

SUGGESTED READINGS
FOR
RAMANA SATSANGS

SURPASSING LOVE AND GRACE

ARTHUR OSBORNE

RAMANASHRAM TODAY

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Arthur Osborne

THERE are so many spiritual centres in India that not only the foreign tourist but even the Indian devotee may well be excused for wondering which one to visit. However, it is not simply a question of duplication; each one has its own specific character, so that while one meets the need of one person, another provides a haven to someone else.

First of all comes the question of the aim of a spiritual centre, because this decides the sort of people who are likely to be attracted to it. The Maharshi was clearly and solely concerned with guiding people towards Liberation or Self-realisation, that is to *moksha*. But is this not the case with every Ashram and holy place? Not at all. There are places where people go to pray for a son or a job, to win a lawsuit or pass an examination, to obtain release from sickness or misfortune.

I do not say that no such prayers are ever answered at Ramanashram, but I do say that the Maharshi did not approve of such motives in those who came to him. Rather, he tried to awaken in them the realisation that they were not the suffering body but the eternally blissful Self and thereby to give them serenity even in misfortune.

There are also places where people go in the hope of developing powers, obtaining visions of the deity, reading people's thoughts, curing sickness, and so forth. To all such aspirants the Maharshi was even more discouraging. Not only do such powers not lead to Liberation, but they can actually be an impediment

to it, since men become just as attached to them, or to the desire for them, as to worldly wealth and power.

All this implies that Ramanashram is not a place visited by large crowds in search of transient gains. Rather, it is for the serious aspirant who has understood that Liberation is the supreme goal and who seeks the grace and support of the Master to guide him on his way.

Even if the goal is agreed upon, there are various paths or disciplines for approaching it. The Maharshi taught the path of Self-enquiry – Who am I? This is not investigating the mind, conscious or subconscious, but seeking the Self underlying the mind. Therefore he said: “There can be no answer to the question; whatever answer the mind gives must be wrong.” The answer comes as an awakening of pure consciousness, a current of awareness in the heart.

This is pure *jnana*, but the Maharshi also taught a path of *bhakti*. He often said: “There are two ways: ask yourself ‘Who am I?’ or submit.” A philosopher could easily prove that these two paths are mutually exclusive. If you seek to realise your identity with the One Universal Self, which is the Absolute, you logically cannot worship a Personal God or Guru at the same time. Logically not, but in real life you can, because you have different moods and are helped by different kinds of approach. Therefore, in spite of logic, the Maharshi said that the two paths are not incompatible; and his devotees have found it so.

It will be seen that both these paths are direct inner disciplines, independent of ritual; so here we have another characteristic of Ramanashram. There is a minimum of ritual and organisation there. People go and sit silent in meditation before the Maharshi’s shrine or in the hall where he sat for so many years with his devotees. They walk on the sacred mountain, Arunachala, or sit in their rooms. They visit or talk. They arrange

to take their meals at the Ashram or prepare their own food, as they choose. There is scarcely any outer discipline. The Vedas are chanted in front of the shrine, morning and evening, as they used to be in the Maharshi's presence in his lifetime, but even for this attendance is not compulsory. And those who do attend sit together, shoulder to shoulder, *brahmin* and non-*brahmin*, Hindu and foreigner, which would not please those who make a fetish of orthodoxy. This, however, does not imply laxity; the discipline comes from within.

Pure *jnana marga* and pure *bhakti marga* though it is, the Maharshi's path contains a strong element of *karma marga* also, since he expects his devotees to follow it in the life of the world. Time and again someone would come to him and ask his authorisation to renounce the world, and he would not give it.

"Why do you think you are a householder? The similar thought that you are a *sannyasin* will haunt you even if you go forth as one. Whether you continue in the household or renounce it and go to live in the forest, your mind haunts you. The ego is the source of thought. It creates the body and the world and makes you think of being a householder. If you renounce, it will only substitute the thought of renunciation for that of the family and the environment of the forest for that of the household. But the mental obstacles are always there for you. They even increase greatly in the new surroundings. Change of environment is no help. The one obstacle is the mind, and this must be overcome whether in the home or in the forest. If you can do it in the forest, why not in the home? So why change the environment?"

How does this affect Ramanashram? In the first place, it means that there are few *sadhus* or *sannyasins* to be found there. Also, not many of the Maharshi's devotees live there permanently. Most of them pursue their professional life in the world, practising his *sadhana* invisibly, without form or ritual,

and only coming to Tiruvannamalai from time to time, to recharge the batteries, so to speak. Thinking of them, a doctor, an engineer, a professor, a bank manager, an editor, a cinema proprietor and many others come to mind. When it becomes appropriate for one of them to retire from active life in the world and settle down at Tiruvannamalai, circumstances become propitious. It just happens so. Visitors tend, therefore, to be such as have pledged their life to silent, invisible *sadhana* while performing their obligations in the world, and who seek the grace of the Maharshi, the power of his support, to aid them in doing so.

Another result of the formless, essential nature of the Maharshi's path is the large proportion of foreigners both among the visitors and the resident devotees. There is no need to be a Hindu to follow it. Anyone, whatever religion he professes, whether he professes any formal religion or not, can practise Self-enquiry or can worship and submit. Therefore the Maharshi never expected any of his devotees to change from one religion to another. Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Parsis came to him, as well as Hindus. Some continued to practise the forms of their religions, others not; it was up to them.

Mr. Evans-Wentz, the well-known writer on Tibetan Buddhism, visited the Maharshi and asked whether he recommended any special methods for Europeans, and he replied: "It depends on the mental equipment of the individual. There are no hard and fast rules." Each aspirant was guided and helped according to his aptitude, not on any basis of race, caste, sex or religion.

While the present article was being written, it so happened that the Ashram received a letter from an American woman who never saw the Maharshi, and indeed has never been to India, containing the following message:

“Great blessing and benediction was unexpectedly mine. At 7 a.m., just before waking, a vivid vision of Maharshi, potent and powerful, was vouchsafed briefly to me, in colour. Yes, I know visions are not our aim and goal. However, the depth of surrender, ecstasy, awe, wave after wave, deeper and deeper – wave after wave of Bliss ineffable – was overwhelming, wonderful and encouraging: almost all vestige of mind was gone. The veil into Self was delicate, tenuous-thin. Of course, thankful, humble and grateful, my dedication deepens greatly after this. The import and impact of it is with me still.”

Of course.

Is it any wonder that people turn to him from all parts of the world? Even from behind the Iron Curtain letters come.

Normally, it has been possible for any spiritual aspirant in any religion to find guidance within the framework of his own tradition. Today it is no longer easy, if at all possible, to find a guide in any religion who has himself attained the heights and can guide others thereto. Nor is it easy, even though one had such a guide, to follow any strictly orthodox path in the conditions of the modern world. However, the divine grace always provides an answer to man's needs, and in this age has appeared on earth the supreme guide, bringing a path to be followed invisibly by anyone who gives his heart to it.

The Maharshi often reminded those who came to him that they were not the body. Now there are those who presume that he was the body and, no longer seeing his body at Tiruvannamalai, take it that he is not there. But not those who have felt in their hearts the power and subtlety of his guidance, the vibrant, all-pervading peace of Arunachala, the sacred mountain at whose foot his Ashram is located. He used to say: “The purpose of the outer Guru is only to awaken the inner Guru in the heart.” And shortly before leaving the body he told a group of devotees: “When the Guru has awakened

the inner Guru in the heart of his devotees, he is free to leave the body.”

Yes, it may be said, that is all very well for those who were already his devotees when he shed the body, but what about those others who approach him now and feel the need for an outer Guru?

It may be that in some cases he influences them indirectly through those older disciples in whom the inner Guru has been awakened. Certain it is that in many cases he influences them directly and powerfully, as with the American lady from whose letter I have quoted (though not necessarily with any dream or vision).

A visitor asked once whether the contact with the Guru would continue after the dissolution of his physical body and he replied: “The Guru is not the physical form, so contact will remain even after his physical form vanishes.”

If it be asked how he can guide individuals or perform any function after having become One with the Absolute, the answer is: in the first place, he has not become One with the Absolute but simply realised his preexisting and eternal Oneness. In the second place, he had already realised this Oneness while wearing the body and was universal then, as he is now. He himself told us that death makes no difference to the *jnani*. The only way of understanding how the *jnani*, who is universal, can perform an individual function is to become one. Therefore, when people asked him such questions he would usually reply: “Never mind about the *jnani*; first find out who you are.” And when you have done that fully you are the *jnani*.

But surely this continued guidance after leaving the body is unusual! Yes, it is unusual; but who is to bind Divine Providence with regulations? The circumstances also are unusual. I have remarked how the formless path the Maharshi prescribed compensates for the modern difficulty in finding adequate

guidance within the forms of any religion; similarly, the invisible Guru may compensate for the modern difficulty in finding a fully potent living Guru on earth. Such explanations are for those who like to speculate; for those who are content to strive on the path, guidance is there.

This invisible guidance also has an effect on the Ashram. It means that many or most of those who come, both from India and abroad, are new people who never saw the Maharshi in his lifetime but have been drawn to him in various ways since then.

The conclusion, then, is that if you are a ritualist or strict formalist, if you crave material boons, if you seek visions or powers, there are other places better suited to you than Ramanashram. But if you have understood the ultimate spiritual goal of liberation and seek grace and guidance on the path, you will find it at Ramanashram.

RAMANA ARUNACHALA

ARTHUR OSBORNE

THE MAN WHO WAS RAMANA

CHAPTER TWO

THE MAN WHO WAS RAMANA

It was the most majestic film I have ever seen, the most awe inspiring, and yet without incident. A view of Arunachala hill from the Ashram drive, and then a tall, frail, light-complexioned man, with short white hair, descending the slope of the hill with the aid of a staff. Then he was seen coming out of the Ashram hall, stopping to smile to a baby, walking across the Ashram ground ; just simple, everyday actions, and yet the beauty of it was breath-taking — the simplicity was so natural, the smile so spontaneous, the majesty so inherent.

His complexion was pale, almost golden, his white hair and beard always short, as the Ashram authorities gave him a shave every full-moon day in the manner of *sannyasins*. Emaciated, aged beyond his years with the burden of our sorrows, stiff-kneed with rheumatism, he leaned heavily on his staff as he walked, his eyes cast down. There was an air of modesty, of utter simplicity, of a child-like defencelessness. The mere sight of him walking across the Ashram ground was enough to grip the heart. People who seemed worldly would gaze after him, with love in their eyes.

The story of Sri Bhagavan is of the most simple. Born in a poor Brahmin family in South India, he went to a mission school where he learned a little English. He was a normal, healthy boy, more fond of sport than study. At the age of 17, when any adolescent might pass from boyhood to manhood, the great change came over him. One day a sudden, intense fear of death assailed him, a feeling of the

immediate imminence of death. There was none to turn to, none to give help. He felt that he must face it alone. Lying rigid upon his bed, he tried to visualise, to dramatise death. He held his breath to make the experience more vivid, thereby unconsciously practising the technique of *pranayama* or breath-control. He said : " Well then, now death is come. What does it mean ? This body is dead. It will be carried to the burning ghat and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body am ' I ' dead ? Is this body ' I ' ? " All this was not dull-thought. Vividly the living truth flashed on him that he was not the inert body nor the thoughts that pass and are gone ; he was the eternal ' I ', the deathless Spirit. And in that moment death was dead and he had awakened into Enlightenment of the eternal Self. A life-time of striving and *sadhana* was, for him, compressed into that brief moment. Theory he learnt later and recognised it, just as a woman who had borne a child might read afterwards about child-birth.

His whole manner of living was changed. He lost all interest in worldly things and would fall constantly into immersion in the Bliss of the Self. His elder brother, who, under his uncle, was in charge of the family, the father being dead, resented the change and rebuked him one day for behaving like a *sadhu* while enjoying the benefits of family life. The young Ramana, recognizing the justice of the rebuke, secretly left home and went to the sacred hill of Arunachala where he remained for fifty-four years until, on April 14th, 1950, he parted from the body he had worn.

For some time after his arrival at Arunachala he remained immersed in the effulgence of Bliss, barely conscious of his body, not needing it, not speaking or moving and scarcely eating, so that to onlookers it appeared to be the most intense *tapas*.

It was not really *tapas* at all. He was simply ignoring the body he had ceased to need. He himself once indicated that by saying : " I did not eat, so they said I was fasting ; I did not speak so they said I was *mouni*". He was already a *Jivan-Mukta* in unwavering consciousness of identity with the Self and had no *karma* left to wipe out, no sin to atone for, no further goal to attain.

For a while he made his abode in the underground vault of the great temple at Tiruvannamalai and, immersed in *samadhi*, took no heed of the ants, mosquitoes and vermin, though his back and thighs became an open wound from them. Some *sadhus* took him a single cup of thin gruel daily, which was all his food. Finally they carried him out bodily while he was in *samadhi*.

His body was so neglected that it might not have endured long and he might have effortlessly discarded it. So the story would have ended. But for us the story began when compassion for those who gathered around, seeking his Grace and guidance, drew him back to a full bodily life. From then on there was a motive for continuing in bodily form — the motive of compassion. And yet it might equally well be said that there was no motive but a simple fulfilment of *prarabdha karma*, just as the sun gives life to plants and animals without purpose, simply by being itself. He compared the *prarabdha karma* of a *Jnani* to the movement of an electric fan after the current has been turned off — it still continues to rotate from past momentum although no new momentum is added. Perhaps these two aspects of truth coalesce if one remembers that compassion in the *Jivan-Mukta* means not individual but cosmic compassion.

It is one of the spiritual paradoxes that he who lays down his life finds it ; he who surrenders his individuality becomes

more individual than any one else. The *Jivan-Mukta* has dissolved the ego which exploits and perverts the individual characteristics in a man, and therefore these characteristics are able to grow to their true likeness, neither stunted nor warped, shining forth more clearly than in other men. In two Masters who are perfect the divine Grace will be the same but the characteristics of the human vehicle quite different.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana was meticulously exact, closely observant, practical and humorous. His daily life was conducted with a punctiliousness that Indians to-day would have to call pure Western. In everything he was precise and orderly. The Ashram hall was swept out several times daily. The books were always in their places. The cloths covering the couch were scrupulously clean and beautifully folded. The loin-cloth, which was all he wore, was gleaming white. The two clocks in the hall were adjusted daily to radio time. The calendar was never allowed to fall behind the date. The routine of life flowed to a regular pattern.

He was affable and courteous to all comers. There was no pontifical solemnity in his expositions ; on the contrary, his speech, whether on daily affairs or on doctrine, was vivacious and full of laughter. And so infectious was his laughter that even those who did not know Tamil would spontaneously join in. Right up to the end he joked, and yet his jokes also bore instruction. When the doctors were alarmed to see a new growth of tumour pushing up during his final sickness, he said, laughing, " Why do you worry ? It's its nature to come up." When a woman beat her head against a post outside his room in grief, despite his insistence that the body's death is no cause for grief, he listened for a moment and then said : " Oh, I thought somebody was trying to break a coconut." A devotee asked why his

prayers were not answered and Bhagavan replied, laughing :
“ If they were you might stop praying.”

His manner of life was of the most normal. It was no attitude of superiority that bent men's knees before him, for none could be more simple or natural ; it was the spontaneous reaction of men to the Divine.

His face was like the face of water, always changing and yet always the same. He would be laughing and talking, and then he would turn graciously to a small child or hand a nut to a squirrel that hopped on to his couch from the window, or his radiant, wide-open eyes would shine with love upon some devotee who had just arrived or was taking leave. And then, in silence, a moment later, his face would be rock-like, eternal in its grandeur.

The love that shone in his eyes, the luminous understanding, cannot be described. Some one has come to the Ashram broken down with the hopeless grief of bereavement, and Bhagavan, after hearing the story, has simply looked, no word spoken, and peace flooded the soul.

An old pandit who knew Sri Ramana as a boy had visited many *yogis* and decided to visit the Yogi Ramana also and discuss with him. But, standing before the couch, he felt his whole body electrified with awe and, before he knew what had happened, had fallen on his face before him. Little children were drawn to him and gladdened by his smile. A cooly picked up a blown sheet of paper and, seeing his picture on it, exclaimed “ Bhagavan ! ” and folded it reverently to take away with him. Animals were drawn to him like people. Once he came back late from his afternoon walk on the hill, and while devotees clustered in groups or sat waiting or followed him up the hillside, a pair of monkeys came to the doorway of the hall and, forgetting their fear of people, came inside and gazed

anxiously at the vacant couch. A monkey that has been tended by humans is ostracised by its fellows on its return to wild life, but any that had been tended by Bhagavan was gladly received. Having transcended the ego, he had transcended fear and antagonism, and the animals sensed this. A snake crept over his leg and he did not move or shrink. When a devotee asked him later what it felt like to have a snake pass over one he replied, laughing : " Cold and moist. "

During the last years the pattern of his daily life was as follows : At five o'clock in the morning the hall in which he had been sleeping on the couch was opened and devotees came in and sat in meditation while the Vedas were chanted. At six he went to the bathroom and at seven there was breakfast in the Ashram dining hall. Devotees sat before him again in the hall from eight till eleven with a break of about half an hour at 10 o'clock. Sometimes all sat silent, and the silence was vibrant with his Grace. It was a peace and fulness in which words would be a distraction ; or it was an intense spiritual striving watched and guided by him, though he might seem to take no notice. Sometimes it happened that some one would ask questions or sing in praise of Bhagavan. The mail arrived between nine and ten, and Bhagavan would read letters and look at newspapers, yet without breaking the current of silence in the hearts of those whom he was guiding. He did not answer letters himself but handed them over to the Ashram office, and the replies were submitted to him for approval the same afternoon.

Lunch was at eleven, and during the last years Bhagavan consented to rest his frail body for awhile after lunch, so the hall was closed to devotees. Their loss was the squirrels' gain, for the whole floor was strewn with nuts. Devotees

came to the hall again from three to nearly five, when Bhagavan used to walk on the hill for about half an hour. But during the last two years or so he was too infirm. His knees were swollen with rheumatism and he could only walk very slowly across the Ashram grounds. Before 5-30 the chanting of the Vedas began again. At 6-30 the women left the Ashram, and an hour later the men.

The consideration that Bhagavan showed to people and animals extended even to inanimate objects. Every action had to be performed worthily and nothing was to be wasted. I have seen the meticulous care with which a book was bound or a cutting pasted and have heard an attendant reproved for wanting to cut into a new sheet of paper for the purpose when one already started could be made to do. Our exploitation of Nature is ruthless today ; it is more a rape than a harvesting ; and it was chastening sight to see the Divine Man so careful in the use of things. Food especially was never wasted. A gift of fruit might be distributed to any children who were present or to the monkeys who tried to steal it, but nothing of it was to be wasted. It is a mistaken notion that economy goes with parsimony and generosity with extravagance ; very often the parsimonious are wasteful and the generous careful. When Bhagavan had finished a meal the banana leaf off which he had eaten it was as clean as though it had been washed. Not a grain of rice was wasted. In former years, when his body was more robust, he himself used to help in the kitchen, preparing meals ; and he insisted that even the parings of the vegetables should be used as cattle feed and not thrown away.

Although he was an absolute King and all craved to obey him, Bhagavan's life was, notwithstanding, a lesson in submission. Owing to his refusal to express any wish or desire,

the Ashram authorities built up their own structure of regulations, and Bhagavan obeyed them without demur ; so that if any devotee found them irksome he had before his eyes the example of Bhagavan's own submission. If ever Bhagavan resisted it was likely to be in the interests of the devotees, and even so it was usually in silence and very often in a manner dictated by his shrewd sense of humour. An attendant once rebuked a European woman for sitting with her legs stretched out. Bhagavan at once sat up crosslegged and continued so despite the pain caused by the rheumatism in his knees. When the devotees protested, he replied that the attendant's orders were for every one, and it was only when the lesson had been driven home that he consented to relax.

But it was not only submission to regulations ; it was submission to all the conditions of life and to pain and sickness which taught us silently that pain cannot disturb the equanimity of one who abides in the Self. Throughout the long and painful sickness that finally killed his body he submitted loyally, one after another, to the doctors who were put in charge, never complaining, never asking for a change of treatment. If ever there was any inclination to try a different treatment it was only so that those who recommended it should not be disappointed : and even then it was made dependent on the consent of the Ashram authorities. If there is a tendency today to regard submission as spiritless it is only because egoism is regarded as natural. Doubtless, it is more spirited to fight for one's desires than to submit reluctantly to their denial, but Bhagavan was showing us the way to freedom from desires. Such freedom is not the submission of the abject ; it is the joy of concord for it is the Self, not a stranger, to whom one submits.

Bhagavan sought to free us from psychic as well as physical desires, and he therefore disapproved of all freakishness and eccentricity and of all interest in visions and desire for powers. He liked his devotees to behave in a normal and sane way. For he was guiding us towards the ultimate Reality where perceptions and powers which men call 'higher' or 'miraculous' are as illusory as those they call 'physical'. A visitor once related how his Guru died and was buried and then, three years later, returned in tangible bodily form to give instructions. Bhagavan sat unheeding. It was as though he had not heard. The bell rang for lunch and he rose to leave the hall. Only at the doorway he turned and quoted: "Though a man can enter ever so many bodies, does it mean that he has found his true Home?" One of the most delightful examples of his humour was when he was asked whether, if somebody who desired certain powers obtained Moksha directly through the force of his *sadhana*, he would automatically acquire the powers he had wished for. Bhagavan replied: "If he obtained *Moksha* it would not harm him even if he did have power."

No one could be more simple and unostentatious. He called nothing his. He never asked for anything. He accepted the food and clothing that was necessary, that was all. The only outer gifts that one could make were fruit and flowers. And gifts were taken to the dining hall and shared among all equally. Bhagavan refused to have any special consideration shown to him. If those who were sitting in the hall made to rise when he entered he motioned to them almost impatiently to remain seated. I have seen him refuse to have an electric fan switched on because the devotees would not benefit equally. Afterwards ceiling fans were installed and all benefited alike. An attendant was placing a quarter mango on each person's leaf and slipped a half

mango on to that of Bhagavan and he angrily put it back and took a small piece.

One can say 'angrily' because he could show anger at misdemeanours on the part of attendants. They were small outer lapses that called for small outer disapproval; but with regard to the failures and short-comings of the devotees his patience was inexhaustible. He never asked any to come or told any to go. He never pressed any to stay. And yet he watched over each one with the loving solicitude of a mother for her only child. Not that the solicitude was always outwardly manifested, however, for there were cases often enough when it might flatter the vanity of the devotee or arouse the jealousy of others, both of which Bhagavan was shrewdly careful to avoid. Indeed, this care added to the sense of secrecy in his guidance, of which more will be said later.

There was never any question among the devotees what mood he was in, for he had no moods. How could he, when he never for a moment mistook the form for the Reality? No moods of abstraction were needed because, while fully human, he was also fully in *samadhi*, fully divine, alike when talking and when sitting silent. He merely responded according to the need of those who approached him, and therefore each one felt that he enjoyed his especial Grace. It was only the more observant who perceived that every devotee enjoyed his especial Grace. Being established immutably in the Reality beyond all forms, he saw forms and events not with the inherent and graded importance that they seemed to bear for us but sympathetically, with the importance that we gave them. And since each one thought his own problems important, each was delighted to find Bhagavan appreciating their importance. Pandits were sitting in the hall with Sanskrit texts which, now and again, they

took up to Bhagavan to elucidate some point. A three-year-old, not to be outdone, took up his book of nursery rhymes, and Bhagavan was no less gracious, showed no less interest. But the book was tattered, so he took it and supervised its mending and binding and gave it back next day renovated.

And yet sometimes he deliberately did not recognize the importance of men's problems, for his ultimate purpose was to wean them from attachment to things and events. One of the Ashram staff died. His wife who had been on a visit and knew nothing about it came home in the evening and found him dead, and she could not control her grief. Bhagavan said : " What is she grieving about ? Nothing is changed. " He said the same many times during the long months when his own body was approaching death.

To all he showed unfailing courtesy. Each comer felt at home, even though with no word spoken. If he greeted a newcomer in words it was usually to ask : " Have you been served food ? " It was the first question he put to a visiting doctor a few days before the body's end, when the pain was excruciating. And yet, behind the constant equal courtesy, there was detailed individual supervision of each devotee whose inner submission he had recognized. At first such a one might be encouraged with the daily attention of a smile and a friendly look. And then, for weeks or months, he might be apparently ignored, with only an occasional swift glance while he sat in meditation. If his ego had fed on the previous attention and he had imagined himself better and more favoured than others the apparent neglect might be a bitter *tapas*. When wisdom and steadiness began to come he would receive an occasional smile of recognition or a deeper, fuller look from those radiant eyes of love.

It was not often that devotees spent the whole day in the Ashram hall. Many of them were householders living in the

small colony of bungalows that had sprung up around the Ashram, and they had their work and housekeeping to attend to. Some could come only in the early morning and evening. There were also many who lived in other towns, where they had their work, and could come only for an occasional visit. Even the *sadhus* had to procure and prepare their food, for it was usually only visitors and newcomers who were invited to take their meals at the Ashram. This kind of life accorded well with the large element of *karma-marga* in Bhagavan's teaching. Meditation on the inner Self and devotion to the Self manifested as Sri Ramana were stabilised by daily effort to cast off attachment and deny the ego in the work and relationships of life. Otherwise conditions would have been different, for, although Bhagavan gave no injunctions, everything shaped itself according to his will.

There were many who desired him to give injunctions, both for their own lives and for the Ashram management, but he would not. The most he would do was to show approval or disapproval of what was done or of any project that was announced to him, and even that not always. If asked point blank he would probably keep silent or reply : " If you want to do it, do. "

And yet his solicitous supervision did in fact cover the actions also of those who had submitted to him, and his approval or disapproval was usually clear enough, without being so explicit that stray comers who had not put themselves in his hands should demand that they also be given instructions. A devotee announced his plan to leave Tiruvannamalai and take up a job with a regular salary. Bhagavan replied, laughing : " Every one is free to make plans. " The plan did not come off. An attendant admired one of the political leaders of India and wished to go to

Madras to see him when he paid a visit there. He asked permission, but the face of Bhagavan remained like stone and there was no reply. He went. He rushed from meeting to meeting, each time just missing the leader or failing to gain admission. He came back without seeing him, and Bhagavan teased him good-humouredly "So you went to Madras without permission? Did you have a successful trip?" A few months after my arrival I had business in a neighbouring town and, imagining that the worldly affairs of a devotee would not interest Bhagavan, I simply asked permission to go for the day. Bhagavan gave permission but afterwards indicated that I should have explained the reasons for my going.

It might be asked why such hidden methods of guidance were necessary, why Bhagavan should not have given plain instructions. The most obvious answer would be that his grace and courtesy to all comers was such that he did not wish to make an invidious distinction between them and the devotees who had placed their lives in his hands and thereby acquired a right to his guidance. It may be also that he did not wish to provoke open questions as to his being a Guru or indiscriminate demands for initiation, since, as is explained later, this was to be understood by those who went beyond words.

But there was also a deeper, more essential answer. "By their fruit ye shall know them." — A man's words and actions are the fruit of his nature. Bhagavan's silent teaching, working direct upon the heart, sought to rectify the devotee's nature, and as a result sound fruit would spring from a sound tree. Control of his actions would have been a more external method, working from effect to cause rather than from cause to effect. It was best for the devotee to seek the true answer to a problem or way out of a situation

in his heart, like a schoolboy doing a sum and bringing the answer up to his teacher ; and then there would be a smile of approval and encouragement if the sum had been rightly solved, and if not it had to be worked out afresh ; to have told the answer would have helped the schoolboy much less in his work.

General injunctions applicable to all alike, such as each religion imposes on its followers, would also have been inappropriate, since, as already explained, the purpose of Bhagavan was neither to found a new religion nor to restore the integrity of an existing one, but to open a path for all who turned to him from all religions.

Towards the end, Bhagavan was aged far more than his years. He looked more like 90 than 70. In one who had a strong constitution, who had scarcely known sickness except for the rheumatism of his last years, and who was impervious to grief or worry, anxiety, hope or regret, this would appear incredible ; but it was the burden of his compassion. "He who taketh upon himself the sins of the world." Devotees came and sat before him, burdened with sorrows, tormented with doubts, darkened with impurities, and, as they sat, felt themselves heart-free and lightened. How many have come and sat there weighed down with the grief of failure or bereavement, and the light of his eyes has dissolved their pain until they have felt a wave of peace flood their heart. How many have come primed with questions which seemed to them all-important and which their thought and reading had failed to solve ; it might be in desperate hope or as a challenge that they brought the questions, but as they sat there the questioning mind itself was brought to tranquility and the questions faded out, no longer needing to be asked. And then, if they opened their hearts, a deeper understanding was implanted there. Those who sought refuge

in him felt the burden of their *karma* lifted ; and it was he who bore the burden. Even physical ailments have been known to diminish or disappear in his presence and to appear reflected in his own body.

Even the way of his discarding the body was supremely compassionate. There were many who believed that they could not endure or survive it. But when the sickness dragged on month after month, after the doctors had found it incurable and had declared that the pain must be intense although Bhagavan did not show it, they became reconciled to its ending through death. Sometimes one or another implored him to desire to be well, but in their hearts they knew that he would use no powers that they themselves could not use. Indeed, had he consented it would have been a boon of a few years only, whereas the boon he granted was for all time and beyond time, for he said : " I am not going away. Where could I go ? " Where, indeed, for he is Bhagavan. For years this body had been tortured by rheumatism. The knees were swollen, and he walked stiff-legged and with difficulty and had to give up his daily walks on the sacred hill, Arunachala. Over a year before the end a small tumour appeared on the left elbow. It was cut out but returned worse than before. Then it was recognized as serious. Various kinds of treatment were given, and Bhagavan submitted to whatever was prescribed. Three more times it was cut, and after each operation it returned worse and higher up. Already in December the doctors said they could do no more. The tumour, after four operations, had reached the shoulder and gone inwards. The doctors said that the pain must be excruciating, though Bhagavan seldom gave any sign that he was suffering. The whole system was poisoned, and the last months were one long martyrdom. And yet to the last he insisted that all those who came to

him should receive *darshan* twice a day, walking past the room where he lay. At the very end, when every touch was agony, he ordered the attendants to raise him to a sitting posture and he died sitting.

We shall not again see the Divine Grace in human form or the love shining in his eyes, but in our hearts he is with us and will not leave us. His Grace continues to be poured out, not only on those who knew the miracle of his bodily form, but on all who turn to him in their hearts, now as before.

I have not given a clear picture of the man who was Ramana, but how can one portray the universal? What impressed one was his complete unselfconsciousness like that of a little child, his Divinity and intense humanity. The Divinity was recognized in the act of prostration and in addressing him in the third person as 'Bhagavan.' To have said 'you' would have been a jarring assertion of otherness. In speaking of himself Bhagavan spoke very simply and said 'I' or 'this'. Only occasionally, when the meaning clearly indicated it, did he use the third person: "If you remember Bhagavan, Bhagavan will remember you." "Even if you let go of Bhagavan, Bhagavan will never let go of you."

He was unperturbed whatever happened; the majesty of his countenance was inexpressible; and yet it is no less true that he was swift and spontaneous in response and that his face was the most human, the most living, one had ever seen. He attained Realization without learning and never displayed erudition, and yet he had made himself better versed in the scriptures than the pandits who came to him for elucidations. He was all compassion, and yet his countenance might appear immovable, like stone. He was all love, and yet for weeks together he might not favour a

devotee with a single look or smile. He replied to all graciously, and yet many trembled and feared to speak to him. His features were not good and yet the most beautiful face looked trivial beside him. He often appeared scarcely to notice devotees, and yet his guidance was as unremitting then as it is now.

RAMANA ARUNACHALA

ARTHUR OSBORNE

THE DIRECT PATH

CHAPTER THREE

THE DIRECT PATH

All Spiritual Masters have had one purpose : to help men overcome the powerful illusion of the ego and abide in the perfect bliss of the Self, or at any rate to approach towards this. Their expositions have never been philosophy in the modern sense of the word, that is speculation as to the nature of being. They have been a theoretical basis for the practical work of the path. A Master, therefore, while teaching one theoretical basis, might recognize that a different one represents another aspect of truth and would serve as a basis for a different path. To criticize and compare them as philosophies in the modern sense is like comparing a living horse with a hobby horse — the shape may be the same but the factor of life is overlooked.

Masters have used more open or veiled language in their expositions to suit the understanding of those to whom the message was given. In India and China many have declared the ultimate truth openly : that only the Self is, that you are nothing other than the Self, that the universe is a mere manifestation of the Self, without inherent reality, existing only in the Self. This can be understood by the analogy of a dream. The whole dream-world with all its people and events exists only in the mind of the dreamer. Its creation or emergency takes nothing away from him and its dissolution or reabsorption adds nothing to him ; he remains the same before, during and after. God, the conscious Dreamer of the cosmic dream, is the Self and no person in the dream has any reality apart from the Self of which he is an expres-

sion. By discarding the illusion of otherness you can realize that identity with the Self which always was, is and will be, beyond the conditions of life and time. Then, since you are One with the Dreamer, the whole universe, including your life and all others, is your dream and none of the events in it have more than a dream reality. You are set free from hope and desire, fear and frustration, and established in the unchanging Bliss of Pure Being.

This explanation bears a superficial resemblance to a theory that was once toyed with in Western philosophy—sufficient at any rate for a caution to be necessary. The theory is that only I exist and all others are figments of my mind. This would be like saying that one person in the dream creates all the others, which is absurd. The truth is that the mind of the dreamer creates this person as well as all the others and when this one realizes his identity with the dreamer his own life as well as those of others becomes a part of his dream. Or, to change the analogy, the Western travesty would be that one character in a play is real and creates all the others, which is absurd, the truth being that both this character and the others are invented by the playwright, so that the realized man is like the actor who, knowing that the part he acts is not himself, acts it with equanimity, unaffected by its good or evil fortune.

Teachers of the West and Near East have, on the whole, been more veiled in the language of their expositions. However, no such division can be absolute. In the West there have been those who have proclaimed the Supreme Identity, while in India there have been Tantric, Dvaitic and Bhakti teachers who have guided men along the paths of duality to Unity. The final Goal is the same, even though those who follow the less direct paths of duality may not perceive it at the beginning, or may only recognize it in theory without

making it their constant *sadhana*, or may deny it and persecute those who proclaim it.

Some Spiritual Masters have come to "confirm the law and the prophets" in founding a new religion, thereby establishing a complete pattern of life for a whole community as well as a Path for those who are drawn consciously towards the Goal which ultimately none can evade. Therefore they have had to clothe their more direct teaching in parables and symbols which could have an outer meaning for all who do not aspire beyond the ethics and devotion of religion. Within the framework of a religion, some have, in the same way, lived for the spiritual revitalisation of the whole community as well as for the few who strive with consciousness of the Goal, while others have confined themselves more or less exclusively to guiding aspirants on the Path, and have spoken a clearer language; in either case one of the signs of genuineness has been that they have lived and taught strictly within the framework of their religion.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana conforms to none of these categories. He came neither to found a new religion nor to give guidance strictly within an existing one but to open a Path to those who seek in all religions, the world over. The mode of his teaching is a response to the conditions of the world in which he came. Today, at the end of the Kali Yuga, the world has reached a state of unprecedented spiritual darkness. In some countries religion is denounced and men are taught to accept the material world and physical life as all there is. In others countless numbers limit themselves to the material and physical, whether or not they nominally profess any religion. Even those countries which still acknowledge a religion glory in having deprived it of all control over the lives of men or the education of children. A science

of the mind has been developed in complete ignorance of the Spirit which is its source and presumes to analyse a man while leaving out the one thing that is his essence. All religions have dwindled in numbers (proportionately, that is, to the size of the population) and in spiritual power. In Christian countries the initiatic paths to realization have been more or less completely lost, so that most who call themselves Christians are ignorant that there ever were any; and in other communities also they are fewer and less potent than ever before. Often they have gone underground and their Masters are hard to find, while false, self-styled masters are as vociferous as they are dangerous, and old truths are given forth in garbled form, mixed with modern errors.

And yet it is a law of the cycles that the re-ascent is always prepared before the nadir is reached ; and it is also true today that books of ancient wisdom are accessible in all languages and the doctrine of Advaita, of Oneness with the Self, is openly proclaimed in the West as well as the East, and also that physical science itself has at last found the material world not to be material, since there is no solid matter but only atoms which are reduceable rather to energy than matter. Coupled with this mental re-awakening is a dread of the chaos towards which the once vaunted 'progress' is leading mankind. And, as a result, many, both in the West and the East, are drawing back disgusted from the crude violence and hollow platitudes of a material civilisation and groping for spiritual Reality. This is the circumstance of Bhagavan's living on earth among us and of the message he brought and the path he made open.

The task performed by Bhagavan Sri Ramana was to reopen the direct path of Self-enquiry which had become too arduous for our spiritually dark age. This path, with its theoretical basis of Advaita, stands, so to speak, at the

source from which the various religions diverge and can therefore be approached from any side. Whether there are many or few who take it is not the question, only that it has been made open.

In itself, but for the Grace of Bhagavan, it would be the most inaccessible to modern man on account of its very simplicity and directness ; and yet it is the most accessible, and in many cases the only accessible path, from the contingent point of view, since, because of its very directness, it requires no ritual or forms of worship, no priesthood or congregation, no outer signs or special observances, but can be practised in the workshop or kitchen or city office as well as in the monastery or hermitage.

Also it requires no great burden of theory. Its description as *Jnana-marga*, the Path of Knowledge or Intellect, sometimes leads to the idea that it is more philosophical than other paths, but the opposite is true. It is the sword that cuts through the Gordian knot of philosophy. The structure of spiritual philosophy or science, whichever one may choose to call it, is vast ; its ramifications may be bewildering. On various paths more or less theoretical knowledge has to be mastered, and usually the less direct the path the greater the need for theory. Only on the Direct Path the one stupendous truth of Advaita, like a veritable sword-flash, cuts through the entanglements and is all the theory needed. The whole intricate theory of posthumous development falls away, since it is necessary to discover what you are now and in eternity, not what you will be when you die. The traditional doctrine of cycles of history is unnecessary, since " the wise man is always in *Satya-yuga* ". The complex yogic and tantric sciences of the non-physical powers and modalities of man and the techniques for developing them are superfluous, since you are not all

that but the Self. The vast fabric of spiritual cosmology, expounding the stages of devolution from the Formless Substratum down to the state of physical man, and the stages of man's return, does not arise when the cosmos is to be looked upon simply as a dream from which to awaken. On all these branches of spiritual science Bhagavan usually refused to answer questions, repeating that what is needed is to concentrate on the Self that you really are.

However, it is not only in its simplicity of application and its freedom from inessentials that the path Bhagavan opened for us is the most direct. It is so intrinsically. This can, perhaps, be best explained by outlining briefly the initial position of the aspirant, then the task before him, and finally the methods of accomplishing it.

The initial position is that Atma, the Self or Spirit, alone is and is manifested in all the forms of the Universe and in your being, without ever ceasing from its formless, changeless state. But there also appears to be an ego, an individual self, which imagines itself a real and separate being, as though one of the persons in a dream should imagine himself to exist apart from the mind of the dreamer. The Self is in unchanging Bliss and Perfection, without birth or death, beginning or end ; the ego is in unceasing turmoil, plagued by hope and fear, anxiety and regret, attachment and bereavement, and foredoomed to death. But, as its sole good, the ego has an intuition of the Self, which it conceives of as a greater Being, infinitely good, unfathomably wise, boundlessly loving ; and it calls this Being ' God '.

The task is to extinguish the ego-sense so that only the Self, which alone was, is and will be, remains in consciousness and sees all this panorama as its own manifestation. As an expression of this, Bhagavan often said laughingly : " You have only to disrealize unreality and Reality will

appear". This task normally means passing from unity through duality to unity ; for at the beginning it appears to the aspirant that his ego is the one indisputable reality, then he feels the reality of both the ego and God or Self, and the end is when the ego-sense is dissolved.

The ways of undertaking this task are innumerable, but it will suffice here to divide them into three general categories : that of exoteric religion, that of indirect spiritual paths, and that of the Direct Path of Self-enquiry.

The way of exoteric religion is to progressively replace egoism by submission to the will of God. Its four cardinal demands are faith, love, humility and good deeds. In so far as they are complied with, they effectively bring a man towards Self-realization, even though he does not consciously envisage this. True, the Goal is not likely to be attained in this lifetime, but in God's patience a lifetime is very little. Faith strengthens the intuitional conviction of the reality of God or the Self. Humility, its counterpart, weakens the belief in the ego and lessens the importance attached to it. Love strives to surrender the ego to God and its welfare to others. Good deeds deny egoism in practice and are alike the fruit and the proof of love and humility. Therefore Bhagavan sometimes encouraged this way in speaking to those whose nature did not draw them to a more conscious *sadhana*.

The way of indirect *sadhana* (that is of spiritual paths more conscious of the Goal than exoteric religion but less direct than Self-enquiry) is to strengthen, purify and harmonise the mind by various techniques and to hold it to the quest of the Self, which is often conceived as Father, Mother or Lover. Bhagavan never denied the efficacy of such methods. Once, when a lady said that Self-enquiry did not help her and asked whether she could follow some other

way, he replied : " All ways are good ". However, since, by his Grace, he was opening a more direct and potent path and one more suited to the conditions of modern life, he did consistently deprecate men's following other, less direct paths. He referred to them as " like the thief turned policeman to catch the thief that is himself ". The thief is the ego or mind which usurps the reality of the Self, for by these indirect methods of *sadhana*, the mind is trained as a policeman to catch and condemn itself.

On such a path there is the danger that the thief turned policeman may acquire police powers and then his thievish nature re-assert itself and do far more harm than it ever could before. The ego may acquire powers and perceptions beyond the physical and then persuade itself and others that it is the Self and become that most terrible scourge, a false guru, consuming others to feed its unconfessed vanity. Or it may simply entrench itself at some high post which it imagines to be final but which, beautiful though it may be, is no more final than is the physical body. In any case, the mind must at last be extinguished in the Self which alone is, so it is simpler and more direct for it to strive to do so from the beginning by awakening the Self-awareness of the Self and subsiding before that awareness.

And that is the Direct Path as taught by Bhagavan : to forget the ego and discover the Self, not as one self discovering another, but by awakening Self-awareness of the Self, by beginning, occasionally and imperfectly at first, but ever more constantly and powerfully, to be the Self. It is in this sense that knowing is being.

Bhagavan's instruction was to ask yourself, ' Who am I ? ' I am not this body which changes but leaves me the same. Nor am I these thoughts which pass through the mind and go out again, leaving me the same. Ten years ago I had

thoughts, emotions, aspirations, which are gone now, but I am still the same. What then am I?

This is far from being a mental puzzle. Bhagavan's instruction was, while meditating, to concentrate the consciousness on the heart — not the physical heart on the left, but the spiritual heart on the right side of the chest. He was especially insistent on this supreme centre of consciousness. The following is one of the more simple illustrations that he gave of it. "When a schoolboy says 'It is I that did the sum' or when he asks you 'Shall I run and get the book for you?' does he point to the head that did the sum or to the legs that will carry him to get you the book? No, in both cases his finger is pointed quite naturally to the right side of the chest, thus giving innocent expression to the profound truth that the source of I-ness in him is there. It is an unerring intuition that makes him refer to himself, to the Heart which is the Self, in that way. The act is quite involuntary and universal, that is to say it is the same in the case of every individual."

He insisted that it is necessary to try, not to argue. "You should try to have rather than to locate the experience. A man need not find out where his eyes are situated in order to see. The heart is there, ever open to you, if you care to enter it, ever supporting all your movements even when you are unaware." After some practice, this meditation awakens a current of awareness, a consciousness of 'I' in the heart — not the ego-sense but a feeling of the essential 'I' who is the universal Self — unaffected by good or ill fortune or by sickness or health. This consciousness should be developed by constant effort until it becomes more and more frequent and finally a constant undertone to all the actions of life. Then all that is needed is to refrain from interference by egoism so that it may deepen into an ever vaster

peace beyond all understanding until the moment when it will consume the ego and remain as the abiding realisation of Self.

If various thoughts come up during meditation, one should not get caught up by them and follow them out, but look at them objectively and ask : " Where did this thought come from, and why, and to whom ? " And so they pass away like clouds across a clear sky and each thought leads back to the basic I-thought : and who am I ? It is of the very essence of the meditation that there is no mental or verbal answer. There cannot be, since the Self transcends thought and words. The ego is seeking what is before its origin and beyond its source and the answer will not be grasped by it but will grasp and devour it.

" I came to devour Thee but Thou hast devoured me ; now there is peace, Arunachala, "

Arunachala-Aksharamanamala, Verse 28.

The beginning of the answer is the awakening of a current of awareness, a sense of being, in the heart. This awareness, is neither physical nor mental, though body and mind are both aware of it. It can no more be described than hearing could be described to a deaf man.

If impure thoughts arise during meditation they are to be looked at and dispelled in the same way, for thus the evil tendencies in one are discovered and dissipated. " All kinds of thoughts arise in meditation. That is only right, for what lies hidden in you is brought out. Unless it rises up how can it be destroyed ? "

Just as Self-enquiry is not a mental exercise, so also it is not a mantram. Bhagavan' replied quite definitely, when asked, that it should not be repeated as a mantram but used as above indicated.

Every spiritual path requires both purity of living and intensity of spiritual effort, and the *vichara* was given by Bhagavan as a technique of pure and dispassionate living no less than as a technique of meditation. If anything happens to offend or flatter you : Who is injured, who is pleased or angry, who am I ? The word 'frustration' is much in vogue nowadays, but who is frustrated ? So by use of the *vichara*, the I-am-the-doer illusion can be destroyed and it is possible to take part in the life of the world aloofly, without vanity or attachment. Bhagavan represented it as the bank cashier who handles lakhs of rupees unemotionally and yet quite efficiently because he knows that it is not his money. In the same impersonal way a man can attend to all the affairs of life, knowing that he, the real Self, is unaffected by them ; and every attack of greed, anger or desire can be dispelled by *vichara*. It must be dispelled, because it is no use repeating that one is the Self and acting as though one were the ego. Real, even partial, awareness of the Self weakens egoism ; egoism, whether expressed as vanity, greed or desire, is a proof that recognition of the Self is merely mental.

This means that in adapting an ancient path to modern conditions Bhagavan has in effect created a new path. The ancient path of Self-enquiry was pure *Jnana-marga* to be followed by the recluse in silence and solitude, withdrawn from the outer world. Bhagavan has made it a path to be followed invisibly in the world in the conditions of modern life.

He never encouraged any to give up life in the world. He explained that it would only be exchanging the thought "I am a householder" for the thought "I am a *sannyasin*" whereas what is necessary is to reject the thought "I am the doer" completely and remember only "I am" ; and

this can be done by means of the *vichara* as well in the city as in the jungle. It is only inwardly that a man can leave the world by leaving the ego-sense ; it is only inwardly that he can withdraw into solitude by abiding in the universal solitude of the heart, which is solitude only because there are no others, however many forms the Self may assume.

Indeed, life in the world is not merely permissible but a useful part of the *karma-marga* inherent in the way of Bhagavan.

The outer discipline of Self-enquiry is a constant check on actions and on the motive from which they spring. Sincerely and constantly applied, it removes the need for any formal code of conduct, for it strikes directly at the egoism in every action and reaction. The impulses of the ego will not change immediately. An insult will still cause anger and a flattering remark pleasure ; attachment to property and comfort will still continue ; the senses will still clamour ; but all such impulses will be exposed for what they are, so that the result will be to recognize one's egoism and feel shame and reluctance over each of its manifestations. From that point its eradication will begin ; but only by constant effort and remembering.

And yet, even so, it may be asked how such a path can be integral if it does not leave room for *bhakti*, that is for love and devotion. For the path of *bhakti* pre-supposes a conception of duality, of the other to whom one submits. However, the Grace of Bhagavan was too vast to exclude any possibility. Although he spoke of it less frequently, the path he opened did include submission and devotion also. He said : " There are two ways : either ask yourself ' who am I ? ' or submit ". And, even more explicitly, he said : " Submit to me and I will strike down the mind. "

It was not a matter of another alternative path ; devo-

tion to the Guru is a powerful and essential ingredient of the Direct Path that Bhagavan taught us. It is true that he reminded us that the real Guru is in the heart, and once the mind turns to seek Him He draws it ever more powerfully to Himself. But, to begin the process, the outer Guru is needed, for, as he said, "The outer Guru gives the mind a push inwards and the inner guru pulls it." And Bhagavan is the universal Sad-Guru who, of his Grace, opens the path to every man who turns to him; and ultimately the two Gurus are One. It was so when he was with us in the body. He said, "The Guru is One". But it is more obviously so now than ever, since the apparent duality of outer and inner Guru has been removed.

Submission is all that is needed. Bhagavan said "Only keep quiet and Bhagavan will do the rest." That is the great task: through devotion to Bhagavan and Self-enquiry to keep the mind quiet, for it is like a monkey in constant vain agitation. Only when it submits and is quiet can the Guru, who is the Self, be heard.

As on every path, progress is gradual and requires constant effort, whether or not there be the radiant foreglow of Truth come and gone again. Bhagavan expressly warned the disciple for whom he wrote 'Self-Enquiry': "However, the Self-oblivious ego, even when once made aware of the Self, does not get Liberation — that is Self-Realization — on account of the obstruction of accumulated mental tendencies; and it frequently confuses the body with the Self, forgetting that itself is in truth the Self. Long cultivated tendencies are to be eradicated only by long continued meditation." A miracle such as Bhagavan's own immediate realization of the Self is not to be achieved by others, and he never led them to expect it. Actually, to desire success or even to think about it is itself an impediment, since it

means desiring achievement for the ego instead of trying to extinguish the ego by asking 'Who am I?'

The vibrant awareness of Self is to be made more frequent and uninterrupted until it awakens as soon as one sits in meditation, and then until it becomes constant not only in hours of meditation but underlying all the actions of life. In proportion as it grows stronger and more continuous the ego is weakened and, what comes to the same, purified in preparation for its final immolation. Bhagavan said : "The moment the ego-self tries to know itself it changes in character ; it begins to partake less and less of the body, in which it is absorbed, and more and more of pure consciousness, the Self or Atman."

The 'Forty Verses' composed by Bhagavan are the doctrine of the Direct Path. In verses 29 and 30 he thus succinctly describes it :

"The path of Knowledge is only to dive inwards with the mind, not uttering the word 'I', and to question whence, as 'I', it rises. To meditate 'This is not I' or 'That I am' may be an aid, but how can it form the enquiry?"

"When the mind, inwardly enquiring 'Who am I?' attains the heart, something of Itself manifests as 'I-I', so that the individual 'I' must bow in shame. Though manifesting, it is not 'I' by nature but Perfection, and this is the Self."

The Direct Path awakens Love through Knowledge. It is not knowledge of one by another or mind-knowledge, but the awakening Bliss of the Self to which the mind is drawn and in which it is absorbed in Love. That is why the beginning of the *vichara*, before the Inner Guru is yet awakened,

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is by turning to Bhagavan with the fullest possible love and submission and opening one's heart to him. Whoever opens his heart to Bhagavan and uses the *vichara*, as I have described it will feel the sweetness and power of his support and will know that this is true. Whoever submits to him will be borne up and never forsaken. "God and Guru are not really different, they are identical. He who has earned the Grace of the Guru will undoubtedly be saved and never forsaken, just as the prey that has fallen into the tiger's jaws will never be allowed to escape. But the disciple, for his part should unswervingly follow the path shown by the Master."

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GOLDEN JUBILEE SOUVENIR

MAJOR A. W. CHADWICK

THERE IS NOTHING, BE!

“THERE IS NOTHING. BE!”

Sadhu Arunachala (Major A. W. Chadwick, O.B.E.)

Fifty years is a long time. Wonderful how in these last fifty years the world has rushed on in its mad career of change, faster than ever dreamt of in the whole recorded history of man. Yet this hectic rush has left the Maharshi absolutely untouched, in truth I suppose he has remained quite unconscious of it, for I have often heard him say that the time has passed in a flash.

In many ways these years have been quite uneventful. A few changes of house and diet, a few annoyances from jealous *sadhus*. That is all. All except a reputation that has been steadily growing year by year, till now one can say there is no country where he is unknown and where in some corner or other some devotee cannot be found.

But what strikes one who ponders over the life of Bhagavan is not this wonderful increase in fame and reputation. This was inevitable. The world had been anxiously looking for someone and in answer to all these anxious prayers Bhagavan appeared. It will always be thus. But it is the study in contrasts which is so remarkable.

Bhagavan belonged to a family which was absolutely unknown; he has become world-famous. They were very poor; now people are willing to lay their fortunes at his feet. Orthodox of the orthodox, no foreigner had ever crossed their doorstep, it would be pollution; now Bhagavan sits to eat surrounded by foreigners and members of the depressed classes. And does it all in the most natural way; to the manner born as the expression goes. For him there is no distinction. And in this way he has made himself available to all. To the Brahmins because he is of Brahmin

birth, they will rarely sit at the feet of one of another caste, and to the rest of us because of his magnanimity.

For most people it is the arrival of Bhagavan at Tiruvannamalai that we are now celebrating, but for me that is relatively unimportant, and seems to be more the business of the local townsfolk. Wherever he had settled I should have gone, and though one can think of no holier spot than this, it is easy to think of many which would have been far more convenient.

Fifty years ago Bhagavan became a full and perfect *Jnani* once and for all. There were no stages in his attainment. Lying on the floor of the room in his uncle's house he was conscious of the final and absolute death of the ego. He dramatized a fact. In his own words: "Nothing has ever happened to me, I am the same as I always was." Yes, *I am* the same, the essential and eternal "I am", but relatively everything happened at that moment. Then was achieved the summit of attainment that hundreds strive after during many long years of austerities, and even many births. But the ego being dead, there is no one but the "I am" left as a witness, and that must ever remain the one changeless noumenon behind all phenomena.

And the philosophy of this greatest of Sages can be summed up in just three words "There is nothing." So simple and yet so supremely difficult. "There is nothing". All this world that you see, this mad rush of people after money and "existence" is just a fabricless thought. "There is nothing." You as a personality, as a petty entity striving for your own selfish ends, ever seeking so-called "Self-realization" are nothing. You are like the shadow of a leaf cast by the moonlight, intangible, unsubstantial, and in fact non-existent. And as the shadow is a purely negative phenomenon, is in fact nothing but a shutting out of light, so is the ego and everything else, (because everything

follows in the train of the ego and is actually a part of it) only a shutting out of the light of the Self.

You may justly turn to me now and ask: "Who wants this purely negative state?"

To which I can only reply: "It is just a question of taste." Though, note you, I have never suggested that Bhagavan ever says that the ultimate state after which, it is presumed, we are all striving *is* negative. On the contrary, when he says: "There is nothing," it is obvious that he is speaking about our present egoistic existence, which for us is everything. But this being nothing there must obviously be a state which is something. That state is Self-realization. Not only is it something but it is EVERYTHING, and being everything then logically and philosophically it must be PERFECT.

"If we are already perfect and there is nothing else, what need is there for us to go to Bhagavan?" you ask.

And this reminds me of a story against myself.

An Australian journalist came to the Ashram, quite why he came is a mystery, I doubt if he would be able to tell himself. Anyhow he did come and in the course of his visit came to see me in my room. It was obvious from the first moment that I was a tremendous problem to him. Why an European should shut himself away in a place like this was beyond his comprehension. He asked many questions but none of my replies satisfied him, how could they? Especially as he had not the first idea of what the Ashram was or what people were doing here. I didn't even write, then what on earth did I do! At length he could contain himself no longer and bluntly asked me what I was doing here. Now here was a problem to answer. If I had tried to tell him the truth he would never have understood, that I realized, so making the best of it I just

said that here I found peace of mind. I knew it was an inadequate answer but hoped it would stave off further enquiries.

He looked at me seriously for a few minutes and then said pityingly: "Oh I see, I have never been troubled in that way myself."

All I had succeeded in doing was in confirming him in the conviction that I was insane. And was there not, after all, some ground for his belief? Here have I been spending ("wasting", he would say) half a life time searching for something I already possess. I know that I possess it too, which makes matters appear worse.

But let us return to the question and admit straight-away that even now I am unable to reply satisfactorily. I can only say why I came and that is because I wanted to. And why do I stay? Because I want to. Doubtless there are many learned writers to this volume who will be able to give philosophical and cast-iron replies to this question, I leave the reader to them. I am not particularly interested. To my metal Bhagavan was a magnet and as yet his magnetism has lost none of its force. I am helpless.

But it is true that the majority of people who come to Bhagavan want something, either material or spiritual. That is why they come and that is why they stay. One hears rumours of miracles performed, I can quote no authentic instances, but why not? Did not another great Sage say that by Faith everything could be achieved, even if one had faith only as large as a grain of sand, one could easily remove mountains. They have the faith and the miracle happens automatically. But those who expect Bhagavan to hand them Self-realization, as if it were some tangible thing, are surely sadly deluded. How can anybody give one what one has already got? All he can do is help

one to remove the ignorance that hides it. It is like going to a lake with a cup and sitting by its side praying to it to fill the cup with water. You may sit there for a thousand years but it is certain that unless you lean forward and dip the cup into the water yourself nothing will happen. Even then you have to make certain that the cup is not already full of a lot of rubbish. Most cups are!

"How then to obtain this perfect state?" You may well ask, "How to empty our cups of rubbish?"

Bhagavan tells us just one other thing. He says: "Be". Just be your real Self, that's all.

"Certainly it sounds all right," you say, "but when one tries to do it, it does not seem so easy. Has he no method?"

Method! Well what exactly do you mean by method? Sitting on the floor and concentrating on the navel? Or blowing the wind out of alternative nostrils? Or repeating some incantation one crore and eight times? No, he hasn't got any method. All these things are no doubt good in their way and help to prepare one, but Bhagavan doesn't happen to teach them. That's all!

"Then what am I to do?"

You must just "BE," he says. And to be you must know the "I that is". To know the "I that is", just go on enquiring "Who am I?" Don't take any notice of anything except the "I", throw everything else away like the rubbish out of the cup. And when you have at last found the "I", BE.

All talk, all empty words. "There's nothing" and that's the end of it. No method, nothing to discard, nothing to find. Nothing at all is except the "I". Why worry about anything else? Just BE, now and always, as you were, as you are, and as you ever will be.

It sounds so easy, doesn't it? Well, Bhagavan says it's the easiest thing there is. I really don't know. To me it seems about the most difficult thing there is. Some books call it the "razor's edge", but I suppose it all really depends on how much rubbish there is in your cup. We're all different anyway and perhaps some of us were handicapped at the start. It's certain that the rubbish has to come out and the coming out process is full of surprises. All kinds of hidden vices and evil tendencies start to pop up their heads which one never suspected were there at all. But it's all for the good. Bhagavan says they have to come out. But let them come out, not take charge. Don't give way to them. All excellent advice, no doubt. But the practice is not nearly so easy as the preaching.

However, it is not Bhagavan's teaching that is so remarkable. There's nothing new in that. Gaudapada, the Upanishads, you find it all there. And if one gets really down to it there only ever was one teaching. The methods of attainment may have appeared different on the surface but the goal was always the same. No, it's not the teaching. It's he himself. He is a living example of the teaching. And it's much harder to find that than a teacher. There are thousands of teachers. Every other man you meet has a passion for preaching, but there are precious few who ever practise what they preach. And fewer still who attain the goal that they set out for others. There have been many saints before, but one has only read about them. Doubtless many of them were *Jnanis* but I haven't any proof of that. It's all just hearsay as far as I am concerned, and it's the same for millions of others. But here before us in Bhagavan we have a living example that such people can and do exist. And this gives me tremendous confidence.

I realize that I have only to strive sincerely and I, too, can reach that value of peace, where there is no more

sorrow or trouble, just because the objective world of sorrow and trouble has entirely ceased to exist.

I see him sitting in the Hall completely detached, entirely unmoved by the happenings which seem so momentous to me, his face wreathed in the most lovely of smiles, and an expression of serenity and beauty on it which it is impossible to describe, or even believe unless you have seen it for yourself. And this is an eternal source of hope and encouragement for me. No books written in the past, no stories of former saints can convey this same message: after all there is always the chance that they may have been frauds. But *this* is absolutely genuine and I am unable to doubt any longer even if I want to. And I suppose that is why people come here and stay. Here we are on the bed-rock of certainty in an ever-changing and uncertain world. Nothing can shake our faith in this as long as we have the living presence here before us.

Methods do not matter, attainment does not matter. Questions disappear, for one gradually begins to realize that there *is* nothing, nothing but He.

"But didn't Maharishi once write some Hymns to Arunachala?" you may ask. "How do you explain this if there is nothing?"

I can't. It is one of those delightful inconsistencies that one must expect to find among *Jnanis*. He says there's nothing and yet writes hymns to God. But you surely don't expect a *Jnani* to be cut to your pattern, do you? Who are you to be able to say whether a thing is consistent or inconsistent? Yours is such a narrow, relative point of view, while his is the Absolute, Universal point of view. There can be no comparison. Anyhow ask him, I can't explain it. But then I don't much want to. The Hymns are beautiful and he wrote them. Surely that is enough!

"But just one more question, Why did he move, why did he come to Arunachala?"

I can't say, but if you were to ask him he would probably say he has never gone anywhere. He is where he always was. Not a very satisfactory answer from our point of view. But from his the only one. He would also probably say there is only one point of view, the others do not exist, and leave you to work it out for yourself. The fact is undoubtedly that for us he did come and we are now celebrating his arrival. And, truly, Tiruvannamalai has been blessed by his presence, and all of us who have had the good fortune to sit at his feet. I doubt if we realize how lucky we are. One is inclined to get used to things and take them for granted. That is the nature of the ego. But there's no taking Bhagavan for granted, he is always surprisingly different, and that is one of the great wonders of his presence.

But, gentle reader, these are only random thoughts. I am not trying to interpret Bhagavan for you or explain his philosophy. That is far beyond me.

The only person who can write about Bhagavan is the person who really knows him, and the only person who really knows him is Bhagavan himself. And it is perfectly certain that Bhagavan will never write about himself.

You say: "If there's nothing, why write?"

Yes, why? The whole thing can be summed up in four words: "There is nothing. Be!" When one understands those four words one understands everything including Bhagavan, himself.

Then there is no more to say.

THE MAHARSHI OF ARUNACHALA

G. H. MEES

MOUNTAIN PATH - JUNE 1979

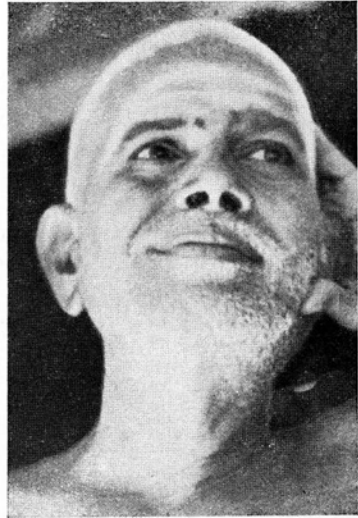
The Maharshi of Arunachala¹

By

Sadhu Ekarasa
(Dr. G. H. Mees)

WHEN Kon-Fu-Tse met Wen-Poh-Hsuch-Tse, a sage from the South, the first did not speak a word. Then his companion, Tse-Lu, said, "Master, for a long time you have wished to see Wen-Poh-Hsuch-Tse. Why is it that you don't speak, now that you see him?" Kon-Fu-Tse answered, "One only needs to look at someone like him, and Tao is. There is no need for speaking". (from Chuang-Tse, Chap. XXI).

In the presence of the Maharshi the same thing happened to me — twelve years ago when I saw him for the first time and during the many years that I visited him again and again, especially during the three years that I stayed near him almost without interruption. It is for this same reason that I find it ever so difficult to speak or write about the Maharshi, as I am often asked to do. It is not so very difficult to write about the course of the Maharshi's life or about his teachings. Both of them differ very little from those of the earlier great sages that Hinduism has produced, although in some respects the Maharshi himself is unique. It is certainly much easier to invent the image of a great sage and write a story about his life and works than to give a description of a living sage. Such a creation is produced by emotional, intellectual, moral and cultural forces, whereas the important element which makes a human being a sage does not lie within these aspects of the human soul, but deeper in the essence which forms the ground of the spiritual. As long as attention is fixed on emotional, intellectual, moral and cultural life, there is a permanent contradiction which expresses itself in a



duality of life and works, of that which is introvert and that which is extrovert, of theory and practice, of speaking and doing. However, as soon as the essence has become the basis, which is only the case with a real sage, who is Holy (which means "wholly"), there can no longer be any question of a contradiction. The essence is the unity of these contradictions that rule the lives of ordinary mortal beings, and in it these contradictions simply disappear. For visitors who have enough insight to perceive something of this essence, this unity of contradictions in the sage is exactly that element that makes such

¹ translated from the Dutch in "Mens en Kosmos" Vierde Jaargang, No. 2, March 1948.

a mighty impression on them. Anybody who is honest with himself is aware of a contradiction between his being and his actions, between his inside and the outside which he shows to the world by his actions. With a sage he experiences that being and doing, that spiritual aspirations and practical life can be one, and this cannot but make a mighty impression upon him. Others, who are less honest with themselves and consequently are not disturbed by these contradictions, are probably more struck by a novel in which the life of some historical saint is set out in detail, written from the emotional and moral points of view but lacking the essence.

However what has been said above is nothing but words — for the essence is just that which is beyond words and can't be put into words. It is exactly that factor which one cannot describe, which one can only feel for oneself. One must see a sage in order to experience him — if only his eyes are able to see!

For a sage who lives in the realization, "I and my Father are One", St. Dionysius' words hold good: "All that you may say about God is untrue, for God is beyond speech and therefore what you say about God relates to something else". Therefore, if in India someone asks me to speak or to write about the Maharshi, I am inclined either to answer that the questioner ought to visit the Maharshi and see for himself, or to do what Sri Sankaracharya did when somebody asked him to describe the real ecstasy. Sri Sankara sat quietly down and communicated the ecstasy by merely getting absorbed in it without any further word.

In Europe, however, neither of these answers will do. Under the circumstances, it would be unfair to suggest to people to go to India to see the Maharshi. Those very few to whom it is given by destiny to see him will be led to him of themselves. As for the demonstration, it would in almost all cases

produce no effect, since it would be understood as a mere pose, meaningless in itself, for in Europe people go to each other to talk. The speechless absorption in some spiritual or super-spiritual state is so little known that to do so in the company of other people would be entirely misunderstood. Even in church "talking" is going on nearly the whole service; the mind is kept busy without interruption with sentimental, moral and spiritual images. A sage, however, possesses the calm of the Seventh Day of Creation: "God blessed and hallowed the Seventh Day by having rest on that day, after creating all things to perfection."

It is in this way that sages advise their disciples to do nothing — a state of mind reflecting the calm of the Seventh Day. Read, for instance, what was said by Lao-Tse 2,500 years ago and by Chuang two centuries later about and you find it is just the same as what the Maharshi teaches now. This "doing-nothing" does not at all mean that one should do nothing! On the contrary, Divine Inactivity is the opposite of laziness, one of the "seven deadly sins" which kill a man's spirit or keep him dead. Laziness is the sin of not striving upwards, of indifference to higher life, and it brings spiritual death with it.

The inactivity of the Sages of China, the rest on the Seventh Day of Creation, is that which the Maharshi calls the "Natural State". This Natural State has nothing to do with the state of relation to the natural world propagated by the "back-to-nature" supporters, but is rather the state of mind in which no Fall is possible. It is a state of perfect inner rest and equilibrium, in which there is no striving whatever, and which in normal life may include the greatest activity. This comes to light in the 6 verses chosen by the Maharshi from *Yoga-Vasista*. They contain instructions given to Prince Rama by his Guru, Vasista, and are

found in *Upasanthi Prakarana*, in "The Story of Punnya and Pavana".

"Having enquired into (the nature of) all the states, (wakeful, dreaming and deep sleep), and ever holding steadfastly at heart to that State Supreme which is absolute and which is free from illusion, play in the world, O Raghava, the Hero! You have realized That in the heart which is the Substratum of truth of all appearances. Therefore, without ever abandoning that (right-perspective), play in the world just as you like."

— (*Forty Verses*, Supplement 26).

"As one with feigned enthusiasm and joy, with feigned excitement and hatred, as one taking feigned initiative and making a feigned effort, play in the world, O Raghava, the Hero!"

— (*Forty Verses*, Supplement 27).

It is one of the wise traditions of Hinduism to look upon life as a Divine play — *Lila*. For the sage, in whom *Maya*, the world of appearances, and God-Reality have become one, who experiences God-in-Action and God-in-Being as a Oneness of which he himself forms a natural part, *Maya* becomes *Lila*, or Divine play. To engage in this play consciously and to enjoy it from the Centre of peace, described above as Inactivity and rest and the Natural State, is recommended by the sages. As a matter of course one should know and follow the rules (the conditions mentioned by Vasishtha) in order to be able to play and enjoy the play.

I am often asked, mainly by Westerners, "What exactly does the Maharshi do?" One should in fact answer, "The daily occupation of the sage is to be Himself". Because he really succeeds in doing so, the Maharshi makes such a great impression on many of his visitors. Not only does he demonstrate the Natural State, but in doing so he is perfectly natural — a man without any pose,

Sitting at Ramana's Samadhi

By
Farokh Merat

At first the mind went wild and cried:
I have come thirty years too late.
But by and by the heart replied;
Who is early, who is late,
Here before the Eternal, the timeless
state?

without a mark. The Maharshi effects drastic changes in the lives of many like me. That's what he does, and he does so by doing nothing at all. In no way does he force anything on anyone, He doesn't even offer me advice regarding any problem of life. The world bristles with advisors, but with all their advice they are unable to solve world problems or personal difficulties. Their method is to try to get improvement from outside, which is like looking for a needle in a haystack. The method of the sage, on the other hand, is to let improvements come from within, from the Essence that is the Supreme quality and to let the improvements manifest themselves outwardly quite spontaneously and naturally, without any interference.

Concerning the Maharshi's daily life, until recently it was entirely public. Visitors surrounded him night and day and he was ever inclined to pay attention to them and to answer their questions, provided they were sincere and their questions lay in the sphere of the spirit. In fact he was never alone. At night people slept in his room on mats on the floor, as is the Indian custom. Now that he has become old, the administrative head of the ashram community that has grown up around him has made some rules, so that Maharshi is to be left alone for some hours

after lunch and during the night. The Maharshi himself has never asked for such protective measures. He is one with all people in a very real way.

Until a few years ago, the Maharshi got up at 3 a.m., to cut vegetables in the Ashram kitchen and prepare them for the meals of the coming day. Day now begins in Rama-

CONVERSATION—11

By

Darlene Delsi¹

Sri Kunju Swami conveniently divides Sri Bhagavan's life at Arunachala into three parts: They are given hereunder in a tabular form.

<p>His life until He came up the Hill (at Gurumurtham, Pachiamman Koil etc.) (1896-1898)</p>	<p>He did not talk. His presence and darshan was enough to give one a complete spiritual fulfilment.</p>	<p>Can be compared to a 'powerful spring'</p>	<p>One contact, one glimpse from Bhagavan was enough for one to get <i>atmasakshatka</i>.</p>
<p>His life on the Arunachala Hill (at Virupaksha cave, Skandashram etc.) (1899-1922)</p>	<p>He spoke sparingly and with very few words and that too only in answer to questions put to him. His presence radiated peace and quietude (the perfect silence of the first stage) and added to it were the words of nectar by way of answers.</p>	<p>Can be compared to a 'Smooth flowing beautiful River'</p>	<p>A few hours' with Bhagavan was enough to give one spiritual fulfilment.²</p>
<p>His life at Sri Ramanasram (1922-1950)</p>	<p>Bhagavan was extraordinarily brilliant, and pouring out His experiences and reminiscences. (He would some times repeat anecdotes 4 or 5 times, viz., to help late-comers to the hall). Bhagavan had to oblige multitudes of devotees coming for His darshan.</p>	<p>Can be compared to 'an unfathomable Ocean'</p>	<p>It really took months or years for even dedicated devotees to realise themselves (as in the case of Sri Ramananda Saraswati, Major Chadwick)</p>

¹ Gathered by the writer while talking to Sri Kunju Swami.

² One Masthan Sahib got his *atmasakshatka* in eight hours. When Kunju Swami asked him whether he had asked Sri Bhagavan any questions, the Sahib replied: "When I came to Bhagavan He was seated like a rock outside Virupaksha Cave, without altering His look, which was filled with Grace, compassion and Steady Wisdom. So, I also stood by His side. After giving me a look, He opened the gate of my heart and I was also established in His state. I stood like that for eight hours, absolutely without fatigue, but filled with total absorption and peace. Bhagavan in those days used to open our heart with a simple gracious look and it transformed us. There was no need for any questions since He made us, by His look, like Himself!"

nasramam before dawn with the recitation of some part of the *Yajur Veda* by Brahmins, whose hereditary occupation it is to do so. This recitation is done in the hall where the Maharshi spends the day on his couch. By this chant orthodox Hinduism honours the sage, who himself is beyond any sectarianism or religious differences. Before sunset the recitation is repeated together with other texts. People in great number — usually hundreds, and even thousands during the time of temple festivals in town — are always present at the recital. Every day the Maharshi reads the incoming and outgoing mail. Letters from Ramanasramam are written by a Secretary and signed by the administrative head of the Ashram. The Maharshi never signs anything. More than 50 years ago he gave up his name and possessions. He answers questions when they arise; glances through Tamil and English newspapers; he corrects translations of writings and reads proof sheets. All the while many people sit cross-legged in the Hall, men on one side, women on other. Small children walk about. Visitors — among them are nearly always a few Europeans — sit quietly meditating or in their own way profiting by the presence of the Maharshi. Frequently visitors or inmates of the Asram sing devotional songs and sometimes concerts are given, all as offerings to the Maharshi. Occasionally the Maharshi gets absorbed in contemplation. The usual expression "getting absorbed" is actually not correct, for there is no question of getting into and later returning from a special state. There is but one state for him, the Natural State, and he appears to be in this state continuously. He is usually addressed as "*Bhagavan*", which means "Divine Being". He takes little notice of the crowd that surrounds him. Peacocks, dogs, monkeys and other animals go to him; even an old cow visits him at regular intervals. There is always something in store for them, the offerings of fruit, nuts and cakes which are put

I AM FREE

By
Dale

Oh, my Soul, steeped in sadness.
Joy is near.
Turn to Arunachala.

Oh, untouched Beacon of my heart,
Sweet gentle slayer of the mind,
Consume me!
Suck me up into your holy fire.

I am free !
I am free !
I am free !

at his feet and which are always distributed amongst those present. The Maharshi refuses to take anything special or more than what others get.

Sometimes "important" visitors arrive — learned men, Maharajas, men of name, well-known politicians, globe-trotters, captains of industry and so on. The management will, perhaps, for the most "distinguished" amongst them, put some extra carpet on the floor or pay special attention to them. Not so the Maharshi; he treats all the same way. At best he may be somewhat friendlier to those who come from far away. Often "the great of this earth" feel like small school-boys while standing before him. They get quite new experiences which radically alter their understanding of the sage. The late Maharaja of Mysore, the biggest State of South India, a very devout and orthodox Hindu, kneeled humbly before the Maharshi and stood motionless for a long time with tears in his eyes. He kneeled once more and departed without a word.

Once a visitor asked the Maharshi what he thought about the ignorance and sufferings

EVENING

By
Colin Oliver

A light across the river
fires my own gaze
like an arrow
back at myself
and on, forever falling.

When I pause
to look at an ear
of corn, tenderness
passes like a hand
across the field.

of the modern world. The Maharshi answered, "The world is but an ocean of delight", though he went through much suffering during his early years in Arunachala. He remained for some time in a dark cave with his body covered with vermin, and was almost always alone, exposed to the teasings of mischievous youngsters.

Moralists sometimes think of sages as "escapists" who avoid their social duties. It is not so. A sage is not one who has been put on the defensive by the difficulties of life, but one who has bidden farewell to the world, not because of its sorrow and crudity, but because it is not True Life! Even the joys of worldly life are painful in comparison with the beatitude of real life. The average man is inclined to pity the sage, whom he

regards as having foregone the pleasures of life. The sage, however, pities his commiserating fellow-man, because the latter does not know what real happiness is. The average man either thinks that a sage is one who has strayed from the path and is abnormal and unnatural, or else sees him as a fairly harmless lunatic. In either case, it is clear to him that there is something wrong with the Sage's mind. A few people humbly admit that they have not as yet progressed as far as the sage, and that it will be a long time before they acquire the same wisdom. The sage, on his part, considers all his fellow-men as potential sages; he is aware of no difference between others and himself. The mystic Hui Neng of the eighth century, A.D., made the remark that the only difference between a Buddha and the average man is that the one realizes what the other discards. The Maharshi has often said the same. When someone asked him, as Swami Vivekananda asked Rama-krishna, "Have you seen God?", the Maharshi replied, "Is there anybody who hasn't seen Him?" To the sage, God is the only Reality. He is the Beginning and the End.

If we don't see Him in the midst of all experiences, and consequently lose our Natural State — symbolized in the Holy Bible as the garden with the *Arbor Vitae* (Tree of Life) wherein Adam walked with God by his side — it is our own fault. The prodigal son may at any time return to his Father.

"Whoever has in his heart even so much as a rice-grain of pride, cannot enter into Paradise."

— MUHAMMAD.

CENTENARY SOUVENIR COMMEMORATING
THE ADVENT OF BHAGAVAN
SRI RAMANA AT ARUNACHALA

PROF. K. SWAMINATHAN

THE UNITY OF SURRENDER AND SELF-ENQUIRY

THE UNITY OF SURRENDER AND SELF-ENQUIRY

K. Swaminathan

One of Ramana Maharshi's most frequent comments was that there were only two reliable methods for attaining Self-Realization; one could either pursue Self-enquiry or one could surrender. An almost equally common statement was that *jnana* and *Bhakti* are ultimately the same. This second statement is usually interpreted to mean that whichever of the two paths one chooses to follow, the ultimate goal and the culminating experience will be the same. It is generally assumed that the two paths do not converge until the moment of Realisation is reached. However, if Ramana Maharshi's teachings are correctly interpreted, then it will be seen that the paths of surrender and Self-enquiry merge before Realisation, and that in the higher levels of practice, if one follows the path of surrender, then one's *sadhana* will be the same as that of someone who has chosen the path of Self-enquiry. This may seem very radical at first sight, but this is only because of the general misconceptions that many people have about Ramana's teachings on the true nature, meaning and practice of surrender. In order to eliminate these misconceptions, and to clarify Ramana's attitude and approach to surrender, it will be helpful to examine some of these commonly held ideas in the light of Ramana's statements on the subject, firstly to show how unfounded most of these ideas are, and secondly, by eliminating them, to illustrate the profundity of Ramana's real teachings.

The most convenient starting point for this enquiry is the relationship that exists between Ramana Maharshi, the Guru, and the thousands of people who call themselves his devotees. There is a long tradition in this country of people accepting certain teachers as their gurus, and then proclaiming immediately that they have surrendered to them. In most cases, this surrender is only a statement of intent, or at best, there is a partial surrendering to this new authority figure in the hope of acquiring some material or spiritual reward. Ramana's opposition to this type of religious bribery was quite clear, and it is best summed up in the following statement: "Surrender to Him and abide by His will whether he appears or vanishes; await His pleasure. If you ask Him to do as you please, it is not surrender but command to Him.

You cannot have Him obey you and yet think that you have surrendered. He knows what is best and when and how to do it. Leave everything to Him; His is the burden, you no longer have any cares. All your cares are His. Such is surrender. This is *Bhakti*". (Talks, p.425). This statement, typical of many that he made is a categorical refutation of the idea that one can surrender to one's God or Guru, and yet demand that the God or Guru fulfills one's desires or solves one's problems. Despite this often repeated refutation, it is probably true to say that the majority of Ramana's devotees both believe that they have surrendered to Ramana, yet at the same time, would not hesitate to approach him with their personal and material problems, especially if the perceived need required an urgent solution. In Ramana's teachings on surrender, there is no room for stray desires, and no room for expectations of miracles, no matter how desperate the situation might appear to be. Ramana says:

"If you have surrendered, you must be able to abide by the will of God and not make a grievance out of what may not please you." (Talks p.115)

Under Ramana's strict interpretation of absolute surrender, the only appeals which might qualify for approval are those where the devotee approaches the God or Guru with the attitude "This is your problem and not mine; please attend to it in any way you see fit." This attitude bears the marks of partial surrender, for it fulfills the bare minimum requirements of Ramana's definition of true surrender. On this level of surrender, there is no longer any expectation of a particular solution, there is simply a willingness to accept whatever happens. It is interesting to note in this connection that although Ramana clearly stated that devotees who wanted their problems solved were not practicing true surrender, he did admit that surrendering one's problems to God or to the Guru was a legitimate course of action for those who felt that they could not stick to His absolute teaching of complete surrender. He was once asked, "Is it proper that one prays to God when one is afflicted by worldly ills?" and his answer was "Undoubtedly." (Talks, p.501). This admission that the Guru may be approached with personal problems should be seen as an extension of, and not a contradiction of his teachings on absolute and unconditional surrender. For those who are not ready for complete surrender, there is this intermediate practice of surrendering one's problems to the external "Higher Power." It is not a dilution of his notion that surrender must be complete and total to be effective, it is more an admission

that for some devotees, such a massive step is impractical without some lesser intermediate stage.

If we can reach this point where we accept that we cannot ask Ramana to solve our problems and still claim that we have surrendered, then we move forward a few steps in our understanding of his teachings, but if we then try to put our new understanding into practice, we immediately encounter a new and apparently insoluble problem. The problem is that the desire to surrender is in itself a desire which we want fulfilled, and since, according to Ramana, true surrender cannot be accomplished without complete desirelessness, the presence of this desire in us is sufficient to prevent true surrender from taking place. It is the paradox of effort which is inherent in nearly all forms of *sadhana*. Simply stated, the problem is that there is a perception that there is an individual self which wants to extinguish itself so that the state of Realisation will be revealed, but anything which this individual self tries to do to eliminate itself merely prolongs its own existence. If one sees spiritual practice as something that one *does* to attain Realisation, then there is no solution to this problem; there is no solution because the whole problem stems from the totally false assumption that this individual self has a real existence. The first path along the path to true surrender is not to throw oneself at someone's feet and say "I surrender," it is the cultivation of the awareness and the understanding that there is no individual self to surrender, and that this individual self never at any time had, has, or will have any real existence. When Ramana said on several occasions: "Who is to surrender what and to whom?" (Talks, p.176), he was trying to drive home this fundamental point that without this understanding that there is no individual self, then all spiritual practices are done under false pretences, and that meditation, surrender or self-enquiry done without this constant awareness are merely exercises in self-deception. The best illustration of this point that I have come across appears in a recent publication called *The Secret of Arunachala*. In it, a devotee remarked to Ramana that a certain fellow devotee must be well advanced on the spiritual path because he meditated for eight to ten hours every day. (Page 73). "Oh," replied Ramana, "*he* meditates, *he* eats, *he* sleeps. But who is meditating, eating, sleeping? What advantage is there in meditating for ten hours a day if in the end that only has the result of establishing you a little more deeply in the conviction that it is you who are meditating?"

This aspect of Ramana's teachings, that one is already realised here and now, is widely ignored when it comes to practice, but its importance cannot be overstated. Ramana has said: "The removal of ignorance is the aim of practice and not acquisition of Realisation." (Talks p.322). The most fundamental piece of ignorance is that there exists an individual self who is going to do *sadhana*, and that by doing *sadhana*, this individual self will disappear or be merged in some super-being. Until this concept is eliminated on the mental level, it is not an exaggeration to say that one is wasting one's time in attempts to surrender or to enquire 'Who am I?' Correct attitude and correct understanding of this matter are of pre-eminent importance if the application of Ramana's teaching is to be successful.

Returning now to the practice of surrender, and bearing in mind the necessity of maintaining the right attitude with regard to the nonexistence of the individual self, there remains the problem of how to surrender since the mere desire to surrender invents an illusory person who is going to surrender. The key to this problem and the key to all problems connected with the practice of Ramana's teachings is to bypass the mind and move to the realm of being. One cannot truly surrender without escaping from that vast accumulation of ideas and desires we call the mind, and according to Ramana, one cannot escape or destroy the mind by any kind of mental activity. Ramana's solution is to let the mind subside to the point where it disappears, and what remains when the mind has subsided is the simple, pure being that was always there. In a conversation in *Talks*, Ramana gives the following illuminating answer. He says:

"It is enough that one surrenders oneself. Surrender is to give oneself up to the original cause of one's being One's source is within oneself. Give yourself up to it. That means that you should seek the source and merge in it." (Talks, p.175).

This is an immensely profound statement which not only sweeps away many of the myths that surround the practice of surrender, it also shows an indication that the route to the rediscovery of the Self is the same whether one chooses to label it "surrender" or "self-enquiry". If we examine this statement closely, it is possible to extract three important conclusions regarding Ramana's attitude and approach to surrender. Firstly, there is no external deity or manifestation to whom one must surrender; secondly, the source of one's

being is within us; and thirdly, and most importantly, true surrender is to go back to the original cause of one's being and remain firmly and continually rooted there.

If this is translated into terms of practical advice, then surrender comes down to two words, being and stillness. In *Talks* Ramana says: "Your duty is to be, and not to be this or that, 'I am that I am' sums up the whole truth. The method is summed up in 'Be still'." (*Talks*, p.333). The stillness and the being which Ramana speaks co-exist with each other and reveal themselves in their full radiance whenever interest in one's thought stream dries up. Thus, for Ramana, the practice of surrender is to find within oneself this feeling of beingness and surrender oneself completely to it. On this level of surrender, practice consists of giving up wrong ideas by refusing to give them attention. Ramana's statement that "The removal of ignorance is the aim of practice and not acquisition of Realisation" (*Talks*, p.322) is extremely relevant in this connection, for it is only wrong ideas that separate us from a full awareness of our natural state. This final stage of surrender is simply a giving up of attachment to ignorance by bypassing the mental processes which cause and perpetuate it. The practice is the fruit of the conviction that there is nothing to surrender, for by denying attention to the mental processes, one is finally surrendering the erroneous idea that there is an individual self to surrender.

When one attempts to practice this conviction by putting attention on the feeling of being that is within us, thoughts and desires will initially continue to flow at their normal rate, but if attention is maintained over a period of time, the density of thoughts decreases, and in the space between them, there emerges the clarity, the stillness and the peace of pure being. Occasionally this stillness and this peace will expand and intensify until a point is reached where no effort is needed to sustain the awareness of being, the attention merges imperceptibly with the being itself, and the occasional stray thoughts no longer have the power to distract.

When this point of surrender has been reached, all the ignorant misperceptions which constitute the illusory ego have disappeared, but this is not the final state of Realisation, because the misconceptions are only in suspension, and sooner or later, they will emerge again. Ramana has stated that the final, definitive elimination of ignorance is a matter for Self. He says that effort can only take one to a certain point, and then the Self takes over and

takes one to the goal. In the case of surrender, the initial effort is the shifting of one's attention from the world of thoughts to the feeling of being. When there is no attention on it, the mind subsides revealing the being from which it came, then in some mysterious way, the Self eliminates the residual ignorance and Realisation dawns. Ramana summed it all up very neatly when he said: "Just keep quiet and Bhagavan will do the rest." (*Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p.147).

This shifting of attention is the ultimate act of surrender. It is an acknowledgement that the mind, its concepts and desires are all ignorance, and that involvement in and attachment to the ignorance is all that prevents a full awareness of Reality. It is an acknowledgement that nothing that is understood or believed is of any use; that no belief, theory, idea or mental activity will bring one any nearer to Realisation. It is an acknowledgement and a final acceptance of the idea that all striving and all notions of attainment are futile and illusory. This simple shifting of attention constitutes the culmination of surrender, because it is the final surrendering of the ignorant notion that there is an individual self to surrender. It is the final acceptance in practice of the conviction that there is only attachment to wrong ideas and that this attachment can be severed by refusing to give these ideas any attention. This final level of surrendering ignorance represents the full flowering of Ramana's teachings on surrender, and any less absolute interpretation merely entangles one in the meshes of the ignorant ideas he was striving so hard to eliminate. It is admitted that as a concession to weakness, he occasionally permitted and approved lower levels of surrender such as devotion and worship, but for those who could comprehend and practice his more absolute teachings, he would be satisfied with nothing less than the total unconditioned surrender which is implied in the practice of being and the detachment from ignorance.

Bearing this in mind it will now be constructive to have a closer look at the practice of self-enquiry, and to focus attention on the large overlap that exists between enquiry and surrender. Ramana's advice on self-enquiry was clear, simple and direct, but like his advice on surrender, it has often been misunderstood and misrepresented.

The easiest way to avoid errors is to remember three simple but fundamental tenets of Ramana's teachings; firstly, that we are all Realised here and now, and that the only purpose of sadhana is to remove the idea that we are

not; secondly, there is no individual self to extinguish, because the individual self never at any time existed; and thirdly, no amount of mental sadhana is helpful because the mind cannot do anything except extend the frontiers of its own ignorance. If an awareness of these points is continually maintained, then the most obvious errors in practice can be avoided. One immediately sees that concentration on a point in the body is counter-productive because it involves mental effort. One can also eliminate the idea that self-enquiry is a mantra or an exercise in self-analysis because both of these approaches involve mental activity. On a more subtle level, if one maintains an awareness that the individual self at no time ever exists, then one can avoid the dangerous but often deeply-rooted notion that self-enquiry involves one self looking for another self.

To cut through the entanglements of these and similar misconceptions, and to find out what positive practical advice Ramana had to offer on self-enquiry, one cannot do better than go back to the words of Ramana himself. In *Maharshi's Gospel*, he says that "The purpose of self-enquiry is to focus the entire mind at its source" (p.48) . The purpose of this focussing is the same as that which has just been outlined for the practice of surrender. According to Ramana, the mind is only a collection of ignorant ideas, and unless one steps completely outside this mental realm by keeping attention on the being from which the mind emerges, then the ignorance and the wrong ideas will inevitably continue. It is important to note that Ramana never explains self-enquiry as a practice by which an individual self is eliminated, he always phrases his advice to indicate that when one looks for the source of the mind or the ego, then both disappear, and it is discovered that neither of them ever existed. This stepping outside the mind is as crucial to an understanding of self-enquiry as it is to an understanding of surrender.

In a passage in *Talks* he says:

"The fact is that the mind is only a bundle of thoughts. How can you extinguish it by the thought of doing so or by a desire. Your thoughts and desires are part and parcel of the mind. The mind is simply fattened by new thoughts rising up. Therefore it is foolish to attempt to kill the mind by means of the mind. The only way to do it is to find its source and hold on to it." (p.463).

This finding the source and holding on to it is the beginning, end and

purpose of self-enquiry. The precise method is simple and well known. When thoughts arise, one does not allow them to develop. One asks oneself the words, "To whom do these thoughts occur?" And the answer is "To me," and then the question occurs, "Then who am I? What is this thing in me which I keep calling 'I'?" By doing this practice one is shifting attention from the world of thoughts to the being from where the thought and the thinker first emerged. The transfer of attention is simply executed, because if one holds on to the feeling "I am" the initial *thought* of 'I' will gradually give way to a *feeling* of 'I', and then sooner or later, this feeling "I am" will merge into being itself, to a state where there is no longer either a thinker of the thought, 'I', or a feeler of the feeling 'I am'; there will only be being itself. This is the stage where attention to the feeling of "I am" has merged with the being from which it came, so that there is no longer the dualistic distinction of a person giving attention to the feeling of "I am". There is only being and awareness of being.

If this practice is done persistently, then the verbal redirection of attention soon becomes redundant; as soon as there is the awareness of attachment to a particular thought, then attention is immediately switched back to the being from which the thoughts and the imaginary thinker came. It is important to stress that the verbal preliminaries of asking "Who am I?" or "To whom do these thoughts occur?" are simply tools to redirect the attention, the real self-enquiry begins with the subsequent witnessing of the disappearance of the thoughts, and the re-emergence of being as the mind subsides into temporary abeyance. Ramana summarized this very succinctly when he said in *Talks*: "*Abhyasa* (spiritual practice) consists of withdrawal into the self everytime you are disturbed by thought. It is not concentration or destruction of the mind, but withdrawal into the Self". (p.464). Since, in Ramana's terminology the terms being and Self are virtually synonymous, what he is describing here is the practice of withdrawing into being and remaining there, undisturbed by the transient distractions of thoughts. This practice may be viewed from two perspectives. In the higher levels of surrender, maintaining awareness of being can be seen as a surrendering of wrong ideas, including the wrong idea that there is someone to surrender, whereas in self-enquiry, one reaches this same point of being by actively discarding thoughts, and by tracing back the feeling of "I am" until it finally subsides into the being from which it came. Though the two descriptions might appear to be describing two completely different approaches, particularly in the preliminary stages, if

the practices of surrender and enquiry are persistently and earnestly pursued, then the two approaches finally merge imperceptibly into the single practice of being. To surrender false ideas is simply to be and that same state of being is the point where thoughts and the idea of a thinker disappear. This point, this state of being, is beautifully described in *talks* when Ramana says:

“It is the state of perfect awareness and perfect stillness combined. It is the interval between two successive thoughts, and the source from which the thoughts spring Go to the root of the thoughts and you reach the stillness of sleep. But you reach it in the full vigour of search, that is with perfect awareness.” (p.564).

This point which Ramana describes so graphically is the point of convergence between the path of self-enquiry and the path of surrender. The final, definitive detachment from ignorance has not yet happened, for this final elimination is a matter for the Self. Until that elimination takes place one can only be, and once the awareness of being is maintained effortlessly, then the being of surrender in which one has given up all ideas, is the same being which results from witnessing the disappearance of the “I thought”. This state of being is still a stage of *sadhana*, for it lacks permanence, and the mind is liable to reassert its dominance at any time. However, it is the final stage, and as such it is the purest and deepest level of both surrender and self-enquiry. It is a state which belongs neither to the world of ignorance nor to the Absolute Reality, but somehow, mysteriously, according to Ramana, it provides the link between the two.

When Ramana said on one occasion, “Do not meditate, *Be*, do not think that you are, *Be*”, (*Secret of Arunachala*, p.73), he was summarising the whole of his practical teachings, because for Ramana, it is only in this state of effortless awareness of being that the final Realisation will be revealed.

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Om Sri Ramanarpanamastu

—oOo—

RAMANA MAHARSHI AND HIS
PHILOSOPHY OF EXISTENCE

PROF. T.M.P. MAHADEVAN

THE SAGE OF ARUNACHALA

PART III

REFLECTIONS

I. THE SAGE OF ARUNACHALA

TIRUVANNAMALAI (Arunachala in Sanskrit) is one of the most sacred places of pilgrimage for the Hindus, as God is worshipped there in the form of Light. Once in a year the holy beacon is lit on the top of the hill; and thousands of people go thither to see the light and adore it. But all through the year, the place has now become an international port of call for spirituality, because Maharshi Ramana lived there for over half a century shedding the flame of God-realization.

As a young lad in his teens, he went to Arunachala, and since then he made it his life-abode. The very name Arunachala served as an imperious call from the Divine, and he simply obeyed the call. The exalted state of egolessness came to him; and once it comes, it never goes. Strictly speaking, it is not one state among other states of experience; it does not come nor occur in a given moment of time. It is the eternal status (*sahaja-sthiti*). Because of *avidya* (nescience) one does not recognise it. And when *avidya* is made to disappear, the self-luminous nature of the spirit shines. This is what is called *moksha* in Vedanta. It is not an after-death experience. The continuance of the body is not inconsistent with release. It is only identification of the Self with the ego, etc., that is an obstacle to realization. When that obstacle has been removed, one becomes a *jivanmukta*, free while living. We hear of many such great souls in our scriptures. But in the Maharshi we had a contemporary *jivanmukta*, a living commentary on the most sublime texts of the Vedanta. Many a

statement of the scriptures, like the one in the *Bhagavad Gita* about seeing inaction in action and action in inaction, will remain obscure and unintelligible, unless one comes into contact with sages like the Maharshi. Apparently, Sri Ramana seemed to take interest in things that happened around him. He recognised people and sometimes talked to them. Even creatures belonging to the sub-human species claimed his attention. He used to lend a helping hand even in the kitchen by dressing vegetables for cooking. But all these modes of action were performed without the least attachment to them. In truth, they were no actions at all, since they were void of egoity. The core of activity had been removed; only the shell remained; and that too for us, the onlookers. Nothing seemed to affect this Rock of Ages. He stood as a witness to all phenomena. The distinctions of high and low had no meaning for him. The stranger and foreigner who visited him felt absolutely disarmed and free even at the first sight. One may be foreign to another or look strange; but how can one be alien to oneself? The Maharshi who had crossed the boundaries of individuality naturally and effortlessly felt — if we may use such a poor word — *one* with all. Like the pandit (the wise one) of the *Gita*, he looked upon all as the same — the high-born and the lowly of birth, the cow and the elephant, the dog and the dog-eater — these classifications may have meaning for us who are caught in the network of difference. To him who had *seen* the non-dual *Brahman* which is *sama*, the same, there was no plurality, no difference.

It was a delightful and unique experience to sit in the presence of the Maharshi, and look in the full glare of his beatific eyes. One might go to him with a medley of doubts and questions. But very often it happened that these upsurgings of the mind died down and were burnt to ashes as one sat before

the Sage. One had a foretaste of that pristine state, of which the Upanishad speaks, when the knot of the heart is cut and all the doubts are dispelled. One stepped back and watched how the turbulent mental stream quietened down and received an undisturbed reflection of the self-luminous Spirit. What one might succeed in attaining after a prolonged course of Yogic discipline, one got with perfect ease and effortlessly in the proximity of the Maharshi. True, this experience might not stay for long. One might get back to the world and wallow again in the dirt of worldliness. But still, the impress of spirituality that had been gained was never lost. Seldom was one, the depths of whose soul had been stirred by the sublime look of the Sage, without the desire to go again to him and receive fresh intimations of the eternal. People sometimes went to him in the hope that by his *darshan* (look) their earthly wants would be fulfilled. But very soon they discovered their own foolishness in asking for fleeting pleasures, when the imperishable *bliss* awaited them. Instead of getting dissatisfied that their cravings went unfulfilled, they would feel thankful that they had been saved from a delusion and a snare. Nachiketas of the *Katha Upanishad* was offered by Yama all the pleasures of all the worlds in lieu of Self-knowledge for which he had asked; but the true son of spirituality that the boy was, he refused to be tempted into accepting the pleasant in the place of the good. The Maharshi who to us was the personification of the supreme Good transmuted our lower passions and desires into *moksha-kama*, an intense longing for release.

Some went to the Maharshi with a curiosity to get from him a cure-all for the world's ills. They used to ask him what solution he had for the problems of poverty, illiteracy, disease, war, etc. Social reform was their religion; a re-ordering of society

was what they sought after. They framed their questions in different ways. What message had the Maharshi to give to the social reformer? Was it not the duty of every enlightened citizen to strive for bettering the lot of his fellowmen? When misery and squalor were abroad, how could anyone who had a feeling heart keep quiet without exerting himself in doing his bit for world-welfare? The invariable answer that the Sage gave to all those who put such questions was: 'Have you reformed yourself first?' Very often it happens that so-called social service is a self-gratification of the ego. In much of what passes for altruism, there is a core of egoism. Such service blesses neither the server nor the served. The former's pride increases, and the latter's demoralisation is made complete. It is only such service as that which contributes to the reduction of the ego that is the harbinger of good. And the influence of the ego cannot be lessened unless one knows, however remotely, that the ego is not the Self, that it is only the pseudo-self, responsible for all the evil and misery in the world, and that the final and lasting felicity could be realized only when the root-cause of the ego, *viz.*, ignorance, is dispelled. And so, unless one seeks to know the true Self, one cannot do real service to society. Reform must begin with oneself. He who is on the path renders service to fellow-beings so that his ego may be cleansed and become attenuated and ready to be discarded. And he who has realized the End and has become a *jivanmukta* performs work — or more correctly appears to us to perform work — in order that the world may be saved (*loka-sangraha*). So Self-enquiry is the basis of true service; and Self-knowledge is its culmination.

The Sage of Arunachala had no new message for humanity. What he taught through silence more than through words was the ageless gospel of the Vedanta. Sankara cites in his *Sutra-*

bhashya text from the *Smriti* in which it is stated that when approached by Badhva for instruction, Sage Baskali kept quiet, and, on being questioned again and again, said 'We have declared the truth already, but you have not understood: the Self is peaceful, quiet (*upasanta*).' The Maharshi's teaching was exactly the same as that of the Upanishadic sage. He seldom spoke. It is in the stillness of silence that the depths of the spirit are reached. Words and thoughts cannot lead us far enough. Even the words of scripture help us only up to a point; and there they must stop. It is said of young Dakshinamurti that he taught his elderly disciples in the language of silence. It is true that only a few can understand what is taught in silence. And so, sometimes the Maharshi used to talk. But he warned his interlocutors at the same time, that both questions and answers belonged to the realm of *avidya* (nescience), though the latter did serve as signposts towards the light of wisdom. Doubts would assail the mind so long as the mind lasted. It was only when the eternal state of mindlessness (*amanibhava*) was realized that all doubts of the mind and questionings of the heart would roll away like mist before the rising sun.

The Maharshi's teachings may be stated aphoristically thus: *Seek to know the Self; and the knowledge will make you free.* The *Chandogya* records the story of Narada, master of many sciences and arts, going to Sanatkumara and confessing that he was sorrow-stricken, though he was very learned. He knew that all his learning would be of no avail and that Self-knowledge alone could save him. So he approached Sanatkumara with the request 'Help me across the ocean of sorrow', and received from him the wisdom about the great, the true Self. The supreme commandment of scripture is 'Know the Self' (*atmanam viddhi*). The Maharshi has said over and over again that *atma-vichara* is the one sure and

inescapable path to liberation or release. Other *sadhanas* may help in this process more or less remotely. It is *jnana* alone that is the direct means to *moksha*.

This is essentially the view of Advaita Vedanta. And the reason for it, is that *moksha* is the eternal nature of the Self and not something which is to be newly acquired or accomplished. No operation, either of the body or of the mind, can bring about release. The ever free status of the Self is not recognised because of the ignorance which veils the true and projects the untrue. When this ignorance is removed, one realizes one's eternal nature as the non-dual, unconditioned Self. That which effects the removal of ignorance is wisdom. And what paves the way for wisdom is *atma-vichara*.

The enquiry 'Who am I?' is not to be regarded as a mental effort to understand the mind's nature. Its main purpose is 'to focus the entire mind at its source'. The source of the psychosis 'I' is the Self. What one does in Self-enquiry is to run against the mental current instead of running along with it, and finally transcend the sphere of mental modifications. It is comparatively easy for us to disentangle ourselves from wrong identification with the physical body and material objects. But the identification with the ego is hard to get over. As the *Panchapadika*, a commentary on Sankara's *Sutra-bhashya* says, 'The conceit "I" is the first superimposition on the Self.' The outer layers of ignorance may fall away easily. The last one, however, is difficult to tear. The best way to remove it is to track it down to its source. When there is awareness of the source which is the Self, the ego vanishes. And when the 'I' has been crossed out through *jnana*, there is no more bondage and consequent sorrow.

The cessation or non-cessation of the body has nothing to do with release. The body may continue to exist and the world may continue to appear, as in the case of the Maharshi. That makes no

difference at all to the Self that has been realized. As Sankara says, 'There is no need to dispute, whether the knower of *Brahman* bears the body for some time or not. How can another object to one's own experience, realized in the heart, of *Brahman*-knowledge as well as continuance of the body?' In truth there is neither the body nor the world for him; there is only the Self, the eternal Existence (*sat*), the self-luminous Intelligence (*chit*), the unexcellable Bliss (*ananda*). Such an experience is not entirely foreign to us. We have it in sleep, where we are conscious neither of the external world of things nor of the inner world of dreams. But that experience lies under the cover of ignorance. So it is that we come back to the fantasies of dream and the world of waking. Non-return to duality is possible only when nescience has been removed. To make this possible is the object of Vedanta. To inspire even the least of us with hope, and help us out of the slough of despond, is the purpose of such illustrious exemplars as the Maharshi.

Sri Ramana's example is unique because he did not first read and then experience. Experience came to him first; and only later he found corroborative evidence in the scriptural texts. To an unbelieving world which is impatient and wants to burn its sacred books, Sri Ramana has this message to offer, viz., *that the real book of life is within, and that if we but turn to it and consult its pages, it will open up undreamt-of vistas leading to limitless felicity and bliss.*

II. DAKSHINAMURTI, SANKARA AND RAMANA

In the *Sankaravijaya* of Madhavacharya there is a verse which says that the image of Siva in the form of Sankaracharya goes about in the world, having emerged from the seat under the banyan tree giving up the attitude of silence, in order to save all beings that are fallen into the deep pit of ignorance and

FRAGRANT PETALS

WALTER KEERS

THE HEART OF THE WORLD

The Heart of the World

Wolter A. Keers

WHEN I LOOK BACK UPON MY CHILDHOOD, it is clear as crystal that I brought an amount of spiritual *samskaras* into this life. Born into a family of clergymen, many generations, with my father and both my grandfathers ministers of divinity in the Protestant, Calvinist tradition, all interest was focussed on matters of religion, and I must have been taught how to pray almost before I could talk.

If it is true that one's childhood is decisive in most important matters in life, this is certainly true in my case. Two events have marked the whole sequence of adventures in the spiritual realm. Leading to a desperate search for someone who might enlighten me, and ending in the unbelievable event of finding just such guidance.

The first event must have occurred when I was about five years old. A well known missionary, travelling from place to place, arrived at our village with a roving exposition about Netherlands and New Guinea where he had worked. I can still remember some of the exhibits, but more important was that he stayed in our house, and had his meals with us.

Then, one day, during lunch, he told my parents how this time he had not made the journey from the East Indies (now Indonesia) in the usual way and by boat, but partly over land, travelling also through British India.

That phrase, British India, struck me like lightning. It is hardly possible that at this very early age I could ever have heard this name before. But it struck me as if it were to split me into two. I was numb with still, amazed wonder with some inexplicable recognition of something extraordinary, something absurdly desirable, and something like the ultimate good, almost like God, even.

The second event must have occurred just a little later. I presume that it might have been in the spring of 1928 when I was five years old.

I was playing on a small grass field, baking cakes of sand, then looking up at a hedge with very tiny pink flowers and white balls as big as marbles.

If anything triggered off what then happened, I cannot tell what it was. But suddenly the entire world and I myself were transformed into light. I fell into *samadhi*. But although it was a most impressive event, at the same time it was the most ordinary of all ordinary things. Even so, small as I was, I decided to keep this as a secret to myself, and in fact I never talked about it to anyone until the age of about twenty, when the same thing happened in the company of a very good friend, who was reading a text to me, originating from ancient oriental mystics. Suddenly, and without any warning as it always does *samadhi* as it were dissolved me.

Many things had of course happened between the ages of five and twenty. But here was a new decisive point, confirming that it was in the East that I had to look for an answer to the questions I put to all the theologians in my family and many others, but that none could answer, even vaguely.

I continued my reading, but although I found many books of interest, none could explain to me what I wanted to know. But gradually it seemed to become quite, desperate, and when, after this second and spontaneous *samadhi* I discovered that whatever I tried or did, I could not get back to that state, I fell into a deep depression. I decided that I must find a Guru, and that, if I did not find one, life would not be worth living any more.

It was then that an elderly lady, mother of a friend of mine, lent me two books. The first one was by Swami Vivekananda, and its title was 'Jnana Yoga'. I had no idea that the book as well as the author was world famous, to me it was a book like any other. But when I started to read it, it caused something like an explosion in me. There, finally, I found someone who had been able to put into words what I had been feeling intuitively, but could never have verbalized.

Then, the second book, written by Paul Brunton, did the rest. When I read that there was a living sage in India whom one could talk with, asking questions and getting real answers, blue patches returned to my sky. The only thing I was worried about was, that this sage might meanwhile have left this world, and there was no means to enquire, for it was right in the middle of the war.

But I decided to trust what was written about him, and started to concentrate on him. In the Dutch edition of *A Search in Secret India*, which is called *Hidden Wisdom*, there was a picture of Bhagavan, which I used during my meditation, and initially with a lot of effort I started to concentrate on the heart centre, which, of course, was the tool he handed to us in order to get beyond the phenomenal.

Having rather strong *yogic samskaras*, it turned out to be quite easy, after a while, to descend straight into this centre.

During my meditation hours, I concentrated very hard on Bhagavan, and after a while I was assured of his living guidance.

Yet, this was not enough. It did help as a marvellous preparation, it did melt all depressive tendencies in less than no time; it did help me to see that I was not a body not this, not that, but it did not place me in the true center.

What I did not know at the time is, that on account of close identification with the body, the body must be brought at least once, but preferably many times, into the living presence of an authentic Master. What I did know is that I had to see this strange being, in that little Indian town. I concentrated on him, more and more, and sometimes almost fought with him, asking him to help me in my efforts to come and see him. And absurd as this expression now sounds I won. He made his presence felt, very strongly, and with it came the certainty that I was to see him.

What part in this *sadhana* was my own projection and what part was Bhagavan's real presence, I shall never be able to know. Certain it is, that every *sadhaka* projects a man upon the sage: a man who walks and talks and eats and wills things, failing to understand that from his own "point of view" "the Master is nothing of the kind. The authentic Master never gives the *sadhaka* anything to get a grip on. He is like thin air, wherever you try to catch him or to find something tangible, he disappears. One cannot get hold of him; any more than one can put sunlight into a box. Yet the sunlight is there, most clearly.

Still, it took several years before, finally, in the beginning of 1950, I arrived. As if it happened last night, I can remember the train ride from Madras on the metre gauge; the first view of Arunachala, with the full moon hovering above it a very good omen; I thought; the fight amongst the porters, who had got hold of my luggage before I knew what happened; the ride in the *jutka* and the driver shouting "Hey hey", the accent always on the second syllable. It all just happened, I was no longer implicated. It was as if I had become completely transparent. I knew from friends around the ashram that Bhagavan was terribly ill, but I knew also that I had come in time to see him, and that he had kept his promise to help me in getting there. Nothing in the world could go wrong, hereafter.

It was Roda MacIver, who is still living at the ashram, who took me to him, a few hours later. And when I saw him from far, sitting on a chair on the little passage between his room and the main hall, I started to tremble all over

not because of nerves or uneasiness, but because of the shock of this confrontation. Here I was but what on earth could this mean, I; this transparent thing and there, there, there, on that chair, light Itself, radiant as I had never seen anything or anyone.

Roda introduced me to him, and Bhagavan looked at me. He hardly talked, but his face, his presence, said: "So, finally, you're here!"

I was invited to sit down, amongst a group of men, perhaps ten, perhaps twenty, my back against the wall opposite him. I looked, and looked, and looked. Long ago I had lost all faith, all belief of my childhood years. No god riding the clouds any more; no soul. And now, suddenly, here Light Itself, blazing light, penetrating light, going right through me, like X rays.

Bhagavan seemed at the same time completely unconcerned, looking around, smiling at the squirrels that ran up and down the trees; exchanging a few words with his attendants; dozing off, now and then for half a minute; then, immediately and fully awake, looking, not at you but into you, casual like one looks into a street, without effort, but seeing in one glance right to the other end and taking note of all that happens in one glance; and then again rubbing his head with his long fingers.

In those days he came out twice a day two hours in the morning, and two in the evening, so that we might have his *darshan*.

To me, those first days, it was the fulfillment of everything I had ever hoped to find as a matter of fact, it

was much more than that. I knew that in the most lucid, radiant moments of my heart, it would have never been possible to imagine even a portion of this blazing Presence, that radiated right through everything and took me away beyond the phenomenal.

The second, or the third day, I had to laugh, about the absurdity that had been my life before. Who was I, to cultivate a garden full of problems? What on earth could have given me the impression that I was so important that I ought to have problems, questions and complicated situations to get out of.

And before I knew it, there I was in the middle of this Who am I *sadhana*. But now, in his presence, it was an entirely different matter. In this radiant light it was so *evident* that I was not a body, not an ego, that no analysis was needed. This light swept away all my darkness in one stroke.

Then, after a week or two, an irritation came up in me. For I noticed that when I returned to the little house opposite the Ashram, which belonged to a Dutch friend, the lucid, blazing state which invariably swept everything away in Bhagavan's presence, left me, and when questions did come up, I was quite unable to solve them.

So after a few days, I became rebellious, and decided that I was going to have it out with Bhagavan.

When I walked in, during the afternoon *darshan* hour, I refused to melt away in his radiance, strong as ever. I simply refused his blessing, and I may say that. it was most difficult to do so. It was, I discovered, as if you were

slapping your own mother in the face. Yet, I decided to be stubborn, because it was not a heavenly hour I was in search of but lasting liberation from ignorance.

When I passed in front of him, and greeted him, Indian fashion, a quick smile ran across his face and that was all. I was already at that moment perfectly certain that he was aware of the whole situation, but he paid no attention to it at all. He showered his radiance over all visitors (and every day there were more, as the news of his impending departure from us spread rapidly, and many, many people wanted to see him before he went away), rubbed his head; looked at the squirrels, dozed off for a moment, or looked quite indifferent at something or the other.

I found a place opposite him, under the covered passage that in those years ran along the side of the hall, and sat not very far from where we now find his samadhi. The passage has now been added to the big hall.

From there I started my bombardment. I fired thoughts at him, with all my might. "Bhagavan, of what use is all your radiance to me, if I cannot solve my problems, the moment I have left you?" That was, more or less, the theme.

Bhagavan took no notice. So I concentrated on him even more, and with my thoughts I began to shake him as if he were a fruit tree. I must have an answer.

Then, suddetnly, he looked at me, with a smile of utter amazement. "What do you want?" the smile said. And then, with a different expression on his face: "You are looking for your glasses, and they are right on your own

nose!" Then, suddenly, his eyes emitted light, spat fire, and when he looked at me, his look went straight into me, physically into my chest. The heart centre, very often felt in his presence, began to get warm; became hot like fire, and then started to spark as if an electric machine were installed next to my heart. I sat straight as a needle, my eyes glued to his drilling firelook. "Kill me", I prayed.

How long this may have lasted I cannot say. It was an event outside of time and space. The moment came, when my body could no longer stand the strain. It was as if my chest would explode, and I asked him to let me go.

I had received what I had come for. This account of the initiation that I received from Bhagavan is of course only a mere indication. In reality it was a complete transformation an *Umwertung aller Werte*, as Nietzsche calls it. And all this, without hearing Bhagavan's voice. Communication in silence was clearer than any explanation in words could have given.

Yet, I still needed words.

A few days before Bhagavan's departure, I decided to leave Tiruvannamalai. There were at least a thousand people, and we were only allowed to stand in front of the door, for ten or twenty seconds, to see Bhagavan lying on his bed. I thought that he ought to be left alone.

Back in Bombay, where I stayed in a friend's flat, I was amazed to discover to what extent changes had occurred. On my way coming, I had been reading Spinoza's *Ethics* a very tough book, which I had to chew phrase by phrase. I had left it open on my bed. Now,

coming back, I picked it up, and found that I could read it almost like a novel.

Yet, all this was not enough. Although my two months with Bhagavan had turned me inside out and upside down, this period had been too short to remove all obstacles, if only for the reason that at the time a number of fundamental questions had not arisen, and certain mistakes had not been recognized. I had for instance very strong yogic tendencies, and I could not understand that *consciousness* did not arise from the *kundalini*, but that the *kundalini* appeared in consciousness. Where I got this absurd notion from I cannot tell, but it was only when somebody drew my attention to it, that a doubt about this point of view arose in me weeks after Bhagavan had shed the body. And other questions, new ones, began to tease me: what about this mysterious deep sleep state, for instance; and what was implied in the simple statement that one is ever the witness of thought, not a thinker . . .

But although I was far from satisfied, I did not suffer or worry to the extent I had done in Europe. If Bhagavan had proved a help and a certainty as tall as Mount Everest, he would not leave me after shedding the body. So I waited in full confidence.

And help came.

Some three months after His physical departure, suddenly a discussion as I used to have with Him in my imagination turned into something that might perhaps be called a vision. Suddenly I was back at Ramanashramam, and I sat opposite Him, as I always had during the first

weeks of my stay. Again, there were quite a number of people, perhaps a hundred or two hundred.

Silently I wished: "O Bhagavan, I wished I were alone with you." And hardly did I think this, when the first person stood up, prostrated before Bhagavan, and left. Then number two, three, and in less than no time, the entire gallery was empty, but for Bhagavan and myself.

I drew myself next to His feet, looked at Him, and said: "How wonderful, to be alone with Bhagavan ". Again this smile of His . . . It always contained a world. It was a bath of light and love, spiced very slightly, this time, with something like sarcasm to make me aware of my absurd standpoint, when he said, slowly, taking time to pronounce every syllable slowly and clearly: "Are . . . you . . . ever . . . not . . . a lone . . .?"

Immediately, this very "Bhagavanish" remark made me glow with happiness and recognition. I understood immediately what He meant I was completely home again.

But, very much aware of *my* new problems, I asked him what to do. He then directed me to see a certain person, whom I discovered to be most venerable, and who, for some incomprehensible reason, allowed me to be with him regularly over a period of several years, until the obstacles had been overcome.

When, during that same vision, I questioned Bhagavan about this Guru, and asked Him: "Is he realized?" He again fired one of his cryptic answers at me, saying

"He is neither realized, nor not realized." This one took me a week to understand 'realized' and 'not realized'

are labels that we paste onto someone. But the person Bhagavan referred me to was beyond labels and I soon found the confirmation of what Bhagavan had indicated.

Now, more than 25 years later, I am still sometimes with Bhagavan and I do not mean with him as, pure consciousness or the Atma Brahman, but as this “typically Bhagavanish Presence”, with or without form. I am no longer interested in visions or other, phenomena of a yogic nature, but when, suddenly he is there in one way or the other his presence may either bring tears of deep love and emotion to my eyes, or it may make me glow with happiness, and make my heart jump into the sky. Such is the radiance from his heart. It is the Heart of the World.



FINAL TALKS

ANNAMALAI SWAMI

CHAPTER 18

Question: Is fasting beneficial? I have heard that thoughts diminish when one restricts one's food.

Annamalai Swami: This may happen, but one should be careful not to take it to extreme lengths. Bhagavan said that sattvic food in moderate quantities was the best external aid for *sadhaks*. Starving oneself will not produce long-term benefits. Bhagavan also advised that we should starve the mind of thoughts rather than starve the body of food. We need to keep the body in good health in order to do good *sadhana*. Depriving it of food and making it weak is not a step in the right direction.

One of Bhagavan's devotees, Lakshman Sharma, was a great advocate of naturopathy and fasting. He was a good devotee who wrote an excellent commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu*. Bhagavan gave him many lessons on this work, and Lakshman Sharma's commentary incorporated the explanations that Bhagavan himself gave.

During the 1940s a boy of about twenty years of age came from London. A bomb blast had affected his hearing. Lakshman Sharma wanted to treat him through naturopathy. Usually this involves going on a fast, although there are several other aspects to the treatment as well. The boy was put on a fast of several days, but unfortunately in this case there was no improvement. The fasting treatment was extended but the boy became weaker and weaker. Eventually, he became so weak he died. Right till the end the boy was expecting that this treatment would cure him, but in the end it brought about his death.

These treatments have to be taken carefully. There are many people who will not be benefited by them.

Question: So we should make sure that we eat regularly?

Annamalai Swami: We should not force ourselves to eat if we are not hungry. Eat food when you feel hungry. Food always

preferences, but I have to admit I am different. I have a strong desire to be in your presence. I believe that being here is doing me good, so I stay. [Addressing the translator] Here I have a beautiful feeling that no one has loved me as he does.

Annamalai Swami: Drop the body-mind idea and you will discover that you don't have any likes or dislikes. You do not think that your shirt is yourself. Similarly, the *jnani* does not believe that he is his body or his mind. The *jnani* understands that the body and the mind are animated by the Self, but he also knows that he shines as the Self whether the body and mind are there or not.

Without the Self, the body and the mind can do nothing at all. You could not eat, sleep, speak, or do anything at all without the Self.

Keep your body in good condition if you want to, but don't ever believe that it is you. You can keep your car in good working order without ever believing that you are the car. Have the same attitude towards your body. You are not your car and you are not your body. Both will perish, but the Self will continue because it is always there. When you identify with transient things that pass away or perish, you too will pass away and perish, but when you identify with the Self, you will not pass away or change in any way. The Self has no birth, no death, no bondage, no misery, no youth, no old age, and no sickness. These are attributes of changing bodies and minds, not the Self. Be the Self and none of these things will ever happen to you.

tastes better if you have an appetite for it. Eating food at times directed by others is far less satisfactory. If we take food at times when we have an appetite for it, we won't get sick. This is not just my advice. Avvayar, a great Tamil saint, gave this advice in one of her poems, and Tiruvalluvar, another of our great poet-saints, wrote, 'If you take your food only when you are hungry, you won't get sick. If you live like this, you will never have to go out in search of medicine.'

Question: I want to ask Swamiji a question. I want to relax more into the present and surrender to Bhagavan's will, but I am not sure that this is really within my power. In Swamiji's book, talk number five, Swamiji gave this answer: 'According to one's *prarabdha*, the efforts that are destined to happen will arise in one's mind.'

This is an extremely significant remark for me. As I understand it, all the activities that happen in this world happen according to Bhagavan's will. But the thoughts that instigate the actions also seem to come from Bhagavan, and are also predetermined.

Annamalai Swami: Yes, everything comes from Bhagavan. All our activities play themselves out as a manifestation of the divine will. Our karma is part of this destiny.

Question: OK. But I would still like to relax in the present and surrender to Bhagavan's will. I find that throughout the day thoughts are coming up. A thought comes up: 'I want to realise the Self.' I remind myself, 'Here and now I am the Self. This desire does not come from the Self, because the Self has no need of realising itself. So this must just be my *vasanas* coming up. I will ignore this thought.'

I cannot help this particular sequence of thoughts arising because Swami has said that these thoughts manifesting in that particular order is Bhagavan's will, my destiny. I might think that I am choosing a particular option or not, but that choice ultimately seems to be incorporated in my destiny. As I watch these thoughts arise, I feel that there is nothing I can do to end

them, execute them, or indulge in them. I can surrender and watch them, but it doesn't seem that I can do anything more than that.

Annamalai Swami: Your thoughts arise on a moment-to-moment basis because of your *vasanas*, but it is a mistake to think that you can do nothing about them. You can be interested in them, or you can ignore them. If you show interest in them, they will persist and you will get caught up in them. If you ignore them and keep your attention on the source, they will not develop. And when they don't develop, they disappear.

In *Who Am I?* Bhagavan compared this process to laying siege to a fort. If you cut off, one by one, the heads of the thoughts as they come out of the fort of the mind, sooner or later there will be none left. The way to do this is by self-enquiry. As each thought rises, you ask yourself, 'To whom does this thought appear?' If you are vigilant in doing this, the forest of thoughts will lessen and lessen until there are none left. When the thoughts have gone, mind will sink into its source and experience that source.

Question: I want to understand this process of ignoring thoughts. Thoughts will arise: 'I want to realise the Self'; 'I have not realised the Self'; or, 'I must do such-and-such a practice to realise the Self'. I realise that these are all desires, all *vasanas*, so I say to myself, 'I am the Self. Here and now I am the Self.' As Swamiji says, this seems to stop the flow of thoughts for a while. I try to hold onto the 'I'-thought, as Swamiji recommends, but I don't seem to have any real control over it. I still feel that whether I succeed or not is Bhagavan's will, something that is not within my control. I feel helpless. I remember that whenever the mind moves, it is on a wild goose chase, that it is chasing phantoms that don't exist. So I remember Swamiji's advice and remind myself, 'I am the Self here and now'. It helps, but not for long. Thoughts still come up again.

Annamalai Swami: Suppose you are walking down a busy road. You encounter all kinds of people doing all kinds of things.

Little conversations are going on in one place. Perhaps workmen are digging a hole somewhere. Inside a store a customer may be arguing about the price of some goods, while in the middle of the road there may be a crowd of people congregating around an accident victim. None of this is your business, but there is always a possibility that you will get interested in some or all of these activities and forget the reason why you are out on the street yourself. Don't get excited by anything you see and hear. Just walk steadily towards your destination.

Your *vasanas* are all the sideshows in your head that can drag your attention away from your main business, which is being aware of the Self. If you have no interest in them, you will walk straight to your goal. If something temporarily distracts your attention, bring yourself back by asking yourself, 'Who is interested in all this? Who is getting interested in this distraction?' This will deflate the distracting desire and it will bring you back to an awareness of your true purpose.

Remember, nothing that happens in the mind is 'you', and none of it is your business.

You don't have to worry about thoughts that rise up inside you. It is enough that you remember that the thoughts are not you.

Question: That goes for all kinds of thoughts?

Annamalai Swami: Whatever kind of thought arises, have the same reaction: 'Not me; not my business.' It can be a good thought or a bad thought. Treat them all the same way. To whom are these thoughts arising? To you. That means that you are not the thought.

You are the Self. Remain as the Self, and don't latch onto anything that is not the Self.

Question: There is another thing that comes up for me: there is a desire for the earnestness to remember the Self all the time. The mind will latch onto this and think, 'I should meditate more. I should pay more attention to being in the present.' Ideas such as these set off whole chains of thought. Yet this still looks to

me to be an effort by the ego to realise the Self that is already here. In some ways it seems to me to be another distraction.

Annamalai Swami: If you remain as the Self, no *vasanas* and no karma will touch or affect you. If you remain in the mind, thoughts of one sort or another will bother you all the time.

Question: If I understand correctly, my karma is all the activities that my body has to undertake in this life. I can be a witness to it but I cannot change it. If I pick up this glass that is in front of me, it happened because it was my karma to pick it up in this moment. I don't have a choice. Either I am destined to pick it up, or I am not. Bhagavan said the same thing. When someone picked up a fan and asked if that act was destined from the moment he was born, Bhagavan said 'Yes, it was destined'.

Annamalai Swami: If the thoughts 'I should meditate' or 'I should realise' arise, ask yourself, 'To whom are these thoughts arising?' Why do you need to think about your body and your mind so much? If you are the light, there is no darkness. If you are the Self, there is no thought, no body, and no mind to give you any trouble. Any number of thoughts may come. Let them. But remember all the time, 'I am the Self'. You are not the *vasanas*, you are not the thoughts, you are the Self. Keep that awareness and don't worry too much about what is going on in your mind, and what it means.

Don't allow any identifications to settle on you. Don't think, 'I am sitting in Bhagavan's shrine'. Don't think, 'I am doing, I am acting, I am sitting'.

You are the Self, not the body. Even your *vasanas* are the Self. All is your Self. There are no distinctions, no differences in the Self. Nothing is separate from the Self. You cannot find a single atom, a single thought that is apart from the Self. All is the Self.

Question: But is there anything I can do to discover this? Is not all effort pointless if everything that happens to me is predetermined?

Annamalai Swami: All these doubts that are troubling you arise simply because you are enmeshed in the 'I am the body' thought and all the confusing consequences that it brings. It is more productive to keep the awareness 'I am the Self' than to be analysing the usefulness of effort. *Sadhana*, effort and practice, and any ideas you may have about them, are concepts that can only arise when you believe that you are not the Self, and when you believe that you have to do something to reach the Self.

Even the sequence, 'To whom has this thought come? To me,' is based on ignorance of the truth. Why? Because it is verbalising a state of ignorance; it is perpetuating an erroneous assumption that there is a person who is having troublesome thoughts. You are the Self, not some make-believe person who is having thoughts.

If you remain in the Self, as the Self, no harm can come to you. In that state, whatever comes to you will not be a problem. There is no duality when you remain as the Self; no thoughts about what you should or should not do, and no thoughts about what can be done or what can't be done. The main thing is not to go out of the Self. When you have switched on the light, darkness cannot come, not even if you desire it.

Question: Swamiji frequently says that we should meditate constantly to stay in the Self. I find that I cannot meditate constantly. When I realise that I am not meditating, the mind tells me that I should do something to get back into the Self. This is my real state, my actual condition. I cannot stay constantly in the Self.

Annamalai Swami: When this thought, 'I am not meditating,' or 'I am not in the Self,' arises, just ignore it and go back to the Self. When thoughts such as these arise, look at them and think, 'Not me, not my business,' and go back to the Self. Don't waste energy on thinking or evaluating how well or how badly you are doing in your meditation.

Question: When attentiveness has been lost, when I realise that I am not in the present, that I am not meditating, the mind is

inevitably distracted. The thought, the evaluation, always comes: 'I am distracted.'

Annamalai Swami: Whatever thoughts come, ignore them. You have to ignore anything that is connected to the body-mind idea, anything that is based on the notion that you are the mind or the body. If you can do this, the rising thought will not disturb or distract you. In a split second, it will run away.

All thoughts are distractions, including the thought 'I am meditating'. If you are the Self, darkness will not overcome you. Whatever thoughts arise in that state won't affect you.

Question: Is the ability to remember 'I am the Self' part of one's destiny?

Annamalai Swami: If you are the Self, no destiny will affect you. If you tear your shirt, does that mean that you are also torn? No. Something has happened to something that is not you. Similarly, the body and the mind will experience pleasure, happiness, misery, and so on, all according to the karma that has been brought into this life. But the Self has no attachment, no detachment, no happiness, no unhappiness and no karma. The body is not the Self; the mind is not the Self. The real 'I' is the Self, and nothing ever happens to or affects the Self.

Thoughts will come as long as the potential for them is inside you. Good thoughts, bad thoughts, they will all keep coming. There is nothing you can do about this flow, but at the same time, this flow of thoughts need not be a problem. Be the Self, be the peace that is your real nature, and it will not matter what comes up. Walk, eat, drink, sleep, meditate, but never think that you are the one who is doing these things. The thought that you are doing something is the thought that is poisoning your life. Because once you think that you are doing something, you will start to think that you need to be doing something else to put yourself in a better situation. You don't have to do anything to experience the nectar of the Self. All you need to do is drop the idea that you are doing anything at all.

You need to change your vision, your perspective. When you

live in the mind and see a world outside you that is separate and apart from you, you will make plans, you will worry, you will have doubts such as the ones you have been telling me about today. These doubts keep coming up in you because you are not dwelling in the source, the substratum. In that place there is oneness, a oneness in which all distinctions, all separation is absent.

If you abide as the Self, you will see the world as the Self. In fact, there will be no world at all. No world, no *maya*, no mind, no distinctions of any kind. It is like the state of seeing only wood in the carved elephant, only threads in the dyed cloth. In that state of being and knowing the Self, ideas of right and wrong, things to do and things to avoid doing, will vanish. You will know that they were just mental concepts. In that state you will know that mind is the Self, bondage is the Self, everything is the Self. With that vision, nothing will bind you; nothing will cause you misery.

The Self may appear as the manifest world, as different separate objects, but the underlying reality, the only real substance is the Self in which they are all appearing and disappearing. Things and people may appear in this substratum, and you may use them or interact with them, but your peace will never be disturbed.

When you abide as the Self, there is no one left to choose and decide. Life goes on automatically. You will pick up the things that are needed, and not pick up the things that are not needed. What you pick up and what you don't pick up will not be a consequence of what you like or dislike. These preferences will not be there any more.

This perspective will be yours when you give up or cease to believe the idea 'I am different from the world'. Giving up this thought is a great *sadhana* in itself. Abandoning this false idea will be enough to give you peace.

When the thought is there, the world seems to be full of good people and bad people, all busily engaged in doing what appear to you to be good things and bad things. When the thought is absent, you know them all to be your own Self. In that state you won't like them, dislike them or judge them, or be aware of

them as being other than your own Self. This absence of likes, dislikes and judgements will leave you in your original natural state of peace.

Teeth and tongue are both parts of you, and they both function in harmony, without fighting or struggling. When there is the knowledge that mind and Self are one, there will be no fights, no struggles, and no attempts to judge or attain. To have this harmony, place the mind in the Self and keep it there. This is the real meditation.

However, until you reach this state in which there are no distinctions and preferences, you should use a little discrimination with regard to who and what you associate with. Avoid bad company and bad thoughts, and try to keep the conviction that nothing is separate from you.

During sleep you have no likes and dislikes. *Jnanis* and babies manage this while they are awake. Baby mind is good; *jnani* mind is good; 'I am the body' mind is very, very bad.

Question: It's a poisonous thought!

Annamalai Swami: Yes, yes. The 'I am the body' thought is just as poisonous as a cobra.

'All is my Self.' 'All is the nectar of my own Self.' These are the great affirmations that counter the 'I am the body' thought. Holding on to one of these sayings is the equal of millions of *punyas*. If we continuously meditate on the truth of these statements, if we hold on to the truth that they are pointing towards, countless *punyas* will accrue to us.

There are many other mantras, but none are as useful as these. *Ribhu Gita* says, 'All is one. All is the Self.' This is the truth that you have to hold onto. To the real 'I', nothing is foreign in the entire universe. If you know you are everything, there will be no desire to pursue some things and not others. Nothing will be liked more or less than anything else. Do you like or desire your arm more than your foot? When your body is the whole universe, likes, dislikes and desires will be absent.

Question: I know that the *jnani* has no dislikes and no

RAMANA SMRTI

SAMPURNAMMA

BHAGAVAN IN THE KITCHEN

Bhagavan in the Kitchen¹

Sampurnamma

Along with Shanthamma, Sampurnamma diligently served Bhagavan for many years. A childless widow, she first met Bhagavan early in her life in 1928, and two years later she settled down at the Ashram.

Bhagavan was born in the village next to ours and my people knew him from his earliest childhood. When he became a great saint with an Ashram at Tiruvannamalai, my relatives used to go there often, for they were quite devoted to him. I was busy with my household and was not interested in going with them.

When my husband died, I was in despair and thought life not worth living. My people were urging me to go to Ramanashram to get some spiritual guidance from Bhagavan, but I was not in the mood to go anywhere.

One day I was in Madura, worshipping in the great Meenakshi Temple, when an old Brahmin approached me and asked: "Won't you cook a meal for me?" The request was strange and I was surprised. A Brahmin would freely ask for food from another Brahmin, but this man wanted food to be specially prepared for him. Since hospitality is in our blood, I told him that he was welcome to a meal to be cooked for him specially and asked him to accompany me to our family house in the town. I entered the inner shrine for a moment, and when I came back the old Brahmin was not to be seen. Somehow the incident left a deep mark on my mind and I just could not forget the old man and

¹ Narrated to G. Venkatachalam. Translated from the Telugu by Z.

his strange request. Later on I had good reasons to believe that the old Brahmin in the Meenakshi temple was Bhagavan himself who came to call me to his feet.

In 1932 my sister and her husband, Narayanan, were going to see Bhagavan and I agreed to go with them. We found Bhagavan in a palm leaf hut built over his mother's *samadhi* (place of burial). Some devotees and visitors were with him and all were having their morning coffee. Dandapani Swami introduced me to Bhagavan, saying: "This is Dr. Narayanan's wife's sister." The next day I had my period and had to keep away. I was told that Bhagavan was enquiring about me.

When I was able to sit for long hours in Bhagavan's presence my mind would just stop thinking and I would not notice the time passing. I was not taught to meditate and surely did not know how to stop the mind from thinking. It would happen quite by itself, by his grace. I would sit and sit, immersed in a strange state in which the mind would not have a single thought and yet it would be completely clear. Those were the days of deep and calm happiness. My devotion to Bhagavan took firm roots and never left me.

I stayed for twenty days. When I was leaving, Bhagavan got a copy of *Who am I?* and gave it to me with his own hands.

In my village I was restless. I had all kinds of dreams. I would dream that a pious lady would come to take me to the Ashram, or that Bhagavan was enquiring after me and calling me. I longed to go again to Ramanashram. My uncle was leaving for Arunachala and I eagerly accepted his offer to take me with him. On my arrival I was asked to help in the kitchen because the lady in charge of cooking had to leave for her home. I gladly agreed, for it gave me a chance to stay at the Ashram and be near Bhagavan.

In the beginning I was not good at cooking. The way they cooked in the Ashram was different from ours, but Bhagavan was always by my side and gave me detailed instructions. His firm principle was that health depended on food and could be set right and kept well by proper diet. He also believed that fine grinding and careful cooking would make any food easily digestible. So we used to spend hours on grinding and stewing.

He would sit in the middle of the kitchen, watching and offering suggestions. The kitchen was small at that time and every time I needed to move I would go around him and take good care to have him on my right hand. Thus I would perform numberless pradakshinas (circumambulation) during the day. Was he not my god? Was I not fortunate to have him in the very middle of my kitchen?

He would taste all food before it was served to others. Thus it would be consecrated, for all food offered to God becomes holy.

He paid very close attention to proper cooking. I would give him food to taste while it was cooking, to be sure that the seasoning was just right. He was always willing to leave the hall to give advice in the kitchen. Amidst pots and pans he was relaxed and free. He would teach us numberless ways of cooking grains, pulses and vegetables, the staples of our South Indian diet. He would tell us stories from his childhood, or about his mother, her ways and how she cooked sampurnam (sweet filling). He would tell me: "Your cooking reminds me of Mother's cooking. No wonder our villages were so near." Whenever my going home was mentioned he would say: "Oh, our best lady cook wants to go away."

He was very strict with us in the kitchen. His orders were to be obeyed to the last detail. No choice was left to us to guess or try on our own. We had to do blindly as he taught us and, by doing so, be

convinced that he was always right and that we would never fail if we put our trust in him. When I think of it now, I can see clearly that he used the work in the kitchen as a background for spiritual training. He taught us to listen to every word of his and carry it out faithfully. He taught us that work is love for others, that we never can work for ourselves. By his very presence he taught us that we are always in the presence of God and that all work is his. He used cooking to teach us religion and philosophy.

In the kitchen he was the Master Cook, aiming at perfection in taste and appearance. One would think that he liked good food and enjoyed a hearty meal. Not at all. At dinner time he would mix up the little food he would allow to be put on his leaf – the sweet, the sour and the savoury, everything together – and gulp it down carelessly as if he had no taste in his mouth. When we would tell him that it was not right to mix such nicely made up dishes, he would say: “Enough of multiplicity. Let us have some unity.”

It was obvious that all the extraordinary care he gave to cooking was for our sakes. He wanted us to keep good health and to those who worked in the kitchen, cooking became a deep spiritual experience. “You must cover your vegetables when you cook them,” he used to say. “Then only they will keep their flavour and be fit for food. It is the same with the mind. You must put a lid over it and let it simmer quietly. Then only does a man become food fit for God to eat.”

One day some friends were going sight-seeing and I wanted to go with them. Shyly I went to Bhagavan and asked for leave to go. He looked not at all pleased and said: “I thought you could be depended on to cook for me properly. And now you want to go. Why are you always so restless? Anyhow, you are going, are you not? When will you be back?”

“I will surely be here within two days,” I promised. It took me four days to return. Bhagavan said: “You were sure you would return in two days. Now you know that nothing is in your hands. Going and coming is not yours to decide, my foolish child.” He taught me to stick to my job and make of it an offering to him.

One day he gave me a copy of *Ribhu Gita* and asked me to study it. I was not at all anxious to pore over a difficult text good only for learned pandits, and asked to be excused, saying that I did not understand a single word of it. “It does not matter that you do not understand,” he said. “Still it will be of great benefit to you.”

He would allow nothing to go to waste. Even a grain of rice or a mustard seed lying on the ground would be picked up, dusted carefully, taken to the kitchen and put in its proper tin. I asked him why he gave himself so much trouble for a grain of rice. He said: “Yes, this is my way. Everything is in my care and I let nothing go to waste. In these matters I am quite strict. If I was as I married, no woman could get along with me. She would run away.” On some other day he said: “This is the property of my father Arunachala. I have to preserve it and pass it on to his children.” He would use for food things we would not even dream of as edible. Wild plants, bitter roots and pungent leaves were turned under his guidance into delicious dishes.

Once a feast was being prepared for his birthday. Devotees sent food in large quantities. Some sent rice, some sugar, some fruits. Someone sent a huge load of brinjals and we ate brinjals day after day. The stalks alone made a big heap which was lying in a corner. Bhagavan asked us to cook them as a curry! I was stunned, for even cattle would refuse to eat such useless stalks. Bhagavan insisted that the stalks were edible, and we put them in a pot to boil along with dry peas. After six hours of boiling they were as hard as ever. We were at a loss what to do, yet we did not

dare to disturb Bhagavan. But he always knew when he was needed in the kitchen and he would leave the hall even in the middle of a discussion. A casual visitor would think that his mind was all on cooking. In reality his grace was on the cooks. As usual he did not fail us, but appeared in the kitchen. “How is the curry coming along?” he asked. “Is it a curry we are cooking? We are boiling steel nails!” I exclaimed, laughing. He stirred the stalks with the ladle and went away without saying anything. Soon after we found them quite tender. The dish was simply delicious and everybody was asking for a second helping. Bhagavan challenged the diners to guess what vegetable they were eating. Everybody praised the curry and the cook, except Bhagavan. He swallowed the little he was served in one mouthful like a medicine and refused a second helping. I was very disappointed, for I had taken so much trouble to cook his stalks and he would not even taste them properly.

The next day he was telling somebody: “Sampurnam was distressed that I did not eat her wonderful curry. Can she not see that everyone who eats is myself? And what does it matter who eats the food? It is the cooking that matters, not the cook or the eater. A thing done well, with love and devotion, is its own reward. What happens to it later matters little, for it is out of our hands.”

It was clear that Bhagavan did not want me to treat him differently from others and would set me right by refusing to touch the very thing I was so proud of and eager to serve.

In the evening, before I would leave the Ashram for the town to sleep, he would ask me what there was to be cooked the next day. Then, arriving at day break the next morning, I would find everything ready – vegetables peeled and cut, lentils soaked, spices ground, coconut scraped. As soon as he saw me in the kitchen, he would give detailed instructions about what should be cooked

and how to do it. He would then sit in the hall awhile and then return to the kitchen to see how things were moving, taste them now and then, and go back to the hall, to come again an hour or two later. It was so strange to see him so eager to cook and so unwilling to eat.

Once I prepared some semia (noodles) beautifully; they were fluffy and separate. He squeezed his share into a hard little ball and chewed it. "What is it, Bhagavan?" I asked. "You have spoiled your noodles. They are not meant to be squeezed like this." "Why all this separateness? Should not all be one indistinguishable whole?" He had ruined his meal to teach us a lesson in Vedanta!

As a cook, Bhagavan was perfect. He would never put in too much or too little salt or spices. As long as we followed his instructions, everything would go well with our cooking. But the moment we acted on our own we would be in trouble. Even then, if we sought his help, he would taste our brew and tell us what to do and what to add to make the food good for serving. We thus came to know fully that in dealing with him our only duty was to obey. This training became a part of our lives. By daily practice we learnt to have our minds always focused on Bhagavan. Whenever we were afraid, anxious or in pain, we had only to think of him and we felt his helping hand.

On my way from the town to the Ashram and back, I had to walk in the dark along a jungle path skirting the hill and I would feel afraid. Bhagavan knew this and once said to me, "Why are you afraid, am I not with you?" Chinnaswami, Bhagavan's brother and manager of the Ashram once asked me, when I came at dusk: "How could you come all alone? Were you not afraid?" Bhagavan rebuked him: "Why are you surprised? Was she alone? Was I not with her all the time?"

Once Subbalakshmiamma and myself decided to walk around the hill. We started very early, long before daybreak. We were quite afraid of the jungle – there were snakes and panthers and evildoers too. We soon saw a strange blue light in front of us. It was uncanny and we thought it was a ghost, but it led us along the path and soon we felt safe with it. It left us with daylight.

Another time, we two were walking around the hill early in the morning and chattering about our homes and relatives. We noticed a man following us at a distance. We had to pass through a stretch of lonely forest, so we stopped to let him pass and go ahead. He too stopped. When we walked, he also walked. We got quite alarmed, and started praying: “Oh, Lord! Oh, Arunachala! Only you can help us, only you can save us!” The man said suddenly: “Yes, Arunachala is our only refuge. Keep your mind on Him constantly. It is His light that fills all space. Always have Him in your mind.” We wondered who he was. Was he sent by Bhagavan to remind us that it is not proper to talk of worldly matters when going round the hill? Or was it Arunachala Himself in human disguise? We looked back, but there was nobody on the path! In so many ways Bhagavan made us feel that he was always with us, until the conviction grew and became a part of our nature.

Those were the days when we lived on the threshold of a new world – a world of ecstasy and joy. We were not conscious of what we were eating, of what we were doing. Time just rolled on noiselessly, unfelt and unperceived. The heaviest tasks seemed a trifle. We knew no fatigue. At home the least bit of work seemed tiresome and made us grumble, while here we worked all day and were always ready for more. Once Bhagavan came to the kitchen and saw the cooking done and everything cleared. He wondered that the day’s work was over so soon. “No mere human

hands were working here, Bhagavan. Good spirits helped us all the time," I said. He laughed: "The greatest spirit, Arunachala, is here, towering over you. It is He who works, not you."

Once I suggested that we should eat our dinner in the open because the moon was bright in the sky and there was quite a crowd of visitors. Bhagavan agreed and we arranged for food to be served in the open courtyard. Bhagavan was sitting in the middle and there was a strong and clear halo around his head. Was it the moonlight or some other cause? I cannot say, but the halo was there and many could see it. It made a deep impression on us and we talked about it for weeks.

Just before the meal somebody brought a big basketful of sweets, enough for all. Was it a coincidence or Bhagavan's wonderful play?

During their periods, women were not given Ashram food to eat or allowed to enter the Ashram. One month none of my relatives were there to help me, nor could I arrange for my food elsewhere, and I was starving. I sat in a stone shed in front of the Ashram where beggars usually spent the night. Bhagavan enquired about me and was told that I would not be coming for three days. "Where is she?"

"In the mantapam in front of the gate," was the reply.

"Bring her in and feed her decently," ordered Bhagavan. Everybody was shocked, for it was a clear breach of all rules and customs. "But she is impure," they protested.

"Who is pure and who is impure? All are one, all are the same!"

One needs to know the South Indian Brahmin to understand what a crisis Bhagavan had created. The rules about women in their periods were severe and rigidly enforced. To break them would mean to pollute the entire Ashram and face a public outcry.

It speaks a lot for the devotion of the inmates that they very reluctantly called me in. Bhagavan wanted to go to the kitchen to bring some food, but they asked him to wait. They brought some food and fed me in front of him. An ancient rule was broken and he sanctified the breach with his presence. He wanted to teach us the entire lesson that in spirituality the human being comes first and that compassion is the supreme law. Some understood, but many looked daggers at me or scolded me for polluting them all, by causing them to feed me.

Once I sought Bhagavan's permission to accompany some friends who were going on a pilgrimage to Kashi. He made fun of me. "What do you expect to find in Benares that you cannot find here?" he asked. "The Lord of Kashi is here. He is himself Arunachala. Why go in search of Him who is here with you?" Without his permission I would not go. The next morning he said, "Sampurnam, I had a dream. I saw you worshipping God in the Kashi Viswanath Temple." Was it a dream? I felt as if he took me there and gave me a chance to worship and brought me back.

I did go to Benares after Bhagavan left his body. When I entered the holy waters of the Ganga, I had a feeling of my body dissolving and myself floating up delightfully into the sky. For a few minutes I was quite unconscious of everything except of being carried away.

Once a deer found her way to Bhagavan and would not leave him. She would go with him up the hill and gambol around him and he would play with her for hours. About a year later she ran away into the jungle and some people must have pelted her with stones, for she was found severely wounded with her legs broken. She was brought to the Ashram. Bhagavan kept her near him, dressed her wounds and a doctor set her broken

bones. One midnight the deer crept onto Bhagavan's lap, snuggled up to him and died.

The next day Bhagavan told me that the deer had died. I said: "Some great soul came to you as a deer to gain liberation from your hands." Bhagavan said: "Yes, it must be so. When I was on the hill, a crow used to keep me company. He was a rishi in a crow's body. He would not eat from anybody's hand but mine. He died soon after."

Once a garuda, a white breasted eagle, which is considered holy in India, flew into the hall and sat on the top of a cupboard near Bhagavan. After a while it flew around him and disappeared. "He is a siddha (a saint endowed with supernatural powers) who came to pay me a visit," said Bhagavan most seriously.

The respect he showed to animals and birds was most striking. He really treated them as equals. They were served food first like some respected visitors, and if they happened to die in the Ashram, they would be given a decent burial and a memorial stone. The tombs of the deer, the crow and the cow Lakshmi can still be seen in the Ashram near the back gate.

Who knows in how many different forms animal, human and divine beings visited this embodiment of the Almighty! We, common and ignorant women, knew only the bliss of his presence and could not tear ourselves away from the Beloved of all.