Realized Soul. But it is also stated in the same book that any apparent attachment one may be conscious of pertains to the

body only and not to the Self. That attachment is a deterrent to the complete happiness of a 'jivanmukta', i.e., of one delivered from worldly bonds during his lifetime; whereas for the 'videha mukta', (one who is delivered from worldly bonds only at death,) Realization alone is important. When it is stated that liberation can be gained by obtaining realization even without non-attachment and desirelessness, it means that liberation is gained only at the time of death. It cannot be said, however, that it will all be waste if one has non-attachment and desirelessness yet no realization, for they will enable one to attain Heaven (*punyaloka*). It is all mentioned in Vasudevamananam."

I then asked how realization could ever be attained without non-attachment and desirelessness.

Bhagavan explained, "Non-attachment, Illumination and desirelessness (*vairagya*, *bhodha*, *uparati*), these three, will not remain separate from one another. After attaining realization though one may continue outwardly to show attachment, inwardly non-attachment will necessarily be there. It is however said to be a hindrance to the complete enjoyment of bliss by a 'jivan mukta'. Owing to the strength of the results of past actions, (*prarabdha*) he acts as one having inherent tendencies (*vasanas*); but, strictly speaking, attachment will not touch him. That is why it is said to be the result of past actions".

I asked whether that meant that, even though one attained knowledge of the Self, one would not be able, were past actions to remain too strong, to discard inherent tendencies, and that, until those inherent tendencies were destroyed, one could not attain undisturbed peace.

Bhagavan replied, "Yes, those who are firm in their *vairagya*, *bodha* and *uparati* are indeed in a high state of realisation, that means they are *jivanmuktas*. If instead those for whom Self-realisation alone is the most important, but out of *prarabdha* they move about as if they have attachments, they remain conscious of the fact that they actually do not have attachments. Strictly speaking such attachments do not affect them. That is why in *Vasishtam* it is said that even in the third stage, *vasanas* get exterminated and the mind gets destroyed. If it is asked when the fourth stage is reached and where is the need for the fifth and the sixth stage, some vague replies are given. So long as there is a doubt, there is an explanation. The disappearance of all doubts is realisation"

“For a Realized Soul,” I asked, “to the extent to which he has non-attachment, will he to that extent have tranquillity and peace; while to the extent that his attachment grows, will he to that extent be further removed from tranquillity?”

“Yes,” said Bhagavan, “that is the meaning”. And so saying, he was again silent.

PEACE OF MIND ITSELF IS LIBERATION

16th September 1947

The day before yesterday, an Andhra lady with her husband came to Bhagavan and asked:

“Swami, I have heard several discourses on Vedanta; I also do some meditation. Sometimes while in meditation, I feel blissful and tears come to my eyes; at other times I do not have them. Why is that?”

Bhagavan with a smile, said: “Bliss is a thing which is always there and is not something which comes and goes. That which comes and goes is a creation of the mind and you should not worry about it.”

The lady: “The moment the bliss that comes with a thrill of the body disappears, I feel dejected and desire to have the experience over again. Why?”

Bhagavan: “You admit that ‘you’ were there both when the blissful feeling was on and when it was not? If you realize that ‘you’ properly, those experiences will be of no account.”

Another questioner: “For realizing that bliss, there must be something to catch hold of, mustn’t there?”

Bhagavan: “There must be a duality if you are to catch hold of something else; but what IS, is only one Self, not a duality. Hence, who is to catch hold of whom? And what is the thing to be caught?”

No one replied, and with a kindly expression, Bhagavan said, “The inherent *vasanas* are so strong. What can be done?”

A young man came in, sat down, and gave a note to Bhagavan.

Bhagavan, after reading it, said, “See, in this note is written, ‘Is peace of mind Liberation (*moksha*)?’ The reply is contained in the question itself. What else can be said? He must have asked after knowing what Mind (*chitta*) is”.

Someone asked the young man, “You know what is meant by *chitta*, don’t you?”

The young man: “*Chitta* means Mind”.

Bhagavan: “Yes, but what about it? Your question itself states that peace of mind is liberation”.

The young man: “The mind is at times peaceful and at other times distracted. How are we to prevent those distractions?”

Bhagavan: “For whose mind is that distraction? Who is it that is enquiring?”

The young man: “For my mind. The enquirer is myself”.

Bhagavan: “Yes, that is the real thing. There is a thing called ‘I’. Peace being experienced now and then, it must be admitted that there is a thing called peace; moreover, those feelings called desires are also of the mind; and if desires were banished, there would be no wavering of the mind; and if there is no wavering, that which remains is peace. To attain that which is always there requires no effort. Effort is required only for the banishing of all desires. As and when the mind wavers, it must be diverted from those matters; if that is done, peace remains as it is. That is Atma, the Self, that is Liberation and that is Self”.

*Restraining the restless and fidgety mind from all those objects after which it runs,
one should repeatedly concentrate on the Self.*

(Bhagavad Gita, VI:26)

THE MUDALIAR GRANNY

24th September, 1949

The Mudaliar Granny who, like Echamma, was bringing food to Bhagavan daily, gave up her body last night and got merged in the lotus feet of Sri Ramana. She was buried in Gounder's compound this afternoon. Her native place is a village called Thillayadi near Karaikal. She belonged to the Thondaimandala Mudaliar caste. Her name was Alankarathammani. She had a son by name Subbiah Mudaliar and a daughter-in-law Kamakshi. The three used to spend their time in the service of an old Sanyasi. That Sanyasi passed away sometime in 1908 or 1909. During his last days, when all of them implored him to tell them about their future it seems he told them that their future was at Arunachala.

Subsequently, in 1910, it appears she came here along with her son and daughter-in-law. By then Echamma had been supplying Bhagavan food every day. In the same way Alankarathammani also began supplying food. In due course, she began giving food now and then to the devotees also. The son and daughter-in-law used to help her in the work. After some time the son renounced everything, took to Sanyasa at the Tiruppananthal Mutt and began wandering about as a Tamburan (wandering minstrel). Kamakshi, the daughter-in-law, concentrated all her attention in the service of Bhagavan with single-minded devotion, without being in the least worried over her husband's desertion. She passed away sometime in 1938-1939.

The Granny had no money and none to help her in the domestic work in the house. Seeing her desolate condition, and taking pity on her, Niranjananandaswami, Kunjuswami, Ranganatha Gounder and others advised her saying, "Now you are an old woman. You can no longer worry yourself about this service of offering food to Bhagavan. The Asramam is giving shelter to several people. So you eat here and sit in peace in Bhagavan's presence with closed eyes; or if you so desire we will send you food to your place. Eat and stay at home." She replied, "Whatever the difficulties, I will not give up this holy task. If I do not have money, I will go to ten houses, feeling my way with my stick, beg for food, offer it to Bhagavan and then only will I eat. I cannot keep quiet." So saying, and with tears in her eyes, the woman went away. Kunjuswamy, Gounder, and other devotees took pity on her and gave her financial help so as to enable her to continue her offerings to Bhagavan. It was only after

that, that Rangaswami Gounder built two houses in the place where Kunjuswami is now staying with a stipulation that Kunjuswami can occupy them during his life time, and after him these should be given away for the use of Sadhus. He endowed some property also for their maintenance and arranged for this old woman to stay there. In her last days, her son came to her and helped her in her offerings to Bhagavan, even though he had renounced the world by becoming a Sanyasi and a wandering minstrel. In this manner, the life of a devotee who had worshipped Bhagavan for about forty years without failing even for a single day in her self-imposed duty has come to a close.

Granny took great liberties with Bhagavan. During the early days of my stay here she used to bring food and serve it herself to Bhagavan. She used to place on his leaf a handful of curry and a handful of cooked rice. One day, Bhagavan reprimanded her saying, "If you serve so much, how can I eat it?" With great familiarity, she said, "How much is it, Swami? It is only very little." "There are several other things also to eat. Should not my stomach contain them all?" said Bhagavan. "It is all a matter of the mind, Swami." So saying, she served him as usual and left. Laughing at it, Bhagavan told people near about him, "Do you see? She is paying me back in my own coin (My Upadesa)."

For the last two or three years, she had been sending food through somebody, and had given up serving it to Bhagavan personally as her eyesight was failing. It seems some one told her that Bhagavan's body had become very much emaciated. She was therefore feeling that it was all due to her ceasing to serve food personally and one day she came to see Bhagavan. She approached him, and shading her eyes with her palm, said with great feeling of sorrow, "Oh! How reduced has the body become!" "Who told you, Granny? I am all right. What you have heard is all false," said Bhagavan. The old woman came to the place in the hall where women sit and sat down in the front row. After a while, Bhagavan rose from his seat to go out. When Bhagavan gets up, as you know, all the rest of us also get up. She stood at the doorway leaning against the door. When Bhagavan came near, he said with a laugh, "Granny, have I become reduced? See how well I am! It is a pity, you are not able to see." So saying, he went out.

Of late, she has not been able to see at all. Even so, when about four months ago she expressed a wish to see Bhagavan, a devotee led her to Bhagavan's presence. When a person near Bhagavan said, "Granny, you have no eyesight to see Bhagavan. Why have you come?"

She replied, “Though I cannot see Bhagavan’s body, my body can be seen by Bhagavan and that is more than enough for me.” The agony she experienced when she heard that an operation was performed on Bhagavan’s arm for the tumour that had grown on it, is indescribable. When Echamma passed away, Bhagavan remarked that Mudaliar Granny was still alive. She too has now passed away. You see, Bhagavan felt relieved because a great responsibility was off his hands now. She is indeed lucky but somehow I could not help grieving over her death.

BONDAGES

26th September, 1947

A devotee who had been listening to all that Bhagavan had said yesterday morning about past bondages, came and sat near Bhagavan today.

The devotee spoke: “Yesterday, Bhagavan was pleased to tell us about past bondages, but he did not tell us anything about present and future bondages”.

“That is so,” said Bhagavan, “but then has not Sri Vidyanaraya, in his ‘*Panchadasi*’ explained in detail about future bondages and the way in which deliverance from them can be had?”

“I have not read the ‘*Panchadasi*,’” said the devotee.

“Then I will tell you,” said Bhagavan and proceeded to expound it:

“Present bondages are said to be of four types-‘*vishaya asakti lakshanam*’, ‘*buddhi mandyam*’, ‘*kutharkam*’ and ‘*viparyaya duragraham*’. The first of these means great desire for material things; the second, inability to grasp the teachings and expositions of the Guru; the third means to understand perversely the teachings of the Guru; the fourth is to feel egoistically that ‘I am learned in the Vedas’, ‘I am a Pandit’, ‘I am an ascetic’. These four are called present bondages. If it is asked how these can be overcome, the first can be overcome by tranquillity (*sama*) by curbing the evil propensities of the mind (*dama*), by detachment (*uparati*) and by indifference to external things (*titiksha*). The second type can be overcome by hearing the teachings of the Guru over and over again; the third by reflection or

contemplation; and the fourth by profound meditation on a thought. If, in this way, the obstacles are removed and destroyed, Seekers get confirmed in their belief that they are themselves the embodiment of the Self (*atma-swarupa*).

“As for future bondages, they arise from acts done without anyone knowing they are sinful. How can this be discovered? A Seeker should recognize it as a future bondage when some action presents itself which makes him feel that he wishes to do it because the doing of it is an act of human kindness and sympathy; and so he is tempted into doing it. He does not realise that the act will be the cause of future bondage. If he thinks that, by being a non-doer (*akarta*) and worldly-detached (*asanga*), the fulfilment of the desire will not affect him and he can therefore do the act. He will become bound all the same and will be freed from the bondage only after several more births. That future bondages result in re-births is authoritatively stated in the Scriptures (*srutis* and *smritis*), Vasudeva, for instance, had one more birth, Bharata had two more, and others many more. Hence a Seeker must bear in mind the three bondages and carefully avoid them. If he does not avoid them there can be no doubt that he will have more births. ‘Whosoever is released from these three bondages, for him deliverance (*mukti*) is certain,’ said Vidyaranya. All this is mentioned also in the ‘Vasudevamananam’ in which, in addition to this, a number of stories are related. The story of Bharjuva and that of Yajnapasu are particularly interesting, as also that of Asura Vasana. For each aspect of these bondages, a separate story is given by way of illustration. Have you not read even that?”

“I did read it when young but did not realise that it contains such important matters. I will look into it again, Bhagavan”.

With that, the devotee took his leave of Bhagavan.

THE PATH OF SELF-ENQUIRY

29th November, 1947

This afternoon, a devotee asked Bhagavan, “Swami, for gaining Realization, is the enquiry ‘Who am I?’ the only way?”

Bhagavan answered him: “Enquiry is not the only way. If one does spiritual practice (*sadhana*) with name and form, repetition of holy names (*japa*), or any of these methods with grim determination and perseverance, one becomes THAT. According to the capacity of each individual, one spiritual practice is said to be better than another and several shades and variations of them have been given. Some people are a long way from Tiruvannamalai, some are very near; some are in Tiruvannamalai, while some get into Bhagavan’s hall itself. For those who come into the hall, it is enough, if they are told as they step in, ‘Here is the Maharshi’, and they realize him immediately. For others they have to be told which route to take, which trains to catch, where to change, which road to turn into. In like manner, the particular path to be taken must be prescribed according to the capacity of the practiser (*sadhak*). These spiritual practices are not for knowing one’s own Self, which is all-pervading, but only for getting rid of the objects of desire. When all these are discarded, one remains as one IS. That which is always in existence is the Self - all things are born out of the Self. That will be known only when one realizes one’s own Self. So long as one has not that knowledge, all that is seen in this world appears as real. Supposing a person sleeps in this hall; in his sleep he dreams of going somewhere, loses his way, wanders from one village to another, from one hill to another, and during that time, and for days together, searches without food or water. He suffers a good deal, enquiries of several people and finally finds the correct place. He reaches it, and feeling that he is stepping into this hall, greatly relieved, he opens his eyes with a startled look. All this will have happened within a short time and it is only after he wakes up that he realizes that he had not been anywhere. Our present life is also like that. When the eye of knowledge is opened, a person realizes that he remains ever in his own Self”.

The questioner asked further: “Is it true that all spiritual practices, as is said, merge into the path of Self-enquiry?”

“Yes,” replied Bhagavan, “the enquiry ‘Who am I?’ is the beginning and the end of the teachings of Vedanta. It is said that only he who has the assets of the four kinds of spiritual practice is fit for Vedantic enquiry,. Of the four categories of practice the first is the knowledge of the Self and the non-Self (*atma* and *anatma*). That means a knowledge that the Self is eternal (*nitya*) and that the world is unreal (*mithya*). How to know this is the question. It is possible to know this by enquiry as to ‘Who am I?’ and what is the nature of my Self! Usually this procedure is suggested at the beginning of the spiritual practice, but generally it

does not carry conviction. So all sorts of other spiritual practices are resorted to and it is only ultimately as a last resort that the practiser takes to Self-enquiry. The alphabet A B C D E etc. are learnt while young. If it is stated that these letters are the fundamentals for all education and that there is no need to study for B.A. or M.A., will people listen to such advice? It is only after studying and passing these examinations that it will be realized that all that has been studied is contained in those fundamental letters A B C etc. Are not all the Scriptures contained in the elementary thing, the alphabet? That it is so, is only known after learning by heart all the Scriptures. It is the same with every one of these things. There are a number of rivers, some flow straight, some wind and twist zig-zag, but all of them ultimately become merged in the ocean. In the same way, all paths become merged in the path of Self-enquiry, just as all languages become merged in Silence (*mouna*). *Mouna* means continuous speech; it does not mean that it is a vacuum. It is the speech of Self, identifying with the Self. It is Self-luminous. Everything is in the Self. In Tamil Nad a great person composed and sang a song the purport of which is, 'We are like a screen, and the whole world appears like pictures on it. Silence is full and all-pervading'. Like the saying: *om purnamadah purnamidam purnath purnam udachyate**-everything appears to be the same for the Realized Soul. Even though he sees something it is as good as his not seeing it".

So saying, Bhagavan was once more silent.

* "From the Fullness when the Full is taken the Full remains". The Abstract Brahman in Its fullness is all-pervading. The Jiva in the body is also full with the knowledge of the Brahman and awareness of the world. From the former, i.e., nirvikalpa Brahman, is born the latter, i.e. savikalpa Brahman, with all the fullness of the world.

SELF-ENQUIRY ESSENTIAL IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE

7th December, 1947

Recently some people in responsible positions in Madras came here and stayed for some days. On one of the days, they went to the Gurusurtham and Pravalagiri caves on the hill, where Bhagavan had lived long ago, and returned in time for the evening Vedaparayana. After the parayana, when Bhagavan was telling us about his life in the Pravalagiri cave, and enquiring whether they had seen this or that there, one of the party said to him, "Bhagavan tells us most interestingly about those places we have just seen, but by the time we reached the Pravalagiri cave and went into the room there, we were thoroughly exhausted. Bhagavan

stayed there for a long time and we now realize how completely Bhagavan must have felt that the body was not his. Swami, how can people like us be saved from our materialistic outlook? If we ask, you will surely say, 'It is enough if you go on with Self-enquiry: Who am I?' How is that possible for us who are family people and are doing our respective jobs? If the mind goes on with worldly affairs, how can we get peace of mind?" Bhagavan simply remained silent, listening to them quietly.

This morning when I got to the Asramam, one of the Asramites was speaking freely with Bhagavan and was saying, "Yesterday evening, the people who came from Madras asked you some questions, but you did not answer. Why was that? In the past when Sivaprakasam Pillai wrote a verse beginning '*Udalinai veruthum*' I am told that you were also silent. Why, Bhagavan? Does it mean that no one can become a Realized Soul, a *jnani*, unless he lives in a lonely place like that?"

"Who said that?" Bhagavan replied. "The nature of the mind is determined by its former actions, its *samskaras*. People are able to continue to do all their work and yet pursue their Self-enquiry and ultimately become Realized Souls. Janaka, Vasishtha, Rama, Krishna and others like them, are examples of this. Again, for some it would appear impossible to do this and they have to go to solitary places to become Realized Souls through Self-enquiry. Of these, Sanaka, Sanandana, Suka, Vamadeva, are amongst the examples. Self-enquiry is essential for whomever it may be. It is called 'human effort (*purushakara*)'. The course of the body follows according to our fate (*prarabhdha*). What more can we say about it?" added Bhagavan.

THE FIRST BATH AND THE FIRST SHAVE

12th April, 1948

After writing to you yesterday afternoon about the grandeur of Bhagavan's surroundings in the Jubilee Hall, I went to the Asramam a little later than usual. As soon as he saw me, Bhagavan said, "Ramachandra Iyer and Ananthanarayana Rao together have just taken a photo".

Being summer and already hot, Krishnaswami sprinkled water on the rush screen at the back of Bhagavan's sofa and also on the crotons which were behind the screen. The spray from the sprinkling fell on Bhagavan and he rubbed his body, saying, "See, they are consecrating (*abishekam*) me!"

That incident seemed to have reminded him of something that had happened in the past, for with smiles all over his face and with appropriate gestures, he told us the following story:

"After I came to this place, Tiruvannamalai, I had no bath for four months. One day, when I was in the compound of the Arunachala Temple, the wife of a devotee by name Ponnuswami, came unexpectedly, pulled me along, made me sit, cleaned my head with soap-nut powder and gave me a bath. She had been coming to the temple every now and then; so I had thought that she had come as usual, but that day, she had come there prepared! That was my first bath."

"Were you bathing regularly everyday afterwards?" I asked.

"No, there was no question of a bath; who was to make me bathe? Who was the one to bathe? After that, a year or so passed in the same way. I had been in the Gurumurtham cave for some time, you see, and as not many people came there every day, no one bothered me. Even so, a lady, by name Minakshi, who used now and then to bring food to give me, one day brought a large pot and began to boil water. I thought it was for some use for herself, but, taking from a basket some oil, soap-nut, etc., she said, 'Swami, please come'. I did not move. But would she keep quiet! She pulled me by the arm, made me sit, smeared the oil all over my body and bathed me. The hair on the head which had got matted for want of care, was now spread out and hung down like the mane of a lion. That was my second bath. After that, Palaniswami came and everything was adjusted into routine of daily baths."

"This incident is not found in your biography," I said.

"No, that is so," said Bhagavan, "it was never written then. Shaving was also like that. The shave I had on the day I came here has been recorded; the second was after a year and a half. The hair had got matted and woven like a basket. Small stones and dust had settled down in it and the head used to feel heavy. I had also long nails, and a frightful appearance. So people

pressed me to have a shave, and I yielded. When my head was shaven clean, I began to wonder whether I had a head or not, it felt so light. I shook my head this way and that to assure myself that it was there. That showed the amount of burden I had been carrying on my head.”

“During those one and a half years, did nobody try to get your head shaved?” asked a devotee.

“Yes, indeed they did try,” said Bhagavan, “when I was in the Subramanya temple. One Nilakanta Iyer, the grandfather of a lawyer of the same name now practising, used to come there frequently. One day, he came prepared for the purpose. Thinking that he had come as usual, I kept my eyes closed. Without saying a word to me, he stood some way off opposite me. I heard a ‘tip, tup’ behind me, so opened my eyes. I saw a barber sharpening his razor. I left the spot immediately without saying a word. Poor man, he realized that I was not willing to be shaved and so had gone off. Ponnuswami’s wife alone would not leave me unless and until I took a bath. When she dragged me, pulling me by the arm, what was I to do?”

“Perhaps she felt you were like a child,” I said.

“Yes,” said Bhagavan, “and another thing happened when I was living under the madukha tree; a twenty-year old dancing girl, by name Rathnamma, saw me one day while going to and from the temple to dance. She grew devoted to me and got disgusted with her profession, and told her mother that she would not eat unless she could give food to the Swami. So both of them brought me food. But I was then in deep meditation and opened neither my eyes nor my mouth, even when they shouted. But they somehow woke me up by asking a passer-by to pull me by the hand; they then gave me food and left. When Rathnamma insisted that she must daily feed the Swami before she ate, her mother said, ‘You are young and so is Swami, and he does not wake until somebody touches and pulls him. We can’t do that; what can we do?’ Rathnamma then asked a first cousin of hers for assistance, and with his help used to give me food daily. After some time, however, relatives of the boy felt this work to be undignified and so stopped sending him. She, however, would not give up her resolve to feed me; so at last the old mother herself came regularly, and being elderly and thinking that therefore there was no harm in it, used to wake me up by shaking me and then gave me food. Shortly afterwards, the old mother passed away, and I too shifted from there to a distant

place. Rathnamma could no longer then go the long distance to feed me, and so gave up her attempts. Since she could not live unless she earned by her profession, Rathnamma confined herself to one man only; what does it matter to what community she belonged, she was pure. She had great non-attachment and great devotion. She had never liked her profession and did not want her daughter to follow it; so married her off.”

The story finished, Bhagavan was once more silent.

THE GREATNESS OF MAN

2nd May, 1948

After writing to you the gist of yesterday’s discussion about practice of meditation and desirelessness, I wanted to give you the number of the chapter and the number of the Slokas that were quoted but could not locate them easily in the Gita. So I thought the best thing would be to ask Bhagavan himself. I went to the Asramam early in the afternoon by about 2-30. Not many people were there. I gave Bhagavan my copy of the Gita. Bhagavan was not only pleased to point out the Slokas but also once again explained their meaning to me. While doing so some Andhras came there in a group and sat down. One of them asked, “Swami, what is the easiest way to attain *Moksha*?”

Bhagavan said with a smile, “That is just what I am explaining now. As and when the mind goes astray, it should be turned inward and made to steady itself in the thought of the Self. That is the only way.”

Another said, “To do so, the repeating of the name of Rama is good, is it not?”

“Certainly; it is good,” said Bhagavan. “What could be better? The greatness of the *Japa* (repeating) of the name of Rama is extraordinary,” and looking at me, he said, “You know the story of Namadeva. He is reported to have told one Devotee, ‘If you want to know the greatness of the name of Rama you must first know what your own name is, (Own name means one’s real nature *Swarupa*), who you are and how you were born. Unless you know your own origin, you will not know Your Name.’ This idea is found in the Abhangas of Namadeva written in Marathi language. Someone wrote Adhyatma Ramayana in great detail

in the Malayalam language. It is stated in that book that when Anjaneya went in search of Sita, he seated himself opposite to Ravana in the Durbar Hall on a high pedestal and fearlessly spoke to him thus: 'Oh Ravana, I give you a teaching (*Upadesa*) for attaining liberation (*Moksha*). Please listen to me carefully. It is certain that the Self (*Atma*) gets purified by intense devotion to Hari, who is in the lotus of the Heart at all times. The ego gets destroyed and then the sin gets destroyed. Afterwards, in its place, the knowledge of the transcendent Self emerges. With a pure mind and with the Bliss (*Ananda*) generated by a firm knowledge of the Self, the two letters 'Ra' 'Ma' which are like Mantras, will repeat themselves within you automatically. What more is required for a person who has this knowledge, however little it might be? Hence worship the lotus feet of Vishnu, which will remove all worldly fears, which are dear to all devotees and which shine as brightly as the light of a crore of Suns. Give up the ignorance of your mind.' This has been mentioned in two or three Slokas in the Sanskrit Adhyatna Ramayanam but not as elaborately as in the Malayalam text. Is the greatness of the name of Rama ordinary?

“But one thing. The method of repeating the name (*Japa*) must be known. In the case of all *Japa* it is stated '*Pranayame Viniyogaha*' which means that the breath is to be controlled first, and then *Japa* should be done. In other words the mind must be controlled. Sambanda is a devotee of Siva. He explained in a verse the way to do the *Japa* of *Panchakshari* (five letters) of Lord Siva's name. Its meaning is that one should close *Navadwaras* (the nine apertures of the human body, i.e. 2 eyes, 2 ears, 2 nostrils, mouth, anus and the organ of generation), lock them and seal them; otherwise the mind will run away. After sealing the nine doors, do *Panchakshari Japa* (repeating the five letters). If, by controlling the senses, the mind can be controlled, i.e. submerged, that which remains is the Self. One meditates on one's Self and the *Japa* becomes one's own Self.”

“Is that state called '*Ajapa*'?” asked someone else.

Bhagavan: “That which is repeated inwardly is '*Ajapa*' but how could the one which is repeated by the mouth be '*Ajapa*'?”

Devotee: “Will it be possible for all people at all times to do *Japa* like that?”

Bhagavan: “No, it will not be possible. That is why elders have said that you should do *Japa* for some time, sing for a while, read, write and thus turn the mind to good deeds and prevent it from getting into bad habits. The Gita also says that one should stop the mind from wandering by practice and desirelessness. Even *Japa* is like that. The mind should gradually be made single-pointed while performing *Japa*. It is to get that single-pointedness that all the other practices have been prescribed for spiritual practice (*Sadhana*)”.

THE DELIVERANCE OF LAKSHMI, THE COW

20th July, 1948

In my letter to you under the caption “Worship of the Cow”, I described to you the grandeur of Lakshmi, the queen of the cows, and the amount of regard Bhagavan had for her. To that queen, as for his own mother, Bhagavan on Friday the 18th instant gave *Videha Mukti* (deliverance from the body). That morning when I went to the Asramam, I was told that Lakshmi was seriously ill and would not survive the day. So I went straight to the cow shed, without seeing Bhagavan even. The room built for the calves was vacated, cleaned and Lakshmi was given a bed of straw to lie down upon. As it was Friday, she was as usual decorated with turmeric paste, vermilion mark on the forehead and a garland of flowers round the neck and horns. Venkataratnam was sitting by the side fanning her. Lakshmi was lying down with her majestic look spreading lustre all round. She reminded me of Kamadhenu going to Kailas to do *Abhishekam* with milk over the great Lord Siva.

When I went to Bhagavan and prostrated before him and got up, he looked at me with a divine look. Taking it as an order, I said I would go and stay with Lakshmi. He nodded his head in assent and I went immediately. Venkataratnam gave me the fan and left. Sitting in that place I began repeating *Ramana Dwadasakshari* (twelve letters of Ramana Mantram), *Ashtotharam* (108 names of Ramana) etc. and Lakshmi appeared to hear them carefully.

When Bhagavan came to the cow-shed at 9-45 A.M. as usual he came to see Lakshmi. Bhagavan sat on the hay by her side, lifted her head with both his hands, and passing one of his hand lightly over her face and throat, and then placing his left hand on the head, began pressing with the right hand fingers her throat right down to the heart. After pressing like that for about a quarter of an hour he said, addressing Lakshmi, “What do you say, mother? Do

you want me to stay here alone? I could stay, but what to do? All people could be round you as in the case of my mother. Even so, why? Shall I go?" Lakshmi remained calm, devoid of all the bonds of this world and of the pains of her body as though she were in Samadhi. Bhagavan sat there unwilling to move and with a heart full of compassion. I was overwhelmed at the sight and exclaimed involuntarily, "Oh! Mother Alagamma had the greatest luck. So has Lakshmi now." Bhagavan looked at me with a smile. Subramaniam came and said, "It seems the doctor will not be coming till 10-30 as there is no immediate danger to Lakshmi." "All right. So Doctor will not be coming now. Have you brought the medicine for injection?" asked Bhagavan. Turning towards Lakshmi and gently stroking her head and neck, he said, "What do you say? May I go?" Subbulakshmi said, "She will feel happy if Bhagavan is by her side." "That is so, but what to do?" So saying and looking into the eyes of Lakshmi, Bhagavan said, "What? May I go? Won't you tell me?" Lakshmi looked at him proudly. What reply Bhagavan got, we do not know but he got up and went away saying, "See that the flies do not get into the mouth." I assured him that we would take due care of Lakshmi and Bhagavan left the place very reluctantly.

With the divine touch of Bhagavan, the outer breath of Lakshmi began subsiding and the movement of the body began to decrease. When the doctor came at 10-30 and gave an injection Lakshmi remained unaffected as if the body was not hers. There was no death agony. Her sight was calm and clear. The doctor turned her over into the posture of Nandi, put some medicine on the boils and went away instructing us to keep some support for the head. As it was 11-30 by then, Venkataratnam came back after having his meal. He asked me to hold up the head saying he would bring some more hay. The tongue touched me and it was icy cold; the life of Lakshmi reached the feet of Sri Ramana and was absorbed in Him.

Ten minutes later, Bhagavan came into the shed saying, "Is it all over?" and squatted by her side, took her face in both his hands as though she were a little child, and lifted it and said, "Oh Lakshmi, Lakshmi," and then, to us, controlling his tears, he said, "Because of her, our family (i.e. Asramam) has grown to this extent." When all were praising Lakshmi, Bhagavan asked, "I suppose the doctor has not troubled her much, did he? How did her life cease?" We told him all that had happened. "That is all right. Did you notice this? The right ear is uppermost now. Till yesterday she was lying down on her other side. Because of the boil she was turned over to this side. So this ear had to come up. Look, in the case of people who die in Kasi, people say Lord Siva will whisper into the right ear. Lakshmi too has her right ear

up,” said Bhagavan, and showed that ear to all people there. By that time, crowds gathered. After a quarter of an hour, Bhagavan got up and said, “Ramakrishna has been saying for the last ten days that a good tomb (*samadhi*) must be built for Lakshmi.” Bhagavan then went away to the hall.

APPROPRIATE TEACHING

29th July, 1948

As Bhagavan was going out this morning at a quarter to ten, his body faltered a little. The attendants hesitated to touch him to enable him to steady himself as they knew he would not like it. An old devotee who was walking by his side at the time tried to hold him up. Warning him against that, Bhagavan coolly said, “You all try to hold me from falling down but actually throw me down. Enough of it. Please take care that you don’t fall down yourself.” These words are pregnant with great meaning. Though it would appear that Bhagavan was saying something commonplace, there was a great truth in those words and I therefore made a note of them then and there.

In the meantime, Bhagavan returned and sat down in his usual place. Even before that, a young man had come there in a huff into the Hall. After some attempts he said, “Swami, I have got a question in my mind. Can you tell what that question is? Or do you want me to ask it?” Bhagavan said, “Oho! That is what is the matter, is it? Sorry. I do not have such powers. Being a capable person you may be able to read other’s thoughts. How can I get such powers?” That young man was about to say, “What is then your greatness if you cannot do that much?” but others who were there prevented him from saying that. Seeing that, I came and sat nearer Bhagavan. Looking at me Bhagavan said, “Look. This young man asks me whether I can know what question he has in his mind! No one has asked such a thing so far. So it means that he is testing me. The purpose of a person in coming here is known even as he comes in. The manner in which he sits itself reveals the purpose of his visit. Instead of trying to test me, why does not he test himself and find out who he is? Would that not be much better?”

A gentleman, who happened to be sitting by the side of the young man, took up the thread of the conversation and said, “Swami, You say that finding out the self is the greatest thing in

life. But for finding it out, is the *Nama Japa* (repeating the name of the Lord) good? Can we attain Moksha in that way?" Bhagavan said, "Yes, it is good. That itself will take you in due course to the Goal. The repeating of the Name is to remove all extraneous things. Then everything extraneous disappears and what remains is the Name alone. That which remains is the Self or God or the Supreme Being. *Nama Japa* means we give a name to God and call HIM by that name. You give Him that name which you like most."

That devotee asked, "Will Iswara manifest Himself if you give him some name and pray to Him to appear in a particular form?"

Bhagavan: "Yes. He will answer your call by whatever name you call Him and will appear in whatever form you worship Him. As soon as He manifests Himself you ask something; he grants the boon and disappears but you remain where you were."

I said, "I suppose Bhagavan also will do likewise, if we ask him for some material benefits." Without taking any heed of what I had said, and by way of avoiding the question, Bhagavan said, "That is why God is afraid of manifesting Himself. If He comes, the devotees will ask Him to give away all His Powers and retire. Not only will they say, 'Give everything to us', but they will also say, 'Do not give them to any one else.' That is the fear. That is why God delays in coming to His devotees."

Another devotee: "Is it the same thing with Mahatmas?"

Bhagavan: "There is no doubt about it. If any lenience is shown to people, they begin to exercise authority on Mahatmas. They will say, 'You should do as you are asked to.' They will also say, 'No one else should come here.' And so on".

Devotee: "It is said that the Mahatma looks upon all with the same kindness. Why then do they tenderly receive some, reply to some and not to others, when asked, shout at some and show indifference towards others?"

Bhagavan: "Yes. All the children are the same for the father. He wishes them all well. Hence he treats them with love and anger according to their propensities, and thus gives them training. Children who are gentle, remain aloof with fear and do not ask for anything; they

should be cajoled with love and tenderness and given whatever they want. Those who are bold, ask for and take whatever they want. Those who are vagrant should be reprimanded and kept in their proper places. Those who are stupid should be neglected and left to fend for themselves. In the same manner Mahatmas have to be loving or harsh according to the merits of the devotees.”

ASTROLOGY

20th September, 1948

A few days ago an astrologer came here. At about 10 a.m., the day after his arrival, he asked Bhagavan several questions on astrology and obtained suitable replies. I give below a brief report of their conversation:

Questioner: “Swami! According to the astrological science, predictions are made about coming events taking into account the influence of the stars. Is that true?”

Bhagavan: “So long as you have the feeling of egoism all that is true. When that egoism gets destroyed all that is untrue.”

Questioner: “Does it mean that astrology won’t be true in the case of those whose egoism is destroyed?”

Bhagavan: “Who is there to say it won’t be true? There will be seeing only if there is one who sees. In the case of those whose egoism is destroyed, even if they appear to see they do not really see. The window is open. Even so there must be some one to see. Does the window see anything?”

Questioner: “If that ego were not there how could the body continue to function from day to day?”

Bhagavan: “Yes. That is it. The body is a house for us. This house will be properly maintained only if you are in it. Hence we must realise that we are keeping the house habitable only so long as we are in it and must never give up the knowledge that the house is

separate from the Self. The moment that is forgotten the feeling of ego comes in and troubles begin. Everything in the world thus appears real and the destruction of that feeling is the destruction of the EGO. When that ego is destroyed nothing (of this world) is real. What is to happen will happen; and what is not to happen will not happen.”

Questioner: “You say that what is to happen will happen and what is not to happen will not happen; if that is so, why should it be said that good deeds must be done?”

Bhagavan: “If something good is done, it results in happiness. Hence people say good deeds must be done.”

Questioner: “Yes. That is why elders say that sorrow is adventitious.”

Bhagavan: “That is so. Sorrow is adventitious. It is only happiness that is natural. Every living being desires happiness because his natural state is the embodiment of happiness. All *sadhanas* (spiritual efforts) are for overcoming adventitious sorrow; when a headache comes on casually, you have to get rid of it by medicine. If it is a permanent ailment of the body attached to it from birth to death, why should you try to get rid of it? Just as boils and other diseases of the body are cured by a doctor’s treatment, sorrows which are the result of various difficulties can be overcome by *sadhana* specially aimed at them. This body itself is a disease. The root cause of it is ignorance. If for that ignorance the medicine called Jnana is administered all inherent diseases will disappear at once.”

Questioner: “Is it possible to get immediate results by *sadhana*?”

Bhagavan: Some yield immediate results and some do not. That depends upon the intensity or otherwise of the *sadhana*. If good acts or evil acts are done with great intensity the results will manifest themselves immediately; otherwise the results are slow. The results, however, necessarily follow. There is no helping.

THE LOTUS FEET OF THE MASTER

4th November, 1948

I do not know if you have noticed that there is a big light-red mole on the sole of Bhagavan's right foot. I too did not notice it for a long time. Only the other day I saw it. As you are aware, during the winter months, a charcoal stove is lighted and kept near Bhagavan to warm his hands and feet. I feared therefore that the stove had been kept too near, resulting in the sole of the foot getting burnt, and so asked Bhagavan anxiously. Bhagavan replied: "Oh! It is nothing. It has been there since my childhood." I did not attach much importance to it at the time. Yesterday, however, during some conversation, I broached the subject with Aunt Alamelu (Bhagavan's sister). She said, "I was also once perturbed on seeing it and asked Bhagavan. He laughed and told me that it had been there even at birth. He also stated that it was by that mark of identification that his uncle had recognised him after he had run away from home."

You know, we used to read in fairy tales (Kasi Majli Stories) that great personages have a pearl in their navel and a lotus flower on their instep. I went to sleep thinking of that mole. The foot of Bhagavan appeared in my dream. With that thought in mind I went to the Asramam early this morning, by half-past seven. By that time Bhagavan had returned from the bath room by the side of the cow-shed and had sat down on the couch. After all the others had prostrated before him, I too prostrated and got up, and standing, continued to stare at his foot. Noticing this, Bhagavan looked at me enquiringly. "Nothing," I said, "I am looking at that foot which has all the characteristics of a great personage (*Mahapurusha*)." "Is that all?" said Bhagavan with a smile and was about to open the newspaper to read it when I said, "It seems that when Auntie enquired about that mole, you stated that it was by that sign you were recognised by your uncle when you ran away from home."

"Putting the paper down and sitting cross-legged in Padmasana pose, Bhagavan replied, "Yes. It is stated in the 'Ramana Leela', as you know, when my younger uncle, Subba Iyer, passed away, my other uncle Nelliappa Iyer, while he was in Madurai, came to know through Annamalai Thampuran that I was here. However much Thampuran told him, Nelliappa Iyer was not sure about my identity. So when he came here he could recognise me only by that mole."

"How anxious he must have felt!" I said.

Bhagavan then remarked, “How could he not be anxious? He used to look after us with great care after we had lost our father. I came away like this and so he was always fearful for my safety. In the meantime Subba Iyer also passed away and so the burden of looking after Subba Iyer’s family also fell on him. It was then that he heard that I was here. He came here running, with great concern. Subba Iyer had great courage and pride, but this man was very meek and mild. If it had been Subba Iyer, he would never have gone back home leaving me here. He would have bundled me up and carried me away. As I am destined to stay here, my whereabouts were not known so long as he was alive. It was known only a month after he passed away. Nelliappa Iyer, being spiritually minded and mild in his ways, left me here saying, ‘Why trouble him?’” So saying, Bhagavan became silent.

“It seems that the watchman of the garden, Rama Naicker, did not allow him even to enter the garden?” I enquired.

Bhagavan: “No. He did not allow my uncle. That is why he wrote a chit and sent it inside. For writing the chit, however, he had neither pen nor pencil. What could he do, poor man! He took out a neem twig, sharpened the end to a point, plucked a ripe prickly-pear from its stalk, cut it open, dipped the twig into the red juice of the pear, and with it wrote the chit and sent it on to me. He finally came in and realised that there was no chance of my accompanying him. Subsequently, he saw in a neighbour’s garden a learned man giving a discourse on some book to a small gathering and so went to enquire about me. In the view of that learned man I was an ignorant person knowing nothing, so he said, ‘That boy is sitting there without any education and with a crude philosophy’. My uncle was naturally worried because I was young; had not learnt anything from anyone and might turn out to be a good-for-nothing fellow. So he told that gentleman, ‘Please keep an eye on my nephew and teach him something, if possible’, and went away. For a long time, he (that learned man) held the view that I knew nothing, and tried once or twice to teach me something, but I never cared. Later on, when I was giving a discourse on the ‘Gita Saram’ in the Eesanya Mutt, he came there. He then discussed with me various matters and when he heard my explanations and expositions of the Gita, he said, ‘Oho! You are such a great man! I thought you were illiterate.’ So saying, he suddenly prostrated before me and went away. Nelliappa Iyer, however, continued to feel sad for a long time for my lack of education.”

On my enquiring whether he ever came back, Bhagavan said, “Yes. He came back twice when I was in the Virupaksha cave. On the first occasion, I never spoke anything. Though I was speaking to someone before he came, when I learnt he was coming I kept silent as I did not like to say anything before an elder such as he. But you know what happened when he came another time? I did not know beforehand about his coming. Some people wanted me to explain to them the meaning of Dakshinamurthy Stotra, while I was in the Virupaksha cave, and so I began explaining. Daily I used to sit facing the door; that day I sat with my back to it. Hence I did not know of his arrival. He came in quietly and sat outside listening to me. We came up to the Sloka ‘*Nana Chidra*’. After I gave out its meaning and began my commentary thereon, he suddenly came inside and sat down. What could I do? I felt unconcerned and gave my commentary without any hesitation. After hearing it all, he felt that his nephew was not an ordinary person, that he knew the subject very well and hence there was no need to worry any further. He went away fully satisfied. Till then he was always anxious about me. That was his last visit. He never came again. He passed away a few days later.” Bhagavan’s voice quivered, as he said that.

“This incident has not been mentioned in the Biography. Why is it?” I asked. Bhagavan replied saying, “It ought to be there. But they never asked me and I never told them.”

THE BIG SELF

16th January, 1949

About ten days back an American young man came here. Knowing that he takes photographs, some people from here arranged to get the elephant which lives in the Thousand-pillared Mandapam in Arunachaleswarar Temple and keep it in the open space by the side of the Jubilee Hall. Bhagavan on his return from the bath room stood by the side of the elephant and was giving it a feed, when that American took a photo. Yesterday morning, after 10 o’clock, some one brought the photo to Bhagavan, to show it to him. All people began to see it with some curiosity. They were talking amongst themselves about something that was written on the back of that photo. As I did not understand what all they were talking about, I asked Bhagavan about it quietly in a low tone.

Bhagavan: “Nothing particular. On the back of the photo it is written, ‘A big self which does not know the body and a big body which does not know the Self are at one place’.”

Devotee: “What exactly could be his idea in writing thus?”

Bhagavan: “That is easy. Though that elephant has such a big body it does not know the Self. For that reason, whatever food is given to it, it stands there dissatisfied trumpeting unceasingly. Perhaps because of that or for some other reason, it is stated to be a big body without knowing the Self. I stood there somehow with a shaky body; so again, perhaps because of that or for any other reason, it is stated that I am the Big Self not knowing the body. That might be his idea.”

Devotee: “That is true. Bhagavan always appears unconcerned about the body, does he not?”

Bhagavan (with a smile): “That’s it. That’s it. Chintha Dikshitulu has written saying that I am like a statue in the Madras Museum. Sowris has written saying that I am like a celluloid doll. People say something or other.”

Devotee: “I suppose Jada Bharata also used to appear as though he was not concerned about the body.”

Bhagavan: “What you say is true.”

Devotee: “Is it because he was a big Self who did not know his body that he got the name Jada Bharatha?”

Bhagavan: “What else could it have been? It cannot mean that he was lying down inertly like an inanimate being. It means that he was the personification of the Self who did not care for his body.”

As an illustration of this Bhagavan himself in his early days was sitting in the Arunachala temple compound either under a Madhuka (Ippa) tree or in a flower garden or in the vehicles’ mandap or here and there without caring for his body. People who were coming and going, used to say, “He is sitting like a Jada (dull-witted person); he must be a mad fellow”, and they

never paid any attention to him. And Bhagavan has told us several times that he used to be amused at such talk and wish such madness would overtake all people. Not only that; when under the instructions of the Sarvadhikari, Kunjuswami was serving Bhagavan as an attendant, he found Bhagavan's body and head were shaking and faltering and so, when there was no one else there but close disciples, he asked Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, although only in middle age, strangely enough, has a shaking of the head and of the body necessitating the aid of a stick for walking what could be the reason for it?" Bhagavan replied, it seems, with a smile, "What is there so strange in it? If a big elephant is tied down in a small hut, what else will happen to that hut except troubles of all sorts? This is the same."

Do you see what profound meaning there is in those words? Without revealing this meaning to all people, he says humorously now and then, "Do you see? While all of you have two legs, I have three."

BLISS OF THE SELF

22nd January, 1949

At 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon, two pilgrims came and sat in Bhagavan's presence. It was clear from their attitude that they were thinking of asking something. After a while, one of them said, "Swami, it is all right if we sit up for meditation with closed eyes but if we keep them open, the outer senses give trouble. What should we do?"

Bhagavan: "What happens even if the eyes are kept open? It is enough if you make the mind sleep just like your sleeping in a house, keeping the windows open."

Devotee: "That means the mind should be kept away from worldly affairs. However much we try, we are not able thus to control the mind."

Bhagavan: "Yes, that is true. That is why it is said that when a child tries to catch its own shadow by running after it, and weeps when unable to do so, the mother comes and prevents him from running. So also, the mind should be prevented from running away."

Devotee: "By what method can that be prevented?"

Bhagavan: “The mind should be held by hearing and meditating on the sayings of the Vedanta and thereby prevent it from going astray.”

Devotee: “That means, you must give up worldly pleasures and catch hold of *Atma Ananda* (Bliss of the Self). Is that so?”

Bhagavan: “Ananda (Supreme Bliss) always exists. It is only the worldly things that have to be given up. If they are given up, what remains is only Bliss. That which IS, is the Self. Where is the question of catching that which IS? That is one’s own nature (*Swabhava*)”.

Devotee: “Is that nature also called *Swarupa* (the Self)?”

Bhagavan: “Yes. There is no difference between the two.”

Devotee: “If it is said that *Ananda* is the Self itself, then who is it that experiences it?”

Bhagavan: “That is the point. So long as there is one who experiences, it shall have to be stated that *Ananda* is the Self itself. When there is no one to experience, where is the question of a form for *Ananda*? It is only that which ‘IS’ remains. That IS is ‘*Ananda*’ That is the Self. So long as the feeling that the Self is different from oneself there will be one who enquires and experiences, but when one realises the Self there will be no one to experience. Who is there to ask? What is there to say? In common parlance, however, we shall have to say that Bliss is the Self or is our Real Nature (*Swarupa*)”.

Devotee: “That is all right, Swami. But, however much we try, this mind does not get under control and envelopes the *Swarupa* so that it is not perceptible to us. What is to be done?”

Bhagavan with a smile placed his little finger over his eye and said, “Look. This little finger covers the eye and prevents the whole world from being seen. In the same way this small mind covers the whole universe and prevents the Brahman from being seen. See how powerful it is!”

WHAT DOES BHAGAVAN LIKE MOST?

16th February, 1949

Several people that come to Bhagavan's presence become interested in Self-Enquiry and do Sadhana. Other people are not satisfied with mere looking around. They begin to say, "We will repair this," or "We will improve that." If they asked Bhagavan, he would say, "Yes, yes. That is good no doubt, but discuss the matter with the Office." If the office staff and those people agree and place the matter before Bhagavan, he would merely nod his head in approval, but if they did not agree and sought his opinion, he would say, "I do not know. Do as you think best." And as soon as they left, he would tell devotees, "Look. Without minding the purpose for which they come to the Asramam, they begin thinking of reforming the Asramam. It is enough if they reform themselves. Instead of that, they say, 'We will do this and we will do that.' What then? If all of them agree, then there is no trouble. But if what they say, the office staff do not like and what the office say, they do not like, in between, what is it I can do? Added to that, they enquire what it is that Swami would like to be done. Do I want all these things?"

As an instance, one interesting thing happened here recently. A devotee came here and offered to supply a *Kavacham* (outer cover) for the Meru Prasthara Sri Chakram* made of copper with a silver plating over it. The Asramam authorities, however, wanted the cover to be made of pure silver. As they could not agree on this issue, they decided to refer it to Bhagavan and so came to the Hall. On behalf of the Asramam authorities, one of them approached Bhagavan and asked him with great reverence, "They say that they will make the outer cover for the Sri Chakra of copper plated with silver while we all feel it would be better for it to be made of pure silver. What is Bhagavan's advice in the matter?"

Bhagavan: "What have I to do with it? It is all right in whatever way it is done. Both of you come to an unanimous decision and do that which you have decided to be the best."

Enquirer: "Swami, we wish to know what Bhagavan would like us to do."

Bhagavan: "That is exactly what I am saying. That which you all agree to do in mutual consultation will be to my liking. If both of you give different opinions, what can I do?"

Enquirer: “As we hold two different opinions, we are enquiring in order to find out what Bhagavan would like best.”

*A wheel representing the universe.

Bhagavan: “Oh, I see. You want to know what Bhagavan would like best! What Bhagavan likes best is to remain silent without doing anything. If people with different opinions give up their *Mowna* (silence) which is the embodiment of love, and come to me and say, ‘We will do this,’ and ‘We will do that,’ and enquire of me what I like better of the two, what can I say? If you all agree upon a course of action and then ask me for my opinion, I would then say it is all right. But when you are of two opinions, why do you come to me and ask me which I like the better? What I like is, to know who I am and to remain as I am with the knowledge that what is to happen will happen and what is not to happen will not happen. Is that not right? Do you now understand what Bhagavan likes best?” So saying Bhagavan assumed silence.

THE HELPER OF THE HELPLESS

24th May, 1949

You remember, till 1943, in the old hall there used to be a door on the southern side opposite to where Bhagavan used to sit on the sofa and a window in the southern wall which is now converted into a door. Devotees used to enter by the southern door, have a Darsan of Bhagavan who is the incarnation of Dakshinamurthy and go out by the northern door. Some ladies used to sit on the southern side opposite to Bhagavan. As time passed, the number of visitors increased and ladies with their children began sitting there. The children naturally began to create some nuisance. Besides that, from 1943 onwards, the number of visitors of all types increased still more. Moreover, some poor ladies were coming with their children to prostrate and the children were making water there itself. The mothers do not get even a cloth to wipe it out; and even if a cloth was given, some of the modern ladies would not take the trouble to clean the place. Therefore, Bhagavan’s attendants had to clean it up. They were tired and vexed at this and thought of preventing such uncivilised people from coming into the hall. Bhagavan, however, would not, under any circumstances, agree to it. Hence, they began thinking of preventing ladies from sitting in the hall and making arrangements for their

sitting in the verandah only. I came to know of it indirectly and was very much grieved. I told them, “Just because one or two people behave in an uncivilised manner, why do you intend to penalise all ladies by preventing them from sitting inside? We trusted Bhagavan and have come here from long distances. Please do not penalise all of us. I will clean that place whenever necessary.” From that time I began looking after that work. Even so, they were not satisfied. At last, one day, they went to Bhagavan and told him that they would make seating arrangements for ladies outside. Bhagavan thereupon asked why men should sit in the hall if women could not sit there. The attendants stated the difficulties they were experiencing in looking after the ladies that come and go. Bhagavan said, “What work is there in the hall even for Bhagavan? It will be all right if he sits under the almond tree, which is opposite. There will then be no trouble or worry for anybody, whatever the children may do.” When he said that, they gave up all their attempts to isolate the ladies. Instead, the window on one side was replaced by the door on the other side and vice-versa. After that, the ladies got their seating place opposite to Bhagavan’s feet.

A similar incident happened in 1946 when I was appointed as a volunteer for ladies during the Brahmotsavam. I have already written to you that Bhagavan changed his seat to the Golden Jubilee Hall immediately it was ready, that is, on the third day of the festival. He did not thereafter come back to the hall even during the rest period in the afternoons. There was not even a curtain around the sofa. Only a rope was tied to prevent people from the villages crowding around him in the afternoons. The people used to wander about the town and so when they came to Bhagavan’s presence very much tired, some used to squat on the floors with legs outstretched; some used to discuss their affairs in loud voices and some used to lie down and snore. That used to happen between 12 noon and 2 p.m. Mothers used to sleep while breast-feeding the children and the other children used to wander and play about everywhere. When attempts were made to send such people away, it seems Bhagavan said, “Poor people! They must have wandered about a good deal. They are now taking some rest. How could you drive them away? Let them stay on.”

I went there soon after it was 2 p.m. By that time, those people were leaving. Krishnaswami and others had to clean the places themselves. Unable to put up with that nuisance any longer, Krishnaswami was requesting Bhagavan to sit in the hall only. Bhagavan did not agree.

Krishnaswami: “Who will tidy up the nuisance committed by the children?”

Bhagavan: “It should be all right if their mothers are asked to clean it up themselves and are requested to be careful thereafter.”

Krishnaswami: “Who is there to tell them all that? If it were the Congress, they have women volunteers for looking after the women visitors.”

Bhagavan (looking at me with a smile): “There she is. We have a volunteer. Why do you say we have none?”

I: (understanding Bhagavan’s instructions): “Will they care to listen to me?”

Bhagavan (coolly): “Why not? Outsiders will certainly carry out your instructions.”

I: “Then it is all right. I shall certainly tell them.”

Bhagavan: “Poor people! They come here only to see Swami; and they get all the required conveniences here.”

In accordance with Bhagavan’s orders I looked after the work from that day. That arrangement was found very convenient, and so the office people considered the matter and confirmed me in that work. Bhagavan wanted to give Darshan to poor people in that way during those ten days and he sat there too, with kind solicitude for them. I therefore felt that I should also do that much of service to them.

As you know, during the time of the Jayanti, Mahapuja and other celebrations, Bhagavan does not get up for his meals unless and until the feeding of the poor starts and is half-finished. It seems in the past, during such festive occasions, Bhagavan did not take his food except with the last batch. It is only recently, on representations made by devotees, that Bhagavan has been taking food after the feeding of the poor was half-way through. Daily, before the time for the mid-day meal, and before striking the gong, rice was mixed with all the other preparations, made into balls and was sent out for distribution to the poor. That custom prevailed for a long time. Within recent times, however, it so happened that the distribution was done either while meals were being taken or soon after that. One day,

Bhagavan saw a poor man struggling under a tree as he could not get his share of the food. Next day, when the gong was struck, Bhagavan got up and went to the tree where the poor people had gathered, stood there and said, "If you do not give them food first, I will not come to the dining hall at all. I will stand under the tree along with these people, stretch out my hands for food like them, and when I am given a ball of food, I will eat it, go straight to the hall and sit there." From that day onwards, it is only after food is sent to the poor, they strike the gong in the dining hall.

You know what happened one day in February 1947? A poor man came into the hall and stood opposite to Bhagavan's sofa. As Bhagavan was busy writing something, he did not notice him. The attendants asked the poor man to go out. He did not go. "If you do not go away, why not sit?" they said. He did not move. Bhagavan lifted his head and looked at him questioningly. The poor man said with great eagerness, "Swami, I do not want anything. My stomach is burning with hunger. Please arrange to give me one handful of rice to satisfy this great hunger." Bhagavan looked at his attendants indicating his intentions. "For this small thing, should you ask Bhagavan? Come, let us go," said one of the attendants and took the poor man towards the kitchen. After they left, Bhagavan looked at all those in the hall and said, "Do you see that? As he is a very poor man, he has no desires except one and that is to fill his stomach with food as it is burning with hunger. With that, he will be satisfied and will go. He goes and lies down under some tree and sleeps happily. Where do we have the satisfaction that he has? We have any number of desires. If one desire is satisfied another one comes up. Hence where is the chance for our desires to be satisfied?"

Is it not clear from this that in Bhagavan's presence, there is a shelter for the weak, the helpless and the poor at all times?

THE IMPORTANCE OF YATRA AND PRADAKSHINA

(Pilgrimage and Circumambulation)

26th June, 1949

Bhagavan has not been keeping good health for some time past. Troubled in my mind on that account and unable to know what to do, I decided to go round the Hill, not only on Tuesdays as usual but also on Fridays and to pray to Arunachaleswara for Bhagavan's health. With that

decision, I went to Bhagavan on Thursday evening to tell him that I was going round the Hill the next morning, “Tomorrow? Is it Tuesday?” asked Bhagavan.

“No. It is Friday,” I said. As if he had understood my purpose, he said “Yes, yes.”

One of the devotees who had recently come and had been staying for some time, asked Bhagavan, “Several people here go round the hill frequently. What is its greatness?” Bhagavan told him the following story:

“The greatness of this *Giri Pradakshina* has been described at length in ‘Arunachala Puranam’. Lord Nandikesa asked Sadasiva a similar question and Sadasiva narrated as follows: ‘To go round this hill is good. The word ‘*Pradakshina*’ has a typical meaning. The letter ‘*Pra*’ stands for removal of all kinds of sins; ‘*da*’ stands for fulfilling the desires; ‘*kshi*’ stands for freedom from future births; ‘*na*’ stands for giving deliverance through Jnana. If by way of *Pradakshina* you walk one step it gives happiness in this world, two steps, it gives happiness in heaven, three steps, it gives bliss of Satyaloka which can be attained. One should go round either in *Mouna* (silence) or *Dhyana* (meditation) or *Japa* (repetition of Lord’s name) or *Sankeertana* (Bhajan) and thereby think of God all the time. One should walk slowly like a woman who is in the ninth month of pregnancy. It seems Amba who was doing Tapas here, went round the hill on the day of the Krithika star in the first quarter of the night. Immediately after the Darshan of the holy beacon, she became finally absorbed in Lord Siva. It is stated that on the third day after the festival of the Holy Beacon, Siva himself started for the *Pradakshina* with all his followers. Really, it is difficult to describe the pleasure and the happiness one gets by this *Pradakshina*. The body gets tired, the sense organs lose their strength and all the activities of the body become absorbed within. It is possible thus to forget oneself and get into a state of meditation. As one continues to walk, the body automatically gets harmonized as in the *Asana* state. The body therefore becomes improved in health. Besides this, there are several varieties of medicinal herbs on the hill. The air that passes over those herbs is good for the lungs. As there is no vehicular traffic there is no worry about making way for cars and buses. One can walk care-free according to one’s wishes.

“It used to be very exciting during those days when we were going for *Pradakshina*. We started whenever we felt like it especially if there was any festival day, we used to halt whenever we felt it was late or we were tired, cook for ourselves and eat. There was no

anxiety whatsoever as there was no stipulation that we should stop at any particular place. Before railway travel came in, pilgrimages were all made on foot. They never used to start with an idea of reaching a particular place at a particular time, or that they should stop for a particular period at any particular place. There is a proverb saying that people who go to Kasi (Banaras) and those who go to Kati (cremation ground) are equal. Only those who have no hope of coming back would start for Kasi Carrying all their belongings with them, they used to walk along immersed in Dhyana, stop whenever they felt tired and start again in due course. There used to be *Dharmasalas* (rest houses) at the outskirts of the villages so that there was no need for those pilgrims to go into the village proper. Where there were no *Dharmasalas* there used to be temples, caves, trees and piles of stones, which were available as places of shelter for them. Those pilgrims became absorbed in their Atma by walking with no other thought than that of God. *Giri Pradakshina* is also the same thing. The body becomes light and it walks of its own accord. There will not be the feeling that we are walking. The Dhyana that you cannot get into while sitting, you get into automatically if you go for *Pradakshina*. The place and the atmosphere there are like that. However unable a person is to walk, if he once goes round the hill he will feel like going again and again. The more you go, the more the enthusiasm for it. It never decreases. Once a person is accustomed to the happiness of the *Pradakshina*, he can never give it up. Look at Nagamma! She used to go round only once a week on every Tuesday. Now she is going around even on Fridays. She goes around all alone in the dark without any fear whatsoever.”

“A Sadhu by name Kannappa, it seems, goes round every day,” said the devotee. “Yes, yes. He is a very old man. He cannot see. So he starts every day at 8 o’clock in the night as there will not be much cart traffic. He has a conch shell which he blows as he goes. Hearing that sound, all people make way for him. There are several devices for people who do not have eyesight,” said Bhagavan.

“Is it a fact that when Bhagavan was going round the hill with the devotees during the night he used to see groups of Siddhas?” asked another. “Yes. All that is written in the Biography.” So saying Bhagavan resumed silence.

BRAHMANIRVANA

The small tumour which showed itself on the left upper arm of Bhagavan in November 1948, began growing from day to day so that by 1-2-1949 it became as big as a marble. The doctor in charge of the Asramam hospital Dr. Sankara Rao, and a retired surgeon Dr. Srinivasa Rao pointed it out to Bhagavan and offered to remove it by a small surgical operation. Bhagavan however did not agree to it. As it continued to grow rapidly, the doctors got perturbed and somehow prevailed upon Bhagavan to agree to its removal. Accordingly the first operation was performed on the morning of 9-2-1949.

All the devotees wanted the bandage to be covered so as not to be visible to outsiders. But then, was there an upper cloth to cover it? Was there a shirt to wear? The only thing Bhagavan had was a white cloth half-a-yard wide and three-fourths of a yard long. He tied it around his neck so as to conceal the bandage. Still the bandage was visible through the gaps. When some people who had the courage to ask him, enquired what was the matter, Bhagavan used to reply with a laugh, that he had worn a bracelet on the arm or that a Lingam had been born there, or that it was a *Swayambhu Lingam*.^{*} Some time later the bandage was removed. People said that the wound was healing up. Somehow, everyone forgot about it during the bustle of the Kumbhabhishekam which took place on 17-3-1949. As soon as the festivities were over all people came to know that the tumour had shown itself again. Some suggested treatment with green leaves and milk of the fig tree. Others brought a medicated plaster and put it on. On 27-3-1949, Raghavachari and other doctors who came from Madras, said that none of those remedies would do and that the tumour must be operated upon again. They left after deciding that a second operation should be performed and promised to come back on 3-4-1949 for the purpose.

^{*}Swayambhu Lingam is a lingam which springs or arises from the ground by itself. It is associated with Lord Siva.

I was somehow frightened and in a prayerful attitude, entreated Bhagavan, saying, “Why all these operations? Why do you not cure yourself by getting some medicine prescribed by yourself and using it, the same as you did when you had jaundice?”

Bhagavan replied, “They are all reputed doctors. Let their treatment be carried out.”

When I said that they had already performed an operation which had been found unsuccessful and enquired why Bhagavan should not have his own treatment, Bhagavan said, “Let it go this time. If it appears again, we will see about it.”

On the morning of 3-4-1949, while we were discussing about the details of the operation in the presence of Bhagavan, the doctors came. Seeing them, Bhagavan said, “Look. The doctors have come,” and began arranging his legs preparatory to getting up. Bhagavan was showing in practice in this matter also his ‘Upadesa’ (teaching): Whatever is to happen will happen and whatever is not to happen will not happen. Bhagavan said with a firm voice, “Yes. That which is to happen will not stop even if we say ‘no’.” So saying he got down from the couch and went into the hospital. Till about the middle of May 1949, everything went on fairly satisfactorily. But afterwards there was an all round anxiety and worry because when the stitches were removed blood began oozing from the place where the operation had been performed. The tumour had not healed and was clearly exhibiting its malignancy.

As it was suggested that it would do good to expose the tumour to the sun’s rays, in June 1949, the doctors used to seat Bhagavan behind the ‘*Gosala*’ (cow-shed), open the bandage, wash the wound and keep it exposed for some time to the sun’s rays. On such occasions, devotees who expressed their fear and anxiety were told by Bhagavan, “See how nice it is! It is like a precious ruby. It has become an ornament to my arm. See how red it is! It is glowing brilliantly with the sun’s rays falling on it. Look at it!” And when they saw blood oozing out and remarked about it with great grief, he used to say, “Why worry? Let the blood flow out. It is a ruby, you see. Like the ‘*Syamanthakamani*’* this is also producing gold every day. The only difference is, in that case, the gold that was produced was yellow while in this case it is red. See how much is oozing out.” And if any devotees prayed to him to heal himself, he used to say “What have I to do with this?” or “What can I do?”

**Syamanthakamani* is a kind of valuable gem, said to yield daily eight loads of gold and also protect the wearer from all kinds of dangers and calamities.

On 5-7-1949, an old man from Valuvai, a village nearby and a reputed Ayurvedic doctor, started applying the juice of some green leaves and bandage the wound. Before he began the treatment, he saw the wound in all its malignancy and remarked with immense grief. “Oh Bhagavan! How serious this is! Swami, this is cancer. This should not be touched at all. Why

did you allow it to be operated on? If I had known it in the beginning, I would have dressed it with green leaves containing medical properties and cured it. It is too late now Swami.”

When Bhagavan was returning to the hall after leaving the hospital in the evening of 1-7-1949, his body began to shake and his legs began to falter. He had fever. He somehow reached the hall and squatted on the couch. While we were all alarmed and were anxiously looking at him, Santhamma could not contain herself and, being elderly, and a very old devotee, took the liberty of addressing Bhagavan and said, “Oh, the body!” No sooner had she said this than Bhagavan remarked, “Oh, the body? Why? What has happened? It is shaking. What if it shakes?” So saying, he suppressed the shivering, and looking at his attendants, said with a laugh, “That is Nataraja’s* dance. Why should you be afraid? If everyday the body is giving you Darshan in its static form, today it is giving it to you in a dance pose. Why all this anxiety?” So saying, he sat there in dignified silence. The *Vedaparayana* was then done.

*Nataraja is another name for Lord Siva, one of the Trinity. He is reputed to dance when in ecstasy.

On 7-8-1949 Dr. Guruswami Mudaliar was here personally to supervise the third operation. I had already written to you that it was from that date that questions and answers in Bhagavan’s presence had become rare. After the final operation was performed on 19-12-1949, Bhagavan did not come into either the new hall or the old hall. He confined himself to the small room opposite the big hall. After homeopathic treatment was tried Ayurvedic treatment began. The Moos (a famous Ayurvedic doctor from Kerala) who was treating Bhagavan felt discouraged and on 3-3-1950 he wrote a Stothram in praise of Bhagavan and arranged for its Parayana along with *Vishnu Sahasranamam* (thousand names of Vishnu), every day. Some devotees performed *Surya namaskar* (salutation to the Sun) and some began doing *Mrityunjaya Japam* (prayer to Lord Siva, the conqueror of death). Just as he had handed over his body to the doctors to do whatever they liked with it, saying ‘Yes, yes’ he was accepting the offerings of those devotees in the shape of *Tirtha* (consecrated water) and *Prasadams* (offerings of food to the gods).

After the *Mrityunjaya Japam* was over, the people concerned asked him if they could proceed with the *Mrityunjaya Homam*. He nodded in assent and as soon as they left turned towards Venkatratnam and said, “Extinction of ego and abidance in Self is the *Mritunjaya Homam*. In

Devikalottaram, v. 16 and 17, it is stated that one should not get immersed in mantrams, homams and such things. Also in *Sarvajnanottaram*, v. 35, it is said that abidance in Self itself is the mantra, the devata, the diksha, the tapas, the homam and the dhyana.”

About the same time a lady devotee had ‘*Chandi Homam*’ performed. Another lady lighted holy candles to appease Sani (Saturn). Some had *Abhisheka* and other Pujas performed in Arunachaleswara temple.

On 17-3-1950 Bhagavan had some vomittings with consequent discomfort and so did not take any food subsequently. Hearing that, his sister Alamelu went to him and said, “Oh, Bhagavan! It seems you have not taken anything at all. Today’s *payasam* (pudding) is very tasteful. You have not taken even a drop of it.” Bhagavan however sent her away with some words of comfort.

From the time the cancer showed itself, I always used to pray to Bhagavan whenever I could manage to see him, “Please get yourself cured of this ailment and remain in this world for our sake.” Bhagavan used to console me with some comforting words or other. When the third and the fourth operations were performed and I expressed my fear and anxiety, he used to say that there was no need for worry and there was nothing really seriously wrong. Hence, however serious the ailment was, and however much other people felt anxious and discouraged, I used to think that Bhagavan would hint to me if there was anything imminent. That egoism enveloped my whole being and blinded me to the grim realities of the situation. I was therefore confident that he would get cured ultimately.

On 19-3-1950 was the Lunar New Year’s Day. From the time I had come here, it had been usual for me to offer to Bhagavan for his personal wear a khaddar towel and a *kowpeenam* and arrange for Bhiksha in the Asramam that day. As I did not like to give it up this year, I took with me a towel and *kowpeenam* in the evening at about 7 o’clock of 18-3-1950, went into that small room accompanied by our post-master, Raja Iyer. Bhagavan stared at me. I quietly placed the clothes on the table and said the next day was the *Ugadi* (New Year’s Day). Bhagavan started at that and said, “Is the *Ugadi* come? Is the Vikruti (the name of the new year) come?” There was something strange and perplexing in that voice. And I cannot explain why, but it seemed to forbode something disastrous and it was to me heart-rending. The two attendants stood aghast. I too could say nothing and so mumbled, “I felt it would be

inauspicious if I gave up my usual practice.” Bhagavan said, “Oh! What is there in that?” and looking at one of the attendants by name Anjaneyalu who was by his side, he said, “Keep those clothes carefully. Nagamma has brought them. Tomorrow it is Ugadi, it seems.” So saying, in a very gentle manner he gave us leave to go. As the attendants were removing the clothes, I went near the couch and asked Bhagavan, “How is the arm?” Bhagavan said, “What shall I say how it is?” I told Bhagavan, “You must somehow cure yourself.” Bhagavan replied, “Ahem. I cannot say anything now.” I pleaded with great humility, “How could you say that, Bhagavan?” Perhaps he felt that my hopes would not go unless he told me the bare truth and so looking at me with compassion, he said, “Ahem. Cure? What cure?” I said, “Ayyo! Will it not be cured?” Bhagavan replied, “Ahem. Cure? What cure? How could there be any cure now?” The previous assurance that there was nothing to worry about and nothing would happen - all of them disappeared at that moment and when I heard those words, my whole body shook with fear. My eyes filled with tears and my voice got choked. I wanted to ask about our fate for the future and so was trying to gather some composure of mind and open my lips when someone from the office came in hurriedly on some urgent work. I was startled by that noise and came out without asking what I wanted to ask and slowly retraced my steps to my hut. The next morning I thought of approaching Bhagavan again and ask for his final message, but could not get an opportunity. The resonant voice of Bhagavan that said, “Is the *Ugadi* come?” appeared to me to say, “All is over.” With that *Ugadi* the great privilege I had all these years of hearing and enjoying the nectar of Bhagavan’s voice ended.

On the evening of 14-4-1950, I went at 6-30 and stood in the queue arranged for an orderly Darshan of Bhagavan and when I got up on the raised mound opposite the door of the room where Bhagavan was sitting, and stood there for a while with my sight concentrated on him and prayed to him mentally, “Oh Prabho! Won’t you for once radiate on me your compassionate look?” Bhagavan’s eyes slowly began to open and from those eyes, a mild and compassionate look came on me. That was the last time I had the great fortune of his compassionate look.

At 8-47 that night, Sri Ramana, the embodiment of light and enlightenment, left his mortal coil.

When the mortal body of Gurudev, who was at once my mother, father, Guru and God and who has protected me all these years, ceased to be the abode of that great soul, I remained still as a statue, drowned in inexpressible grief and sorrow.

The writing of these letters was begun on 21-11-1945 and continued uninterrupted all these days through the grace of Bhagavan, and with the end of the Avatar of Bhagavan, I am giving up the writing of these letters.

OM TAT SAT