

NEWSLETTER

Ramana Maharshi Foundation U.K.
Spring/Summer 2021



Newsletter Spring/ Summer 2021

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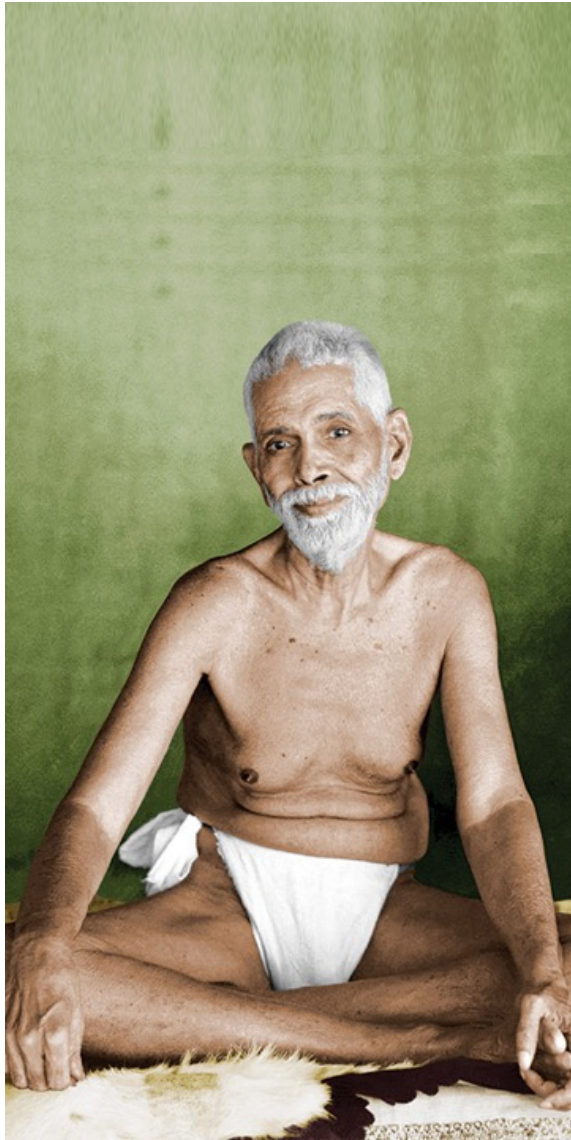
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Welcome to this Spring/Summer Newsletter. There will be two editions of the Newsletter every year - Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter in a new format.

With the ashram's permission, the material in each newsletter will be articles from existing Ashram publications including articles from the Mountain Path and Call Divine. These articles are of particular significance because they are written by and large by people who had the blessing of being in the presence of Bhagavan when He was in the body. We are blessed to have all this material to draw from to enrich our understanding, and give us context, as we each pursue our sadhana.

Each edition of the newsletter will include a few verses from *Aksharamanamalai*. We have chosen verses from the publication Arunachala Aksharamanamalai which has a commentary by Muruganar and has been translated by Robert Butler. For ease of reading we present only the paraphrased version and the commentary. In Tamil there is frequent use of puns and many words have double meanings. There are many instances of intentional double meanings in the text. These are explained in detail by Muruganar and by Robert Butler. We recommend the book to those who would like to see the detail. In this edition we begin with the Prefatory Verse written by Muruganar, the Explanation of the Title – Aksharamanamalai, The Invocation and Verse One.

Bhagavan appeared to be fascinated by the Hill and for many devotees it continues to fascinate. This is eloquently described in the article by Katya Osborne on *The Hill*.

Bhagavan was frequently asked for *Diksha* or an initiation of some sort but rarely acquiesced. Viswanatha Swami's article describes a rare instance when Bhagavan appears to have given a mantra to a devotee.

The final piece in this edition is an article by Arthur Osborne on Bhagavan's view on *Austerity*.

Arunachala Aksharamanamalai

Prefatory Verse

(Composed by Muruganar)

taruṇā ruṇamaṇi kiraṇā valinikar
taruma kṣaramaṇa maḱiḷmālai
teruṇā ṭiyatiru vaṭiyār terumaral
teḷiyap paravutal poruḷākak
karuṇā karamuṇi ramaṇā rīyaṇuva
kaiyiṇār coliyatu katiyāka
varuṇā calameṇa vakamē yaṛivoṭu
māḷvār civaṇula kāḷvārē

Paraphrase:

The meaning of 'Aksharamanamalai', is the praise and worship of Lord Arunachala. (Out of the joy which arose in him on their behalf), our master Ramana wrote it to dispel the mental confusion of true devotees who steadfastly sought true realisation (to which that mental confusion was an impediment). Those who trust in it as their salvation, (thinking) 'Arunachala' (in their minds) and subside into the Heart with full awareness, will, through divine grace, come to rule in the realm of Sivam.

Arunachala Aksharamanamalai

Explanation of the title of this work

Aksharamanamalai [is] a garland exuding a sweet and auspicious fragrance, woven with the letters of the alphabet as its flowers, and fitting to be worn by Lord Arunachala; further, it is a garland which will unite the devotees who sing it, fully comprehending its import, in wedlock with the eternal Reality, Arunachala. (*akṣara poru!* [means] *Reality, absolute, imperishable Reality.*) That this second meaning is acceptable to the author, Bhagavan, is made clear in a later verse, which says, 'Arunachala', bestow upon me through your grace union with the supreme Brahman, so that my mind, which carries the scent of the world, may take on the scent of that Brahman.' [ibid v. 69].



Invocation

aruṇācala varaṅkēra vakṣaramaṇa mālaicārrak
karuṇākara kaṇapatiyē karamaruḷik kāppāyē.

Ganesha, Ocean of Compassion, extend your helping hand and protect me, that I may offer to, and adorn as befits Him, my Lord Arunachala, my beloved, the best among all bridegrooms, with this *Marital Garland of Letters*.

Commentary:

Poetic licence has here been employed to change the word *cāttal* - *to adorn* to *cārral* - *to speak, tell*, so as to create a pun upon the two meanings *to adorn* and *to compose a text*, *varaṅ* [can mean] *great one or husband, bridegroom*. *mālai cārra*, [means] *to relate a work in the form of a garland*, *karuṇākaram* [can also mean] *hand of compassion, hand of grace*; further *karam* [can mean] *ray, consciousness*. Split as *aruṇācala araṅ* [the meaning is] *Arunachala Siva*. *araṅ* [Sanskrit *hara* - *the Destroyer*] is a derivative, causal name for Siva, as destroying the suffering of his devotees. 'The Lord who, as the Destroyer [of suffering], bestows grace upon the devotees who follow Him, when suffering follows on their heels and assails them'. (Appar, *Tēvāram* , [5:51, v. 8]).

Text

aruṇā calaciva aruṇā calaciva
aruṇā calaciva aruṇācalā!
aruṇā calaciva aruṇā calaciva
aruṇā calaciva aruṇācalā!

Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva
Arunachala Siva, Arunachala!
Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva
Arunachala Siva Arunachala!

This hymn should be chanted every day with unfailing regularity, with a one-pointed, inward-turned mind, and with the heart deeply absorbed in contemplation [of the Self, Arunachala Siva].

Verse 1

aruṇā calameṇa vakamē niṇaippava
rakattaivē raṇuppā yaruṇācalā.

Paraphrase:

Arunachala! You will tear out by the roots the egos of those devotees who consider themselves to be not different from yourself, thinking in their minds 'I am Arunachala'.

Commentary:

[It is necessary] for Arunachala to tear out by the roots the egos of his devotees because that ego is the obstacle to the final state of liberation, which devotees seek from Him through such forms of meditation as this, and with which He in turn desires to unite them through his divine will. (This final state of liberation is the direct experience of Arunachala Siva, the Self; it is the state of supreme devotion, whose essential nature is to remain through the power of contemplation in the state of pure being beyond thought). It is also necessary because the ego is the seed of all the manifold suffering of birth, which arises from the world of diversity, which in turn evolves due to veiling by ignorance, a process described by Tayumanavar as follows, 'In everyone the ego arises as "I" and afflicts them. Manifesting as the manifold world of *maya*, it pursues them relentlessly.

Who might possess the power to describe the magnitude of the ocean of sorrows that arises from this? [*Hymn 14, v.15, lines 1-2*]. The first instance of the word *akam* can be interpreted either as 'mind' or as 'I', so that the use of the word in both meanings is implied [i.e. 'thinking in their minds (*akam*) I (*akam*) am Arunachala']. The particle *ē*, separated [from the word *akam*] and appended [to the word *aruṇācala*], indicates both *distinction* and *certainty*. The main sense is that the five bodily sheaths, which are unreal and inert, are not 'I', and that only Arunachala, the Self, pure being-consciousness, is 'I'. 'The highest of all forms of meditation, superior to that which regards God as other than oneself, is that in which one contemplates God as not different from oneself, having the conviction *I am He!*' *Upadesha Unthiyar*, [v. 8]. The meaning of Arunachalam is simply the Supreme Self, *Atma Swarupa*. 'Arunagiri the supreme Self' *Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam*, [v. 1]. Additionally, the words *akattai vēṇ aruppāy* [can mean] *you will tear out sin by the roots*.



"Giving up the ego is the real sannyasa, not the wearing of ochre robes."

(Sri Ramana. Printed in Mountain Path January 1969 Page 47)

The Hill
by Katya Osborne

What is it about Arunachala that attracts some people to the point of obsession? There are some who, once ensnared, find it almost impossible to leave; there are others who pass by and barely notice it. You drive along the main road in either direction and the countryside is more or less littered with hills of a similar size and configuration. Why should this pile of earth and rocks be in any way different? Yet different it most assuredly is. None of the other prominences has the power, presence, or sheer personality and exuberance of Arunachala.

Even Bhagavan, if he could be said to be attached to anything, was attached to this place. On the face of it, it is an inexplicable mystery; yet it is nonetheless a fact and therefore worth trying to explain. In the myths of antiquity, Arunachala was acknowledged to be the incarnation of Lord Siva on earth as the Lord of Fire. Physically it is a hill, or small mountain, some 2,668 feet above sea level, of apparently unremarkable rocks physically indistinguishable from any others in this landscape of scattered hills dotted about on the hot plains. Bhagavan treated Arunachala as a living manifestation of God, and as such it is hard to describe.

A person cannot be truly conjured up by a catalogue of physical details, and yet any other sort of description is even harder to arrive at. To those who are in tune with it, Arunachala is a microcosm of the world. Its signature on the landscape is so powerful that it seems to distort one's inner compass; no hill this, but an overwhelming presence that makes everything else around seem shadowy and unreal. It also acts like a prism to intensify all the senses and emotions. Colours seem brighter; the taste of food is sharper; the very act of breathing is not just the drawing in of whatever comprises the local atmosphere, rather it is an effervescent inhalation of invigorating power.

Every sensation seems to be keener; love is stronger, but then so too is hate. Having heightened senses works both ways, which is why people come to Arunachala. They hope for release and enlightenment, but the corollary is that all one's negative aspects are also highlighted.

They can be dealt with or given in to, according to the personal application of the individual. People who resonate with the Hill have a unique opportunity to deal with all the troublesome facets of their characters, to recognise them and try to eliminate them; they also have the possibility of elevating their least desirable qualities and this can happen so slyly that it almost goes unnoticed. Small skirmishes can become major wars and a mild interest in one's neighbours can become malicious gossip. In the same spirit, a lack of interest in personal possessions can become genuine renunciation and ordinary thoughtfulness can transmogrify into true spirituality.

It is a mistake to suppose that everything within the ambit of the Hill is benign. People have been robbed, raped, and have even died on the Hill. Others have lived there as renunciates, untroubled in a cave for years. Still others have carried on a life-long love affair with it.

Whatever happens in the world at large also happens on or around the Hill...but more so. Addicts to this sort of intense living find it hard to revert to black and white after the glories of Technicolor. These are the people who cannot keep away for long. Whatever the outside world has to offer pales into insignificance when compared to the concentrated wealth of emotion engendered by Arunachala; although this amount of sheer cosmic power is hard to contain and can sometimes cause the mind to spin out of control, which may be the reason why some people who come to Tiruvannamalai either are, or become, unbalanced. It is dangerous to underestimate the intensity of this place.

Another attribute of the Hill is its healing powers. Known also as the 'Medicinal Hill', this can be a reference to the many therapeutic herbs to be found on it, but it can also be an allusion to total holistic healing, in fact to the immense feeling of well-being that emanates from anywhere within the aura of Arunachala. The many special attributes of this sacred place have been recognised from time immemorial. Possibly, in ancient days, when people were more attuned to natural forces, the power of Arunachala was more apparent to everyone and its manifestation was acknowledged by all. Certainly many shrines and temples, some of enormous antiquity, festoon the pradakshina road and legendary stories of the sanctity of the hill proliferate in the scriptures. It is an eloquent confirmation of the abiding authority of this place that its influence has not evaporated over the millennia; indeed it is apparently just as strong now as it ever was. Whether the source is geological, due to a concentration of magnetism in its structure, or whether it is purely spiritual due to causes we cannot understand, the fact remains that the power is there and so strong that it is almost tangible.

Some interested people have gone to the trouble of measuring the distance from which the aura of the hill can be felt and they came up with a figure of a 40 km radius. This may or may not be accurate, but in any case it is irrelevant. For Bhagavan the Hill was his guru and he walked around it, climbed up it and composed songs to it. Indeed, it was the Hill that drew him to Tiruvannamalai in the first place.

The solace that some people find within the radius of the hill is alluring and addictive. Historically people have looked for sacred places upon which to build their altars, temples or any other place of worship. A hill was felt to be a fitting location from which to praise God. With Arunachala however, although many shrines have been built at its feet and Bhagavan himself lived in a cave on its slopes for some years, no one has ever even considered building any structure on the summit. It would seem like a desecration. At least that was the feeling of respect which Arunachala engendered until recently. Nowadays, possibly as a sign of the Kali Yuga, the summit of the hill is disfigured by shoddy shacks and there are a number of quite aggressive 'sadhus' who demand money from pilgrims. In the past this was never the spirit on the hill.

It was enough that at the festival of Deepam a huge copper cauldron was hauled up to the top from the big temple. Pilgrims clustered around and thronged the pathways to the peak, each one bearing gifts of ghee to fill the container. On Deepam night, the flame is lit, not by Brahmin priests but by ancient custom, it is done by simple townspeople. For ten days, the flame is kept alight while everyone honours Siva in his aspect of Lord of Fire. No one can say how old this ceremony is; certainly it goes back beyond the era when records were kept.

Lost in the dim past is the origin of the feeling of awe and reverence engendered by Arunachala. But whatever its source, the hill's spontaneous attraction still exists, and is experienced by so many people, even those who first came to the Hill expecting nothing at all. It speaks eloquently of the power of Lord Siva in whatever incarnation he chooses.

(Printed in Mountain Path April 2005 pages 23 – 27)



AN EARLY DEVOTEE

by Viswanatha Swami

VILACHERI MANI IYER, a senior schoolmate of Bhagavan, was noted for his physical strength and for his rough dealing with anybody whom he disliked. And so he was called Pokkiri Mani (Rogue Mani). He never went to any temple nor bowed down before any god or man. However, he took his mother to Tirupati a few years after Bhagavan had settled down at Tiruvannamalai. His mother wanted to alight at Tiruvannamalai which was on their way, to see Venkataraman whom she had known as a small boy at Tiruchuzhi. But Mani did not agree, saying that it was not worth the trouble. So they went direct to Tirupati. On their way back to Madurai the mother again pressed her son and he had to yield to her request. But he agreed only on condition that he was allowed to take Venkataraman back home. He said: "It is not for darshan of this bogus sadhu that I am alighting at Tiruvannamalai, but to drag him by his ear and bring him back to Madurai. I am not a weakling. I shall succeed where his uncle, mother and brother have failed." "All right, do as you please", said the mother and they both alighted at Tiruvannamalai and went up the Hill to Virupaksha Cave where Bhagavan was then staying.

The mother bowed to Bhagavan and sat down quietly. But the son looked and looked at Bhagavan, getting more and more puzzled. There was no trace of the ordinary boy Venkataraman whom he had known. Something quite unexpected had happened. Instead of his old friend there was an effulgent Divine Being seated in front of him, absolutely still and silent.

His heart melted for the first time in his life, tears rolled down his cheeks and his hair stood on end. He fell prostrate before Bhagavan and surrendered himself to him. He became a frequent visitor and a staunch devotee of Bhagavan. But yet, he thought that he was in need of a more tangible method than the Vichara — Who Am I? — and approached Bhagavan for it a few times. There was no response. Once when he went out for a walk on the Hill with Bhagavan, he stood before him and said: "I won't allow you to return unless you give me some upadesa (teaching) suited to me." Bhagavan replied: "What is there to teach, Mani? Instead of saying 'Siva, Siva' and keeping quiet, why do you ask for this and that?" Mani Iyer fell down at Sri Bhagavan's feet with great joy and exclaimed: "I have got my upadesa and initiation!" From that moment he went on with the japa of 'Siva, Siva' day and night and in course of time it became one with his prana, life-current. He was totally transformed and his face shone with divine radiance. When Mani Iyer felt that his end was near, he stayed with Bhagavan for a few days. Every morning he rolled with his body round Bhagavan's Hall (anga pradakshina). When Bhagavan tried to stop him, he said, "I do not know how else I can express my gratitude for what Bhagavan has done for me!" A few days later he took leave of Bhagavan, and soon got released from bodily bondage to dwell for ever at Bhagavan's feet.

AUSTERITY

(by Arthur Osborne)



The article I wrote in the February Issue of the Call Divine was a commentary on the first sentence of 'Who Am I?' It contained in germ the intellectual explanation of religious austerity.

So long as a person mistakes the body or individuality for the Self he seeks pleasure from events and contacts, but in the measure that he approaches the true Self he discovers the true happiness which, being his real nature, requires no stimulus to provoke.

Unless a man renounces the extraneous and fitful happiness given by pleasure for the deep abiding inner happiness there is no austerity - he is simply exchanging the lesser for the greater, the spurious for the true. More, usually however, a man's pursuit of pleasure (or his hankering after it, even if he does not pursue it) is itself what impedes his realization of the Self being due to his false identification with the ego. Therefore he normally has to renounce the pursuit of pleasure not after but before the attainment of eternal, indestructible happiness, not because it has ceased to be pleasure but because he realises partly through faith and partly through understanding and pre-vision, that indestructible happiness does exist, and is his goal and his true nature and that it is shut off from him by his mistaken identity and by the indulgence of desires and impulses that this entails. That is to say that he has to renounce the false attraction before it has ceased to attract. Therefore the renunciation hurts him and is austerity.

Religious austerity may bear fruit without understanding of the intellectual basis of it and therefore there may be many who practise it, without this understanding; nevertheless this is its basis. To some extent every spiritual seeker must follow the two fold method of turning his energy away from the pursuit of pleasure and towards the quest of happiness, away from gratification of the ego and towards realisation of the Self. They are two complimentary phases of one activity. However, a method may concentrate on one phase or the other.

That taught by Bhagavan concentrated almost entirely on the positive phase, the quest of the Self, and he spoke very little of the negative, that is of austerity or killing of the ego. He spoke rather of the enquiry that would reveal that there was no ego to kill and never had been. This does not mean that Bhagavan condoned ego-indulgence. He expected a high standard of rectitude and self-control in his devotees but he did not dictate any actual programme of austerity.

The basic forms of austerity are celibacy and poverty, further heightened by silence and solitude. Let us see in more detail what was the attitude of Bhagavan in such matters. In speaking of celibacy one has to remember that the traditional Hindu society with which Bhagavan was familiar has no place for the worldly celibate: either a man is a householder or a mendicant. When any householder asked Bhagavan whether he could renounce home and property and turn mendicant, he always discouraged it. "The obstacles are in the mind and have to be overcome there."

He would say, "Changing the environment will not help, you will only change the thought 'I am a householder' for the thought 'I am a mendicant'. What you have to do is forget both and remember only 'I am'. He similarly deprecated vows of silence and solitude, pointing out that the true silence and solitude are in the heart and independent of outer conditions.

Yet Bhagavan showed a benevolent interest in the personal and family affairs of his Devotees - their marriages and jobs, the birth and sicknesses and education of their children, all the cares and obligations that family life entails. His injunction was to engage in it like an actor in a play, playing one's part carefully and conscientiously but with the remembrance that it was not one's real self.

Neither did he denounce the small indulgence common to the life of a householder. Indeed, there was a time when he himself chewed betel and drank tea and coffee. The only specific rule of conduct that he advocated and that some might call austerity was vegetarianism. He often spoke of the benefit of restricting oneself to sattvic food, that is to vegetarian food which nourishes without exciting or stimulating. I have also known Bhagavan saying different things to different people. But they should be taken to suit particular occasions and not as a general rule.

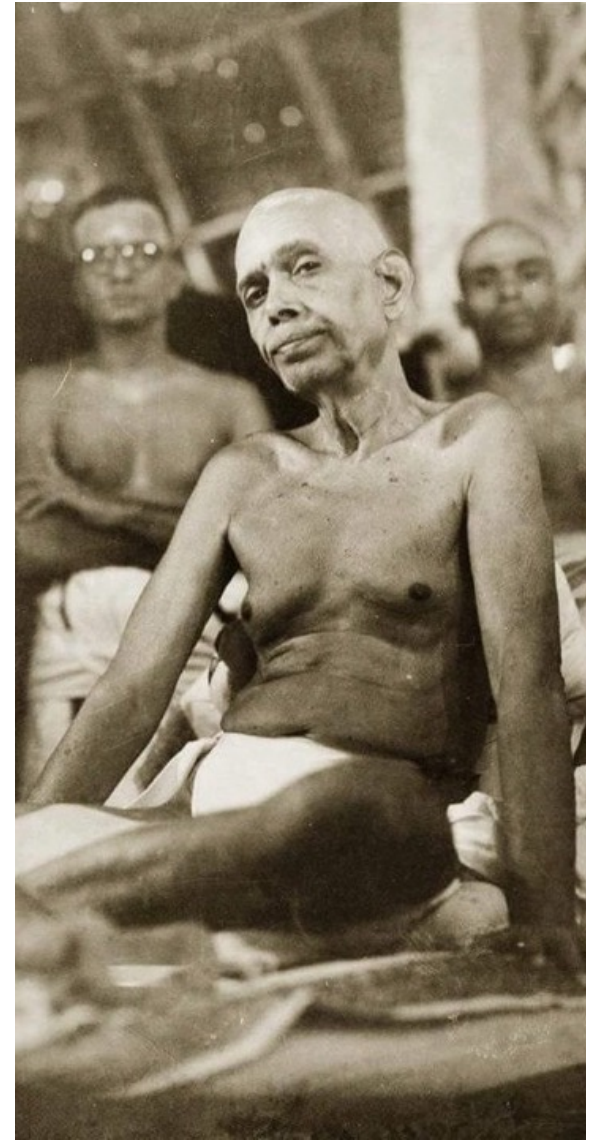
The standard set by Bhagavan was uncompromisingly high but it did not consist in disjointed commands and restrictions. It was a question of seeking the true Self and denying the impostor ego and in doing this he approved rather of a healthy, normal, balanced life than of extreme austerity. It is true that there was a time when he himself sat day after day in silence, scarcely eating, seldom moving, but that was not austerity, that was immersion in the supreme Bliss after the Self had been realised and there was no longer any ego to renounce that is when austerity was no longer possible. His abandoning it was not indulgence of the ego but compassion to the devotees who gathered around. He said that even in the case of a Gnani the ego may seem to rise up again but that is only an appearance, like the ash of a burnt out rope that looks like a rope but is no good for tying anything with.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana enjoins steadfastness in sadhana as may be seen from the following conversation:

Devotee: But the mind slips away from our control.

Maharshi: Be it so. Do not think of it. When you recollect yourself bring it back and turn it inward. That is enough. No one succeeds without effort. Mind control is not one's birthright. The successful few owe their success to perseverance.

(Talks with Ramana Maharshi Printed in Mountain Path Editorial Jayanthi Issue 1995)



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