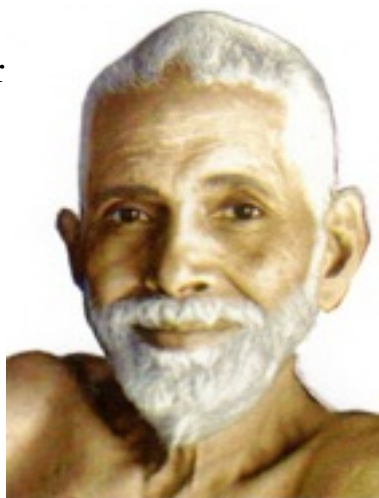


# The Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK

Newsletter

Autumn 2020



## Valedictory Edition

The normal programme of events and activities of the RMF UK are suspended for as long as the Coronavirus Pandemic lasts. Further developments will be posted on our Website.

Michael James is nevertheless holding talks and discussions in Zoom Satsangs on the second and last Saturday of each month. Anyone wishing to participate in Michael's discussions online should contact [enquiries@ramana-maharshi.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ramana-maharshi.org.uk). These discussions should be available as usual on the Sri Ramana Teachings channel on YouTube soon after each meeting.

Michael is currently answering questions in the Zoom Satsangs before beginning a series of talks about The Marital Garland of Letters (Aksara Mana Malai).

## Meditation and Study

A Silent Meditation Group currently meets by Zoom at 6.45 pm (and finishes at 8.45 pm) on Thursday evenings.

A Study Group also meets by Zoom every other Tuesday evening to study some of the Core Texts. We are currently going through Padamalai, the quintessence of Bhagavan's Teachings as selected and interpreted by Sri Muruganar.

Anyone who is interested, please contact us on [enquiries@ramana-maharshi.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ramana-maharshi.org.uk)

**NB Please look at the Notice on Page 21**

## Alan John Lawrence Jacobs

### 9th September 1929 - 25th July 2020

Alan was the second Chairman of the Foundation from 1993 to 2005 following the retirement of our first chairman, Squadron leader Nair Vasudevan. And then, after a short spell in India, he became our second President from 2006 until his death on the 25th July 2020. However, what is less well known is that he established and ran a small Ramana Group in Hampstead shortly after his first wife died in 1981, and it was this group that eventually became the present Foundation. So that it was Alan who was mainly responsible for our Foundation coming into being in the first place. For many of us he *was* the Foundation.

Born into a Jewish family in London on the 9th September 1929, his father was a colourful *bon viveur* who managed a prosperous family business (clothing & household furniture) of which he himself eventually became the head. He had fond and grateful memories of his father who was deeply religious and used to take him to the Synagogue (*shule*) every week from the age of five. When the war came in 1939, he and his sister were sent to stay for a year with business friends of his father in New York when his *shule* attendance temporarily lapsed.

After which he was sent to board at Malvern College in England, a school which was then mostly run by retired vicars who were all friends of the headmaster! Although Jewish, Alan enthusiastically joined in the the Christian worship at Malvern. Indeed he had always been interested in religion and had dedicated himself as a child to leading a spiritual life. The Headmaster of Malvern, whom he admired very much, was a truly spiritual Christian. When Alan joined his divinity class, the Head took a particular interest in him, recognising that his approach was both wholly valid and interestingly different. He was invited to the Head's discussion group as a consequence, the first time he became involved in any spiritual dialogue. He very much enjoyed his time at that school where he became, surprisingly for someone of his temperament, a member of the boxing team! Although he was also in the Chess team. After leaving school he did his two years National Service in the Army Intelligence Corps.

While still in his twenties, the question came to him seemingly from somewhere outside himself, "Who am I?". He realised later that this was Bhagavan calling him.

After his time in the army he returned to *shule* at the Synagogue in London. A new Rabbi had been appointed, Rabbi Louis Jacobs, an outstanding religious leader, a great theologian and profound thinker. Alan and his father, both of whom were prominent members of the Jewish community in London, became very close to Rabbi Louis, who himself very nearly became the Chief Rabbi of England. He and his father helped Rabbi Louis to

establish the New London Synagogue in St Johns Wood where Alan helped to produce and edit that reform movement's periodical, 'The Venture'.

In 1954 Alan married his childhood sweetheart, Claire. It was a happy marriage and they were blessed with a daughter and two sons. Alan had meanwhile taken over the management of the family business which included taking charge of a branch of the business in Aberdeen at one point. He worked in the family firm for about 20 years all told.



In 1957 he met Kenneth Walker, the biographer of Gurdjieff, as a result of which he and Claire became enthusiastic members of the Gurdjieff Society. He learned various practical skills in the Gurdjieff Society, including tree-planting and plumbing. He became, at one point, the personal assistant to Madame Lannen, a lady of some standing within the Society. He once drove Mme Lannen to do some shopping but inadvertently left her locked in the car. She chided him for this when he returned, to which he replied, "Well you are rather valuable!"

After Alan's father's death in 1969, which he felt very deeply, he felt released from his family duties but could not at first decide what to do next. Through a fortuitous set of circumstances, however, he found himself dealing in masterpieces of the late seventeenth century school of Dutch landscape painting. He opened a gallery in London's West End as well as writing a book on the subject which became a best seller in that field. He had a colourful career in the art world, selling pictures to various wealthy and eccentric European aristocrats in deals which occasionally involved clandestine frontier crossings in helicopters!

In about 1967 both Alan and his wife came under the influence of J Krishnamurti as a result of which he became part of the K scene for the next ten years. He eventually ran a K study group in Hampstead, in which some of the subsequent RMF UK members were also attendees.



On a trip to Moscow, Alan went down with hepatitis and it was while he was recovering that Claire brought him a Yoga journal with a picture of Ramana in it. This had such an effect on him that he eventually re-dedicated his spiritual life to Bhagavan. He had anyway begun to feel by this time that K's teachings were somewhat cerebral. Although he had previously been aware of Ramana's Teachings, he had until then felt that those Teachings were too advanced for him. Someone had remarked to him that they demanded a certain type of commitment and that it was one thing to follow them in India but quite another in Europe, a sentiment which may resonate with some of us.

Claire died suddenly and unexpectedly in 1981, leaving Alan utterly bereft. After which Douglas Harding, Jean Klein and Swami Venkatesananda became important to him. He found Jean Klein particularly helpful in his bereavement. He also continued to travel to Saanen to hear K speak, although Bhagavan had by now become the *sruti* note in all these other teachings. At a Jean Klein meeting when there was a discussion about surrender, the speaker stressed the importance of 'non-doership', to which an elderly lady objected: "I disagree with everything you say. To get up off the floor I have to use my elbows ...". Alan later asked this lady who she was. "Lucia Osborne!" was the reply, after which they became friends and Lucy Osborne attended some of the early Ramana meetings.

Now on his own, Alan moved into a cottage in Hampstead from where he began to run a small Ramana group which in turn formed the nucleus of the present Foundation. A devotee who was a Jungian therapist, Buntie Wills, made her rooms in St John's Wood available for these meetings and it was at about this time that another member of the group, Squadron Leader Nair Vasudevan who had known Bhagavan, took over leadership of the group.

After Buntie's death the group moved to new premises in Brondesbury, North London.

In about 1990 the Ashram authorities decided that the Ramana Group should be put on an official footing, following which the Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK was inaugurated at a meeting at the Bharata Vidya Bhavan, West Kensington, on the 12th August 1990. This meeting was led by Sri Ganesan, one of Bhagavan's great-nephews, with Alan, Vasudevan and Annie Elkins also taking part. Paul Turner was also there. Bhajans were sung and flower petals scattered. It was a wonderful event. Ganesan was appointed our first President with Vasudevan as Chair, Alan as Deputy Chair and Annie as our first Hon. Secretary and Treasurer. We began to meet for Satsangs in Brondesbury on the second Saturday of each month and these monthly Satsangs have continued ever since without a break.

Soon after this, Alan and Vasudevan began to produce the Foundation's distinguished periodical, *Self Enquiry*, and we began the process of applying for charitable status. But those early years were not without difficulties. Vasudevan resigned in about 1993 for personal reasons, following which Alan took over as Chair and appointed Alasdair Black as Deputy Chair. Alasdair, a lawyer, had been helping with our application for charitable status. Jane Adams, a very talented artist who had, amongst other things, painted a portrait of a member of the Royal family, also began to help Alan to produce *Self-Enquiry*. Alan appointed Jane 'Hon-sec' and 'Hon-Tres'. She and Alan married in 1998 and their Flat in West Hampstead became the HQ of the Foundation for some years.

We began to hold our Satsangs at the Friends Meeting House in Hampstead in about 1996. At about this time Alan, along with many others in the Foundation, became interested in a variety of Neo-Advaitic teachings and there was a great deal of cross-visiting, networking and sharing with other groups. Which caused difficulties in our relationship with the Ashram. Alasdair resigned in 1997 because he felt that we had lost our focus, to be replaced by Sarah Farrand as Deputy Chair. We nevertheless continued to receive visits from Sri Ganesan, Swami Ramananda, Nannagaru, Francis Lucille and many others. There were also various social events at this time. Then Alan began to visit the Ashram again after a gap of some years and Alasdair to attend the Satsangs again in 2004.

*Self-Enquiry* meanwhile grew in size with contributions from Ganesan, Douglas Harding, David Frawley, Hans Heimer, Francis Lucille and many others, together with a lot of poetry by Alan and illustrations by Jane. She and Alan put a huge amount of effort into the production, editing and publishing of that Magazine, such that when *Self-Enquiry* came to an end in about 2004 there was a great deal of disappointment and regret.

Then, in 2004, when Alan was about 75, he and Jane split up and he decided to spend the rest of his life in India, close to Arunachala and the Ashram.



However, he became ill in September of the following year and had to return to England, at which point he took over as President of the Foundation with Alasdair as Chair. Since when he lived, successively, in two Old Peoples Homes in Edgware and Hampstead Garden Suburb. He remained very active during most of this time, leading many of the Satsangs and attending Committee meetings in which his input was especially valuable.



However, he started to get seriously ill in about 2015. A turning point in his illness came three or four years ago when he had an operation to have a heart pacemaker fitted, which went slightly wrong and meant that he had to have another operation to have it put right. He was never happy with that pacemaker which caused him a lot of pain and discomfort and he subsequently regretted that he had ever agreed to have it fitted. After more spells in hospitals he finally went into a Nursing Care Home in Cricklewood in about February of this year, just before lockdown started in March. Which meant that we were no longer able to visit him. We nevertheless continued to phone him for as long as we could until this too became impossible when his voice became so faint that we couldn't understand what he was trying to say. Since when we continued to send him cards and letters to let him know that he was by no means forgotten by us.

Alan was also, amongst other things a scholar and the author of a number of books, including ones on Bhagavan, Gandhi, The Dalai Lama and The Legend of Jesus in India. In addition to which he wrote and published a great deal of poetry and wrote various articles, including ones for The Mountain Path, *Self-Enquiry* and this Newsletter.

It also needs to be said that the way Alan's daughter, Laura, looked after him in the last years of his life was little short of heroic, especially from the time when she flew out at very short notice to be with him in India when he first became ill in September 2006. From where she took him back to London and had him to stay in her small flat before finding some excellent homes for him to live in before he started going into hospital and then into the Nursing Care Home. About a week before he died she and her brother Graham got the staff of the Home to bring him out to the front door where she almost had to shout at him, "I love you Dad!", which he seemed to understand and made him smile. He had a Ramana book in his hand.

He died a week after that at 10.45 pm on Saturday 25th July and we understand that his death was quick and painless. He is survived by his daughter Laura, his two sons Graham and Keith and six grandchildren.

Alan's kindness, his quiet humility, his warmth, his accessibility and friendliness, his availability to help in any personal situation, his charm and sense of humour - these and many other qualities gained for him a very special place in our affections. We miss you, Alan, and we are grateful to you. We wish you every good thing wherever you are now.

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**Paula Marvelly writes:** I first met Alan in my mid-twenties at the Ramana Maharshi Foundation in London, of which he later became its exemplary president. Over the years, Alan was a mentor to me, owing to his profound integrity and inexhaustible knowledge, as well as being the kindest and most compassionate of friends.

In 2014, Alan and I, together with the film director, Jean R. Dedieu, all stayed together for a month in the Ramanasramam, India, in order to make the documentary, *Jnani*, based on the life of Sri Ramana, with Alan being instrumental in writing the script and giving guidance on the overall production. The film was very well received and is an excellent introductory resource for the teachings of that great Indian guru.

Concurrently, I also made a black and white "moving image" feature, *A Singular Man*, with Alan as its protagonist. He gave an impeccable performance of a Renaissance man, steeped in learning and the contemplative life. In many scenes, he exudes such a deep sense of stillness, I was humbled and honoured to be able to capture the fundamental essence of silence in human form directly onto celluloid.

Alan was the quintessential English man of letters and a perfect gentleman. I shall always have an enduring image of him sporting a Panama hat, cravat and cane, with a cup of tea close to hand. He had an aura of wise humility and was someone with whom you could speak honestly and freely about life and issues pertaining to the spiritual path. Everyone respected and loved him wherever he went; he was always surrounded by companions, be it at the Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai or the Sri Ramana meetings in London. I shall miss him with all my heart.

**Sean Campbell:** I was very sad to hear of Alan's death, the world feels an emptier place without him. I joined the RMF in the mid 1990's when he and Jane together were guiding the organisation, and leading it with notable flair. He was an inspirational figure throughout that period and well on into the twenty-first century, steering it through waters both calm and choppy at differing times.

I will always remember his kindness, courtesy and unfailing good humour and, in particular, I remain appreciative of the way in which he led the Foundation through an amazing period when he became, quite literally, "Mr Advaita" in the UK - inviting, organising and hosting an astonishing stream of Advaitic and non-dual teachers to London.

It was a rich time, a shining time when a tangible stream of Grace flowed through Alan and the Foundation. Almost weekly Satsangs with one teacher or another turned the normally staid atmosphere of the Hampstead Meeting House into a churning hotbed of shakti and energy. One teacher followed upon the heels of another, each giving their own unique flavour of Satsang to Foundation members and others – almost all of them facilitated by Alan.

The Ashram, it seems, felt that Alan was straying beyond the confines of his remit as head of the Foundation and there was some truth in that. Relations with the Ashram were therefore challenging at this time. But the fact remains that literally hundreds of people, many of them never exposed to non-duality before, came to these Satsangs and found inspiration and silence, and were either launched onto their own paths or offered a new and profound vision. And it was Alan who made it all happen.

For myself I also will not forget when Alan introduced me to Rhada Ma, while we were both in Tiruvannamalai one winter. A quite extraordinary, free and evolved being, she seemed to live by no societal rules or values that I could discern, instead exuding a spontaneous and immediately accessible warmth and love. To look into her eyes was to fall into a profound inner silence, and she left the world all too prematurely when she consciously decided to drop the body while she was still so young. She had a profound impact on Alan too.

Subsequently in later years Alan turned his focus to Bhagavan more exclusively and became, in my eyes at least, an example of how a disciple of the Maharshi should be.

He is surely absorbed back into Arunachala where his essence can now abide with other notable figures of Bhagavan's teachings. His legacy to all of us is exceptional and an era has ended with his passing.

**Paul Turner:** I knew Alan since the early 70's, initially through an interest in Krishnamurti, socialising each year at the happy Brockwood annual gatherings and then in London throughout that decade at discussion groups hosted at various locations including Alan's then home in Hampstead Garden Suburb. Later, when Alan's interest turned to Ramana Maharishi, 3 or 4 of us would meet to meditate together and discuss the teachings which through Alan



eventually led to the Foundation being formed. I must say that at that time the teachings were lost on me but I greatly valued sitting with others in silence.

Alan was always so courteous and friendly, even amongst some of us who looking back on it were somewhat 'rough diamonds'! He was always welcoming, a peacemaker, one for resolution. This was amply displayed when hosting the Ramana Saturday discussion session where at the end he was always able to summarise proceedings, bringing in the various points of view (some of which might have been expressed in a heated manner) to the satisfaction of all.

One year during the Brockwood gatherings, Alan set off with a mutual friend, Sonia Huisman, each in search of overnight accommodation so as to attend the following day's talk. After searching high and low the only thing they could find was a double room with two single beds which in desperation they took. Sonia recounted the next day how Alan, ever the gallant, had shut himself in the wardrobe whilst she got ready for bed! Oh to have been a fly on the wall! And I never did find out how big that wardrobe was ...

On a personal note, the thing that lives with me most is the following: In the 80's sometime I had a temporary job working in Alan's gallery for a couple of weeks to do with a special exhibition. One day when we happened to be alone, out of the blue he offered me some fatherly advice which touched me deeply. It wasn't so much the advice that did this but rather the care he showed in doing so. I think that when this happens it is a moment out of time and stays with one, as it has, along with the affection it engendered in me towards him.

In the latter days of his failing health Alan was fond of saying that he was 'in the departure lounge'. Well then - thank you and go well old chap, go well.

*Jane Adams:*

TEMPO

Dear Poet Philosopher!  
you're an ocean liner on the seas  
not a jet plane.

You belong to the Victorian  
leisure eccentric class  
and you deal in seventeenth century  
Dutch gold skies.

You move by hunch, your advances  
missing out the modern way.  
You are lissome with your romances.  
Like a China snake they shine, and fall away.

No scrape  
has quite the nerve  
yourself to drape.

You're sufficiently moved on the whole, to regulate  
your affairs from red into black.

Clearing your daily slate  
your warm, flamboyant hand no lack,  
nothing piles up,  
yet in the deep  
unruffled, the long drawn out and hidden marge  
moves with rabbinic inscrutability -  
storms in tilting teacups to submerge.

Your tendency with life  
is almost infinitely elastic.  
In love with, and un-frightened of your wife,  
her naivety sometimes fantastic,

immovably and willingly stubborn,  
with a swing of long arms wide, your knack  
to welcome it all, is a splash of water borne  
from a duck's straight back.

To wash the dishes and care for the cat  
are polite devoted tasks.  
You are not touched by any of that,  
for deep in your noble squares sublime basks  
an esoteric quicksilver Knight  
whose rhyme into metre quick to appreciate  
Castling his King and exchanging port for Poet  
'pon measured modes of black and white  
doth square his Circle bright  
in such way that patient Lord Yama might,  
receiving you into his House, with abashed insight,  
himself the Ultimate Question ask - Who Am I?

Dear Poet Philosopher Spouse,  
my Alchemystic Solitude  
is cradled like an online mouse  
in your August Be-At-itude.

Just one turn it takes  
of that great ruby Stone  
on your little finger  
for the knot in your hanky carefully tied,  
to forget the ropes and snakes

and know that  
all is well,  
all is One.  
Nothing matters and  
who cares.

### **Some of Alan's published books:**

Seventeenth Century Dutch and Flemish Masters, a Collectors guide (McGraw Hill)  
Mystical Verse (Element books)  
Mysterious London (XLibris Corp)  
When Jesus lived in India (Watkins books)  
The Ocean of Wisdom (O Books)  
Peace of Mind: Words of Wisdom to Comfort and Inspire (Bellwether books, USA)  
Sri Ramana Maharshi (Ashram publication)  
Eutopia the Gnostic Land Of Prester John, a Novella" (O Books in 2010)

### **In the Watkins Masters of Wisdom Series:**

Gandhi  
His Holiness The Dalai Lama  
Thoreau - The Transcendent Nature of the Modern World  
The Wisdom of Balsekar  
The Spiritual Wisdom of Marcus Aurelius

### **In the Watkins Sacred Texts Series which Alan abridged and modernised:**

Plato's Republic  
The Principal Upanishads  
The Bhagavad Gita - a Poetic Transcreation  
Ramana, Shankara and The Forty Verses  
Tales from Rumi  
Native American Wisdom  
The Essential Gnostic Gospels

**There were also many Anthologies and Collections of his Poetry, including 'Sonnets for Awakening'.**

## Sri Venkataraman Sundara Ramanan

29th May 1934 - 21st July 2020



Sri V S Ramanan was born to TN Ventataraman and Nagalakshmi on the 29th May 1934 (*jyestha nakshatra*). He came to live in Tiruvannamalai at the age of three when his father started service in the Ashram. He thus got to spend his formative years in Bhagavan's presence. The family was living in the town at that time but by July 1949 they moved into their newly constructed house in Ramana Nagar. Early photos with Bhagavan reveal the rich lives the children enjoyed in the presence of Bhagavan.

Sundaram studied engineering and a BE (Electrical Engineering) from Madras University in 1957. He married Sushila and went to Germany where he got a diploma in power engineering with special reference to chemical plants and worked for Siemens. He later served 13.5 years in M/s Neyveli Lignite Corporation Neyveli (1957 - 71) and 21 years (1971 - 92) in M/s Indian Petrochemicals Corporation in Baroda as General Manager. In 1992 he took early retirement and came to settle in Tiruvannamalai to assist his father in managing the Ashram. In 1994 President TN Venkataraman, already 80 years old, decided to take sannyas and turned over the leadership of the Ashram to Sundaranna who was installed as the third President.

The Ashram prospered under his guidance and he oversaw the digitisation of the bookstall and publication departments as well as the establishment of the Ashram Archives, built to house and preserve the 1,500 photographic negatives of Bhagavan among other precious items. Over time the demand for more living accommodation led Sundaranna to construct the Post Office quarters and the accommodation just opposite as well as Achalam just a few

doors down from the Presidents Compound. By the mid-1990s the Old Dining Hall was no longer able to serve the growing number of visitors on ordinary weekdays except by multiple sittings so the decision was made to make an extension abutting the Old Dining Hall on its northern side. The new annex was completed in the middle of 1998. Sundaranna also oversaw the renovation and expansion of Morvi Compound in 2010. By 2009 he established a modern dispensary in the Ashram proper as well as the new



library and auditorium. Meanwhile, construction projects and renovations in various locations included Bhagavan's birth house in Tiruchuli as well as the Tirukoilur and Tiruchuzhi Temple renovations and Mahakumbabhashekams.

Sundaram's first order of business was service to devotees and the Ashram. He took this to heart and sought to carry out his sacred duty with the utmost sincerity. The following personal note that he dictated to his assistant in charge in 2012 testifies to this:

*I have committed myself to the conviction that everything within the Ashram is performed by Sri Bhagavan including the so-called inmate's functions which are also ordained by him. He is the only one within the precincts of the Ashram. Nobody can treat anyone else well or ill here, for Bhagavan is the only doer here. Since March 2009 I have begun to practice living in the NOW as Bhagavan has declared things to be ordained. Such a practice will, I feel, keep me ever at his Feet.*

Sundaram surrendered to Bhagavan and wiped clean the slate in order to live only in Bhagavan. He was absorbed in Bhagavan as gently as he lived his life at 9.21 am on the 21st July, wearing his characteristic sweet smile. He is survived by his wife Sushila, his son Anand, his daughter Aruna, his son-in-law Ramkumar, his two daughters-in-law Ranjani and Nitya and six grandchildren.





*The above obituary is taken from the latest special edition of the Ashram's eNewsletter, Saranagati. Apart from the obituary itself, about 70 reminiscences, memories and vignettes of the life of Sundaram Anna were also published, from which the following is a selection:*

It is not surprising that I regard my father as my role model in worldly life and in sadhana. Most daughters would. What touched me as I received messages of solace and commiseration from devotees, college friends and ex-colleagues of Appa's, my high school friends and friends of my brothers was that Appa played a significant role in their lives as well. What tribute can one pay to a father who shaped her, mentored her and continues to do so?

Since Appa would shy away from anything complimentary, I will say something briefly about one of Appa's role models.

Sri Alagappa Chettiar: Appa used to quote Alagappa Chettiar who is the founder of the engineering college that Appa and Mani chitappa attended, as an epitome of generosity. He would often quote Alagappa Chettiar who used to say that "It is all well and fine to give away money when one has it, but better to borrow and donate when one does not."

Another of my father's great influences was Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji's commitment to truth made Appa fall in love with the concept of what one thinks, says and does should be in total alignment. Following Gandhiji's lead, he constantly watched whether he was wavering from the truth. Honesty when practised truly keeps one humble as one can see how insignificant one is in the larger scheme of things. One has to be courageous to practise truth for everything you say or may do may be anything but popular or pleasant. Honesty and humility also mean that ideas can be revised, and that revising them is not diluting leadership, but coming closer to it. I am truly thankful to my father in bearing witness to this and for his role model in shaping my life.

*Aruna Ramanan*

Apart from ensuring that I took part in Ashram activities, Sundaram Anna gave me freedom to establish the Ashram Archives and expand the gosala which he so loved, introducing select Indian breed cows like Gir, Tarparkar and Kangeyam and in carrying out eco-friendly works and developing flora and fauna 'projects'. We have now in place effective 'micro and macro water-harvesting' arrangements, a totally organic farm, bee-keeping and gardens

embellished with more than 150 varieties of trees, plants and herbs to the joy of increasing numbers of butterflies and birds including the peacocks.

*V Subramanian*



My father-in-law was not only an affectionate father figure to me but also to others who visited the Ashram. I loved his beatific smile, his simplicity and his always being ‘in the moment’. What I learnt from him was complete unquestioning Guru Bhakti.

He used to say that he never asked Bhagavan for anything, but if something was bothering him he would go to the Shrine and ponder the matter and it would be resolved in due course.

Several devotees have told me that in their first few visits to the Ashram they never knew that he was the President; they just thought he was another devotee. He believed that one comes to the Ashram to be with Bhagavan and soak in the atmosphere and that one should not get distracted by other things, so he did not expect praise or even acknowledgment.

For me, he will always be the true devotee who did his work joyously with absolute sincerity, integrity and humility, knowing full well that it is Bhagavan and only Bhagavan who makes things happen.

*Dr Nitya Ramanan*

I recall a very earnest young boy who once told me that he assumed I must be the oldest of us children because I was so bossy! Apparently I used to boss him around, something which I deny categorically ... what me? bossy? Unimaginable!

How old memories come back as time goes by.

Once, many years later in our adulthood, we fell out over something ... after all this time I cannot even remember what it was ... but we were both upset. Sundaram rang me up about it and I said. “Sundaram, please don’t shout at me.” He replied, “You are my sister. If I can’t shout at you, then who can I shout at?” I started to laugh, and he won his point.

I will always remember him as my playmate from days gone by. He was a good friend then and remained so even when we had grown up. *Kitty Osborne*

There are moments when I am overcome with sadness that I cannot express my love for my grandfather in person, but I try to remember all of the memories we shared that unequivocally demonstrated our bond. Thatha was one of the few people with whom I felt comfortable asking philosophical or religious questions, like “Why is Vishnu’s skin blue?” He allowed me to question and never shied away from these deeper discussions. Moreover, I will always be filled with a feeling of warmth when I think of his disarming smile, his firm and loving hugs, and the way he peddled chocolates and Starbursts to me as if it was our little secret. I will miss his presence in my life but I am thankful to have shared these moments with someone so extraordinary.

*Swaroopa Ramkumar*

I have known my father-in-law since 1986 and am blessed to have known him. I have always admired his love and devotion to both his family as well as his extended Ramana family of devotees of Sri Bhagavan. He was always present to greet and help devotees who visited the Ashram. He always had a beautiful smile and kind words for anyone who had a question or doubt. He was also very loving and attentive to his immediate family and I immediately felt that I was part of his family. I am also grateful to him for introducing me to Bhagavan.

The other quality of his that I admire and try to emulate was his scrupulous honesty. He would not bend the rules for anyone, including his family. To him everyone was equal, regardless of whether they were family or not. This quality is what made him the ideal President of the Ashram. Bhagavan put him in this place to maintain the sanctity of Ramanasramam.

*Dr Ramkumar Sankaran*

In earlier years, very sweetly, Sundaram Anna would sometimes call me ‘Saradamma’ as Ganesan Anna had once christened me. There were some personal moments that Anna shared with me and some deep spiritual insights as well. He had great love for his family, for his wife, whom we call Manni, and for the children. He once told me:

*Before meeting Susila and getting married I was first taken to ‘see’ another ‘girl’ as the custom is in Tamil Nadu. As you know, in those days, eligible bachelors were taken to meet their prospective brides-to-be. A large retinue from the boy’s house would go to the girl’s place. The girl would be ‘shown’ to us for a few minutes when she came out and placed some eats before us and prostrated to the elders.*

*What can one discern about a girl in that amount of time? But I ‘rejected’ that first proposal and said I didn’t want to marry that girl. I don’t know why I did so. I am sure there was nothing wrong with her or dislikable about her., but somehow in that moment I did not feel that I liked her. However, after saying ‘no’ I was filled with great remorse. I thought my action had been cruel and would have caused hurt and suffering to that girl. Then and there I made up my mind that no matter who the next girl I was taken to see was, no matter how she looked or how she behaved, I would say ‘Yes’, I would agree to marry her. At this point, Anna stopped and said with an affectionate smile, looking at*

*Sushila Manni who was somewhere across the room, 'The next girl I was shown was Sushila.'*

Through this incident Anna showed me how soft-hearted he was, that he would melt easily at someone's sorrow and at the same time how surrendered he was as well. He had chosen for himself the path of total acceptance and Bhagavan brought him a gem of a wife who would not only be deeply devoted to him but also absolutely surrendered to Bhagavan and to the service of his devotees.

*Dr Sarada, editor of 'The Ramana Way'*

I have had contact with Sri Ramanasramam for the past eighty years. I first came to the Ashram in 1940 with my father, mother and two younger sisters. I was about 25 years old then. Although Sri V S Ramanan was younger than me, he always called me 'Akka'.

After being installed as President he proved himself an able administrator but with gentle manners. He was soft-spoken, humble, considerate and helpful to fellow devotees. Many visitors did not know that he was the President of the Ashram until they saw him sitting in his chair attending to his office work. He was loved and respected by one and all from the workers to the distinguished visitors from India and abroad.

Though his physical presence is no longer there in the Ashram now, he will always be remembered as an efficient and faithful head of the Ashram, an ardent devotee of Bhagavan and a loveable human being.

*Mahalakshmi Suryanandam*

Another of Appa's role models was the cow Lakshmi. Amongst other devotees of Bhagavan, Appa used to talk about her the most. He would choke when narrating Bhagavan's explanation for not being with Lakshmi until she breathed her last while he stayed until the end with his mother, Alagammal. "Lakshmi only knew Bhagavan."

*Aruna Ramanan*

Sundaram moved with devotees as one of them, never as one with authority or even as first among equals. Like his siblings and children, he had a fine intellect. He had an engineering degree and retired as a high official in Government with a clean record. At the times when he was loath to reverse a decision he was most often proved to be right. This was because he surrendered to Bhagavan, subjecting his judgment to Bhagavan's will.

Everybody called Sundaram 'good' because natural goodness was his most striking character trait. He knew that all human beings, including himself, were fallible. He thus let Bhagavan, the infallible One, run the Ashram while Sundaranna was keen to merely be his instrument. To him, Bhagavan was not just a granduncle whom he knew as a youth and whose affection he had received but a Guru who is *saakshaat Parabrahma*. Nothing short of undivided devotion to him would do for Sundaram.

Still waters run deep. Sundaramji's bhakti rarely took a verbal form. It was seen in every moment of his life. He never belittled other masters but, like Swami Niranjanananda, Mastan Saheb, Murugana Swami and others, he knew only Bhagavan.

*K V Subramonyan publications*



There were occasions when I would consult with Sundaranna about an Ashram project and he would make a decision that I was sure was the wrong decision. He was the President, so what could I say? But here's the thing, each time this happened, I would later discover that he had made the right decision after all. I marvel over this because these decisions, as best I could tell, were not borne of the intellect or rationality. How was he doing it? I never asked him, but I began to suspect that he simply made some, if not all, of his decisions based on intuition. He simply let what came into his mind in the moment be the final word, trusting that it was coming from Bhagavan. I reflected at length on this gift, if we might call it that, and tried to imitate him but found that such intuitive trust is not something one can acquire all at once by a force of will. Rather, it would seem to have come about over long years and decades, perhaps by virtue of steady prayer and devotion to Bhagavan, and perhaps too, by an abiding commitment to living by Ramana standards as much as one is able, a sort of ongoing 'sadhana of daily life', which would express itself in how one treats others, how one speaks to and about others, and so forth. Witnessing again and again Sundaranna's 'gift' at work in the practical sphere of Ashram projects, I came to trust his intuition as much as he did.

*Michael Highburger, publications*

Before setting off on every motorcycle pilgrimage I'd go to see Sundaram for his blessing. He'd always say, "Oh, you know I don't like you going on these trips. Please be safe, it's dangerous out there on these Indian roads, I might never see you again." Then we'd laugh, and I'd promise to be safe and return in a few weeks, and he'd heartily wave me off.

When requesting help in identifying old devotees appearing in archival photos, Sundaram would always have a tale ready about the person or people in the photos, talking about what Bhagavan said or did. It was timeless when he spoke like that.

*John Maynard, archives*



One morning, by sheer happenstance as is common in Ramanasramam, Sundar Anna and I found ourselves momentarily at the back entrance to the kitchen, soon after breakfast. It was another of those Bhagavan instances that pop up seemingly out of nowhere. A memory was triggered in Sundar Anna's mind, as fresh as the day it happened to him, and his face was alight as he recounted it to me. He pointed to the large mortars embedded in the floor of the kitchen's eastern veranda and said to me: "You know, Bhagavan used to sit there, grinding all the leftover bits and pieces cast aside by the cooks while preparing the food. That morning Bhagavan had just finished making his chutney and we all eagerly lined up to receive our share. I was towards the front of the queue as Bhagavan himself gave a spoonful equally to each person. When my turn came, he put a small amount in the palm of my hand. It was so delicious! I wanted more, so I promptly re-joined the back of the queue. When I stood before Bhagavan again, he chided me kindly as he waved me aside: "Haven't you had your share already?"

*Dev Gogoi*



When I first became editor of the *Mountain Path*, there was some doubt as to whether I was capable of the job. One evening just before Tamil Parayana, when everyone was seated in front of Bhagavan's Samadhi waiting for the starting time at 6.30 pm, I was standing near the stone railings round the Samadhi where the bell hangs for the pujas. Sundaram got up from his place for the chanting and walked over to where I was standing. For the next three minutes or so we engaged in a general conversation about nothing in particular. He then walked back to his place and the Parayanas began. Everyone in the hall was aware of what happened and its significance. This was typical of Sundaram who did things in a low-key way. He showed his support for me without uttering a word.

*Chris Quilkey*

Two particular incidents stand out in my mind in relation to Sundaram Anna.

The first was when my wife became ill in September 2004. Sundaram just couldn't do enough to help us. Apart from asking Michael Highburger to go with us to the Apollo Hospital in Chennai (Michael's part in what we went through was particularly helpful) he gave me two large containers stuffed full of rupee notes in case we needed any extra money!

And once, when I was waiting to see him in the office about something or other, a westerner suddenly marched through in front of me and started shouting at him loudly and rudely: "You know that the water purifying unit in the dining hall is not working! This is very dangerous! You are responsible for this! What are you doing about it?" I can't remember what Sundaram's reply was, but when I went in to see him after this he was completely unruffled and calmly said in his usual quiet way, "Oh I'm used to this sort of thing. We are having it mended as quickly as possible anyway. What more can we do?"

He used to give out sweets to the children before the evening Parayanas! It was wonderful seeing him doing that!

But in the end it is the personality of dear Sundaram that we remember - his gentleness, his humility, his kindness, his quiet dignity and grace - and that smile - there are smiles and smiles, but his was something else again - that gentle, sweet, compassionate smile. *Alasdair Black*

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## Membership

Owing to the fact that we have not been able to make collections at any of our Satsangs since Lockdown began in March of this year (which means that we have had no income since then) we are reinstating our Annual Membership to £10 per annum, or to whatever you can afford, and £50 (or more) for Life Membership. Any other donations would also be welcome.

To pay for your membership or to donate, please contact us via [enquiries@ramana-maharshi.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ramana-maharshi.org.uk)

### Books for sale

Some of our stock of books are still accessible and so we can offer them for sale. The proceeds of sale will go to the Foundation.

1. “Be as you Are. The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi”, edited by David Godman. £10.
2. ‘The Power of the Presence, Part 2. David Godman. £10.
3. ‘Padamalai, Teachings of Ramana Maharshi recorded by Muruganar. £12.
4. The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi. £10.

Postage will be charged separately depending on the weight of the package. If you would like to purchase any of these books, please email [enquiries@ramana-maharshi.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ramana-maharshi.org.uk) stating how you would like to pay and we will be in touch with you. We have more books in stock but they cannot unfortunately be made available for the time being.

## Bhagavan and a dog

At the inauguration of the Foundation on 12 August 1990, Sri Ganesan told a story about Bhagavan and a dog. Bhagavan often said that many of the animals living in and around the Ashram were the reincarnations of former devotees. A particularly mangy and disreputable dog once began to appear in the Ashram and tried to approach Bhagavan. But his minders would never let it get anywhere near him. One evening he didn't appear at the usual time after his ablutions, so one of his minders went off to look for him, only to find him sitting on the ground being licked all over by this dog! The minder rushed in to shoo the poor creature away but Bhagavan said crossly, "Leave him alone. He's been longing to do this for days but you wouldn't let him. Go away and leave us alone!"

## Arunachala Animal Sanctuary and Rescue Shelter



**These two YouTube items give you an idea of what the Sanctuary - in effect a hospital for sick and injured animals - looks and feels like:**

<https://youtu.be/V4on7cvbMhE>

<https://youtu.be/4P-K5rHHe3c>

**Google: [Arunachala Animal Sanctuary](#) for the Sanctuary's Website and Newsletter as well as for more accounts and clips of rescues plus all kinds of other information. You can contribute directly via a portal in the Website or via Global Giving. Do please continue to give generously, and thank you so much for your generosity to date.**

