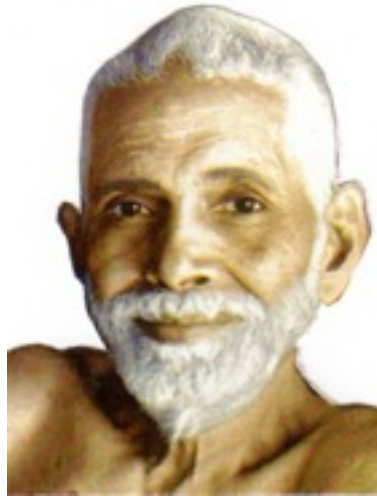


The Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK

Newsletter

Spring 2020



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

We are nevertheless making arrangements for Michael James to hold his talks and discussions via [Zoom](#) on the second Saturday of each month as usual, with the first one on 11 April, as to which we will keep everyone informed by email and on our Website. Anyone wishing to participate in Michael's discussions online should contact enquiries@ramana-maharshi.org.uk. These discussions should be available as usual on the [Sri Ramana Teachings](#) channel on YouTube soon after each meeting.

On Saturday 11 April Michael will conclude his series of talks on Ekatma Pancakam, and from May onwards he will begin a series of talks about The Marital Garland of Letters (Aksara Mana Malai), discussing several verses each month, and continuing for as many months as necessary to complete all 108 verses. The format for these online Satsangs will be announced at the first one.

Satsangs, Meditation and Study

The RMF UK normally meets on the second Saturday of each month for Satsangs which last from 2 pm to 5.30 pm at The Friends Meeting House, 120 Heath Street, Hampstead, London NW3 1DR.

However, Michael James will on 11 April conclude online his series of talks on Ekatma Pancakam and from May onwards begin a series of talks (online for as long as the C emergency lasts) on The Marital Garland of Letters (Aksara Mana Malai), discussing several verses each month and continuing for as many months as necessary to complete all 108 verses. The format for these continuing (online) Satsangs will be announced at the first one.

Normally however, in each Satsang, after an opening mantra and 'Om', there is a period of 10 Minutes silence, after which Michael gives an introduction to his talk and then answers questions (not necessarily confined to his talk). We break for tea from about 3.30 to 4.15 pm. Then there is another period of 10 minutes silence, after which Michael continues to answer questions by way of an open discussion. The meetings conclude with a bhajan and closing mantra at about 5.30 pm.

Additional ('Devotional') Satsangs are normally also held on the last Saturday of each month at 2 pm in the Library upstairs in the Friends Meeting House. The emphasis at these Satsangs is on Devotion and they are less formal than the main Satsangs.

Directions: There is a map on the **RMF UK website**. The nearest Underground Station is Hampstead on the Northern Line. Turn right out of the Station & then immediately right again into Heath Street. The Friends Meeting House is about 5 minutes walk up Heath Street, past a Church on the right-hand-side, past 2 turnings on the right hand side, New End & Elm Row, and then the Friends Meeting House, again on the right hand side, has a black arched entrance under a yew tree. NB it is very difficult to find car parking space anywhere near the FMH and the parking wardens are very keen.

A silent Meditation Group normally meets at 6.45 pm on Thursday evenings at 15a Victoria Road Kilburn London NW6 6SX and finishes at 9 pm.

Directions: The nearest Main Line train Stations are at Kilburn High Road (from Euston) and Brondesbury on the North London Line. The nearest Underground Stations are at Kilburn on the Jubilee Line and Kilburn Park on the Bakerloo Line. Buses 16, 32, 206, 323 and 328 stop close by. There are no car parking restrictions after 6.30 pm.

A Study Group also normally meets on the first and third Tuesday evenings of each month to study some of the Core Texts. We are currently going through **Padamalai**, the quintessence of Bhagavan's Teachings as presented and interpreted by Sri Muruganar.

NB both the Meditation and Study Group meetings normally take place in members' homes so anyone who is interested is asked to contact Alasdair Black in the first place.

Enquiries to Alasdair Black on 020 7328 3314 or enquiries@ramana-maharshi.org.uk

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

To be held as & when the current situation allows

at The Friends Meeting House, 120 Heath Street, London NW3 1DR

CHAIRMAN and COMMITTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

As well as our main monthly Satsangs on the second Saturday of each month, the Satsangs at the end of the month continue as a regular fixture. The Meditation group on Thursday evenings is flourishing, as is the Study Group which meets every other Tuesday evening. The first day of a two-day non-residential Retreat with Michael James was held in April, with the second day in August. As usual some of our members stayed in the Ashram this year including Zarine and Christopher Pegler and Alasdair Black, all of whom benefited from their time there as well as enjoying the usual warm welcome and hospitality.

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of last AGM and matters arising.
3. Chair & Committee's Annual Report.
4. It has been decided to do away with Membership fees. Donations, however, will always be welcome and should be made payable to the Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK, via Bank Transfer if preferred (details at enquiries@ramana-maharshi.org.uk)
5. Suggestions and outlook.
6. (Re)election of Committee Members:
President: Alan Jacobs
Chair: Alasdair Black
Deputy Chair: Shalini Sinha
Hon Treasurer: Zarine Pegler
Chris Pegler
Barry Domegan
Chris Hopkinson
Gurudas Bailur
7. Any Other Business.



Gardens outside the front (east side) of the Ashram

Early Days With Bhagavan

By G Ramaswami Pillai

(First published in the Jayanthi (January) 1966 Edition of the Mountain Path)

From boyhood I was spiritually inclined. Although from a meat-eating family, I became vegetarian while still a boy. I was mainly a worshipper of Siva but learned about Christ and Buddha and revered them too. Twice I visited the great Muslim shrine at Nagore and I understood that Allah was only another name for God. My one ambition in life was to see God face to face. This was granted to me while still a schoolboy. In March 1917 I first went to Skandashram and set eyes on Bhagavan. Reclining on a couch he looked indescribably majestic. Since when he has been a God in human form for me, my God, Guru and all.

I did not ask for anything. I was filled to overflowing by just seeing him. He turned on me that look of heart-melting Grace that he so often bestowed on newcomers. After a few days I had to return home. There I learnt the *Marital Garland of Letters* and spent my time reciting it either mentally or aloud and even writing it out.

After finishing school I went to college. Then I returned to my village and although I had no desire for married life my parents got me married. I had no children, however, and was soon able to give up married life and went to live with Bhagavan in the Ashram.

x x x

Bhagavan had lived in various caves and temples, but Skandashram was the first to be known as an Ashram. He stayed there for seven years with his mother, his younger brother Niranjananda Swami, who was to become the Sarvadhikari, and a few sadhus. It was there that Ashram cooking was first started. This was due to the presence of his Mother. It was her presence that made it into an Ashram. After her death, Bhagavan abandoned Skadashram and went to live beside her shrine at the foot of the Hill, where the present Ashram has grown up. This shows her to have had greater importance than is commonly supposed.

During his years at Skandashram Bhagavan still spoke little and seldom. It did not matter; his gaze was dynamic, penetrating, gracious, soul-stirring, ego-killing. In later years he spoke far more but his silences were still tremendous.

It was on my second visit that I first made pradakshina. A visitor from Madurai whom I knew wanted to go round the Hill with Bhagavan and I joined them. At that time the lower slopes were still forested and we took the forest path for a good part of the way before coming out onto the road. Next day I had a sudden urge to go round by myself. I started out as before but soon lost my way in the forest track. As I started out I noticed that one of the Ashram dogs was following me. Now it ran in front and began to lead. At once it flashed on me that this was Bhagavan's work. With tears of gratitude and joy I followed my guide. He took me by the same paths as on the previous day until we came to the road and then disappeared; and I saw him in the Ashram when I got back. At the time I told nobody about this. It was the first experience of my spiritual relationship with Bhagavan and I was more than ever convinced that he would guide me through the unknown paths of life. Such an incident may appear trivial to the reader but when it actually happens it strengthens one's faith in Bhagavan who alone can help one by his infinite Grace in opening one's inner vision.

x x x

For a whole year at Skandashram Bhagavan took only one meagre meal a day. I was on a visit there the day he broke his fast. I had decided to stay the night even though there was no food for an evening meal for the rest of us. I didn't feel hungry. At about 7.30 one of the devotees, Ramanatha Brahmachari, came back with some pieces of broken coconut and some rice that he had been given at a ceremony he had attended in town. Bhagavan suggested that we should boil it up on the charcoal stove we had there and share it out, as was the usual custom. He told us to see whether there was any sugar or sugar candy left from gifts from earlier visitors to flavour it with. We looked but there was nothing at all. It was dark and raining outside and we could not well go into the town for anything. I was near to tears that Bhagavan should ask for something - so rare an event - and that we should not be able to provide it. At that very moment the door opened and two students came in with a bag of sugar candy and a bunch of bananas they had brought to present to Bhagavan. The meal was cooked and eaten, the two visitors also being invited. Bhagavan remarked that we had asked for sugar candy and had got bananas as well, which could be cut and served like a pickle with the food. After eating he said that it was just a year, 365 days exactly, since he had limited himself to one meal a day and that from now on he would eat in the evening also. That was how things happened with Bhagavan. He did not work miracles; things just happened in the right way. Miracles are generally thought of as deliberate acts willed by a person, but happenings like this are the result of spiritual forces already and always at work. The Jnani is God himself in human form. He never wills but things happen in his presence and the ignorant attribute them to him. One may get a glimpse of this in his presence.

x x x

It was in 1922, when the present Ashram at the foot of the Hill first started, that I became a permanent resident. At first there was only a thatched hut over the Mother's shrine and a second small hut that served as a kitchen. There were only a few of us then. There were no Ashram servants in those days; we did all the work ourselves, and Bhagavan along with us. Puja was performed twice a day, as it still is.

We spent our time doing Ashram work, chanting sacred songs, walking round the Hill, meditating and reading spiritual books. Earlier, Bhagavan had been more silent and aloof; later, when crowds began to come, he was necessarily more distant, but at this time he took part in everything, guiding and helping in every activity of the growing Ashram. He was our Lord and Guru and was always with us. Devotees used to bring us provisions when they were needed and we never felt any want. We used to share things as they came. Sometimes there was even more than we could dispose of on the spot. We even used to make tea and coffee when the ingredients were available.

Although this was an idyllic state in itself, the essence of it was our striving for Realisation. Having attained a human birth, that is the only goal worth aiming at, for it is unalloyed, eternal Bliss and Peace.

x x x

We can dwell on the name or form of Ramana or neither. Repeating the name 'Ramana' inwardly is itself a good sadhana for those who do not practice Self-enquiry. Or by concentrating on him intensely and constantly we may find in him the fire of Knowledge which will burn up our ego and convert us into him so that we realise our identity with him who is the Self of the Self. The state of bliss thus attained through merging into the Guru is called Guru Turiya. It is a matter for experience and cannot be explained in words.

The ego is only an accretion, a shadow, a ghost, an unstable outcome of the combination of chit and jada, consciousness and matter. It is the source of all mischief in our state of ignorance. Nothing is lost by its destruction. It obscures and conceals the true Self of us which is identical with pure Consciousness. This false ego is to be dissolved by steady enquiry into it or by the Grace of our most gracious Sat Guru Bhagavan Sri Ramana.



Arunachala from the Ashram

Beyond the Three States

**From Letters to the Ashram by Suri Nagamma
(This one dated 6th September 1947)**

Last month, during my sister-in-law's stay here, the proofs of the Telegu version of the 'Vichara Mani Mala' (Self-enquiry) were received. In the afternoon Bhagavan corrected them and passed them on to me. On reading them, my sister-in-law asked me the meaning of *svapnatyanta nivrutti*. I tried to explain, but as I was not sure of myself, I could not satisfy her fully. On noticing this, Bhagavan asked, "What is the matter? Is there a mistake?"

I replied, “No. She is asking the meaning of *swapnatyanta nivritti*.”

Bhagavan said kindly, “It means absolute, dreamless sleep”.

I asked, “Would it be true to say that a Jnani has no dreams?”

My sister-in-law was still not satisfied, but as people began to talk about other things, we had to leave the matter at that. But she later said, “In the ‘Vasistham’ it is stated that a Realised Soul appears to perform actions, but that they do not affect him at all. We ought to have asked Bhagavan the real meaning of this”.

On going to the Ashram next morning, it so happened that Bhagavan was just then explaining this very point to Sundaresa Iyer. Eagerly availing herself of this opportunity, my sister-in-law again asked, “Bhagavan has stated that *Swapnatyanta Nivritti* means absolute dreamless sleep. Does this mean that a jnani has no dreams at all?”

Bhagavan: “It is not only the dream state, but all three states that are unreal to the Jnani. The real state of the Jnani is where none of these three states exist”.

I asked, “Is not the waking state also equivalent to a dream?”

Bhagavan: “Yes, whereas a dream state lasts for short time, the waking-state lasts longer. That is the only difference.”

I: “Then deep sleep is also a dream?”

Bhagavan: “No, deep sleep is an actuality. How can it be a dream when there is no mental activity? However, since it is a state of mental vacuity, it is nescience (*avidya*) and must therefore be rejected”.

I persisted, “But is not deep sleep also said to be a dream state?”

Bhagavan: “Some may have said so for the sake of terminology, but really there is nothing separate. Short or long duration applies only to the dream and waking states. Someone may say: ‘we have lived long and these houses and belongings are so clearly evident to us that it surely can’t all be a dream?’ But we have to remember that even dreams seem long while they last. It is only when you wake up that you realise that they only lasted a short time. In the same way, when one attains Realisation (Jnana), this life is seen to be momentary. Dreamless sleep means nescience; therefore it is to be rejected in favour of the state of pure Awareness”.

My sister-in-law then interposed, “it is said that the bliss that occurs in deep sleep is experienced in the state of samadhi (1) as well, but how is that to be reconciled with the statement that deep sleep is a state of nescience?”

Bhagavan: “That is why deep sleep has also to be rejected. It is true that there is bliss in deep sleep, but one is not aware of it. One only knows about it afterwards when one wakes up and says one has slept well. Samadhi means experiencing this bliss while remaining awake.”

I: “So it means waking, or conscious sleep?”

Bhagavan: “Yes, that’s it.”

My sister-in-law then brought up the other cognate question that had worried her.: “It is said by Vasishtha that a Realised Soul seems to others to be engaged in various

activities, but he is not affected by them at all. Is it because of their different outlook that it seems so to others, or is he really unaffected?”

Bhagavan: “He is really unaffected”.

My sister-in-law: “People speak of favourable visions both in dream and while awake; what are they?”

Bhagavan: “To a realised soul they all seem the same”.

She persisted, however, “It is stated in Bhagavan’s biography that Ganapati Muni had a vision of Bhagavan when he was at Tiruvottiyur and Bhagavan was in Tiruvannamalai, and that, at the very same time, Bhagavan had a feeling of accepting homage. How can such things be explained?”

Bhagavan answered cryptically, “I have already stated that such things are what are known as divine visions”. He was then silent, indicating that he was not willing to continue the talk any further.

(1) Samadhi means perfect absorption of thought in the one object of meditation, i.e. the Supreme Spirit (the 8th and last stage of Yoga).

From Day by Day with Bhagavan

The Diary of Devaraj Mudalier (Entry for 25 April 1946, morning)

A visitor asked Bhagavan, “When I try to be without all thoughts, I fall asleep. What should I do about this?”

Bhagavan: Once you go to sleep you can do nothing in that state. But while you are awake, try to keep away all thoughts. Why think about sleep? Even that is a thought, is it not? If you are able to be without any thought while you are awake, that is enough. When you pass into sleep, that state, in which you were before falling asleep, will continue again and again. When you wake up you will continue from where you had left off when you fell into slumber. So long as there are thoughts of activity, so long will there be sleep also. Thoughts and sleep are counterparts of one and the same thing.

Bhagavan quoted the Gita and said, “We should not sleep very much or go without it altogether, but sleep only moderately. To prevent too much sleep, we must try to have no thoughts or *chalana* (movement of the mind), we must eat only *sattvic* food and that only in moderate measure, and not indulge in too much physical activity. The more we control thought, activity and food the more will we be able to control sleep. But moderation should be the rule, as explained in the Gita, for the *sadhak* on the path. Sleep is the first obstacle, as explained in the books, for all *sadhaks*. The second obstacle is said to be *vikshepa* or the sense objects of the world which divert

one’s attention. The third is said to be *kashaya* or thoughts in the mind about previous experiences with sense objects. The fourth, *ananda*, is also called an obstacle, because in that state a feeling of separation from the source of *ananda*, enabling the the enjoyer to say ‘I am enjoying ananda’ is present. Even this has to be surmounted and the final stage of *samadhana* or *samadhi* has to be reached, where one becomes *ananda* or one with the reality and the duality of enjoyer and enjoyment ceases in the ocean of *sat-chit-ananda* or the Self.



An Ashram scene

Lord of Souls

O Lord of Souls! Art thou not also Lord
And firm friend of the impoverished poor?
In earnest we pray, open wide thy door
To the muse of that merciful chord,
Which thou doest so graciously afford,
To heal our wounded hearts so sore.
Aid us to move closer toward
Thy lotus feet, and then walk onward
To realisation of the Self for evermore.
All my sins should be forgiven by Thee.
This is the true duty of a loving father,
Willing to help his child to strive for liberty.
O grant me protection and play thy part
Against those thieves breaking into my heart.

Alan Jacobs

The path of peace

The Self is immediate and present awareness. Our sense of Self does not depend on thoughts and imaginations, but on our own immediate sense of existence. To realise this strongly is what we are encouraged to do by Ramana. This strong experience will allow us to overcome the world, that is the world of our desires and fears, our agitations and limitations and obstructions. We should try to actually experience it in ourselves, not just think about it. This results from inner Self-Enquiry, that is a deep penetration into the source of ourselves. The next best thing is to yearn for this experience strongly and this comes from meditation done with determined and persevering interest. May we overcome the world. When Ramana was in the body, his devotees depended on his physical presence. Now we depend on his inner, spiritual presence in us and outside us, but it is no less strong. Why is it no less strong? Because our determination is our Self.

Chris Hopkinson

Mastan and the Golden Mongoose
From Akhilandamma's reminiscences in Volume 3 of
The Power of the Presence
by David Godman

Many of Sri Bhagavan's activities, utterances and reactions were to some degree predictable. When you live in close proximity to a great being such as Bhagavan, becoming drenched in his presence and teachings, you start to begin to believe that you understand him, at least to a certain extent. However, once in a while Bhagavan would spontaneously say things that astounded us all, making us realise how little we really knew and understood him. I remember one such statement very well.

Bhagavan once told me, 'All sorts of beings gravitate towards the presence of a *jnani* - *devas* (inhabitants of the heavenly realms), *rishis* (sages). *Brahmanistas* (those established in Brahman), *siddhas* (perfected beings with supernatural powers) and yogis. Some come in a normal human form, but others turn up in their subtle, astral bodies. Some of these great beings show up in the guise of beggars or madmen, and some of them even manage to appear in the form of birds and animals.

'Among those who show up in a normal human body, and who subsequently stay on and become devotees, there is a huge range of spiritual attainment; complete beginners mix with highly advanced souls. The most advanced are ripe fruits, just waiting to fall. They only have to come into the presence of a *jnani* in order to plunge into a deep experience of the Self. One such devotee was Mastan.

'He was such a ripe soul that when he came to Virupaksha Cave to see me he would sometimes go into a deep *samadhi* before he had even entered the cave. As soon as he touched the railings of the gate, he would have a paralysing experience of the Self. He would stand, rooted to the spot, unable to move, for six or seven hours. This happened several times. Usually, these experiences would be before he had even seen me since I would be inside the cave, unaware of what was going on at the gate.

'Mastan was in an entirely different category to most of the people who came (1) He was highly spiritual, although outwardly he looked like an ordinary man. He was a kind and generous person who was always looking for an opportunity to help other people. He never showed any self-importance. On the contrary he liked to stay in the background, unnoticed and unappreciated by ordinary people.

'Although Mastan was clearly an outstanding devotee, very little information is available about him or his years with Bhagavan. The few stories that exist come from people who were associated with him. Akhilandamma, who came from the same village as he did, probably knew him better than anyone else. She has described how they used to come to Turuvannamalai together:

'Mastan and I would come to Arunachala from our village to have the pleasure of serving Bhagavan. Mastan, although he was a weaver, did not stick to his craft. A man of whims, he would suddenly suspend his weaving and go to live with Bhagavan for months on end. During this time he would keep his body and soul together on alms that he begged.

In those early days we had no buses. I would make a bundle of provisions, such as rice and pulses and put them on his head. Loaded in this way, we would start on our journey to Arunachala. We would walk slowly and leisurely, telling each other stories of Bhagavan.

Mastan occasionally made towels and kaupinas and offered them to Bhagvan who accepted them with deep regard. Bhagavan once remarked with great joy. ‘Mastan’s craft, though it did not give food either for him or parents, gives me clothes’.

On full moon nights we would go round the hill in the divine company of Bhagavan. In those days there would be about ten of us - Perumal, Mastan and a few others. On those moonlit nights we would walk in rapture, forgetting the entire universe, except for the sacred mountain. I don’t think those enchanting days will ever come again!

On one of those occasions, Mastan began to sing at the top of his voice. I had never heard him singing so loudly. ‘Mastan, what happened to you today?’ asked Bhagavan as soon as the *pradakshina* was over. ‘You never ever sing, so why did you sing like that?’

‘It was nothing,’ replied Mastan casually. ‘Perumal instructed me that I had to sing in order to ward off your drowsiness. To raise my spirits and equip me for the job he made me take a drink containing *ganja*.’

‘So that’s what happened. Ganja intoxication was behind your singing. How many times have I told you that I need no external help to keep me awake? Also, I have told you before not to do anything for my sake. Don’t listen to other people who tell you differently.’

Though Bhagavan rebuked Mastan in this way, I don’t think he took the criticism very seriously. He was a very innocent man and events like this didn’t touch him.

I remember one incident that took place when Bhagavan was at Skandashram. A golden mongoose entered the Ashram premises and made straight for Bhagavan. It sat on his lap for a while. Later, it wandered around and closely inspected all the different parts of the cave. When the inspection was over, it disappeared into the bushes on the hill. While this was happening, Mastan was the only devotee with Bhagavan.

Some time later Perumal came back to the Ashram and Mastan told him about the visit of the mongoose. One can get a glimpse of Mastan’s state of mind at the time from the remarks he made.

‘I was afraid that the mongoose might harm our peacocks,’ he said, ‘so I kept myself ready in case it made an attack. I had a big stick handy. Fortunately, it moved away without making any move towards the peacocks.’

Perumal told him, ‘Mastan, you should have caught it. If you had managed to capture it, we could have brought it here and kept it as a pet.’

Bhagavan was listening to this conversation.

Addressing Mastan, he said, ‘Whom do you think he was? Do you think you could have caught him, and do you think that this other man could have domesticated him? He was a sage of Arunachala who took on this form to come and visit me. He wanted to pay his respects to me. How many times have I told you that sages come to me in different forms?’

Mastan never himself told me about this mongoose. Bhagavan mentioned the incident to me on one of my later visits.

1. Mastan was a Muslim from the same village as Akhildanamma who, when he died, was carefully buried as a saint on the detailed instructions of Bhagavan.

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are now payable directly to the Ashram via a
portal at [http://
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Key books can be downloaded from: www.ramana-maharshi.org. Other
books can be ordered from the Manager of the Book Depot at Sri
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**Donations to the Ramana Maharshi Foundation
U.K.**

**We have discontinued Membership Fees but we would
welcome any donations towards the running of the
Foundation, a cheque for which should be made payable to
"Ramana Maharshi Foundation U.K." and sent to Mrs Zarine
Pegler, 28 Perryfield Way, Richmond, Surrey, TW10 7SP,
giving your full name, address and email address.
Alternatively, if you would prefer to donate by bank transfer,
details of the Foundation's bank account is available on**

request via enquiries@ramana-maharshi.org.uk Due to new banking regulations please be sure to provide the account name accurately.

Arunachala Animal Sanctuary and Rescue Shelter



These two YouTube items give you an idea of what the Sanctuary 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 and there is a collection at all of our Satsangs. Do please continue to give generously, and thank you for your generosity.

