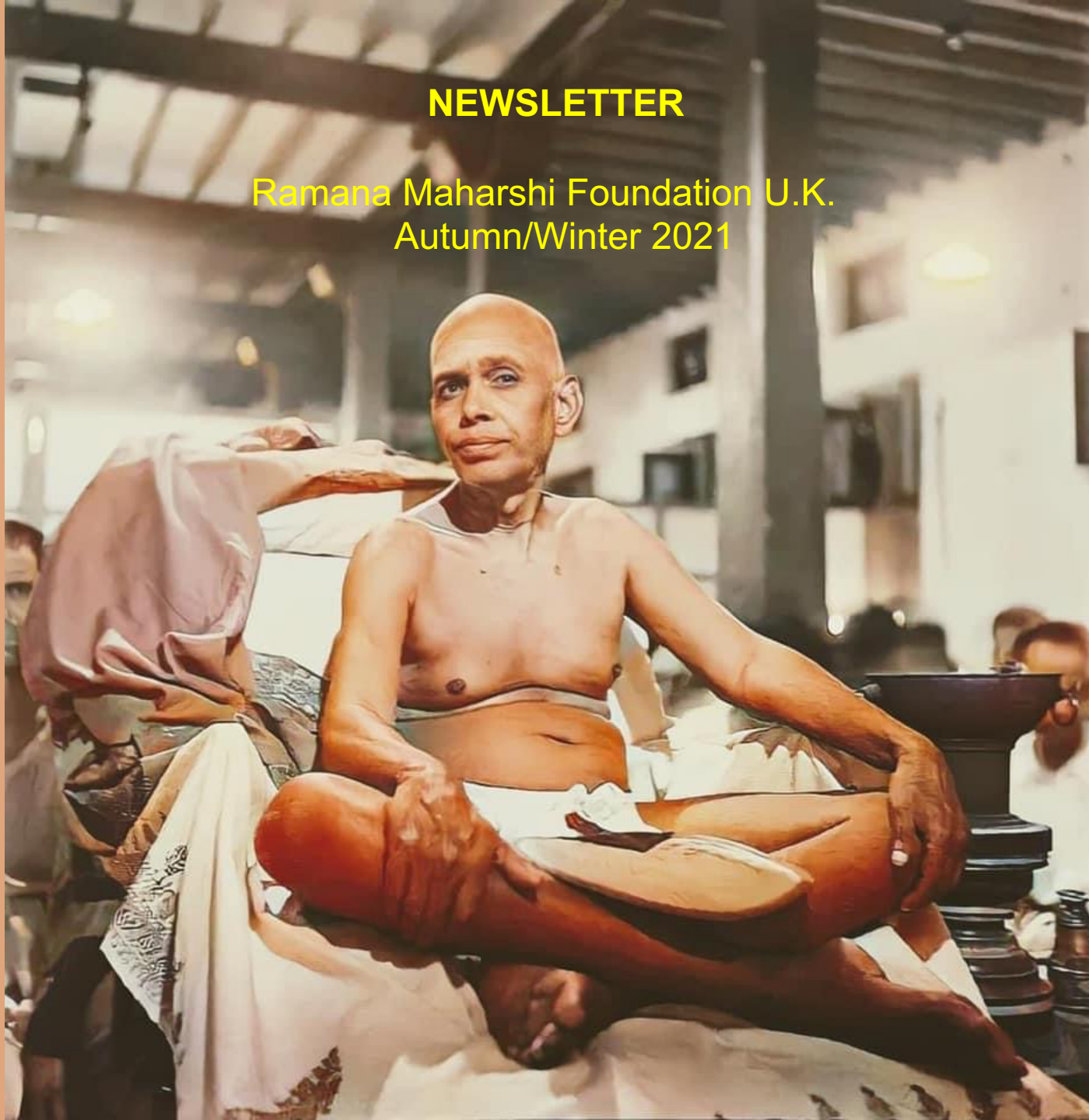


NEWSLETTER

Ramana Maharshi Foundation U.K.
Autumn/Winter 2021



Newsletter Autumn/
Winter 2021

Content:

Pages 5-7 Arunachala Aksharamanamalai Verses 2, 3, 4

Pages 8-9 Frank Humphreys

Pages 10-15 How I Came to the Maharshi

Pages 17-18 The Banyan Tree

Pages 19-20 Devotees' Adventure and Sri Bhagavan's Forgiveness

Ocean of Nectar, full of grace,
engulfing the Universe in Thy Splendour!
O Arunachala, the Supreme Itself!
Be Thou the Sun
and open the lotus of my heart in bliss!

(Five Stanzas on Sri Arunachala v.1)





Welcome to the Autumn/ Winter edition of the RMF UK Newsletter.

Frank Humphreys is the very first recorded European to visit Bhagavan. He was a Deputy Supervisor of Police when he first visited Bhagavan in 1911. Unusually, Bhagavan gave him direct teaching as a Master gives a disciple. Humphreys' record of his meetings with Bhagavan draws a beautiful pen picture of life in the ashram at the time. We bring you his account of his very first visit to Bhagavan.

For Bhagavan all beings were equal. The groundnut party gives a vivid joyous picture of Bhagavan as He related to all beings. T.R.A. Narayana's account of how he came to Bhagavan and this wonderful sight that he stumbled upon never fails to bring joy to one's heart.

The final piece in this edition is the story of Bhagavan and the banyan tree and the subsequent search for the tree by a group of devotees. Clearly it was never meant for Bhagavan or the devotees to find the banyan tree.

Arunachala Aksharamanamai

Verse 2

aḷakucun tarampō lakamum nīyumuṛ
raṇiṇṇamā yiruppō maruṇācalā

Paraphrase:

Arunachala! Although 'Aḷaku' and 'Sundaram' are two different words, they are one in terms of their meaning. Similarly, although I and You are different in terms of the limiting attributes which condition awareness, we will remain as one in our true nature.

Commentary:

'In the nature of their being, God and individual souls are one and the same. They differ only because their [respective] knowledge is conditioned by their attributes'. *Upadesha Unthiyar* [v.24]. 'Aḷaku' and 'Sundaram', are two words, [the first Tamil, the second Sanskrit], which have the same meaning, [*beauty*]. In making this comparison Bhagavan is referring implicitly to his own fond recollection of Aḷaku and Sundaram who were mother and father to his own physical body, and to the harmony that he observed in their married life, as mentioned in the following quotation from *Navamaṇimālai* [v.9], "bearing me and tending me upon this earth in the form of my father and mother." Aḷaku and Sundaram stand respectively for *jiva* and *Siva*.



Arunachala Aksharamanamai

Verse 3

akampukun tīrttuṅ ṇakakukai ciṛaiyā
yamarvitta teṅko laruṇācalā

Paraphrase:

Arunachala! What a wonder of your grace is this, that you entered the home of my mind, dragged me from it by force, and imprisoned me permanently in the abode of your Heart, without any possibility of escape.

Commentary:

cave [means] *heart*. The *mind* and the *Heart* are the abodes, respectively, of the *jiva* and *Siva*. The meaning given is the spiritual one. The straightforward meaning is obvious. The heroine, [bride], is confronting and addressing the hero, [husband, lover], who entered her home, abducted her by force and imprisoned her in his own home. It should be mentioned here that, even in his physical existence, from the moment of his arrival onwards, Bhagavan never left Arunachala, the Heart of the world. Here he expresses his wonder at the causeless grace of the Lord, which brought him under its sway.



Verse 4

āruk kāveṇai yāṅṅṅai yakarriṭi
lakilam paḷittiṭu maruṅācalā

Paraphrase:

Arunachala! For whose sake did you bring me under your rule? You it was who previously claimed me as your own with delight. If now you cast me away with indifference, everyone in the world will blame you.

Commentary:

Previously the Lord [Arunachala] had brought him [Bhagavan] under his rule as an example to the people of the world, with the aim of inspiring in them a belief in his grace, so that they would grasp his feet, worship them and so attain salvation. If He were now to drive him away with contempt, that belief would be confounded, and the fledgling faith they had previously had in his grace would be transformed into complete mistrust. Not only would they be ruined, losing their faith entirely and thus lacking any path to salvation, they would also resort to blaming Arunachala himself. [This is why] he says, 'For whose sake did you bring me under your rule?' and 'If you now abandon me all the people of the world will revile you'.





Frank Humphreys

Frank Humphreys

Frank Humphreys was the first European to visit Bhagavan as far as is known, or at least the first to record his visit. He has given a beautiful picture of Bhagavan in Virupaksha Cave.

The teachings recorded by him are a definitive guide to all who come after. Major Chadwick says “of whom else is it recorded that Bhagavan said ‘I am giving these instructions as a Guru gives them to a disciple?’ Certainly there was some special tie between these two”.

In November 1911 Humphreys went with S. Naramsimhayya and Ganapati Muni at 2 p.m. to visit Bhagavan in Virupaksha Cave. On reaching the cave they sat before Him at His feet and said nothing. They sat thus for a long while, and Humphreys felt lifted out of himself.

Ganapati Muni told Humphreys to look at Bhagavan in the eyes, and not to turn his gaze. Humphreys later wrote, “For half an hour I looked at Him in the eyes, which never changed their expression of deep contemplation. I began to realise somewhat that the body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost - I could only feel His body was not the man, it was the instrument of God. Merely a sitting motionless corpse from which God was radiating terrifically. My own sensations were indescribable.

Sastriar then said I might speak. I asked for enlightenment – for teaching, and He spoke and we listened. In a few sentences of broken English, and in Telugu, He conveyed worlds of meaning, and taught me direct, which He seldom does, and made me His *chela* – not, of course, such a one as the Sastriar, His own very special *chela*, but as one of the many that great Masters have.

The most touching sight was the number of tiny children, up to about seven years of age, who climb the mountain, all on their own, to come and sit near the Maharshi, even though He may not speak a word or hardly look at them for days together. They do not play, but just sit quietly there in perfect contentment.

He is a man beyond description in His expression of dignity, gentleness, self-control, and calm strength of conviction.

(From Arunachala Ramana Eternal Ocean of Grace)

Cast off the notion, 'This vile flesh am I', and seek the ceaseless bliss of the Self.

To seek the Self while cherishing this impermanent flesh is like trying to cross a stream by clinging to a crocodile.

(Ulladu Narpadu, Anubandam v.12)

How I Came to the Maharshi

By T. R. A. Narayana

The year was 1948. I was then in my thirty-ninth year. I lived in Madras with my wife and four children. I was the Branch Manager of a large British firm, and being in happy circumstances, I did not find the need for any religious practices or spiritual enquiries; I was content with enjoying the good things of life.

I was on a tour of small towns, with one of the Inspectors under me, Sri Parthasarathi. It was a hot April day. As Sri Parthasarathi and I were boarding the train at Villupuram to go to Tiruvannamalai, we noticed a young man of about twenty-five trying to enter the 1st Class compartment by the next door. The man was so fat that he heaved his bulky body this way and that, while another man on the platform, obviously his servant, pushed him in through the door. He was also ashamed of the curious way the people on the platform, including Sri Parthasarathi and myself, watched his predicament. He got in somehow and occupied the cubicle next to ours.

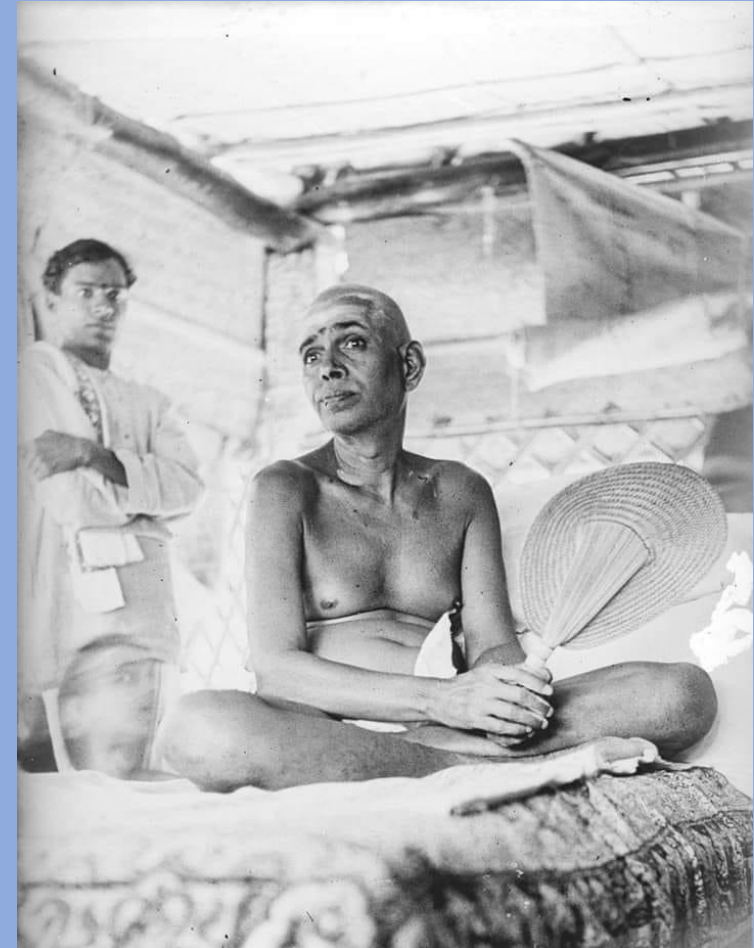
When the train had run for some minutes, the man came to our cabin, introduced himself as Ratilal Premchand Shah and started talking.

Sri Ratilal was a Saurashtra Vaishya, born and brought up in Gondal, the only son of his father, a rich merchant of the place. He had been married six years ago. Cursed with so much fat in his body from his tenth year, now at twenty-five, he was a huge mass of flesh and misery. How he wished to get rid of his fat and be a man!

In the last week of March, Sri Ratilal had a vision while he was asleep at night. He saw an ascetic smiling and beckoning to him. The smile and the beckoning persisted for a long time and stood clearly before Sri Ratilal's mental eye when he awoke. He did not speak to any one about the vision. Two days later, his wife was reading a Gujarati magazine. Looking over her shoulders, he saw the picture of the ascetic he had seen in his vision. He came to know that the ascetic was Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. He at once went to his father and arranged for his journey to Tiruvannamalai with the trusted family servant. All he knew about Bhagavan was what that Gujarati article said. But he felt sure that his suffering would end as soon as he reached Bhagavan; the smile and the beckoning of his vision of Bhagavan had given him that firm faith.

Sri Parthasarathi had had darshan of Bhagavan many times before and had also read a good deal of the literature about him. He and Sri Ratilal talked about Bhagavan during the whole two-hour journey. I was apparently reading an English novel, but heard their conversation with interest and attention.

At Tiruvannamalai station, Sri Ratilal was received by a local merchant with whom his father had arranged for his stay. Sri Parthasarathi and I proceeded to the travellers' bungalow.

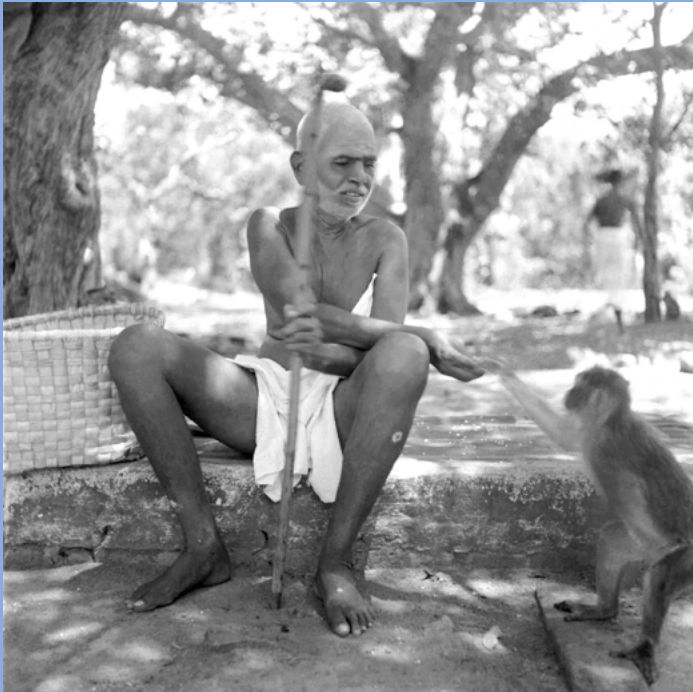


It was four when we had had our bath and tiffin. Sri Parthasarathi knew that I was very business-like and would not waste a single minute. He said we could visit the market. He was very surprised at my reply: "No, Parthasarathi! We shall go and have darshan of Maharshi first. Then, if time permits, we shall go to the temple. Let business wait!"

It was about five when Sri Parthasarathi and I entered the Ashram. Going round Bhagavan's Mother's samadhi, we came to the veranda by its side. About fifty people were sitting there, Sri Ratilal, his host and his servant included. Bhagavan was not on his couch as usual. The visitors talked in whispers, trying to find out where he was.

After waiting for some ten minutes and finding that Bhagavan had not come to his seat, Sri Parthasarathi suggested to me that we could meantime go around and see the gosala and other places.

Finishing our inspection we were returning to the veranda by another side, when we heard a childish voice: "Chee, asatthe (Fie, you creature!)". We could see no children around, and, therefore, peeped to find out the source of the voice. We observed movement among the leaves of the brinjal, lady's finger and other plants in the kitchen-garden near the veranda. Looking more intently, we saw a small goat, a little monkey and a squirrel — and Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi! Bhagavan was sitting on his haunches with his legs folded up to his breast. The goat nestled between his knees, the monkey had its head resting on his right knee, the squirrel was perched on his left knee. Holding a packet of paper in his left palm, Bhagavan picked groundnuts from it with his right-hand fingers, one by one, and fed the goat, the monkey and the squirrel, and himself, by turns. His remarks appeared to have been addressed to the monkey which had tried to snatch the nut he was going to place between the squirrel's lips. As we watched, the four companions went on enjoying the eating.



All four seemed to be equally happy; the way they looked at one another and kept close together was touching. The goat, the monkey, the squirrel, and Bhagavan, had obviously forgotten their differences in species! And we too, looking on, saw all the four only as good friends despite the differences in their forms. No words could describe the feelings which passed through my being at the sight. The vision of the Transcendent appeared as a flash of lightning, and revealed to me the essence of being, awareness and bliss, sat-chit-ananda.

The nuts were over. Bhagavan threw the paper away, and said: "Ponkoda! (go away, you fellows!)", just as any old man speaking to his grandchildren. The goat, the monkey and the squirrel left. Bhagavan made to get up. Sri Parthasarathi and I hurried away, feeling guilty of trespass into the Divine — but not sorry.

Soon after Sri Parthasarathi and I had resumed our seats in the veranda, Bhagavan came to his couch. I cannot say he looked at us. He stood facing us, his eyes fixed on something far above and beyond anything on earth. They were like screens which shut the material world off from the light which was burning behind them. Sparks of light shot out through the fibres of the screen at times, sparks which cooled the eyes on which they fell, pierced the gross coverings and lighted the wick inside them.

Bhagavan reclined on the pillows in the couch, supporting his head on his left palm. We all sat down to look at his face. We sat and sat, and looked and looked. No one spoke or made any noise. But the confrontation was not a dead silence; it was a very live experience in which the innermost being of each one of us communed with the Supreme Consciousness which was Bhagavan.

I was numb with the appalling realisation that the Glory was the same that dwelt in the piece of stillness which a few minutes ago I had seen eating groundnuts in the intimate company of the goat, the monkey and the squirrel. My mind kept recalling that scene; how the goat had snuggled to Bhagavan's breast in perfect confidence in his love for it; how the monkey had grinned in joy and how Bhagavan had returned the grin as both bit the nut; how the squirrel had peered with its pin-head eyes into Bhagavan's dream-laden ones and scratched his nose tenderly with its tiny left paw. The vision of the Supreme Spirit underlying and overlaying the sense perception was spiced with the lowly sight of the groundnut party in the kitchen garden.

Bhagavan got up from the couch. We all got up. It seemed tacitly understood on all hands that we were to leave. We left. I felt a hitherto-unknown peace and joy inside me; the faces of the others also showed a similar condition.

I saw Sri Ratilal, his host and his servant get into their bullock-cart at the Ashram gate. There was a new spring in Sri Ratilal's movements. Bhagavan's promise in the lad's vision appeared to be starting fulfilment.

Many things happened since that day in my life. My material circumstances underwent changes for the worse. But my inner life was happy, always, since that day; for I got a vision of Bhagavan very often, particularly when I was most depressed in spirits.

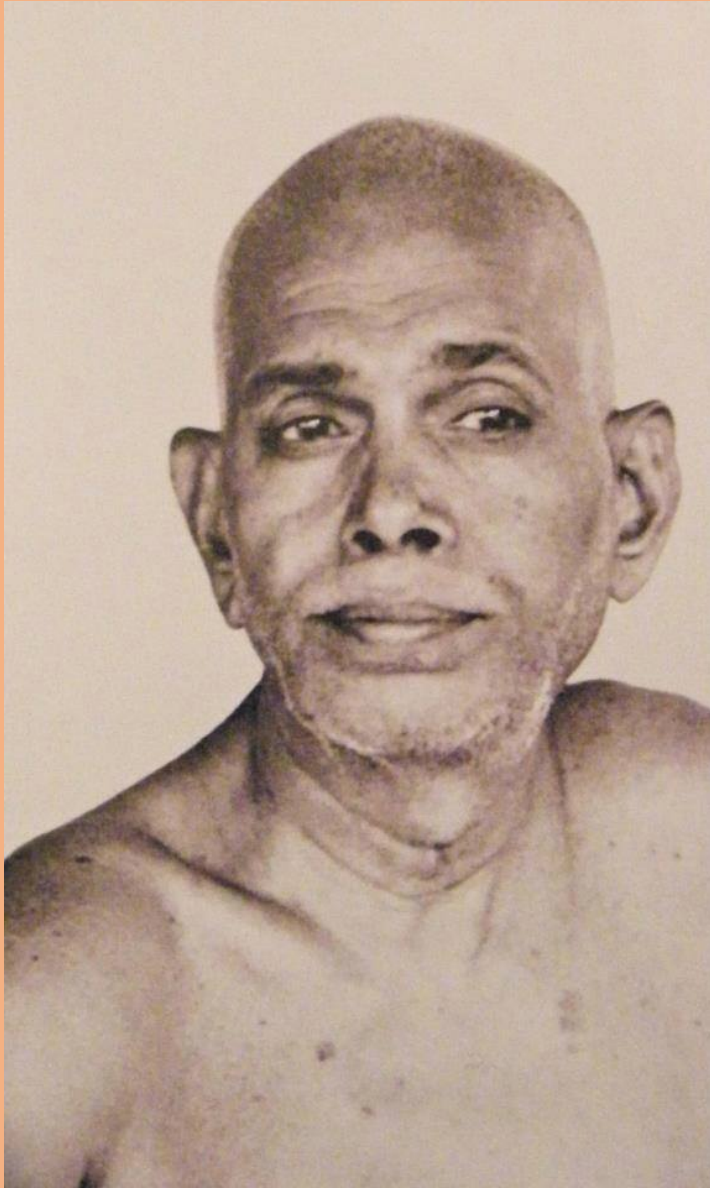
In 1953, I was in Rajkot, staying alone in a lodge. One day, while in the dining-hall, a man of about thirty accosted me: "Don't you recognise me, Sir?" "No, I'm sorry", I replied, truthfully. The man continued: "I am Ratilal of Gondal, Sir! You remember the darshan of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, five years ago?" I looked at the man again. He was thin and wiry, his face aglow with health and happiness. I shook his hands heartily. He spoke again: "Sir, Bhagavan fulfilled his promise wonderfully well. You see me. I am now managing our family business, my father taking complete rest; I have a son two years old, and expect my wife to give me another child in a month or two."

My mind immediately went back to the goat, the monkey and the squirrel — and Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. I could never think of Bhagavan alone!

So it has been all these years. The scene comes to my mind's eye often. The kitchen garden with the four friends at the groundnut party.

And, I thank Sri Ratilal and Sri Parthasarathi for guiding me to the Vision Beautiful!

(Published in The Mountain Path, April 1975)



That which arises as 'I' in this body is the mind.

"If one enquires as to where in the body the thought 'I' arises first,

one would discover that it rises in the heart.

Of all thoughts that arise in the mind, the 'I-thought' is the first.

It is only after the rise of this that other thoughts arise.

(Heart is Thy Name, Oh Lord)

The Banyan Tree

Bhagavan's account as recorded by Suri Nagamma

“One morning unintentionally I came down the hill from the Virupaksha cave and was going around the hill, when it occurred to me that I should go up the hill by a short cut between Panchamukha temple and Pachayamma temple. It was all a big forest. While I was feeling my way, a big banyan leaf drifted across my path. That one leaf was as big as the leaf we stitch together with several banyan leaves to eat food on. When I saw the leaf I was reminded of the Sloka in the Arunachala Puranam where there was a description of the banyan tree under which Arunagiri Yogi was living.”

“What is that Sloka?” asked one devotee. Bhagavan thereupon recited it as follows:

astuttaresmin śikhare dṛsyate vaṭabhūruhaḥ
siddhaveṣassadaivāste yasya mūle maheśvaraḥ |
syacchāyāti mahati sarvadā maṇḍalāmṛtiḥ
lakṣyate vismayopatraiḥ sarvadā deva mānavaiḥ ||

[On the northern peak of the hill there is seen a banyan tree where the great Lord in the form of a siddha eternally sits. The immense shade of the tree constitutes a charmed circle of immortality. Its expanse of foliage represents the entire universe, including men and gods.]

“As soon as I was reminded of that Sloka, I thought that that leaf must be from that banyan tree and so felt that I could see that tree if I went along the direction from which the leaf came. I started climbing up further and soon saw a tree on an elevated spot. As I was going along to it, my thigh hit against a bush. On account of the disturbance, the bees [hornets] in the bush came out and began stinging me. I thereupon thought that I had committed an offence and that that was the punishment. So thinking, I stood still. The bees did not sting me at any other place than the one that touched the bush. They bit me to their fullest satisfaction. After they left me, I began walking.

Curiously enough I forgot all about the banyan tree and wanted to reach the place of the seven springs. But there were three big streams in between which were very deep. The thigh too had swollen and was paining. I somehow crossed the three streams, and reached the seven springs. From there I began to descend the hill and reached the cave of Jataswami by the evening. Till then I had no food, nothing whatsoever. There they gave me a tumblerful of milk which I drank and then took a little fruit. After some time, I went to the Virupaksha cave and stayed there for that night. The leg got still more swollen. Jataswami and others did not notice it, but Palaniswami saw it and said, 'What is it?' and I told him all that had happened. Next day, he applied some gingelly oil to it. When he smeared it with the oil, he found that in every place I was stung, there was a spike as strong as a wire nail. With great effort he took out every one of them and gave some treatment. The swelling subsided after two or three days."

"Did not Bhagavan make any effort afterwards to trace the place where the banyan tree was?" I asked.

"No. That thought never came to my mind again," replied Bhagavan.

I said, "It seems that some time later, Venkatramayya, Muruganar, Kunjuswami and others went in search of the place and came back disappointed."

"Yes, yes. That was a *tamasha*. You were also here at that time and you have heard about it, haven't you?" questioned Bhagavan.

(published in Letters from Sri Ramanasramam 10.4.49)

[The following story is about the devotees mentioned above who went in search of the banyan tree]

Devotees' Adventure and Sri Bhagavan's Forgiveness

by Kunjuswami

Once we decided to go to the hill top. We engaged four coolies and asked them to carry food for us and wait at the Seven Streams on the way to the top. Mrs. Taleyarkhan, Cohen, some devotees from the Bose compound and some devotees from outside, in all about forty, left as a group. We prostrated before Sri Bhagavan before we left. Muruganar, Munagala Venkataramayya, Kalyanasundaram (who was working in the Ashram book depot), an English devotee by name Thompson and his friend, a Zamindar's son, and the friend's bodyguard and myself had planned to go and see first the large banyan tree referred to by Sri Bhagavan and to join the other party later. This was a secret agreement among us and we did not tell either Sri Bhagavan or the other members of the party whom we saw off at Namasivaya Cave.

Keeping in view the three streams mentioned by Sri Bhagavan, we started climbing the hill at 6 a.m. Around noon, we crossed the three streams and reached a steep place. We could not see either the foot or the top of the hill. We were perplexed. We could not see Muruganar. We looked for him and found him in a bush. When we called him, he came crawling on all fours like a child. We asked him why he walked like that. He said, "How should I walk then?" Venkataramayya was lying on the ground breathless. Kalyanasundaram Iyer was speechless, Thompson was sitting absolutely stunned. His friend and the servant were sobbing in fear. I, who was responsible for all this, did not know what to do.

'This is my end,' I thought. I felt wretched that I would be leaving the world without seeing Sri Bhagavan's face. I wept. Even if I was saved, if one of my companions died, how could I go and see Sri Bhagavan? In case such a thing happened, I felt I should give up my life also. The thought that I wouldn't see Sri Bhagavan any more made me feel wretched. Till then I had not prayed for anything. On this occasion, a prayer came out of me: "Oh Lord! See that we don't meet our end without seeing you. Please forgive us."

Almost immediately I saw a wood cutter at a distance and shouted to him. He did not respond thinking that we were forest guards. We waved our ochre robe and said we were from the Ashram and he need not be afraid of us. He came to us and said, "Why did you come here? You can't go to the hilltop from here." When we said we wanted to go to the *Ezhusunai* (Seven Springs), he took us by our hand and brought us to the others, who were waiting for us. By Sri Bhagavan's grace, there was a slight shower which drenched us and we felt cool and refreshed.

The others had eaten and wondered what had happened to us. Looking at our torn clothes and the scratches on our body, they teased us for attempting to go to the banyan tree without telling them.

We ate, took some rest and came down to Virupaksha Cave. We all wondered how we could go and see Sri Bhagavan in this state. What could we tell him? First we sent Thompson and his friend to their house in town, we sent away Mrs. Taleyarkhan, Cohen and others also. Four of us stayed back till dusk and went to Palakothu.

In the meantime, Thompson and his friends went straight to the Ashram, as they felt they should see Sri Bhagavan, who had saved them from a dangerous plight. They prostrated to Sri Bhagavan outside the hall without being seen by him. Munagala also did likewise.

Without knowing any of this, I went to Palakothu, had my bath and went and prostrated before Sri Bhagavan around 7 p.m. Sri Bhagavan asked, "What mischief have you done?" I was completely shaken by this question. "The Zamindar's son came in an awful condition and prostrated outside the hall. Munagala, whose condition was much worse, did the same. You come and stand before me in all innocence. What mischief have you done?"

I narrated everything that had happened. I said, "If we had told you of our plan first, you wouldn't have given us permission. Hence we left without telling you. We have been punished for going without your permission. Please forgive us." Sri Bhagavan said, "If you had told me, I would have asked you not to go. All right." I took his 'all right' for forgiveness and was greatly relieved.

(Published in Living with the Master, Reminiscences by Kunjuswami)

In the Inmost core, the Heart
Shines as Brahman alone,
As 'I-I', the Self aware.
Enter deep into the Heart
By search for Self, or diving deep,
Or with breath under check,
Thus abide ever in *Ātman*.

(Ramana Gita. Ch. II, v.2)



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