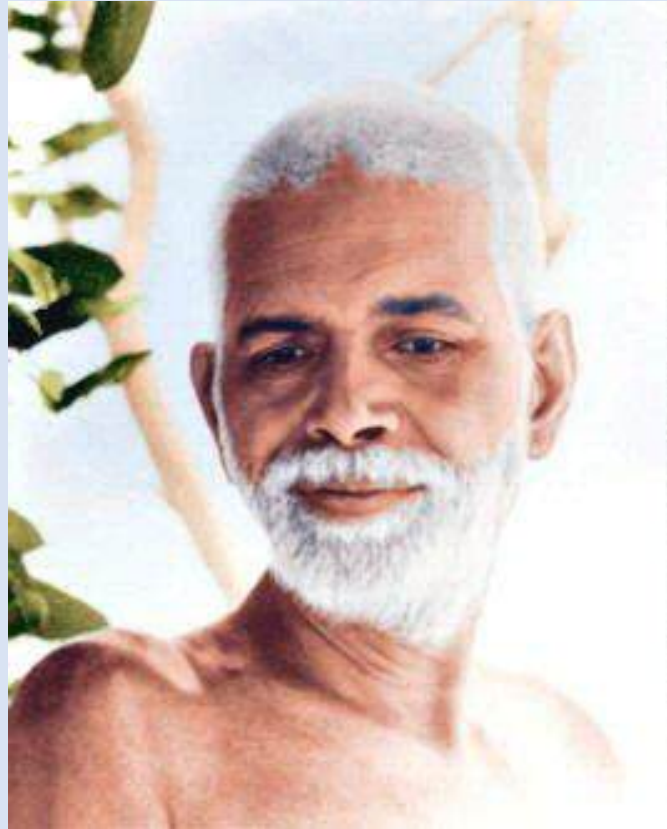


# NEWSLETTER

Ramana Maharshi Foundation U.K.  
Autumn-Winter 2024





## Newsletter Autumn-Winter 2024

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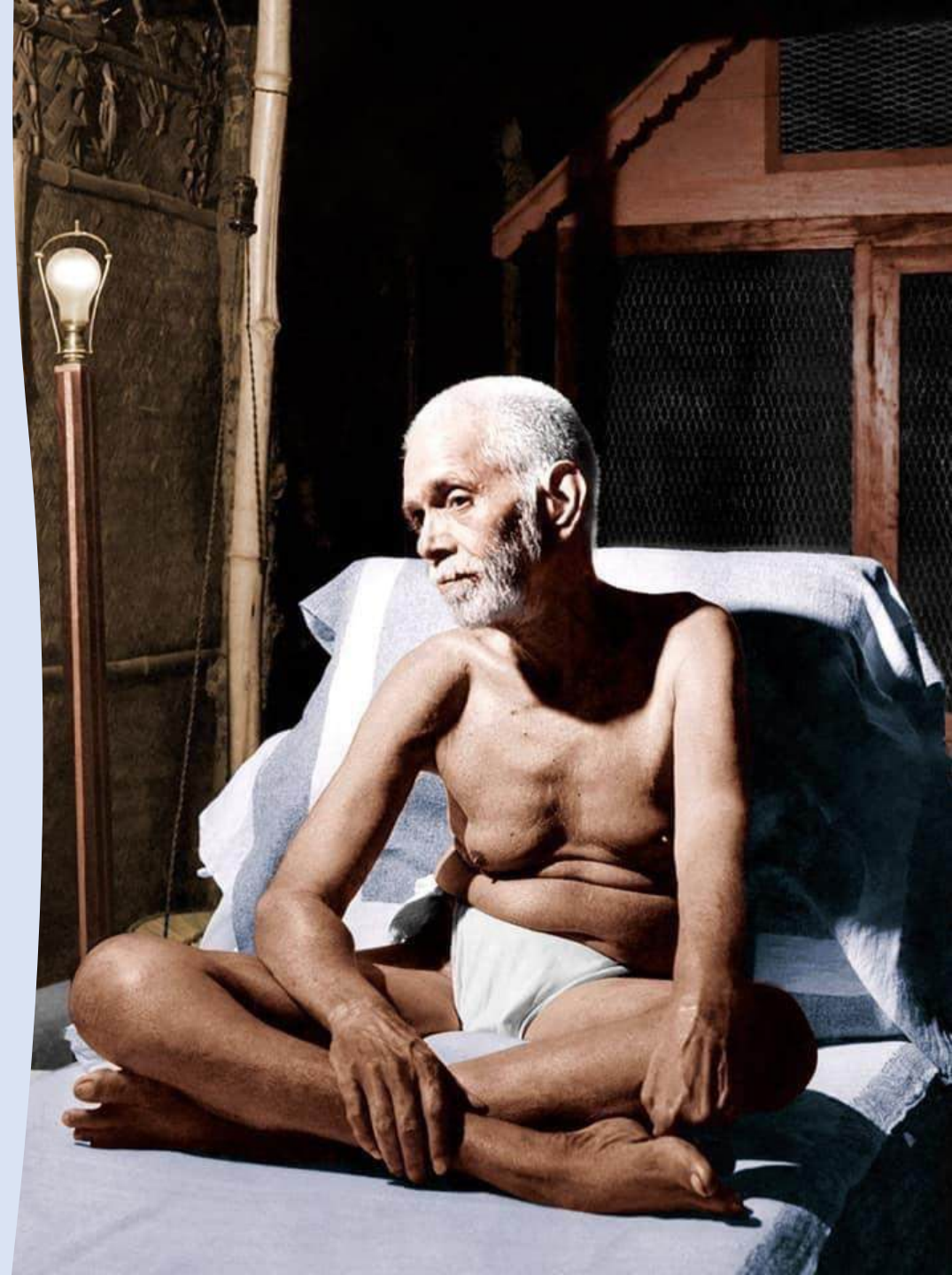
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Since we perceive the world, we must concede a common source, single, but with the power of seeming many. The picture of names and forms - the onlooker, the screen, the light that illumines - all these are verily He.

(Forty Verses on Reality - Ulladu Narpadu, by Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi)



## Welcome to this Autumn-Winter 2024 edition of the RMF UK Newsletter

We begin as usual with three verses from Aksharamanamalai. The three verses included here have a theme of cheating and deception in different ways.

In verse 20 Bhagavan is exhorting Arunachala to save him from being caught up in the treacherous designs of wicked people and by His grace ensuring that he is united in non-duality.

In verse 21 he accuses Arunachala of acting as a cheat by not showing him any pity despite his pleas.

And in verse 22 he says, you who give so freely to your devotees before they themselves know what they want will attract enormous censure if you do not grant me your grace.

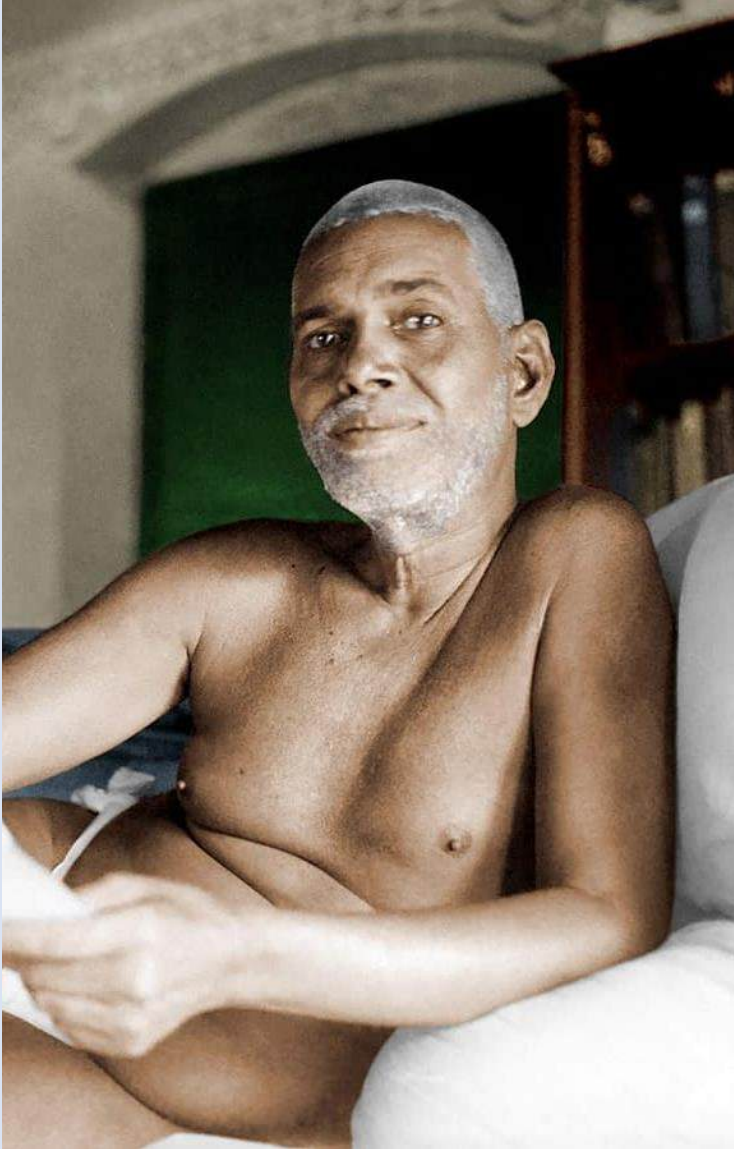
Most of the translations and commentaries of Aksharamanamalai we present are by the great poet and scholar Muruganar as translated by Robert Butler.

Muruganar has been described as the foremost devotee of Bhagavan. It is clear from Muruganar's own writings that he was one of those extremely fortunate devotees to receive '*chaksu* or *nayana diksha*' or initiation by sight from Bhagavan.

We are extremely indebted to Muruganar because many of Bhagavan's teachings were written down at the instigation of Muruganar. He himself was a prolific poet and even after Bhagavan's Nirvana Muruganar continued with his outpourings of the teachings he had learnt from Bhagavan.

Although Bhagavan said repeatedly that He was not the body we cannot but think about what it must have been like to be in the physical presence of the Guru in his human form. Sadhu Arunachala gives a beautiful account, not only of some direct teachings of Bhagavan but also of what it was like to be in His physical presence.

The final piece in this edition is the Significance of *Namaskar* as taught to Kunjuswami by Bhagavan.



## Arunachala Aksharamanamalai

### Verse 20

kūrvāṭ kaṇṇiyar koṭumaiyir paṭātaruḷ  
kūrntēṇaic cērntaru ḷaruṇācalā

#### Paraphrase:

*Arunachala! Protect me from being ensnared and tormented by the wily, deceitful and cunning people with their sword-sharp glances. Bestow on me with compassion Thy grace by being united with me as One (non-duality).*

#### Commentary:

‘Sword-sharp’ and ‘ensnaring-glances’ refer to people of cruel dispositions, which they camouflage in attractive glances and alluring speech. Like the deer caught by the net laid by cruel hunters, attracting people with enticing glances and words, holding them captive, not allowing them to go elsewhere and tormenting them is the way of the wicked. This, in addition, refers to pseudo-gurus who pose as real gurus. Here Arunachala’s succour is sought to be saved from such cunningness.

Another reading would be: the ephemeral world of *maya* with its objects tantalizes the senses, thus ensnaring and captivating the *jivas*, taking them away from their permanent abode. “Oh Lord! Claim me before the sharp eyed and cruel-hearted (*maya*) waylays and abducts me. Come and dispel my doom,” is the prayer.

*(published in Arunachala Stuti Panchakam, commentary by T.R.Kanakamma)*



## Arunachala Aksharamanamalai

### Verse 21

keñciyum vañciyāyk koñcamu miraṅkilai  
yañcalen rēyaru ḷaruṅācalā

#### Paraphrase:

*[Arunachala], my pleas could melt even a stone, but however much I beseech you, you continue to act like a cheat, showing me no pity whatsoever. (At least henceforth let your stony heart soften and melt), and in grace bestow freedom from fear, saying, 'Be not afraid.'*

#### Commentary:

As a cheat, 'you showed me no pity whatsoever.' The reason why Arunachala, the ocean of grace, causes suffering to his devotees, showing them no pity and appearing outwardly like a deceitful cheat, even as they dwell on Him with melting heart, is so that their mind, melting and melting over and over again, will finally perish, and as a consequence the mental impurity [at the root of it] will be destroyed, and they will become Sivam. This is referred to by great poets and sages as *mara-k-karuṅai - chastising grace*.

*(published in Arunachala Aksharamanamalai commentary by M.K. Muruganar)*



# Arunachala Aksharamanamalai

## Verse 22

kēlā taḷikkumuṅ kēṭil pukaḷaik  
kēṭucey yātaru ḷaruṅācalā

### Paraphrase:

*[Arunachala!] thus far you have enjoyed undying glory by knowing what your devotees want and giving it to them without their even asking. Do not ruin it now to no purpose through refusing to give it to me, in spite of my asking, but take pity on me and grant me your grace.*



### Commentary:

Installed as the witness at the source of the minds of his devotees, knowing what they are going to desire even before they know themselves, the Lord's compassion is greater than that of the mother who gave birth to them, and his glorious fame is one that can never die. If now, [says Bhagavan], in contradiction to your natural generosity, in which you ever give freely to all alike, you now fail to grant your grace to any of us, whoever we may be, the undying fame which you have enjoyed till now will be destroyed. In verse 4 he said, 'If you drive me away, the world will blame you'. Therefore, he [Bhagavan] is saying implicitly, 'Grant me your grace now, if only to escape that blame.'

*(published in Arunachala Aksharamanamalai commentary by M.K. Muruganar)*



## Muruganar

(1890 - 1973)

Muruganar is widely regarded as being one of the foremost devotees of Bhagavan.

Although he had been active politically, Muruganar had a strong desire to find a guru who would activate his poetic muse, grace him with his power and presence, and ultimately bestow liberation on him.

Muruganar had a father-in-law, Dandapani Swami, who had already discovered Ramana Maharshi. He visited Muruganar in 1923, when Muruganar was 33 years old, and gave him a copy of *Aksharamanamalai*, the 108-verse poem in praise of Arunachala that Bhagavan had composed around 1914. As he went through the verses Muruganar became increasingly convinced that the author might be the Guru he was so urgently seeking. This is how, in later years, he described the impact that the poem and Dadapani Swami's visit had on him:

“Will I, an unworthy ignorant one, ever be accepted as a devotee by Lord Siva, who as the Divine Guru with the wealth of grace, showed clearly to the world the greatness of Manikkavachagar [9th century Tamil saint]. And even if I get such a chance, will I be able to sing of the glories of his grace-showing feet in the same way as *Tiruvachakam* [Manikkavachagar's most famous poetical work].



“Then I heard from devotees who had redeemed themselves by taking as their support the grace of one at Tiruvannamalai, who is the embodiment of true *jnana*, and who shines as the flame of true *tapas*. When they spoke of the greatness of his grace, they melted in joy.....

“The compassionate Supreme One, who is endowed with *jnana*, then decided in his heart to be my Lord and Master.

“There was in me a thirst, an intense longing to subside [into the Self], that was prompted by the thought of the divine feet, which abound in grace. So, like one who, suffering from thirst, comes across a Ganges of cold water, on an auspicious day, a golden day for my thirst, I went [to Ramana Maharshi] with eleven verses that began ‘Leaving Mount Kailas ....’ and met the excellent sage, the *jnana* Guru, the ocean of *mauna*, the bestower of *jnana*.

“In the same way that wax melts on encountering fire, on seeing his feet, my mind dissolved and lost its form. Like the calf finding its mother, my heart melted and rejoiced in his feet. The hairs on my body stood on end. Devotion surged in me like an ocean that has seen the full moon. Through the grace of *chitsakti* [the power inherent in consciousness], my soul was in ecstasy.

“With an unsteady and quivering voice, I read the eleven verses and placed them at his feet. At that very moment he graciously looked at me with his lotus eyes. From that day on, the praises given out by my impartial tongue belonged only to him.

“From the way he bestowed his grace, becoming my Lord and Master, I was completely convinced that he was Siva himself. As a new ‘comer’, he made my ‘I’ and ‘mine’ his own.

“Even if I get submerged in the miry mud [of this world], I will not forget the mighty nobility of the bountiful bestower of grace.”

In September 1923 Bhagavan was still living in a small, thatched hut that had been erected over his mother's *samadhi*. Muruganar felt unsure of the correct way of approaching Bhagavan, so he remained for some time outside the hut. Bhagavan solved the problem by coming outside and saying 'Enna?' [What?].

In response to this query Muruganar began to sing the verses that had been composed by him in the temple, but emotion got the better of him. Tears welled up in his eyes and he was unable to proceed.

'Can't you read?' asked Bhagavan, 'Give it to me. I shall read it myself.' Bhagavan then read out the poem.

For the next 3 years Muruganar was a regular visitor to Ramanasramam. He would come whenever he had free time and was so attached to being in Bhagavan's presence, on many occasions he would find it physically impossible to board the return train. He would wait on the platform in the station, watch the train leave, and then return to Ramanasramam. When he was asked about this, he would say that his body could not step onto the train. After this had happened a few times, Bhagavan would send someone to the station with him to force him to get into a carriage.

Muruganar had come to Bhagavan with several burning desires: he had wanted a Guru in human form, who would be for him, a physical manifestation of Siva, he had wanted that Guru to inspire him to write ecstatic devotional poetry; and he had also wanted the direct experience of the Self that would be the fundamental basis and inspiration of his poetry.

Though Muruganar ultimately wrote thousands of verses that thanked Bhagavan, for the direct experience of the Self which he had revealed to him, when it happened is not known. It is generally assumed, from some lines he wrote in one of his earlier poems, to have happened quite soon after he and Bhagavan met. He mentions Bhagavan asked Muruganar to come to the nearby forest with him.



Bhagavan Ramana and Muruganar

“He took me to the forest with him on the pretext of plucking leaves to make leaf-plates. There, with great delight, he destroyed my mind’s restlessness by bestowing his glance on me. In the middle of the night he subdued my divided individual consciousness, granting me the experience of the undivided *Sivam*, pure consciousness.”

In subsequent years Muruganar wrote extensively about the glance of grace that had liberated him:

“Through the glance of the Guru who is the Lord of Aruna[chala], I experienced in a heart where darkness has perished completely the boundless life that surges as the expanse of grace, the *swarupa* [my own real nature] that exists forever without the delusion of death.”

Though he never took *sannyasa*, Muruganar lived the rest of his life as a sadhu and daily went to Tiruvannamalai to beg for his food. (Bhagavan used to say that begging for alms was a good antidote for the ego). In the final years of his life, when he lived in Ramanasramam and was venerated by all the devotees who lived there, he still insisted on going for *bhiksha*, but instead of begging on the streets of Tiruvannamalai, he would ‘beg’ at the kitchen door of the Ramanasramam dining room. He would hold out the cloth he wrapped round his shoulders, and one of the kitchen workers would put food into it.

If Muruganar heard Bhagavan say something interesting, he would compose a four-line verse that encapsulated the teachings Bhagavan had given out and would then wait for an opportunity to show the verse to Bhagavan himself. If any changes were to be made Muruganar would redraft and show the corrected version to Bhagavan. In the 1920s and 30s Muruganar was the only devotee who recorded Bhagavan's teachings in the original Tamil, and then got them corrected and approved by Bhagavan himself, usually within a few hours of them being spoken.

In the 1950s, 60s and 70s after Bhagavan had passed away, Muruganar continued to compose poetry that recorded his own experiences of the Self or expressed various aspects of the teachings he had learned from Bhagavan. These later verses tended to appear spontaneously in his mind in a flow that eventually turned into a torrent. He would record the verses that appeared, almost ready-made, in his head on scraps of paper, or he would dictate them to visitors who had come to see him. In the last years of his life, he would sometimes write the new verses down on a slate. If no one took the trouble to make a copy, the slate would be wiped clean whenever a new verse needed to be recorded. Here are two of his verses that allude both to the spontaneous nature of his later poetic output and its tendency to engage him at any hour of the day or night:

“My Guru Lord, who has the power to grant true *jnana*, reached and adopted my heart as his temple and stood shining there. After he had revealed to me that the proper way of praising him was only wordless silence, I praised him with whatever [words] popped up in my mouth!”

“Whether it is morning, evening or noon, my Lord, without ever leaving me, remains merged with me as pure grace, pure consciousness. He dominates my utterances so powerfully, even in the middle of the night I sing only of the glory of his generosity. He will not allow [my tongue] to accept any other topic”.

*(Extracts from The Shining of my Lord and The Power of the Presence Part 2, David Godman)*

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St. Macarius was asked to explain a phrase of a Psalm : "The meditation of my heart is in your sight". He proceeded to give one of the earliest descriptions of that "prayer of the heart" which consisted in invoking the name of Christ, with profound attention, in the very ground of one's being, that is to say in 'the heart' considered as the root and source of all one's inner truth. To invoke the name of Christ "in one's heart" was equivalent to calling upon him with the deepest and most earnest intensity of faith, manifested by the concentration of one's entire being upon a prayer stripped of all non-essentials and reduced to nothing but the invocation of his name with a simple petition for help.....

**FATHER THOMAS MERTON**

*(published in the Mountain Path October 1974)*

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## **A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi**

by Sadhu Arunachala (A.W. Chadwick)



I first came to Sri Ramana Ashram on November 1st, 1935. I had heard of Bhagavan through Brunton's book "*A Search in Secret India*", and immediately decided that here was my Guru.

I arrived in Tiruvannamalai by the early morning train. It was a bright clear day at the beginning of winter, and I was immediately struck by the wonderful atmosphere of the place, which one almost felt that one could take hold of, so potent was it.

To try and describe my reactions when I first came into the presence of Bhagavan is difficult. I felt the tremendous peace of his presence, his graciousness. It was not as though I were meeting him for the first time. It seemed that I had always known him. It was not even like the renewal of an old acquaintanceship. It had always been there though I had not been conscious of it at the time. Now I know.

In the early days of my stay, I was living in a big room adjoining the Ashram storeroom. Here Bhagavan often used to visit me, usually when he went out at about ten o'clock. On coming into my room unexpectedly he would tell me not to disturb myself but to go on with whatever I was occupied at the time. If one put oneself out for Bhagavan or appeared in any way disturbed, he would not come in future, he would disturb nobody, so considerate was he. I had no idea how lucky I was and how privileged, but certainly appreciated the visits.

Bhagavan was a very beautiful person; he shone with a visible light or aura. He had the most delicate hands I have ever seen with which alone he could express himself, one might almost say talk. His features were regular, and the wonder of his eyes was famous. His forehead was high and the dome of his head the highest I have ever seen. As this in India is known as the dome of Wisdom it was only natural that it should be so. His body was well formed and of only medium height, but this was not apparent as his personality was so dominant that one looked upon him as tall. He had a great sense of humour and when talking a smile was never far from his face. He had many jokes in his repertoire and was a magnificent actor, he would always dramatize the protagonists of any story he related. When the recital was very pathetic, he would be filled with emotion and unable to proceed. When people came to him with their family stories he would laugh with the happy and at times shed tears with the bereaved. In this way he seemed to reciprocate the emotions of others.

He was most dainty in his movements and to watch him eat was a pleasure. He always left his leaf so clean that it appeared as if it had not been used.

He was always scrupulously clean, and his body gave off a faint perfume, though he never used any scented soap.

Bhagavan always radiated tremendous peace, but on those occasions when crowds were attracted to the Ashram, such as Jyanthi, Mahapooja, Deepam and such functions, this increased to an extraordinary degree. It was a great experience to sit with him at such times. His eyes took on a far-away look and he sat absolutely still as if unconscious of his surroundings, except for an occasional smile of recognition as some old devotee prostrated.

Bhagavan once told me that thought comes in flashes, no thought was continuous. It was like the cycle of an alternating current, but was so rapid that it seemed continuous as does the light given off by an electric bulb. If one could only concentrate on the intervals between thoughts rather than on the thoughts themselves that would be Self-realization.

He always taught that mind and thought were exactly the same.

*What one has thought of as his mind is merely a bundle of thoughts.*

*All these thoughts depend upon the one thought of "I", the ego.*

*Therefore, the so-called mind is the "I" thought. (Verse 18 Upadesa Saram)*

After I had been meditating in the presence of Bhagavan for some months, I reached a certain stage when I would be overcome by fear. I asked Bhagavan about this. He explained that it was the ego that experienced the fear as it felt that it was gradually losing its grip. It was, in fact, dying, and naturally resented it. He asked me, "To whom is the fear? It is all due to the habit of identifying the body with the Self. Repeated experience of separation from this idea will make one familiar with this state and fear will then automatically cease." Since then, I have come to realize that Bhagavan mentions this fear in the second verse of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

*" 'Tis only those who fear death intensely take refuge at the feet of the Lord."*

In the Supplement to the *Ulladu-Narpadu* it says that one look of a Mahatma is sufficient to give us initiation and is far more effective than any number of pilgrimages, the worship of images and other devotional practices. I asked Bhagavan about this, saying foolishly that I had already been staying with him for some months and yet I did not yet feel any change in myself. It is the look that purifies, he told me, but it is not a visible purification. Coal takes time to ignite, but charcoal is proportionately quicker, while gunpowder ignites immediately. So is it with men under the powerful glance of a Jnani.

Bhagavan would always advise his disciples never to take on the onerous duty of being a Guru. It would only lead to trouble. The disciples would expect all sorts of impossible things from their Guru and trying to satisfy them he would inevitably resort to trickery. Then even if he could perform miracles, they were things to be avoided as being impermanent and would only deflect him from the true path.



Anantanarayana Rao said that once when he was attending on Bhagavan during his last illness and begging him to continue living for the sake of his devotees, Bhagavan replied, “The prime duty of a Guru is to establish the certainty of his existence in his disciples and having done this he is free to leave his body.”

Bhagavan said that the principal *Sadhanas* we should practise were to eat only *Satvic* food and observe *Satsanga*. He laid down no other rules. He said that the mind was entirely created by the food we ate which must be healthy and strictly vegetarian. However, he never interfered with people or enforced such things on them. He was dead against meat-eating.

As regards *Satsanga*, since we obviously take on the colour of the company we keep, the ideal is to live with a Realized Sage; but if that is not possible, then we should choose our company in the best way we can, avoiding undesirable company. He naturally expected Sadhus to lead a decent life and set an example to others. In any case we should practise moderation in all things, even in those that we consider good and, strange though it may seem, a moderation in our Sadhana also is recommended. Overdoing of austerities and prolonged and unnaturally forced meditation may eventually lead to madness, unless we do such under proper guidance.

During one conversation with Bhagavan, I remarked that I tried to shake off the body. Bhagavan replied that a man discards his clothes and remains naked and free, but the Self is unlimited and not confined in any way to the body so how can the body be shaken off? Where can the Self leave it? The Self is all-embracing. Wherever it is, is the Self. The ultimate Truth is so simple, it is nothing more than being in one’s own natural original state. However, it is a great wonder that to teach such a simple truth a number of religions should be necessary and that so many disputes should go on between them as to which is the God-ordained teaching.

One day when someone was talking of doing this and that, Bhagavan asked, “Why do you think that you are the doer? There lies all the trouble. It is quite absurd, as it is obvious to all that ‘I’ does nothing. It is only the body that acts, ‘I’ is always the witness. We so associate ourselves with our thoughts and actions that we continually say, ‘I did this and that,’ when we did nothing at all. Concentrate on being the witness and let things take their course, they will go on anyhow, you cannot prevent them.”

Devaraja Mudaliar quotes Sri Bhagavan on fate and freewill in his book *My Recollections*:

“The only freedom man has is to strive for and acquire the *jnana* which will enable him not to identify himself with the body. The body will go through the actions rendered inevitable by *Prarabdha* [destiny based on the balance-sheet of past lives] and a man is free to either identify himself with the body and be attached to the fruits of its actions, or to be detached from it and be a mere witness of its activities.”

To attain to such detachment Bhagavan taught the method of Self-enquiry, “who am I?” When we have succeeded in that, we will see actions as no longer ours but as just a necessary working of the whole.

*(from A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi by Sadhu Arunachala A.W. Chadwick)*

## Significance of *Namaskar*

by Kunjuswami

I started on a pilgrimage and went to Kovilur Mutt. The head of the *mutt*, Mahadevaswami, was once the head of the Isanya Mutt at Tiruvannamalai. He used to visit Sri Bhagavan frequently when he was at Tiruvannamalai. He was ever kind to us. He used to send to Sri Bhagavan on *Deepavali* day a bottle of oil, soapnut powder, a new *kaupinam* [cloth worn by Bhagavan] etc. He instructed his successor, Natesaswami to continue this tradition and it was followed. Mahadevaswami helped us with money in constructing Skandashram. Some objected to his giving money for constructing something not connected with their *mutt*. To this he said, “We and are *mutt* are subject to certain restrictions and control. But Sri Bhagavan and his state are supreme and beyond any human control. We should consider it our good fortune to serve such a sage. If you don’t approve of my giving money from *mutt* funds, I will give my personal money.” Such was his devotion to Sri Bhagavan.

When I returned to the Ashram after spending some days at Kovilur Mutt, Sri Bhagavan asked me in detail about what I did, where I went and so on. I said, “Mahadevaswami made kind enquiries about Sri Bhagavan and the *ashramities*. The day I went there, Raja Sri Annamalai Chettiar and his relatives came to visit Mahadevaswami. Sri Bhagavan asked me what Chettiar did there. I said that he prostrated with great reverence before Mahadevaswamy and accepted *vibhuti prasad* from him. Sri Bhagavan asked, “Did you prostrate before Mahadevaswami?” When I said no, he asked me why. I said, I don’t want to do *namaskar* to anyone except Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan said, “What an intelligent, wise fellow! Is your Bhagavan only within this body on the sofa? Is he not elsewhere? If a person is devoted wholly to one person, he should not go anywhere. If you go to another place, you must do what the people in that place do. Wherever and whenever you prostrate, you should think of your Guru or your favourite god. If you do like this, your *namaskar* will reach the person you have in mind. That is the proper thing to do.” I realized my mistake. From then on, I think of Sri Bhagavan whenever I do *namaskar* to anyone.

# EVENTS

**Satsangs on Bhagavan's Compositions** - second and last Saturday of every month with Michael James via Zoom

**In-Person Meetings** in London-1st or 3rd Saturday of every month (check our website) at The Study Society, Colet House, London W14 9DA

**Meditation Group** - Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 7pm to 8.15pm (British time) via Zoom

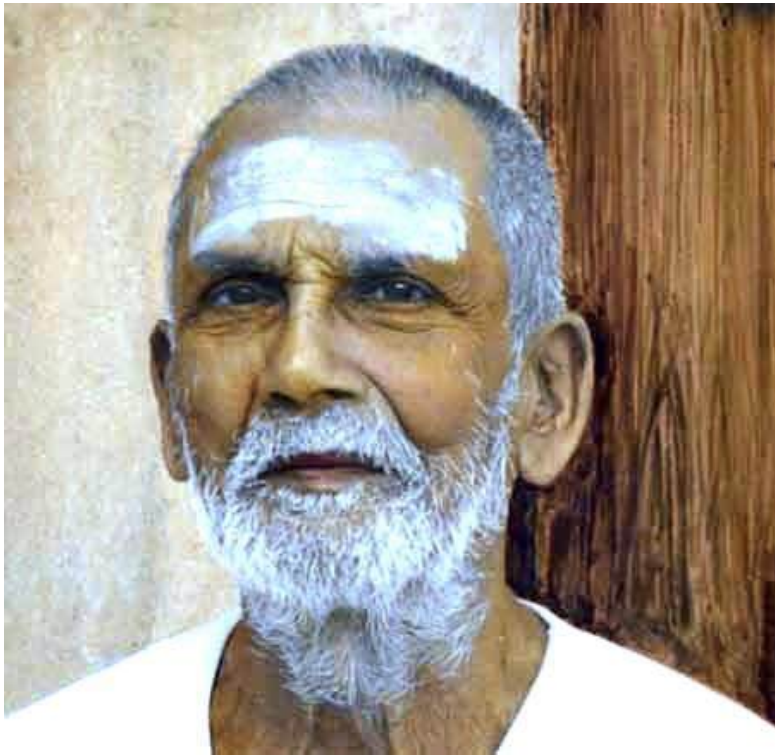
**Study Group** - Every Tuesday and Thursday from 7pm to 8.30pm (British time) via Zoom

Two **Newsletters** are distributed - one in Spring-Summer and another in Autumn-Winter

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Auspicious is each day; benevolent  
In aspect every planet; lucky  
Is each conjunction. Every hour  
Is fit, fine and fresh for the bright  
Unfading worship of the Lord.

*(the Garland of Guru's Sayings by Muruganar)*